

INSPECTION REPORT

THE ST CHRISTOPHER SCHOOL

Leigh-on-Sea

Essex

LEA area: Southend-on-Sea

Unique reference number: 115385

Headteacher: Mr T Wilson

Lead inspector: Hilary Gannaway

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th January 2005

Inspection number: 272851

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	3-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	152
School address:	Mountdale Gardens Leigh-on-Sea Essex
Postcode:	SS9 4AW
Telephone number:	01702 524193
Fax number:	01724 526761
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Purkis
Date of previous inspection:	22 nd May 2000

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is designated to cater for 130 pupils and nursery and reception children. At present, there are 152 on role, of whom nine are of nursery and reception age. Most pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, although two are undergoing assessment. The number on roll is much higher than at the last inspection. This reflects parental choice and the school's willingness to work with a range of pupils with very complex needs. Half of the pupils on roll have difficulties on the autistic spectrum. The remainder have a variety of needs such as moderate or severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and behaviour difficulties and speech and communication disorders. While most classes have a range of needs, the school also has three autistic resource bases spread throughout the age groups. There are few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds with the largest group of pupils being of white heritage. There are only a small proportion of girls and eight pupils are in care. Pupils come mainly from Southend and the surrounding areas of Essex.

The school is involved in outreach initiatives on behalf of the local education authority and was a Beacon school. It has a number of significant partnerships, such as one with a group of schools to deliver graduate teacher training, as well as a range of activities for pupils with other schools. The school has Investor in People status, a Charter Mark and two school achievement awards. There is wide community use of the newly built sports centre and the school has recently opened a purpose built special needs respite care centre which can take six pupils. The school is subject to re-organisation proposals which are now underway to be completed by 2006. The long period of uncertainty has led to 10 staff leaving in the past two years. The school will become the major provider of primary education for 95 children with a range of special educational needs and a reduced secondary cohort mainly for pupils with attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder and severe autism. Pupils and children are increasingly entering the school with attainment that is very low compared to that expected for their age.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21527	Hilary Gannaway	Lead inspector	Foundation Stage Citizenship Personal, social and health education
9052	Helen Barter	Lay inspector	
11239	Sue Flockton	Team inspector	English Religious education Music
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22178	Kate Robertson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Art and design Design and technology
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very effective and outward looking school. Despite the drawn out negotiations over the school's future and the imminent need for all staff to apply for posts in the restructuring of special needs provision, staff have continued to be highly committed to the school. They work very effectively together to ensure pupils' needs are met. The very good leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher has made sure that significant improvements have continued to take place. As a result, pupils' achievement in subjects is good and in personal development very good and supported by consistently good teaching with very good features. Personal development and care by staff is very effective. Along with high quality work related learning this equips pupils very successfully for the next stage in their life. The school gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has an excellent understanding of what the re-organised school needs to do so that the pupils' education continues to improve.
- The very strong emphasis on personal development and life skills means that as pupils progress through the school they become more independent.
- Support for learning outside the school day is excellent and very successfully aids pupils' learning.
- Pupils benefit significantly from very effective community and school and college links.
- Very good support and guidance help build pupil confidence.
- High expectations, very good relationships and team work by staff have a positive impact on pupils' education.
- Although subject co-ordination has improved, co-ordinators do not always monitor teaching.
- While there has been a good improvement in accommodation, some aspects still impede learning.
- Use of alternative ways of communication and consistent work routines for those with more complex needs are not always regularly planned into lessons.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Most of the very good aspects have been maintained, despite the rise in numbers and a more complex range of needs. Although there are still some problems, accommodation for secondary pupils and for physical education has improved. There has also been improvement in assessment, in the subject co-ordinator role and in provision for staff training which is now excellent. Community links have been extended as have those with other establishments.

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 2	Good	Very Good
Year 6	Good	Very Good
Year 9	Good	Very Good
Year 11	Good	Very Good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress towards the goals children are expected to reach by the end of reception, except for personal and social development where progress is very good. **Overall, pupils' achievement is good throughout the school.** They make good and sometimes very good progress towards their individual targets because planning for this is a priority. Achievement is good in English, particularly speaking and listening, mathematics and science because teachers are knowledgeable and work and support are often matched carefully to individual needs. It is good in information and communication technology (ICT) because it is successfully used to support other subjects so skills are effectively reinforced. It is very good in

personal, social and health education (PSHE) and physical education where achievement is boosted by a range of very well planned supplementary activities. As a result, pupils do well in national tests and in awards and certificates at the end of Year 11, often going on to college. Occasionally, pupils with complex and additional needs do not do as well as they could because there are not always enough carefully structured activities for them.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. The school's very positive ethos means that pupils enjoy school and work with enthusiasm. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good. They are happy to take on responsibilities, grow in self-esteem and get on very well with adults. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Although **teaching and learning are good**, teaching has many very good features. This helps to support the very good independence skills pupils acquire in Years 7 to 11 and which build on earlier work. Teachers and support staff know pupils very well. They plan work effectively to make sure pupils' needs are met. This is very effectively supported by assessment, with data used to check progress made and set further targets. The curriculum is good overall with that for pupils in Years 10 and 11 being very good. Supplementary activities, community and school links all very significantly enrich pupils' experiences. Along with very good care, support and guidance this gives pupils the self-esteem to succeed.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and the management of the school are very good. Statutory requirements are met and the governors of this Foundation School have an effective overview. This is because they have been very strongly involved in plans for the re-organisation and fund raising for the new building. The very good leadership by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, along with very effective management, particularly in staff training and performance review, have meant that pupils have continued to receive an effective education despite the difficulties caused by the pending re-organisation. Leadership by other key staff is good, although subject co-ordinators have few opportunities to check on the quality of teaching and learning in their subject.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS

Parents value the school highly and feel that staff communicate with them very well. They are comfortable approaching the school and consider it gives them encouragement. Pupils are very positive about the relationships they have with adults and say that they can go for help at any time and that they will be listened to.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Ensure subject co-ordinators have time to monitor and evaluate teaching.
- Further meet the increasing needs of pupils by the consistent use of a range of alternative communication and improved work routines for those with the most complex needs.
- Ensure accommodation, particularly for ICT, is suitable for the learning needs of all pupils.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' attainment is very low compared to that expected for their age. However, all pupils, including those with more additional complex needs such as autism and the few girls and minority ethnic pupils achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in PSHE and physical education is very good due to the many opportunities, both in lessons and outside the school day, to gain relevant skills.
- Achievement is good in English, mathematics and science because staff are often very skilled and engage pupils well in learning.
- Pupils achieve well in national tests and in accreditation in Year 11 because data is analysed and used effectively to set targets for improvement.
- For a few pupils with more complex needs, work and alternative means of communication are not always planned effectively enough to make sure they have the best chance of achieving.

Commentary

1. The school has worked hard to maintain levels of achievement noted at the previous inspection. Since then, the school has grown in numbers and pupils have entered with more complex needs, with a significant rise in those with autism. Alongside this has been anxiety on the part of staff about the re-organisation. Given all this, the school has done well to ensure that achievement is good throughout the school and, for some pupils, very good.

2. The strong focus on PSHE and citizenship as a part of personal development means that opportunities to make gains relevant to pupils' age and needs are planned into many activities. This has a very positive effect on pupils' achievement, their access to learning and their preparation for life after school. As a result, as they move through the school, they become more independent. Routines such as tutorials, snack time, break and lunch time, after school activities and life skill sessions all help pupils gain skills they will need for living in the community, including how to socialise appropriately with others. Pupils appreciate and enthusiastically join in these activities. In physical education, the combination of a high quality environment, effective team work with learning support assistants and very well qualified teaching and sports hall staff means that pupils value the experiences. They willingly join in activities. The new sports hall enables staff to extend the activities offered to pupils both during and out of school hours and this reinforces and extend skills.

3. Achievement in English, mathematics and science benefits from an effective combination of group and individual work. Very effective subject knowledge on the part of English teachers and an emphasis on pupils' individual targets gives pupils the confidence to try new work and extend their understanding. Careful tracking of how pupils are achieving builds up a picture of their progress so staff know what is needed and additional help is given. This ensures all pupils have good chances to improve their basic skills because they know work is appropriate to their needs. As a result, they concentrate and work effectively. Good support for literacy in other subjects and particularly for speaking and listening reinforce skills. These skills are then successfully used by pupils to help them achieve. In mathematics, good achievement results from high expectations and a wide range of often practical learning activities.

4. Individual work matched to their needs keeps pupils interested so they make good gains. In science, through effective assessment, staff know their pupils well. They carefully plan activities on a group and individual basis that provide an appropriate level of challenge. This gives pupils the

confidence to try out their own ideas, progress and build on previous achievement. In all these lessons, ICT is used well to support learning adding another dimension to achievement.

5. Across the school, pupils generally meet the very well defined, precise targets set at their review meetings. This is because work is often specifically planned into lessons matched to these targets. This enables pupils to make the sort of gains which will give them a good basis for moving on to other work. The use of additional whole school targets for all pupils gives the school another effective measure of how different individuals and groups improve and this is used to help sustain their performance over time. As a result, pupils achieve well in their national tests and gain a range of relevant accreditation matched to needs such as Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses and Entry Level, with some gaining the highest levels. Data on progress is very carefully monitored to plan the very well targeted professional development activities for staff so they can use skills gained to further aid pupils' progress.

6. The changing nature of the school's population has meant that systems and class groupings continue to be revised so pupils' needs can be targeted and they have the best chances to improve. However, there have recently been an influx of pupils with more complex needs and the school has not had time to totally adjust as fast as they would like to these new circumstances. The school is presently re-thinking its approach to the most challenging and difficult to reach pupils. Staff are doing this in order to achieve greater consistency across the entire school. This is because for some pupils with more complex needs, a structured approach is currently sometimes lacking so pupils do not always get into work routines as quickly as they could. Alternative means of communication such as signing and symbols, are often very well used to support access to learning for the youngest children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 and so aid achievement. However, this is not always so elsewhere and this means that these pupils do not always achieve as well as they could.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to school and their behaviour are very good. Attendance and punctuality are good. Provision for personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils very much enjoy school life, attend well and participate very effectively in their lessons and activities.
- Pupils learn to behave very well as they move through the school.
- Personal development is strongly promoted and planned for very effectively.

Commentary

7. Pupils like their school very much and have very positive attitudes to everything they do. This has helped maintain the high standards seen at the previous inspection. Pupils concentrate well in lessons and take a pride in their work and achievements. They particularly enjoy practical work in science and food technology and work very hard in drama and physical education. Pupils speak enthusiastically about trips to places of interest, after-school clubs, residential visits and college courses. They say that staff make learning interesting and give a lot of their time to help them. Many say that they would not change anything about the school. Strong relationships form a basis of mutual understanding and respect and these also contribute to the very positive attitude to learning in the school.

8. Pupils' very good behaviour is a significant feature of the school. They know how they should behave because all staff are consistent in their expectations of them. Improvement in pupils' behaviour is evident as they progress to the secondary department. Older pupils set good examples to others when helping to clear up at lunchtimes. Pupils recognise their own improved behaviour and say how much staff have helped them to achieve this. They say that there is no bullying because adults listen to them when they have any worries and deal very well with any incidents. Fixed-term exclusions were used for a small group of pupils who entered the school with

unacceptable behaviour. These were effective and the pupils' behaviour has improved, as a result. There has been one permanent exclusion.

9. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development as a result of the school's very positive ethos and the provision that is made for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. All pupils are treated with dignity and respect and staff work very effectively to enhance their self-esteem. Prayer and opportunities for reflection in assemblies contribute well to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils' efforts are highly valued and pupils themselves feel valued in return. Moral and social values are very strongly promoted. Pupils are productively, and very enthusiastically, involved in developing class rules, and they are helped to understand what is and is not acceptable. An awareness of the needs of others is successfully fostered through a number of collections for charity, for example, for Children in Need, Red Nose day and, recently, the Tsunami appeal. Pupils become increasingly independent and demonstrate their maturity when, for example, they act as playground friends to younger pupils. Many varied opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their social skills. This includes participation in a number of visits some of which are linked to subjects, and some to the development of life skills such as visiting cafes and shops, and all of which require pupils to behave appropriately toward those they meet. An awareness of their own and other cultures are very successfully encouraged, particularly through English, art, music and humanities

10. An awareness of the major world faiths, both through religious education lessons and celebrations of festivals, enables pupils to develop a very strong respect for the beliefs of others, as well as learning about different ways of life.

11. Pupils attend well. Their parents value the school and want their children to attend. Pupils arrive on time, greet staff politely and are very clear about the procedures for registration. They talk sociably to one another and staff as they wait patiently in the hall before going to lessons. This positive start sets the tone for the day and pupils settle quickly in the classrooms ready for learning.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.2	School data	0.6
National data	8.2	National data	1.8

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	140	10	1
White – any other White background	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	2		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3		
Black or Black British – African	2		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	1		

The table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching very effectively supports the very good independence skills pupils acquire in Years 7 to 11 and which are built on earlier work. Teaching is very effectively aided by assessment, with data used to check progress made and set further targets. The curriculum is good overall with that for older pupils being very good. Additional activities, community and school links all very significantly enrich pupils' experiences. Along with very good care, support and guidance this gives pupils confidence and the self-esteem to work hard and succeed.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall with very good features. Overall, assessment is very effectively used.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships and high expectations of behaviour successfully support pupils' learning.
- Teaching is very well aided by a varied range of training.
- Teachers and support staff plan well and work very effectively together to make sure pupils' individual needs are met, although there are occasions in which a few pupils with more complex needs do not learn as well as they could.
- The very effective way all staff engage pupils in their own learning means that by the time pupils are in Years 7 to 11 their ability to work independently is greatly enhanced.
- There has been a significant improvement in assessment since the previous inspection.

Commentary

12. The quality of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection and the school has clearly moved forward. It has effectively increased the variety of skills teaching and learning support assistants have so they can work with the wider range of pupil needs. As a result, staff work co-operatively to meet these complex needs using a varied range of strategies and groupings. To support them, there has been a significant range of carefully targeted high quality training to help all staff feel confident. Alongside this there is careful monitoring and mentoring of new staff such as newly qualified teachers and those on the graduate teacher training programme. The continuing professional development of all members of staff, which is firmly rooted in whole school development, enhances the pupils' skills extremely well. As a result, staff have the confidence and knowledge to support pupils' learning effectively.

13. Staff expect pupils to behave well, which they mainly do. Most teachers and support staff are skilled in managing those with more challenging behaviours, enabling pupils to concentrate on their work. They deal with any problems calmly ensuring that the learning of others is disrupted as little as possible. Staff understand what to do when some pupil behaviour does become unacceptable and they act promptly to defuse issues and to reintegrate pupils back into lessons if they leave the class, so little time is lost. They are given options which help them to return to class on a positive note and continue learning, such as using choices cards where pupils go into another setting for a fixed period of time to calm down. This is supported by the high quality of relationships all staff have with pupils where they are frequently praised and rewarded. As a result, pupils trust staff and feel confident and able to try tasks which they find difficult and which extend their learning. The strong emphasis on teaching and learning throughout the school helps to create an atmosphere in which pupils are keen to do well. They respond very well to their teachers' high expectations for them and often pupils who have had negative experiences in other settings do well here.

14. Teachers set clear, precise targets for pupils which provide the basis for much work. Targets are very effectively reviewed to support further learning. For example, in the classes for pupils in Years 1 and 2, there were many examples of staff working individually with pupils and work being

immediately annotated and assessed to inform further teaching. This works well because teachers and support staff work and plan very effectively as a team and this provides pupils with appropriately challenging tasks. All staff understand the needs of the pupils they teach. Team work, where lessons are well organised so support assistants know what they need to do, ensures that tasks match the learning needs of different pupils very well. This is accomplished through a variety of learning activities, which include whole class and individual tasks so pupils remain interested and motivated. Learning support assistants always play an integral part in lessons to make sure all pupils remain on task by, for example, scribing, listening to reading, taking groups or reinforcing targets. Most lessons are well structured with plenty for pupils to do. However, for pupils with more complex and additional needs who need a great deal of support, there is occasionally insufficient structure and clarity of purpose to the lesson. This means that they are not engaged in activities for as long as they could be and this affects their learning. Whereas the school is using additional means of communication such as signs and symbols well in classes, such as the primary autistic resource base for pupils in Years 1 and 2, this is sometimes inconsistent elsewhere. It reflects the influx of pupils with more complex needs and the fact that while staff have had appropriate training, some have not all yet had enough practice to be confident.

15. The way teachers organise lessons and concentrate on individual work means that by the time pupils are of secondary age they are practicing, and have the capacity to use, a very good range of independence skills to assist their learning. For example, they collect and return work, filing it in the correct place. Previous teaching of ICT skills means they use computers to gain information and do research in PSHE and geography. In art, work is carefully organised so pupils from the autistic resource base are challenged, and able to work independently. In English they use simple dictionaries without help having been taught these skills when younger. In English and mathematics pupils mark their own work, with those in Year 11 mathematics lessons then discussing areas they feel they need further support. The effective use of writing frames means that these pupils can write paragraphs on their own and concentrate for good periods of time. Teachers also spend time giving pupils the confidence to attempt tasks before asking for help to encourage them to try things out and become self reliant.

16. The assessment systems and records that cover whole school issues are very good overall and give staff a detailed view of how pupils are doing. Most subject assessment is carefully kept up to date and used successfully to support learning. There has been good improvement in the way that all the staff now monitor the same key targets on a termly basis. The analysis of the data about these targets by senior staff helps to ensure that individual pupils maintain hard won skills. As a result, there are regular, shared updates to the information that the school keeps about all pupils' progress in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. Subsequent monitoring makes sure that the use of these different records has a clear impact on teaching. Pupils have precise targets in their individual education plans (IEPs) and these are on display in all teaching areas. The reviews of these plans and the Annual Review reports are very thorough and used to great effect for subsequent target setting. However, there is still a need for further development in religious education.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 58 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (2 %)	21 (36 %)	22 (38 %)	14 (24 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. It provides a broad range of opportunities and activities, relevant to the needs of the pupils. Opportunities for enriching the

curriculum are very good. The school's accommodation is satisfactory and resources are good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Support for learning outside the school day is outstanding and supplementary activities give pupils many rich, additional and valuable experiences.
- There are very good opportunities for pupils to improve their personal and social development throughout the school day.
- While the curriculum is well matched to age and needs overall, it meets the needs of older pupils very well.
- Accommodation sometimes restricts learning.

Commentary

17. Since the previous inspection the school has worked very successfully to increase provision for learning outside the school day. Notwithstanding the obvious transport difficulties, a very wide range of well-attended and stimulating clubs and activities are provided for both primary and secondary-aged pupils whatever their abilities. For example, there are after-school and lunchtime sports clubs, evening youth clubs and weekend and holiday clubs, in addition to residential experiences. Participation in sport is particularly strong, with skills development in rugby and football taught by visiting coaches and tournaments and competitions held with local schools. Furthermore, an extensive range of visits and visitors supports the curriculum, widening pupils' experience and understanding of their community. The wide range of activities on and off site supports classroom based learning very well, and pupils visit a variety of museums, churches, galleries and places of local interest. These visits contribute effectively to the school's PSHE provision.

18. Personal, social and health education is at the heart of pupils' learning experiences and provision is very good. As well as being successfully taught as a subject, it permeates the school day and provides the foundation for all learning. The effectiveness of the planned programme is evident in the very good support for personal development and the skills needed for life in the community.

19. The curriculum includes all aspects of the National Curriculum and religious education and is organised so it is matched to pupils' ages and needs. This is achieved because classes and groups are effectively, but flexibly, organised so that they support the curricular needs of pupils and can be altered, if needed. For example, the pupils from the three resource bases for autistic pupils have opportunities to work with other pupils and join other classes when appropriate. As a result, the curriculum has continued to evolve well to meet the changing needs of the pupils joining the school. The emphasis on direct experience enables pupils to understand what some big issues, such as pollution, mean locally. There is a very effective curriculum programme for older pupils, including work related learning (WRL), and they are, therefore, very well prepared for life after school. There is a wide range of provision, some at mainstream schools and others at colleges offering training and accreditation. Pupils are interested in their studies and motivated by them. This, together with a good range of opportunities for students to gain accreditation including ASDAN and Entry Level provide an appropriate degree of challenge for pupils and enable them to receive recognition of their success.

20. Some aspects of the accommodation are very high quality, such as the recently completed sports hall and respite care centre. Pupils value the opportunities these provide and are proud of this provision. The school has worked imaginatively to create learning spaces for different groups and for individual work. However, some areas limit what can be taught and this has an adverse affect on learning. Internally, the layout means that some rooms always have to be used as passageways, for instance the location of the secondary computer suite means that there are numerous interruptions as pupils move from one room to another. Additionally, the irregular shape of the room and lack of an interactive white board, impacts on the effectiveness of demonstrations.

Similarly, in the primary department, pupils receive ICT skills lessons on a bank of computers housed in a Year 6 classroom making it hard to teach without disturbing another class.

21. Although the school has been very creative in its use of available space, some rooms are now too small to accommodate those pupils who need plenty of space around them and freedom from distraction. Teachers' jobs are, therefore, more difficult, sometimes restricting the opportunities that pupils have and limiting the progress that they can make. Teachers work hard to avoid this, aided by support staff who are very effectively matched to the curriculum and assist teachers with this. The school recognises that there are issues within the main building and is working hard, and for the most part effectively, to address these problems, some of which may ease if numbers go down after the re-organisation.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. They are given very good support, advice and guidance. The involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very well cared for by all adults working in the school.
- Pupils have very good relationships with adults.
- Staff work very well together to provide pupils with very good support and guidance.
- The new respite care provision is very good.

Commentary

22. All adults working in the school have the best interests of the pupils at heart. Procedures for health and safety are very good and constantly reviewed as pupils with different needs enter the school. Child protection procedures are very well implemented and understood by all staff. There is very good and careful monitoring of pupils who are in public care. The school works very effectively with health care professionals to support pupils and their families both in and out of school. The school has employed a specialist speech and language therapist to work particularly with pupils with autism. However, further development of the role in support of whole class strategies for learning is necessary where there are pupils with more complex needs. This is to overcome the problem that parents identify about there never being enough therapy time available to meet all the needs in school. Pupils say that staff are 'lovely because they care for us'. Parents value highly the care given to their children. They feel they are treated fairly and that they are helped to settle in well when they start.

23. Pupils are very positive about the relationships they have with adults working in the school. They say that they can go to them for help at any time if they are worried about their work or personal circumstances and that they will be listened to. Older pupils say how much they appreciate having younger support staff to talk to, as well as very good guidance and help from their teachers. A school council has just been elected to provide more formal opportunities for pupils to discuss school life and how it can be improved.

24. Teachers and support staff work together as very effective teams to help pupils learn to improve their behaviour and to achieve their best. They are sensitive to pupils' needs and care for them very well. Very good quality assessment of pupils' academic and personal progress enables staff to set clear targets in pupils' individual education plans. Teachers use these very well to plan pupils' work, to evaluate how well they are progressing and to celebrate their achievements in the classroom and by the presentation of certificates in assembly. Behaviour plans for some individual pupils have clear targets and are used very well by staff to help pupils understand what they must do to improve. Pupils are supported very effectively as they move through the school and plan for their futures. They are given very good guidance on placements and college courses and are very well supported through the period of transition.

25. The development of Christopher's Cottage, the new respite care provision, demonstrates the school's commitment to providing continuing care for pupils. It provides high quality planned and emergency care for pupils at this and other schools. There is a very good focus on providing pupils with the opportunity to learn independent living and social skills while being cared for very well in high-standard, modern accommodation. Its facilities are also available during the school day for counselling, play therapy and small group teaching, although these opportunities are not yet fully developed due to the newness of the provision.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are very good. There are very good links with the community. The school has developed some very strong links with neighbouring primary and secondary schools and local colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The home-school partnership is very positive and benefits pupils' education very well.
- The school's uses its links with the community very well to enrich pupils' learning and for them to meet pupils from other schools.
- The school is outward looking and works keenly with other schools and colleges.

Commentary

26. The school has a very successful partnership with parents which has a strong impact on pupils' learning, achievement and happiness. They are provided with very good and regular information about pupils' progress and about the work and development of the school. For example, parents learn about their children's progress towards achieving their individual targets on a regular basis. The cycle of different assessments and reports conveys a great deal of useful, up-to-date information about that progress across a wide range of measures. Parents make a very positive contribution at Annual Reviews and their input is carefully maintained within pupils' files. There is a very good and genuine commitment on the part of staff to work with and support all parents. As a result, parents have very good views of the school. They feel comfortable approaching the school and say that teachers are always there to help them and to listen to their concerns. They feel that the school communicates very well with them, both formally at meetings, reviews and in reports, but also in its day-to-day contact, either personally or by telephone. Above all, they feel that the school gives them hope for their children's future and they have been very supportive of it during a period of uncertainty and change.

27. Community links have been strengthened since the last inspection. The school has a clear commitment to supporting every pupil and has extended its brief outside the normal confines of the school day to provide its facilities as a community focus for a variety of clubs and meetings. In this it plays an important role in providing facilities for the community outside the school day and uses every opportunity it can to forge links and to allow open access to its facilities for all groups. These are very highly regarded by interest groups such as MENCAP. There is a wide variety of Saturday, evening and holiday clubs for mainstream and pupils with special educational needs, including those from The St Christopher School. The sports hall provides adults and children with and without learning and other disabilities with excellent sporting and club facilities and was made possible by extensive and generous community and business support and funding. The newly opened respite care provision also extends the school's facilities for the community further.

28. The school has effectively begun to provide support for mainstream schools in meeting the needs of pupils with autism. This follows on from work started as a beacon school and is being undertaken behalf of the local education authority. Schools already welcome and value this, although it is still in the early stages. Senior staff, including advanced skills teachers, visit mainstream schools to observe pupils and offer support and guidance. Mainstream school staff also visit the school to observe practice and to discuss strategies for improving the learning and

behaviour of individual pupils. Mainstream schools are very positive about the support and advice they are receiving and feel that it effectively aids their teaching. Links are also forged through the very well monitored and planned graduate teacher programme as trainees work in The St Christopher School and a mainstream school during each week and are able to learn, use and pass on good practice.

29. The school seeks to place pupils within mainstream schools wherever possible. Careful programmes for gradual transition are established which initially include support from learning support assistants. As a result of this carefully planned transition, younger pupils have been successfully reintegrated into a local mainstream primary school. A small number of older pupils join lessons in mainstream schools for particular subjects which for some lead to GCSE accreditation.

30. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 benefit from a link with a local agricultural college and a college of further education. These experiences prepare pupils very well for their life after school. There are good links with other local schools through the School Sports Co-ordinator Programme. This scheme, together with the excellent quality of physical education accommodation, has allowed the school to form strong relationships with coaches at local sports clubs, several of whom come to the school to take coaching sessions. This provision benefits both pupils in the school and other members of the local community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school is very good overall. The leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher is very good and of other key staff good. Management is very effective and governors have a good overview.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Developments have continued to take place because the headteacher has an excellent vision for the restructured school and has high quality plans already in place.
- Monitoring and evaluation are successfully used to make sure pupils' are given the best chance to succeed.
- Staff teams work together very well; however, subject co-ordinators do not always monitor teaching.
- Excellent provision for training means that all staff are very strongly supported in undertaking this and there is a significant commitment to teacher training.
- Governors know the school well and have a good overview.

Commentary

31. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. This is despite the now imminent reorganisation which has been mooted for several years, the anxiety surrounding this, the changes made to the proposals and the subsequent loss of some staff in the secondary department. Improvement has been possible because the senior management team, including the two assistant headteachers, have worked very effectively together to make sure that all staff have access to high quality training and support. This has aided the ability of staff to very successfully work together so that pupils continue to achieve as well as possible. Improvements such as the sports hall and Christopher's Cottage have gone ahead, involving both staff and the community and this has particularly contributed to staff and pupil morale. Throughout the consultations, the headteacher has maintained an excellent vision of where the school needs to go, being astute at seeing issues and their implications. This is clear in plans for next year. These include very well thought through staffing teams based on evaluation of the present structure and future needs. It includes the appointment of more advanced skills teachers to disseminate skills. This has put the school in a very good position from which to develop from September.

32. Throughout, the senior management team, have ensured that the school has remained an outward looking establishment which ensures as much as possible that pupils' needs are met. This has been done by strengthening links with other schools and colleges, piloting outreach for the local education authority and joining with mainstream schools to train graduates as teachers. It is also seen in the many ways pupils are grouped in school to make sure their individual needs are met. This is supported effectively by monitoring and evaluation by senior staff as well as careful use of data. For example, the deputy headteacher acts as co-ordinator for both special educational needs and assessment to great effect. Her overview ensures that the school's leadership and management team have a clear summary of key information on both the skills staff need to meet pupils' needs and pupil data that can be checked back, if necessary, to each individual pupil's record. The links between these roles, along with the monitoring to see how well pupils are achieving are then used to very effectively inform staff performance management, staff training and any additional resources or provision needed for pupils.

33. As a result, provision for staff development is excellent and focuses well on the school's priorities for improvement and those which will benefit the pupils with increasingly more complex autism and attention deficit hyperactive disorder needs. Wherever possible, all staff are encouraged to undertake courses which lead to accreditation. For example, support staff are encouraged to take courses from GCSE English and mathematics to completion of degrees. The school considers it is important that staff have skills that they can train other staff in. The school has four advanced skills teachers and two staff are qualified trainers in positive behaviour management. They train other staff in the systems, which are applied throughout the school.

34. Performance management is effective in helping staff to improve. The training programme, which is based on this and staff development is equipping staff with the new skills they require to meet the widening range and increasing complexity of the learning needs of pupils. In some cases, however, some training is too new for skills to be completely effective as yet. The school also provides initial teacher training for graduate trainees along with other mainstream schools. The school plays a major part in this training and staff who have been through the course rate it highly. Staff who act as mentors to the students find that this is an additional support for their own professional development.

35. As this is a foundation school, governors have full responsibility for the school. They are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, clearly involved and have a good overview. This is achieved by monitoring and evaluation through talking to staff, committee meetings, and regular visits to the school including some to look at lessons. They have been very involved in raising money for the new building and the sizeable carry over of money to the last financial year was to complete the payment for this work, which has now been done. Governors have been very pro-active with the local education authority over the re-organisation and have taken the opportunity to be involved in development planning, looking closely at how the school operates and where modification or change is needed.

36. There are a wide range of meetings for staff to express views which they value and which supports their ability to work together very effectively. Generally staff lead and manage their subjects effectively. There are development plans and budgets in place, planning is monitored and meetings held to discuss issues. For most, but not all, subjects there is both a primary and secondary co-ordinator, although this will change next year as the school feels it will be more consistent to have one per subject. However, co-ordinators do not have the opportunity to monitor teaching to check on skills and knowledge so they can advise others who teach and support that subject.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1,591,997
Total expenditure	1,584,851
Expenditure per pupil	10,358

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	103,084
Balance carried forward to the next	-4,124

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

The provision for work related learning is **very good**.

- All Year 10 and Year 11 pupils have the opportunity to take part in a period of work experience.
- There is a very good range of accreditation for pupils' work related learning experiences.
- Pupils and their parents are very well supported in planning for and making decisions about life after school.

37. The provision for work related learning is very good and prepares pupils very well for life after leaving school. Staff take great care to ensure that all pupils have access to work related experiences and courses which match their needs and abilities. All Year 10 and 11 pupils complete a very well planned period of work experience. Pupils are well prepared for this experience by visits from advisers from the Trident Trust work experience organisation and Connexions. Prior to this, pupils follow a well structured programme which develops their understanding of the world of work and the expectations of employers. This is delivered through the framework of either the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme or for lower attaining pupils the Transitional Challenge. These provide pupils with accreditation for their work. Visitors to the school, from a variety of occupations, and visits out to careers days, extend pupils understanding of the career opportunities that exist both locally and further afield.

38. School staff, Connexions and MENCAP advisers support both pupils and their parents in planning for and making decisions about life after school. The PSHE programme includes careers education and this work helps to inform pupils' decisions.

39. All pupils attend a local college for part of the week. In Year 10 they attend an agricultural college. In addition, Year 10 and 11 pupils have the opportunity to attend a local further education college for vocational courses that are accredited through ASDAN.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision in the Foundation Stage is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for children's personal, social and emotional development is very good and for all other areas is good.
- Although the curriculum is effectively planned to provide a broad range of activities, work is not always organised effectively for those with more complex needs.
- Assessment procedures are very good and this supports the good progress children make in lessons and towards their individual targets.

Commentary

40. Children are presently taught in two classes according to their special educational needs. The autistic resource base mainly has children of nursery and reception age alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2, while the other class is a group of reception age children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 with mixed needs. There are only a small number of children in the Foundation Stage. Most only arrived last term and two this term. Consequently, it is not possible to make a judgement about overall achievement, although children make good, and sometimes very good, progress in lessons due to the individual nature of much of the work which is often matched to IEP targets. For the few children who have been in the school longer achievement is good overall. This is similar to the last inspection.

41. **Personal, social and emotional development** is very good because from the minute they enter school there are a range of carefully planned activities aimed at helping them settle in, start to be independent and get to know adults. All children learn to choose activities and how to take turns which encourages them to become confident and aware of others. In the base for children with autism, staff work hard with children on dressing skills and activities where several children can be encouraged to work together such as using play dough or toys. In the class for mixed needs pupils, reception age children begin to be aware of others and their needs during snack time when carefully passing food round and talking quietly. They learn to share and say or gesticulate please and thank you when passing round cake when prompted by staff. They enjoy working together when playing with a train and track. Children progress well in **communication, language and literacy** because work is matched to their individual needs and there are opportunities to use language throughout the day. In the autistic base, children share books, turn pages and listen to stories, concentrating well. They make marks on paper and write a story with symbols which is then read to them. Signing and symbols are very effectively used by staff in both classes to make sure children understand what is expected. Children in the mixed needs class learn to speak to an audience during news time. They sing the alphabet, recognise letters and sounds using the interactive white board, and call them out confidently. They under copy and over trace letters and words carefully. All Foundation Stage children take part in role-play; for example, when riding on a pretend train, they make appropriate train noises and explain what they see as they go along. This helps them begin to interact with others.

42. Progress in **mathematical development** is good. This is because much work is individual and takes account of their targets. Higher attaining children know their colours, match and name simple shapes, count and subtract to five and match coins up to 50 pence. Lower attaining children use singing to count and match and count to four. Children make good progress in developing their **knowledge and understanding of the world** through visits to the local environment, such as that to Southend Pier and shops and through activities in school. They begin to learn ICT skills while using the interactive whiteboard and when using computer programmes such as a number

workshop. Higher attaining children begin to understand how a programmable device moves when investigating and predicting how to programme it so it will reach a certain part of the room. Lower attaining children learn the difference between pushing and pulling and cause and effect using a range of toys with switches.

43. In **creative development**, staff provide many art opportunities such as using paint and glitter, making hand prints, using play dough and making collages. Music is often used to enhance understanding of different areas of the curriculum such as counting songs and those on the present theme of 'trains'. Children enjoy these opportunities and try hard to join in with words and actions achieving well. All children have the opportunity to be imaginative during structured play. Progress in **physical development** is good because there are many opportunities to develop this at playtime and through more formal lessons. Well-planned activities, such as threading and early writing skills, support hand eye co-ordination. At playtime, children move up, over and under equipment independently with staff encouraging and assisting them to climb and jump. They swim and use the soft play areas. For lessons in the sports hall, they warm up to *Simon Says* and enthusiastically experience activities such as jumping in and out of hoops and run round obstacles. Children are well supported in these tasks and are enabled to move around as much as possible, using different movements and parts of the body.

44. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed by two experienced teachers who work very effectively with support staff. As a result, teaching is good with some very good features. Teachers know the children well and plan work carefully to meet their individual needs. Although planning is good and based on areas of learning for the Foundation Stage, it rarely refers specifically to the early learning goals. Children are assessed on entry and gains made are recorded on a daily basis, along with annotation of work and the use of the digital camera to record progress. This gives staff a clear picture of how children are doing and what they need to do next. Relationships are very good and this helps children settle well and begin to progress. Good use is made of resources to motivate and encourage. In the base for children with autism there are occasions when a few newer children with additional needs are not as engaged in activities as they could be. As a result, routines are not as quickly established so that they can begin to learn.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1, 2, 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good with some very good features, which enables pupils to achieve well.
- There is a very good range of assessment, although there are occasions when this is not effectively linked to planning.
- The subject is well led and the co-ordinators are clear of the developments needed to further improve provision.
- Additional means of communication, such as signing and symbols, are not consistently used to support pupils with more complex needs, especially to aid their reading and writing skills.

Commentary

45. Through the effective teaching pupils make good progress across the curriculum and in their individual targets. By the time they leave school, most pupils have successfully completed the literacy elements of the ASDAN course and the AQA literacy tests at levels in line with their abilities. In the best lessons teachers plan well to meet the needs of all their pupils because they have good knowledge of them, understand the ways in which they learn and set appropriate tasks. They have very good relationships with pupils and this gives them confidence to attempt tasks which they find difficult. These teachers are skilled in managing those with more challenging behaviours enabling pupils to concentrate on their work. Learning support assistants are very well used both to help manage behaviour and, to support pupils' learning.

46. Speaking and listening skills are being well developed as pupils are encouraged to contribute to discussions. For younger pupils this may be through sharing news or information, while older pupils give their views on books or plays they are reading. Through careful checking by teachers, pupils' vocabulary is developed. Pupils with more complex needs are supported in their communication through the use of signing and symbol, but this is not always consistent, and pupils across the school would benefit from further use of these. Younger pupils begin to develop awareness of reading, and learn to hold a book the right way up and to turn pages. They recognise the names of their peers or of the characters in their reading books, while those with more complex needs identify timetable symbols. Pupils are helped to develop reading skills as they follow reading schemes, and develop a range of strategies for decoding unknown words. Higher attaining pupils read fluently and are provided with an interesting range of literature in their English lessons. A useful development since the last inspection has been the purchase of additional reading materials to supplement the reading scheme, giving pupils supplementary materials at suitable levels. Pupils who have specific difficulties with reading are also helped through the additional individual lessons. Pupils gradually acquire writing skills with the youngest making marks on paper or copying patterns. As they mature, pupils copy under writing, copy short sentences from the board, and progress to independent writing. Handwriting is taught regularly so that many pupils develop a good style. Pupils are given opportunities to write for different purposes, for example, in writing 'thank you' letters to visitors to the school, in completing forms or in writing emotional poetry.

47. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked, both in relation to IEPs and to the National Curriculum. In addition, there are annual reading assessments, to ensure that pupils are making progress, and to identify those who might need additional help. This is now linked to recently introduced termly reading interviews, which help teachers to build up a picture of how pupils read and are a very positive development. Whole school targets for aspects such as being able to write their names and addresses, are also checked. Within the classes teachers continually assess pupils' progress in

lessons, but in some cases the expected outcomes of a lesson are not clear in planning, and this limits the possibilities for assessment.

48. The co-ordinators, both of whom are relatively new to the school, have a clear vision for the development of the subject and have produced appropriate plans to underpin this. This is good improvement since the last inspection when no such plans existed. They lead and manage the subject well. There have been effective changes in the curriculum, and more are planned to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils. These are well rooted in the national strategies. The curriculum is monitored to ensure that all aspects are covered but, as yet, the co-ordinators have no role in motoring teaching in the subject, which means that the advice they can give to colleagues is limited. The co-ordinators have audited and developed resources, but there has not yet been an opportunity to develop the library which, as at the time of the last inspection, is in a corridor and not suitable for pupils to learn library skills.

Language and Literacy across the curriculum

49. There is good support for the development of language and literacy in different subjects. Throughout the school pupils are encouraged to respond to questions, give their views and listen carefully to others. Reading is well supported as they are given opportunities to read in different subjects, with teachers and support staff helping those who have difficulty. Vocabulary is introduced and consolidated where key words are explained and displayed. Pupils record their work in different subjects, for example, in history they write about the local area, and in geography they describe the sensory garden. Where needed, writing frames are used to help pupils structure their work, for example, in geography and science.

Modern Foreign Languages

50. The school's work in modern foreign languages was only sampled during the inspection. Three lessons were observed and it is not, therefore, possible to form judgements about provision or teaching and learning. However, a selection of moderated work was sampled and planning and teacher records were examined

51. During the inspection lessons were seen in French, Polish and Spanish. In these lessons, teaching and learning were good but very good for a class of younger pupils. This was because the pupils were very enthusiastic, there was very good use of time, activities challenged them and they achieved very well. In one lesson, the teacher made very good use of the plenary session to assess the pupils' understanding of the vocabulary they had learned. Teachers use the target language well and encourage pupils to respond. There are suitable schemes of work which are matched to the ability of pupils and carefully planned so that pupils constantly build on their previous work and extend their vocabulary.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features.
- Pupils achieve well and this is supported by very positive attitudes to learning.
- The planning and assessment of work meets the needs of the wide ability range well.
- Mathematics is well led because the co-ordinators have ensured the subject has improved.
- Learning support assistants provide very good support for pupils.

Commentary

52. High expectations and good planning are features of mathematics teaching throughout the school. As a result, pupils are engaged in tasks and make good progress. Teachers plan a variety of learning activities, which include whole class and individual learning experiences. Their good knowledge of pupils means that they organise work which provide pupils with an appropriate level of challenge. Teachers assess pupils' work well. They track their progress regularly and use this information to plan pupils' next learning activities and to see where extra help may be needed. They use questioning techniques well to keep pupils alert and to develop their understanding. They use a range of strategies to reinforce learning so that all pupils remain very well motivated and achieve well. However, in a very small number of lessons some pupils were not fully engaged in learning as the lesson activities did not provide them with sufficient structure or challenge.

53. The youngest pupils make good gains while developing their understanding of number as teachers use a wide range of activities to help them count to 10 and beyond. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 concentrate well while progressing in their understanding of multiplication and fractions. They recognise the symbol for multiplication and chant their two-times table. Higher attaining pupils learn their five and 10 times tables. All pupils gain an understanding of the terms 'half' and 'quarter' as they are encouraged by teachers to jump and turn as instructed on a trampoline and by cutting their pizzas into half and quarters. They enjoy these activities, remain interested and learn from them.

54. Teachers encourage pupils in Years 7 to 11 to build upon their knowledge of number operations. Pupils gain an understanding of units used to measure time and the relationships between them. They use the 12 and 24 hour clocks to record time. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 are able to solve equations using brackets, make scale drawings to a given scale and calculate percentages as part of their GCSE coursework. Pupils extend their understanding of co-ordinates and plot and record co-ordinates in four quadrants.

55. Support staff make a significant contribution to pupils' achievement. Learning support assistants are deployed effectively and provide very good support; for example, in managing the challenging behaviour of some pupils and enabling them to take part in the learning activities. Support assistants work with small groups as they complete their tasks which are well matched to their ability. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good, as they were at the time of the last inspection, and this helps create a purposeful and supportive working atmosphere in lessons.

56. The two co-ordinators provide good subject leadership. Good improvement has been supported by their development of detailed schemes of work that guide teachers as they plan lessons to meet the needs of all pupils. Through observing the teaching in mathematics, they have been able to support colleagues and monitor progress. A good range of accreditation which includes GCSE and Entry Level qualifications is offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11. This is an improvement since the last inspection when only some of their work was accredited. Pupils' progress is well monitored through individual education plan targets, the Annual Review process and the school's curriculum assessment procedures. The good progress reported at the time of the last inspection has been maintained.

Mathematics across the curriculum

57. Overall, there is satisfactory support for mathematics in other subjects with teachers carefully reinforcing pupils' mathematical skills and understanding. For example, in an ICT lesson for pupils in Years 1 and 2, pupils counted how many times they pressed the buttons on a programmable device and in a physical education lesson pupils counted and recorded each other's performance in a circuit training session. The mathematics co-ordinators carefully monitor the development of numeracy skills across the curriculum through subject schemes of work and teacher's planning. However, planning is not always consistent or systematically used so some opportunities are lost to extend skills gained.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good throughout the school.
- Staff are knowledgeable and plan well to make sure that pupils learn effectively.
- The strong emphasis on practical work encourages pupils to think for themselves.

Commentary

58. Pupils make good small steps progress through the school in their knowledge and understanding of science and achievement is similar to that at the last inspection. Pupils achieve well because teachers and teaching assistants work very effectively together to ensure all pupils are fully engaged in their learning. This is managed through well planned lessons which include activities that meet the wide range of individual needs. Lessons are interesting, activities engage pupils and very good use is made of appropriate resources.

59. In Years 1 to 6, toys play a valuable part in relating science to what pupils already know and enjoy. The youngest pupils learn by trial and error about whether to push or pull a new toy but the skilful use of language reinforces their work so that they learn new ideas well. In Year 3, pupils recognise that some toys work whether they push or pull them and they create a new category on their worksheets to capture this fact. By Year 5, pupils categorise forces without needing toys to guide their thinking and observe that opening a door requires both pushing and pulling to be successful. All enjoy being actively involved in investigations and problem solving. Good support gives pupils the confidence to try out their own ideas. This helps them to complete simple record sheets that organise their observations so that, by Year 7, pupils settle quickly to investigate energy transfer in everyday objects such as balloons and torches. In Years 10 and 11, pupils use their knowledge to good effect and, with little direct support, lower attaining pupils build circuits of varying degrees of complexity while higher attaining pupils in Year 11 carry out a series of related experiments to separate mixtures of salt, flour, tea and iron filings. As a result, pupils do well in Entry Level accreditation with 15 passing and most achieving well.

60. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and select carefully the resources to support their lessons and engage pupils' interest. They make sure that key words and ideas receive the right degree of emphasis and this helps pupils to learn while they carry out their investigations. Practical work forms the basis for almost every lesson and this is well prepared and highly motivating. Pupils learn quickly about health and safety issues and conduct themselves well in lessons. Teachers have high expectations and a clear focus on learning but teach in a relaxed way that consolidates very good relationships with the pupils. Learning support assistants aid learning very effectively throughout the school whether by scribing answers, for pupils who cannot write clearly, or by reinforcing the targets for the lesson.

61. Leadership and management are both good. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection because the new co-ordinator has introduced changes that link science more closely into pupils' everyday experience throughout the school. The experience and oversight of just one co-ordinator ensures that when similar topics, such as forces, recur in different years, not only does knowledge build on what pupils already know but that pupils feel more confident about what they are doing. This encourages greater interest in the subject. However, as yet there has been no monitoring of teaching by the co-ordinator to help with evaluation of how well the subject is progressing.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good throughout the school.
- Accommodation adversely affects learning, but resources are good.
- Leadership of the subject has ensured that resources have been developed appropriately.
- Information and communication technology is used well across the curriculum.

Commentary

62. The achievement of pupils throughout the school is good. Although this does not mirror the 'very good' judgement found during the last inspection the discrepancy can be explained by the increasing special educational needs of the changing school population. Improvement overall has been good. Hard and software resources have improved and every class now has reliable access to the Internet. Pupils of all abilities are gaining in confidence and using the technology effectively, most notably in their access to the Internet for retrieving information and in the development of skills. As a result their competence in ICT is good in relation to their capabilities. Last year 15 pupils gained Entry Level passes, three at the highest grade. Currently, one higher attaining pupil is studying for a GCSE at a local secondary mainstream school.

63. Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are explained clearly so that pupils understand what is expected of them. Questions and tasks are adapted to meet pupils' individual abilities and interests and the teacher repeatedly checks their understanding. The very good relationships in lessons enhance the progress all pupils make. Pupils find the correct programmes and use them effectively. Subject vocabulary is used very well so that pupils begin to use it as they discuss their work. For instance, in a lesson on data handling, Year 8 pupils clearly understood the difference between records, files and fields. Staff expect pupils to try their hardest and do very well. Pupils are encouraged to attempt tasks before asking for help and this effectively promotes their independent learning.

64. Aspects of the accommodation adversely affect some teaching and learning in ICT lessons. Dedicated ICT accommodation is sited either in corridors or within a class base, which makes teaching difficult. Although the school has four recently purchased interactive whiteboards the computer suite lacks this facility. Currently demonstrations are carried out in front of a small screen; limiting the effectiveness of teacher demonstration. Staff work very hard to minimise the impact of the shortcomings of the accommodation by making the most of what there is and by maintaining a good standard of teaching.

65. The subject is led and managed well. The co-ordinator has developed a very good range of resources to support learning across the curriculum. These resources are regularly audited and all staff are aware of programs they can use. Scrutiny of pupils' written work and examination of teacher records indicated that, although good, there is still room for development in terms of the detailed information kept of pupil's progress. In recognition of this, a commercial assessment program using 'p levels' has been introduced. This should more clearly identify individual learning needs.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. Information and communication technology is well used both for research purposes and to extend the range and creativity of pupils' work. Having developed skills in the discrete information technology lessons, pupils use them effectively across the curriculum. For example, word processing is used in English and the Internet is used to find information in PSHE. In mathematics pupils produce frequency tables and graphs and digital cameras are used throughout the school for recording.

HUMANITIES

67. Only one lesson was observed in history and one in geography. It is not possible, therefore, to make judgements about the quality of provision, achievement and teaching. However, a selection of work, as well as teachers' planning and records were scrutinised and a discussion was held with the subject co-ordinators.

68. In the one Year 7 **geography** lesson observed teaching was good and relationships very good. During the lesson work on the rainforest was related to previous work on the weather and built upon what the pupils already knew about rainforests. There was a clear emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills and high standards were set for the correct use of new vocabulary. Good use of a video clip and a computer program provided variety within the lesson and created valuable additional learning opportunities.

69. In the one Year 3 **history** lesson, the teacher and the teaching assistants had to work hard initially to engage and focus a lively class. Their task was especially difficult because the classroom was too small for the nature of the group. Arrangements to calm the liveliest pupils away from the main group suffered because of this restriction. However, relationships between staff and pupils were very good even when pupils were at their most challenging. Despite these problems, the staff kept a very clear focus on the learning objectives. As a result, the majority of pupils could ask and answer questions about life in nineteenth century Leigh-on-Sea by the end of the lesson. The use of visual timetables, especially with younger pupils, helps all pupils begin to have an understanding of past, present and future from the moment they join the school.

70. The analysis of a sample of pupils' work files and records shows that their achievement is good throughout the school from Year 1 to Year 9 in both subjects. At this point, pupils start to follow courses that prepare them for life after school. Although geography and history inform some study modules in these courses, they are no longer taught as subjects that teachers assess in the same way.

71. The subject co-ordinators have a clear vision for humanities within the school. They emphasise first hand experience by using a good range of visits to historic places or locations that show different forms of land use. There is a strong emphasis on using places of interest in the locality. Pupils develop a better understanding of how to find their way round their own area and the importance of local environmental issues because of this focus. Resources to support humanities are good and well organised. Monitoring of the different subjects by co-ordinators, however, is mainly informal and this is an area for development.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development
- There is little in the way of formal assessment, however pupils in Years 10 and 11 do achieve accredited awards.

Commentary

72. Teaching overall is satisfactory, although there were examples of good and very good teaching. In the best lessons there is clear planning to indicate what pupils will learn, and this is explained to them at the beginning of the lesson, so that they know what is expected of them. A variety of activities and a good pace engage and sustain their interest. For example, in a lesson for Year 6 pupils, they were introduced through very good teaching to the Jewish feast of the Passover,

the story was read, they saw a short video about the special meal and then sampled some of the foods. They were fascinated, contributed well to discussion and made very good progress. Where teaching is not so successful but still nevertheless satisfactory, the pace is slow, pupils are less interested and behaviour becomes more difficult to manage. In some cases, teachers' subject knowledge is limited so that they cannot extend pupils' understanding.

73. Subject co-ordination is satisfactory and the subject has been satisfactorily maintained. The primary co-ordinator has worked hard to develop planning in line with the locally agreed syllabus. There is no secondary co-ordinator in post, but a new teacher is beginning to take on some of the role and, while planning is less developed, has provided helpful support to colleagues. However, there is no system of focused lesson observations, so the advice which can be given is limited. The locally agreed syllabus does not provide levels to parallel those in the National Curriculum. As none have not been developed in the school there is little in the way of consistent tracking of pupils' achievement although staff do know pupils and their needs well. As a result, it was not possible to make a judgement about achievement overall, although it was satisfactory in lessons observed. Information in reports is also very sketchy, being mainly detail of what experiences pupils have had, rather than statements of what they know, understand and can do. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 undertake a module of their ASDAN award looking at different faiths which adds to their understanding of diversity.

74. As pupils learn about the customs of different faiths, they become aware of the multi faith nature of the world, and are generally respectful when hearing about other peoples' beliefs. They have opportunities to visit places of worship such as a church and a synagogue, and have had talks from people of Christian, Jewish and Hindu religions. These experiences provide good support for their personal development.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

75. It is not possible to make a judgement on overall provision as the subject was just sampled. At the time of the inspection the whole range of resistant materials was not being taught due to staffing difficulties. However, two lessons were observed in textiles and one in food technology.

76. In both textile lessons seen, teaching was good, lively and interesting and pupils were encouraged to develop independence skills. Pupils were given the opportunity to experiment with a variety of materials and techniques, for instance, applying bleach to denim and working with felt. Good quality writing frames support learning and help pupils organise their work.

77. In food technology the curriculum is appropriately geared to fostering independence skills and is thoroughly enjoyed by all pupils. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils followed instructions well, were absorbed in the process of making their apple pies and proud of what they produced. Language skills, mathematics, hygiene and health and safety were reinforced well in all lessons seen.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enthusiastic teaching and effective subject knowledge encourages pupils to learn.
- Pupils are successful in accredited examinations at the end of Year 11.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development.

Commentary

78. While pupils of secondary age have dedicated art lessons, pupils in the primary department access the curriculum through well-planned links to other subject areas, in addition to dedicated lessons. This approach reinforces and develops skills as well as giving these pupils the opportunity to explore a variety of techniques and the properties of different media. Older pupils build on these skills culminating in the opportunity to gain accreditation at Entry level in Year 11. Last year 14 pupils gained passes, eight of which were at the highest level.

79. Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. In the art room, lessons are well planned and structured and the room is well organised. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching helps to maintain a good pace in lessons and provides interesting activities. Therefore, pupils apply themselves, frequently working independently and taking pride in what they produce. Consequently, the teacher is able to move around assisting pupils with technique and prompting and probing them to develop their ideas. Lessons begin promptly and pupils listen attentively to the teacher's introductory discussion. Activities are wide ranging and pupils are given the opportunity to experience a variety of materials as they produce two and three-dimensional work. Clay and *Modroc* modelling work is used to consolidate ideas such as scale and form. Information and communication technology is used effectively in this subject for pupils to design and explore various commercially produced programs through discrete ICT lessons and for research about well-known artists, such as *Seurat*, *Mondrian* and *Dali*.

80. Art makes a good contribution to pupils' personal, particularly cultural, development through their studies of the work of different artists as well as different cultures. For instance, a class of Year 5 pupils studied examples of *Seurat's* work to complete an exercise using a paint program in ICT. The subject also supports learning in other areas of the curriculum, for instance a group of pupils with autism built on their social skills, developing independence and organisational skills while making life size two-dimensional models of the human form.

81. Improvement has been good with a subject specialist developing and leading the subject well in tandem with the primary co-ordinator. Ongoing assessment is well used to encourage pupils to view their own work critically and to suggest ideas for development and improvement. The curriculum is structured to link well with subjects such as history and geography especially in the primary school.

Music

82. Only one lesson was observed so it is not possible to make a judgement on the overall provision for this subject. However, pupils up to Year 9 have music lessons, and planning shows that they are given good opportunities for singing, playing, listening to music and composing. In the one lesson seen, pupils built on a previous lesson on tempo, and began to compose their own music, using a variety of percussion instruments. All were enthusiastic about this, and made good progress. Pupils are given opportunities during the day for singing, for example, in assemblies, and younger pupils sing songs such as number and alphabet rhymes to assist their learning. There are two performances a year, in which pupils of all ages are encouraged to take part, and visitors such as a drummer extend pupils' understanding.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good attitudes towards learning and they achieve very well due to the positive way staff assess and support learning.
- The accommodation is excellent and this helps very good links with the local community. .
- All pupils are encouraged to participate in physical education and sporting activities outside the school day.
- Physical education and sport make a significant contribution to pupils' physical and social development.
- Professional development opportunities for all staff are very good.

Commentary

83. Pupils achieve very well because the quality of teaching is very good and, as a result, they are enthusiastic towards physical education and sport. The youngest pupils develop their skills of control and co-ordination using a variety of different resources. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 improve their passing, kicking and catching skills in different small game situations. They make good progress because teachers are quick to make activities increasingly challenging so pupils improve their performance. Higher attaining pupils control and pass a ball accurately over short distances. Older pupils understand the importance of warming up before physical activity. Some can demonstrate appropriate stretches for major muscle groups. In circuit training sessions they work hard to improve their levels of fitness.

84. Teachers have an encouraging approach and use humour well to capture pupils' attention and help them to remain focused. They give clear instructions and reinforce crucial points well. This helps pupils to understand exactly what is required. Learning support assistants play a very important part in supporting pupils learning and promoting appropriate behaviour. Teachers make careful assessments of pupils' achievement. They use these observations to plan activities which provide an appropriate challenge for all pupils, for example, in swimming sessions in which pupils work towards individual targets. These lessons end with teachers having a short discussion with every pupil so that they have a clear idea of what they have achieved and what they need to do next to improve further. Emphasis is placed on encouraging pupils to listen to others, observe their performances and comment on what they have seen. A strong feature is the focus on encouraging pupils to work with their peers. This has a positive impact on all pupils' social development.

85. There are very good opportunities for staff to develop their own knowledge, skills and understanding. Strong links have been established with some local mainstream schools as part of the government's School Sports Co-ordinator Programme. This has contributed to the very good opportunities for professional development for staff. Good use is made of coaches from local sports clubs.

86. The accommodation is now excellent. The new sports hall enables staff to extend the activities offered to pupils both during and out of school hours. The sports hall manager has worked hard to establish strong links with community groups and, as a result, the facilities are used by pupils and other members of the community in the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays.

87. The subject is very well led and managed. Levels of participation in physical education and sport are high because the ethos encourages all pupils to participate in sporting activities including residential trips. These experiences make a significant contribution to pupils' physical and social development. The co-ordinators have a clear vision for the further development of the subject which is based on encouraging the participation of all pupils.

88. There have been very good improvements in the provision since the last inspection, in particular in the accommodation and resources.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in personal, social, health education and citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff understand that PSHE and citizenship are very important to these pupils and take every opportunity to plan for, and reinforce, relevant skills throughout the day.
- Younger pupils benefit from a varied range of activities and tasks needed to help them begin to gain basic personal skills and access learning.
- There is a very well thought out and age appropriate scheme of work for secondary age pupils that equips them very well for adult life.

Commentary

89. Personal, social and health education pervades all aspects of the curriculum and contributes significantly to the pupils' social and moral development. While teaching in PSHE and citizenship lessons is good, teaching is very good overall. This is because learning is very successfully reinforced by the teaching of these skills as an integral part of the school day and supported significantly by team work with learning support assistants. This is necessary as many pupils have complex needs. They find social and personal skills difficult to grasp, particularly pupils in the three bases for pupils with autism where most aspects of work involve personal skills. As a result, a lot of thought has gone into ensuring pupils have every opportunity to gain as wide a range of skills as possible to support their life in the community. This has ensured that the subject has improved well since the previous inspection. Despite the changes about to happen, staff are continuing to innovate, for example the start of a school council and plans for older pupils to join those in mainstream for this subject.

90. Pupils achieve very well. Well planned PSHE lessons for younger pupils include aspects such as healthy eating, safety, feelings, animal life cycles, friendship and taking care of self. Carefully taught work on making choices, decisions, and rules supports the beginnings of an understanding of citizenship. However these pupils particularly benefit from the very effectively organised other aspects such as the set routines. For example, on arrival they are greeted by staff and queue to pay their dinner money. At lunchtime, they know they must wash their hands, quietly queue, wait their turn and clear up afterwards. Those who need it are also taught eating skills. Younger pupils learn dressing skills while getting ready for physical education and swimming. Activities such as snack time where they take turns, choose food and drink and serve each other also support these skills and are all carefully planned into the day.

91. Older primary pupils have the opportunity to participate in boys' and girls' social groups which they do enthusiastically. These groups have been set up because there are so few girls in the school. They appreciate that it gives them the space to work together and gain in confidence. Very well thought through activities allow pupils to practice skills of turn taking sharing and social interaction when role playing running a restaurant. In one group, one pupil was teaching another the rules of a board game and all were learning about rules and fair play. Throughout these activities staff model good social skills and pupils enjoy the dialogue with adults.

92. Older pupils continue to acquire important social skills out of lessons and there is an emphasis on independence skills through visits, residential visits, after school clubs and subjects such as vocational studies. Older pupils support primary age pupils by becoming playground friends and helping them at lunch time, in the playground and during reading. Planned provision for older pupils is very good and includes careers and carefully organised sex and health education as well as separate citizenship lessons for older pupils. Themes such as health and hygiene, human rights, sex education, bullying, entering adulthood and rights and responsibilities are extended to match their ages and needs. Independence is emphasised, such as in one lesson for pupils in Years 10 and 11 where they were confidently gathering information using the Internet.

93. The two co-ordinators lead and manage the subject well, although one has only just taken up the role and neither monitor teaching. They co-operate effectively and share resources. Assessment is very good because pupils' personal development is monitored frequently through their IEPs. As a result, staff have high expectations and there is much in the way of individual skills work. The secondary co-ordinator has recently introduced ASDAN Key Decisions and pupils have made a good start, particularly in their action planning.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (Ethos)	2
Attendance	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).

*In a special school such as this, **standards achieved** are judged against individual targets and not national standards.*