

INSPECTION REPORT

Helen Allison School

Meopham

LEA area: Kent

Unique Reference Number: 118993

Headteacher: Mrs Jacqui Ashton Smith

Reporting inspector: Mr Alan Wood
T12580

Dates of inspection: 8th - 12th June 1998

Under OFSTED contract number: 401054

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

© Crown copyright 1997. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated. Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school.

Under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and the Education Act 1993, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Information about the school

Type of school	Special
Type of control	Independent
Age range of pupils	5 - 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
School address	Longfield Road Meopham Kent DA13 0EW
Telephone number:	01474 814878
Fax number:	01474 812033
Appropriate authority:	National Autistic Society
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Derek Woolston

Information about the inspection team

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Alan Wood Rgl	Design and technology °French °Information technology	°Attainment and progress °Teaching °Efficiency
Arthur Aldridge LI	post-16 provision	Attendance °Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development °Partnership with parents and the community
Jackie Wadlow TI	English °History °Religious education	Curriculum and assessment °Learning resources
Alan Lemon TI	Science °Art °Music	Support, guidance and pupils' welfare °Leadership and management
Paul Wiehl TI	Mathematics °Geography °Physical education	°Special educational needs °Equal opportunities °Attitudes, behaviour and personal development °Staffing and accommodation

The inspection contractor was:

EDisk Limited
10 Woodlands Close
Little Eaton
Derby
DE21 5DZ

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints which are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised in writing with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Main findings	1 - 20
Key issues for action	21
Introduction	
Characteristics of the school	22 - 23
Key indicators	24
PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL	
Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school	
Attainment and progress	25 - 39
Attitudes, behaviour and personal development	40 - 43
Attendance	44
Quality of education provided	
Teaching	45 - 54
The curriculum and assessment	55 - 59
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	60 - 63
Support, guidance and pupils' welfare	64 - 67
Partnership with parents and the community	68 - 70
The management and efficiency of the school	
Leadership and management	71 - 77
Staffing, accommodation and learning resources	78 - 81
The efficiency of the school	82 - 86
PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS	
English	87 - 93
Mathematics	94 - 97
Science	98 - 103
Art	104 - 108
Design and technology	109 - 116
French	117 - 122
Geography	123 - 126
History	127
Information technology	128 - 133
Music	134 - 137
Physical education	138 - 141
Religious education	142 - 145
PART C: INSPECTION DATA	
Summary of inspection evidence	146
Data and indicators	147

Main findings

1. *The characteristics of the pupils for whom the school caters make it inappropriate to judge attainments against age-related national expectations or averages. The report does, however, give examples of what pupils know, understand and can do. Judgements about progress and references to attainment take into account information contained in pupils' and students' statements and annual reviews.*

2. All pupils within the school have autistic spectrum disorders and as such their communication skills, their social communication and imaginative skills, are impaired in varying degrees. Whilst some are verbal, their abilities to reason and find meaning in language are sometimes distorted. Less able pupils often have no spoken language skills and do not always employ any acceptable communication systems effectively. As such, all pupils are achieving levels well below national expectations.

3. The whole school is a caring community in which all the staff know their pupils well and provide them with good support across the 24-hour curriculum. The school is functioning effectively and has some strengths, key amongst which is its relationships with its parents and the use it makes of the community as a resource.

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

4. The progress pupils make in English is satisfactory at all key stages. Students at post-16 make good progress. In speaking and listening, pupils at all key stages make satisfactory progress. By the time they leave school many higher attaining pupils can initiate and sustain conversations on a range of topics, whilst lower attaining pupils rely heavily on adult support and intervention in many areas. Pupils' progress in reading is satisfactory throughout the school. By the time they leave, higher attaining pupils are reading independently, and lower attaining pupils are progressing towards a measure of independence. At all key stages pupils make satisfactory progress in the development of their writing skills. By the time they leave, some higher attaining pupils can write with accuracy, neatness and with an appropriate use of punctuation and spelling. Lower attaining pupils progress to making marks on paper and being able to write words and sentences with varying degrees of adult support.

5. Pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics throughout the school and good progress in the post-16 Unit. By the time they leave school, higher attaining pupils demonstrate problem solving skills when reasoning and can solve complex money and number calculations. They can make graphs and bar charts and use comparisons in answering complex questions about them. Lower attaining pupils are able to add up to 10, calculate small amounts of money and play simple number games.

6. Pupils' progress in science is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 1, sound through Key Stages 2 and 3 and good by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils progress to being able to name major organs and key components such as parts of the eye. They are skilled in investigating plants and are able to identify the stem, leaf and roots. They know about the water cycle and that electricity is generated in power stations. They can record their work in clear and simple written statements.

7.The progress pupils make in other subjects is as follows :

	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Art	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Design technology	Satisfactory			Good
French	Not taught		Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Geography	Satisfactory	Good	No judgements possible	
History	No judgements possible			
Information technology	Good throughout the school			
Music	Good throughout the school			
Physical education	Good throughout the school			
Religious education	Insufficient evidence at these key stages			Satisfactory

8. Pupils' attitudes to school and their work are good at all key stages. They demonstrate positive attitudes in most lessons by maintaining interest, focus and concentration. They respond to adult support well and are able to complete tasks, sometimes with the aid of specialised teaching approaches and apparatus. Pupils' behaviour is good and those with a greater degree of language and ability show good behaviour which is reflected in the absence of exclusions. Less than satisfactory behaviour is associated with a lack of knowledge of autism and the use of inappropriate methods in the classroom by some inexperienced staff. Parents report that they are pleased with the standard of behaviour and the approach of the school. Though all the pupils are affected socially by their autism, there are good relations overall between pupils and between pupils and staff. There is satisfactory progression in personal development throughout the school. Pupils' sense of personal responsibility and self control is occasionally hampered when adults provide excessive guidance through hand-holding and leading. Personal development is enhanced at Key Stage 4 and accelerates at post-16.

9. Pupils' attendance is very good and a strength of the school. There is a prompt start to the day and lessons have a punctual start.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

10. The quality of teaching is very good or better in one in seven lessons, satisfactory or better in nearly nine out of ten lessons and less than satisfactory in only one in eight lessons. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2, unsatisfactory in the early years of Key Stage 3, good at Key stage 4 and improves further at post-16, to very good. Most teachers' have a sound understanding of the subjects they teach, and of their pupils' disabilities, resulting in effective lessons. However, insecure knowledge of the subject, and a limited knowledge and understanding of how to manage pupils' disabilities, particularly lower attaining pupils, contribute to the unsatisfactory lessons observed. Such lessons result in pupils becoming frustrated and occasionally distressed. However, when this does occur, most staff work co-operatively and effectively, calm is soon restored and the lesson picks up again. Teachers' have satisfactory and often high expectations of pupils, and, in terms of their behaviour, they have very high expectations. Often, the planning for lessons result in activities and tasks well suited to pupils' needs. However, the quality of teachers' planning varies from class to class and depends very much on the level of experience and knowledge the individual brings to bear. Most teachers use appropriate methods to sustain pupils' interests and meet the planned purpose for the

lesson. Most lessons start on time and remain productive for most pupils for the planned duration of lessons. Assessment does not feature sufficiently in most subjects and opportunities to assess pupils' work is not evident in all lessons. The school provides a strong element of purpose and continuity to pupils' learning across the 24-hour curriculum.

11. The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant, and includes religious education, personal, social and health education (PHSE), and sex education. There is equality of access throughout except for a minority of pupils due to the lack of a few teachers' subject knowledge and expertise relating to autism. Information Technology is taught as a separate subject and in an integrated manner to support other subjects. Provision includes supported integration into local mainstream schools with access to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Careers advice and a programme of work experience is included. The curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils is good and provision for students at post-16 is very good, with good access to nationally accredited courses. The aims of the post-16 unit are laudably high and centre on excellence and enabling students to live independently within the community. There is a cycle of assessment procedures, and recording processes are evident in all classrooms to which all teachers and support assistants contribute. However, these are not moderated and this leads to inconsistency across the school.

12. The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development. Assemblies provide opportunities for Christian stories and reflection, displays around the school promote an atmosphere of well-being and reflect the wonders of nature. Grace is said at meal times, and there is ample celebration of pupils' work, and the festivals of Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good and a strength of the school. Understanding of right from wrong is well taught through the curriculum. Some rules regarding friendships, and photographic examples of kind actions, help to reinforce this. Pupils are taught to say "thank you", be polite, establish friendships and support each other. The need for private space, honesty and consideration is reflected in the relationships within the residences. All staff present as very good role models and set high standards through their appearance and attitudes. Provision for pupils' personal development is sound. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. Practical and realistic work experience opportunities contribute to students understanding of community in the world of work. Satisfactory provision for pupils' cultural development is provided through displays reflecting historical events, a May Day assembly, France and its food, and visits to local churches. Japanese teachers have shared their national traditions, there has been a feast of Chinese foods and the celebration of Indian cooking.

13. Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development are good. Pupils are assessed when they arrive and, in consultation with parents, this forms the basis of their individual education plan (IEP). Appropriate targets for learning and personal development are reviewed regularly. However, while many teachers formulate precise and measurable academic targets, others are vague, and this acts to restrict what can be known of what pupils learn. The behavioural needs of pupils are well managed and monitored. Behaviour support plans make clear and simple statements on the nature of pupils' behaviour and the best strategies for staff to respond to it. Where behaviour is likely to be extreme, clear guidance is given on physical handling strategies. Pupils' attendance is monitored well and class registers are properly maintained. Sound procedures for child protection and health and safety are in place. The administration of

pupils' medication is managed properly although the storage of medicines in old filing cabinets in the residential unit is unsatisfactory.

14. The school's partnership with its parents and the community is very good and a strength of the school. There is a good quality prospectus and a comprehensive annual review report of pupils' academic progress. Parents contribute to their children's IEP and behaviour support plans. Home : school books make a significant contribution to children's learning. A parent information booklet is a user-friendly guide to school. The *Parents' and Friends' Association* makes considerable contributions towards improving resources and the school makes good use of parents as volunteers. There are strong links with the community, including strong integration links with mainstream schools and colleges, and very good use of community-based opportunities for extensive and meaningful work experience.

MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY

15. The leadership and management of the school are good and based on well articulated aims and policies. The National Autistic Society (NAS), together with the Principal, ensure that statutory requirements are met. There is an effective senior management team with clearly demarcated responsibilities for the curriculum and the services to pupils. The post-16 unit is managed well and the Head of Care manages the residential provision effectively. Responsibility for curriculum subjects is delegated to classroom teachers acting as subject co-ordinators. While they have clearly stated responsibilities, sufficient time to fulfill these has not been allocated and they have no role for monitoring the teaching of their subjects. A process of structured observation is being implemented to check the teaching and learning in each classroom. However, the process does not give sufficient weight to judging teachers' subject expertise and the rigour with which assessment procedures are being applied and used to inform future lesson plans. The successful behaviour management policy provides good systems for dealing sensitively and effectively with instances of challenging behaviour. Development planning is comprehensive and well structured, addresses all areas satisfactorily and sets out its priorities clearly. There is a positive and caring ethos and a shared sense of purpose on the part of the staff and the NAS. There are good relationships within the school and a successful commitment to equal opportunities.

16. The number of teachers in the school is set at a good level and their qualifications are adequate. A high number of suitably qualified and experienced support and care staff enable teaching, administration and the day-to-day life of the school to function effectively. There are extensive arrangements for the professional development of staff, but these do not yet sufficiently cover the key areas of methodology, systems and techniques necessary to teach all pupils, particularly those at the severe end of the autistic continuum, who have little or no language skills. Teachers' induction consists of a basic information pack and autism awareness sessions taking place in evening or whole day sessions. There is a teachers' appraisal system but due to the high proportion of staff appointed during the past two years, this has yet to have maximum impact on standards.

17. The accommodation provides sufficient class bases for the number of pupils in the school and they are bright, airy and spacious with good displays. There is a lack of specialist areas such as sensory rooms, soft play areas and there is no music or information technology (IT) room. There is a lack of indoor floor markings, symbols or

visual signs for all areas in the school which would promote further the independence and autonomy of the most autistic pupils. The post-16 Unit is well organised with well delineated and separated areas which promote the self-management and independence of pupils. The residencies are sufficient to meet the needs of boarding pupils.

18. The school provides a satisfactory level, range and quality of resources for all subjects offered. However, this provision is good for information technology and music. Pupils enjoy a wide range of books and have a satisfactory library facility. Accessing community resources further enhances most subjects. Pupils in residence are offered a satisfactory level of leisure resources and also benefit from facilities in the wider community.

19. The quality of financial planning is good. All relevant staff are fully involved in the construction of the school development plan, and all priorities are fully costed. The school benefits exclusively from all revenue raised from fee setting. The use of teaching and support staff is good, they are well deployed and are effective in sustaining pupils' behaviour, progress and attendance. The use of the accommodation is good, and that of the post-16 unit and the residential units, is very good. Resources are similarly well used and this sustains the productive learning environment available for all pupils. The quality of financial control and school administration is good. Financial routines are routinely audited each year.

20. The progress pupils make is at least sound, their behaviour is good and their attendance is very good. The quality of educational provision is at least sound, in that teaching is sound or better in the majority of lessons, the curriculum is sound, and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is provision for pupil's support, guidance and welfare; the partnership with parents and the community is very good, and a strength of the school. In view of this, and with regard to its context and income, the school provides sound value for money.

Key issues for action

21. In order to raise standards further, particularly in relation to pupils' and students' progress, the National Autistic Society, Principal and staff should :

ensure all staff have sufficient and appropriate expertise and knowledge to meet the educational needs of pupils with autism;

effectively monitor the quality of teaching to ensure that methods used result in continuously improved learning for all pupils, with particularly attention to Key Stage 3;

rigorously assess pupils' progress in relation to specific learning targets related to the subjects of the National Curriculum;

further develop the role of the subject co-ordinator in accordance with their job descriptions, make provision for them to monitor their subjects, and provide time for this.

Introduction

Characteristics of the school

22. Helen Allison is an independent special school situated in the village of Meopham in Kent. It is a day and residential special school for boys and girls aged 5 to 19 and maintained by the National Autistic Society. It provides education for pupils with autism, a number of whom demonstrate a range of challenging behaviours associated with their learning difficulties. The school aims to ensure that all pupils have full access to the requirements of the National Curriculum and its associated assessment procedures.

23. The standard number for admission to the school is 62 and currently there are 59 pupils on roll. Comparisons with other special schools are not possible as there are relatively few schools that specialise exclusively in the education and care of pupils with autism. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Of the 32 day pupils attending the school, 8 (25%) are eligible for free school meals. The school serves the whole of the South East of England, including London, with the majority of pupils coming from homes where English is the first language. The accommodation provides a combination of classrooms, offices and has both hard play surfaces and grassed areas for external play. The residential units are situated away from the school in the town of Gravesend and provide a range of accommodation in terms of mixed and single-sexed boarding facilities and two flats for independent living. Provision for students over the age of fifteen is also included within the residential accommodation, and provides a range of rooms for classroom-based activity, craftwork, gardening and home-skills independence training.

24. Key indicators

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete	%
Authorised absence	3.97
Unauthorised absence	0

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:	Number
Fixed period	0
Permanent	0

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:	%
Very good or better	14
Satisfactory or better	88
Less than satisfactory	12

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school

Attainment and progress

25. All pupils within the school have autistic spectrum disorders and, as such, their communication skills, their social communication and their imaginative skills, are impaired in varying degrees. Whilst some are verbal, their abilities to reason and find meaning in language are sometimes distorted. Less able pupils often have no spoken language skills and do not always employ any acceptable communication systems effectively. As such, all pupils are achieving levels well below national expectations. Overall pupils' make sound progress in Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, slow progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress at post-16.

26. In speaking and listening, pupils at all key stages make satisfactory progress. Higher attaining pupils progress from using language to initiate and answer questions, to express requests and use questions and answer techniques, and on to being able to express ideas, opinions and preferences. Many can initiate and sustain conversations with adults on a range of self-interesting topics. Lower attaining pupils rely heavily on adult support and intervention in many areas and few can initiate and sustain meaningful conversations for extended periods of time.

27. Pupils' progress in reading is satisfactory throughout the school. By skilled use of both commercial reading material and appropriate computer software, pupils' reading skills are sustained throughout their time in school. By the time they leave school, higher attaining pupils are reading independently from a range of books and material. Some are fluent readers who employ a range of appropriate strategies to sustain their reading; for example, confidently self-correcting when necessary, using picture clues to help meaning, and gaining sufficient sense from the text to predict possible outcomes. Lower attaining pupils also make satisfactory progress towards a measure of independence. They continue to make good use of information technology programmes to support their reading, and, at post-16, have made sufficiently good progress to benefit from the work provided within their accredited courses.

28. Pupils at all key stages make satisfactory progress in the development of their writing skills, appropriate to their level of disability, which is not uniform across the school. By the time they leave school some higher attaining pupils are able to use comprehension methods to write answers to questions. They can write with accuracy, neatness and the appropriate use of punctuation and spelling. Lower attaining pupils progress from relying on routines and objects in context to decipher the world about them, to making marks on paper, to being able to write words and sentences with varying degrees of adult support.

29. Pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics throughout the school and good progress in the post-16 Unit. Higher attaining pupils progress from adding and subtracting numbers to 10, to using hundreds, tens and units, calculating change and identifying simple times on a clock. By the end of Key Stage 3 they can use a calculator, work with carrying figures in mathematical calculations, and solve some mental arithmetic problems. They can recognise shapes and make charts on the properties of 2- and 3-dimensional shapes. By the end of Key Stage 4 they can use computer programmes independently,

demonstrate problem-solving skills when reasoning and solve complex monetary calculations. They can make graphs and bar charts and use comparisons in answering complex questions about them. Lower attaining pupils progress from tracing over numbers and matching shapes to sorting, matching and joining-in with counting rhymes. By the end of Key Stage 3 they can sort and match money, name some coins, identify simple times and do simple sums with apparatus and adult support. By the end of Key Stage 4 they are able to add up to 10, calculate simple monetary amounts and play simple number games.

30. In science, from the unsatisfactory progress at the end of Key Stage 1, all pupils make sound progress through Key Stages 2 and 3, to good progress by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils progress from knowing about 'energy' foods at Key Stage 1, to understanding the milestones in the development of a baby at Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils understand the parts and functions of the human body. They can name major organs and key components such as parts of the eye. Pupils are skilled in investigating plants and are able to identify the stem, leaf and roots. They know about the water cycle and that electricity is generated in power stations. They can record their work in clear and simple written statements.

31. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in art at Key Stage 1 and by the end of Key Stage 2 have developed a satisfactory level of skill using paints and colour. By the end of Key Stage 3 some pupils make unsatisfactory progress in extending their manual skills with art materials. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils make satisfactory progress in the confident handling of art materials and in combining and shaping these to realise their ideas. By the time they leave school pupils' work has taken on a vocational and occupational emphasis, which is a good preparation for transition to the post-16 programme where students' interests and skills are focused on production within mini-enterprise projects.

32. Pupils make satisfactory progress in design and technology (DT) throughout the school. Through the extensive use of construction kits they can manipulate the components into a good replica of the design required with some higher attaining pupils demonstrating a good understanding of the principle of design by following the diagrams included with the kits. Pupils at Key Stage 4 are introduced to workshop based construction using a range of material and methods and make good progress from here into the post-16 unit.

33. Pupils' progress in French is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, but improves to satisfactory at Key Stage 4. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils can correctly repeat a wide range of words based around their study of leisure and hobbies. Higher attaining pupils can recognise the *boulangier* working in the *boulangerie*, the *boucher* in the *boucherie*, and the *pompier*, *gendarme* and *pharmacien* and the most able can converse easily and fluently, using a variety of three- and four-sentence exchanges. Lower attaining pupils can prepare a gourmet experience involving *le vin*, *le pain et le fromage*.

34. Pupils' progress in geography is satisfactory at Key Stage 1 and good at Key Stage 2. Insufficient evidence was available for judgments to be made at other key stages. At Key Stage 2 pupils use real Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photos to identify geographical features such as mountains, rivers and forests.

35. Insufficient evidence is available for sound judgements to be made on pupils' progress

in history.

36. Across all key stages all pupils are making good progress in their tailored programmes in information technology (IT). With varying degrees of adult support, ranging from direct hand-on-hand direction through to full individual access of software and files, all pupils can access their own dedicated software using a personal numeric code. In this manner their key skills in literacy and numeracy are developing well.

37. Pupils at all key stages are making good progress in music. By the end of Key Stage 1 they have a developing interest in performance and listening and have improved their span of concentration. They are able to produce rhythms and changes in tempo and to beat a rhythm in a group performance. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are able to listen to recorded music and follow its rhythm using wind and un-tuned percussion instruments. Over time lower attaining pupils have learned to blow a whistle. By the end of Key Stage 3 higher attaining pupils can identify a harpsichord, viola, lute and drum. Many are able to sing different parts of a song and time their performance accurately. Some pupils receive individual instrumental tuition and are making good progress.

38. The progress made by pupils in physical education (PE) at all key stages is good. By the end of their time in school the most able play games with skill, co-ordination and strength, catching the ball on many occasions. The least able take their turn and with help and reminders can also participate in games.

39. Pupils make satisfactory progress in religious education (RE) at Key Stage 4; insufficient evidence was available to make judgements in other key stages.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

40. Pupils' attitudes to school and their work are good at all key stages. The majority demonstrate positive attitudes in most lessons by maintaining interest, focus and concentration. Most remain seated and adopt good positions at tables or at workstations. They look at adults without significant difficulty and listen to staff in the classrooms and to peers in circle-time. Most pupils show some interest in receiving attention and this affects their attitude to their work. Severe and persistent withdrawal is unusual in the school. They respond to adult support well and are able to complete tasks, sometimes with the aid of teaching approaches and apparatus such as "*finish baskets*". Some pupils lose interest during lessons or find difficulty in changing tasks, primarily in response to a lack of knowledge of autism and use of inappropriate teaching strategies by some inexperienced staff.

41. Pupils' behaviour is good at all key stages. Pupils with a greater degree of language and ability show mostly good behaviour in all situations. Other pupils sometimes display strong autistic behaviours and adult intervention and guidance is needed in order that they may resume better behaviour. There have been no exclusions and this reflects the sound behaviour of the pupils. They tolerate visitors to the classroom well and serious aggressive behaviour towards staff or from one pupil to another is rare. When pupils behaviour is less than satisfactory it usually arises from distress or frustration, often in response to a lack of knowledge of autism and the use of inappropriate methods by inexperienced staff. Pupils usually show respect for the school building; they act in an orderly manner when moving around the school, such as going into lunch or leaving and

entering the classroom at playtimes. On the few occasions when pupils run on the corridors, they avoid collisions with others. They sit together without difficulty in lunch and in assemblies and inappropriate social behaviours such as kissing and hugging staff are at a low level. Those few pupils who tend to show these behaviours respond well to the consistent response from staff to adjust their behaviour and to discussion of such issues in circle-time. Parents report that they are pleased with the standard of behaviour and the approach of the school. Overall the state of the buildings supports that view, being free of graffiti and damage by pupils.

42. Pupils show increasing awareness of others as they progress through the school and do not seek to copy inappropriate behaviour when it occurs. Instead, many maintain good relations with others by gradually developing better sharing and turn-taking skills, in work, and when playing board games. In circle-time they listen to each others' views and occasionally offer supportive comments. Though all the pupils are affected socially by their autism there are good relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff.

43. There is satisfactory progression in pupils' personal development throughout the school but there is sometimes slower progress for younger pupils. Pupils' sense of personal responsibility and self-control is hampered when adults provide excessive guidance through hand-holding and leading. They respond well when their self-confidence is encouraged through the use of structures to promote independence; for example, through systematic use of objects, symbols and schedules. Most pupils are independent in toileting and most can change for PE with minimum help. Pupils usually take their opportunities for responsibility seriously and some younger pupils return the register or take a simple message. Pupils help to clear up after meals and some older pupils are able to serve in a "classroom café" once a week. Personal development is enhanced at Key Stage 4 and accelerates at post-16 and older pupils and students develop good self-help and personal care skills. Though characteristically difficult for children with autism, some are developing skills of reflection and commentary regarding relationships. They take greater responsibility for their own actions, develop greater self-care skills and, where appropriate, participate in the day-to-day running of the residencies. They generalise their experiences into real life opportunities in the community; for example, by working in local establishments and showing courtesy to members of the general public.

Attendance

44. Pupils' attendance is very good and a strength of the school. There is a prompt start to the day and lessons have a punctual start.

Quality of education provided

Teaching

45. The quality of teaching is very good or better in one in seven lessons, satisfactory or better in nearly nine out of ten lessons and less than satisfactory in only one in eight lessons. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stages 1 and 2, unsatisfactory in the early years of Key Stage 3, good at Key Stage 4 and often very good at post-16. The quality of teaching by subject and key stage is :

	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Post 16
English	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very good
Mathematics	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Science	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Not taught
Art	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Not taught
DT	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Good	Not taught
French	Not taught		Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Not taught
Geography	Satisfactory	Good	Insufficient evidence		Not taught
History	Insufficient evidence				Not taught
IT	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Music	Good	Good	Good	Good	Not taught
PE	Good	Good	Good	Good	Not taught
RE					

46. Less than satisfactory lessons occur mostly with inexperienced staff who have an insecure knowledge of the subject, and a limited knowledge and understanding of how to manage pupils' disabilities, particularly lower attaining pupils. These combine in lessons that lack sufficient challenge, where resources are not used to best effect and staff use language that is too complicated for pupils to understand, without the benefit of appropriate visual and symbolic artefacts to support pupils' learning. Such lessons result in pupils becoming frustrated and occasionally distressed. However, when this does occur, most staff manage the behaviour well, calm is soon restored and the lesson picks up again.

47. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are particularly good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. They are particularly good in IT, music and PE at all key stages and in English at Key Stage 4. Where teachers' have a sound understanding of the subjects they teach, and also of the pupils' disabilities, this results in lessons that are well ordered and where learning proceeds at a satisfactory pace. Teachers' sound knowledge results in activities where there is a minimum of language for communication, where modelling is used effectively and where the management of pupils' frustration is good. Sometimes, schemes of work are interpreted well to provide relevant tasks and learning experiences. Where this knowledge is combined with very good teacher confidence and personal skill, such as in music, this results in lessons that are good and occasionally very good.

48. Teachers' expectations are too low at Key Stage 3, but high in Key Stage 4 and post-16. Teachers' mostly have satisfactory and often high expectations of pupils, and, in terms of their behaviour, they have very good expectations. However, whilst such expectations are good for higher attaining pupils, they are occasionally less so for lower attaining pupils, which results in some inappropriate work at this level. Expectations in terms of pupils' social behaviour- for example, to discuss their work and to join in

activities- are high, and results in the good standard of co-operation seen across the school. Expectations in terms of learning strategies are also high; for example, to discuss, investigate, think of alternative ideas, and to make decisions. These expectations result in challenging lessons for many, particularly in the provision of activities that require the greatest level of effort on the part of the pupils.

49. Teachers' planning is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, but good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Planning for lessons follows a corporate model and draws from information provided by pupils' statement of special educational need and their IEPs. These often result in plans that provide for a sequence of activities and tasks well suited to pupils' needs. However, the quality of teachers' planning varies from class to class and depends very much on the level of experience and knowledge the individual brings to bear. Weak planning concentrates mainly on listing activities for pupils to follow, without sufficient reference to what it is intended they will learn. Good planning on the other hand, evident particularly in IT, music and PE, provides for a series of well-organised learning tasks for the duration of the lesson, effectively adjusted to meet the differing needs of pupils, and which meet the appropriate programmes of study for the subject.

50. Teachers' methods and lesson organisation are unsatisfactory at Key Stages 2 and 3, but good at Key Stage 4. Most teachers use an appropriate "mix" of learning methods to sustain pupils' interests and meet the planned purpose for the lesson. Lessons contain a combination of differing activities such as individual work, pairs, small groups and whole class work. Learning strategies include reporting back, modelling, discussion, experimentation, evaluation and hypothesis testing. Tasks require answering questions, writing worksheets, stories and computer work. Music and PE require pupils to perform in public and provide a demonstration of their growing prowess and skill, and the ability to explain to others what it is they are doing. These provide additional challenge and expectation for many, as most find public performance difficult.

51. Staff's management of pupils is good at Key Stages 1 and 2 and very good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The high staff numbers in each room results in the availability of at least one adult, and often more, to provide immediate and effective attention to pupils who become frustrated and occasionally distressed by the lack of challenges presented by some lessons, and their brief inability to understand what to do. Staff response is characterised mostly by the ignoring of repetitive and idiosyncratic behaviour, and a calm, persistent approach to the occasional outbursts of frustration, distress and aggression. In the face of such behaviour all staff insist on pupils completing what is expected and in a manner that is appropriate to the lesson. When this approach is combined with the skilled use of visual or symbolic artefacts, together with a minimum of language, calm is very quickly restored and learning re-commences. Of considerable note is the way that all staff work co-operatively and effectively in achieving and sustaining calm, order and productive learning. The majority of staff are skilled in anticipating likely problems and are effective in managing pupils through and beyond such times. On these occasions the most skilled staff use appropriate cueing techniques to enable pupils to accept some measure of personal control over events and, in so doing, contribute to their personal development and self-esteem. As a result of this, the management of pupils' behaviour is a positive and meaningful experience for most pupils.

52. Teachers' use of time and resources is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, but good at Key Stage 4. Most lessons start on time and remain productive for most pupils for the planned duration of lessons. Only occasionally are lessons disrupted, and usually for

planned events such as swimming or visits. Necessary changes in activities throughout lessons; for example, in music and DT, are managed in such a way the pace of the lessons is sustained and provide a variety of tasks to maintain pupils' motivation and interest. For most pupils, lessons are busy times during which they are expected to complete their work and behave well. Support staff are effectively deployed to sustain pupils' involvement and resources are used well maintain their interest.

53. Assessment is unsatisfactory at all key stages other than Key Stage 4 and post-16. It does not feature sufficiently in the core subjects and not always in the foundation subjects. Opportunities to assess pupils' work are not evident in all lessons. Where assessment opportunities are taken by class teachers in evaluating pupils' progress, there is insufficient discrimination between pupils' skill and the degree of adult intervention, particularly when this has been on an individual basis. The best assessment is seen in music where the teacher listens closely to pupils' performance and then insists on repeats until the required standard is met. A similar approach is also seen in PE. The majority of lessons present many informal opportunities to assess pupils' response and to provide advice on progress; for example, through questioning, observation of performance, or, as in art, by evaluating a drawing at the end of a lesson. On these occasions pupils are successfully informed of their progress through praise, smiles and sometimes a "smiley" sticker.

54. The school uses home : school diaries well to sustain learning activities beyond the end of the school day. Some parents visit the residential units during the week to support activities necessary for their children. The "hand-over" meeting between residential and teaching staffs at the start and end of the day also successfully maintain this continuity, and is further reinforced by the meetings of senior staff from both sites. Together, these arrangements provide a strong element of purpose and continuity to pupils learning across the 24-hour curriculum.

The curriculum and assessment

55. The school provides a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum, including the National Curriculum, in line with its aims. Religious education and sex education are taught and the school offers a modern foreign language (French) at Key Stages 3 and 4. Information Technology is taught as a separate subject and in an integrated manner to support other subjects; for example, mathematics and English. Most subjects are enhanced by the opportunities offered through extra-curricular or community based visits. A small number of pupils' benefit from a programme of supported integration into local mainstream provision, with access available to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). All pupils have careers advice and a programme of work experience. The curriculum is good at Key Stage 4 and very good at post-16, where students have access to nationally accredited courses such as the Youth Award Scheme (YAS).

56. The whole curriculum, which is only recently in place, is well organised and well managed, and supported by a full range of subject policies. Each subject is divided into weekly topics at each key stage, resources are collated for each, and, in this way, satisfactory schemes of work are in place for most subjects. However, individual resource packs do not offer sufficient detail to support all abilities and the differing needs of pupils with autism, resulting in less experienced staff planning for what pupils will do rather than for what they will learn. From time-to-time the school organises the timetable to take

advantage of team teaching; for example, at Key Stage 4 and also in providing transition for pupils from Key Stage 3 to 4 and from Key Stage 4 to post-16. This arrangement is particularly good for pupils on the cusp of change, and for all pupils in the final stages of compulsory education when skilled teaching can be marshalled to best advantage.

57. Provision is made for PHSE through discrete teaching sessions and through an incidental approach throughout the day. Whilst many, more verbal pupils show abilities in caring for themselves and others, the high levels of staff often restrict the need for less able pupils to acquire independence skills. The use of the community enables pupils to practise skills learned in school. Pupils' levels of autism are not fully supported through a variety of approaches to support curriculum access; for example, verbal support is good but there is a lack of visual and physical structure to activities and communication systems. However, the school receives sound support from the full time Speech and Language Therapist in the devising and delivery of lessons to develop pupils' skills of communication.

58. The aims of the post-16 unit are laudably high and centre on excellence and enabling students to live independently within the community. It occupies discrete accommodation, separate from the school, and situated in the residential provision in Gravesend. This enables it to make extensive use of the facilities available in the town in terms of providing for students' growing need for independence and leisure. The unit is managed by a skilled teacher experienced with students in further education, which results in provision that is age-appropriate and specifically tailored to enabling progress towards the next stage of education. All students have individual programmes devised for their particular need and on-going continuous assessment is being developed in line with national initiatives. Experience of work is available to all students and includes working under real-time management, realistic expectations of tasks and time-keeping, being monitored and having to meet health and safety requirements. Supervision from the centre's staff is skilled but unobtrusive, providing high expectations of requiring students to develop their confidence and skills. Attendance at Hadlow College provides further opportunities for social integration as well as realistic experience of work and study in a college of further education.

59. There is a clear structure for the cycle of assessment procedures, and, for post-16 students, are good. Recording processes are evident in all classrooms and teachers and support assistants contribute to these. However, these are not moderated and this leads to inconsistency across the school. Assessment procedures show where verbal or physical prompts have been given but do not fully assess the degree of help given by adults, and targets for individuals lack precision. With the exception of post-16, information from assessment is not used sufficiently well to inform curriculum planning.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

60. The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development. During assembly pupils are reminded that God cares for, and loves all of His creation. The story of Noah, for example, is used to illustrate this, and further emphasis is made through prayer and the enthusiastic singing of a hymn. Displays around school promote an atmosphere of well-being and reflect the wonders of nature. Pupils have visited a farm and experienced the handling of newly-born lambs. When visiting a church some pupils were impressed by the beauty of the stained glass windows. Grace is said at meal times,

and, through discussion at during circle-time, pupils explore how they feel when undertaking tasks that are strange to them. There is good celebration of pupils' work, and also the festivals of Harvest, Christmas and Easter.

61. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good and a strength of the school. Understanding of right from wrong is well taught throughout the curriculum. Rules regarding friendships, and photographic examples of kind actions, help to reinforce this understanding. Discussions during social communication sessions (circle-time) with the speech therapist, provide opportunities for self-evaluation, and this time is well used to allow reflection upon their own, and each others' behaviour. Pupils are taught to say *thank you*, be polite and establish friendships. Good expectations are levied for older and more able students to support their younger and less able peers. The need for private space, honesty and consideration is reflected in the relationships within the residences. Pupils make choices about eating and consider the need for a healthy diet and an environment which is free from pollution. All staff present very good role models and set high standards through their appearance and attitudes.

62. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, and most have immediate impact; for example, preparing and watering the hanging baskets, clearing and upkeep of an area of land for a conservation project, and a work experience group responsible for clearing the bracken for a Groundwork Trust. Students are members of the school council, contribute to the choosing of menus, make their beds, lay tables and clear away at meal-times. Community-based education provides the opportunity for pupils to participate in the community. They visit Meopham Country Club, have full use of the recreational facilities of snooker and darts, choose their lunch, and are good friends with the patrons and members. Social communication programmes provide a significant range of opportunities for students to be part of, and experience life in, the community, and their proximity to the local town contributes well to their community awareness. They make frequent and needs-related journeys to the shops to acquire provisions for their work experience periods. This involves them in investigation, selection and choices leading to positive outcomes. Realistic work experience opportunities contribute to students' understanding of the world of work. Two students have a regular placement at a local leisure club/bar, where they clean and set the room for use by the customers. Others partake in placements at a local agricultural college, where they undertake commercial activities in the potting sheds and gardens, and have social interaction with their peers from mainstream and other special needs groups. Students' awareness of community was demonstrated by one young man sharing his prize of bulbs, and making hanging baskets for the local elderly persons' home.

63. The satisfactory provision for pupils' cultural development is seen through displays reflecting historical events such as the Golden Hind, Rochester Castle and the allotments of World War Two. They have taken part in a May Day assembly, experienced France and its food, and visited local churches. Through religious education pupils are taught of the major religions of the world and have visited a synagogue and Sikh temple, One pupil returning from visiting his relations in Africa brought to school and wore, the national dress of the Ashanti tribe, to whom his relations belong. Japanese teachers have shared their national traditions with pupils, there has been a feast of Chinese foods and the celebration of Indian cooking is similarly planned.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

64. Procedures for monitoring the progress and personal development of pupils are good. The whole school is a caring community in which all the staff know their pupils well and provide them with good support across the 24-hour curriculum. The daily hand-over meetings between residential care and school staff ensures good continuity in managing pupils. Despite some turn-over of staffing in recent years the school has retained sufficient stability within teams, particularly of non-teaching staff, to ensure good provision for pupils' welfare.

65. Pupils' strengths and weaknesses are assessed well when they arrive and, following consultation with parents, this information forms the basis of pupils' IEPs. Appropriate targets for learning and development are written and these are reviewed regularly to assess progress, with pupils' social skills measured against targets for mealtimes and coping with community-based experiences, such as shopping or being in a cafe. Pupils' progress is also monitored through their individual files which are maintained by teachers and support assistants in classrooms. These files contain several levels of daily monitoring: the autism support targets are used to monitor pupils' social interaction and their use of communication and imagination; for each subject of the curriculum, a record is maintained of progress over several learning targets, supplemented by written comments. However, while many teachers formulate precise and measurable academic targets, others targets are vague (for example, 'to increase knowledge') and, as a consequence, do not always provide sufficient detail of what a pupil has learned. This acts to restrict what can be known of what pupils learn.

66. The behavioural needs of pupils are well managed and monitored. Behaviour support plans make clear and simple statements on the nature of pupils' behaviour, its likely causes and the best strategies for staff to respond to it. Where behaviour is likely to be extreme, clear guidance is given on physical handling strategies. Parents are consulted on the formulation of these plans, staff are trained, implement them successfully and record them accurately. These reports are confirmed by senior staff and monitored by the Principal and the National Autistic Society Education Manager. Sanctions beyond appropriate verbal disapproval for poor behaviour are seldom used. When a pupils' behaviour is seriously disrupting a classroom a period of withdrawal is applied until calmness is restored, throughout which the pupil is accompanied by a member of the classroom staff.

67. Pupils' attendance is monitored well and class registers are properly maintained. Procedures for child protection are in place in accordance with the school's policy. At each site a designated person is known to all staff and the Deputy Principal in charge of pupils' welfare co-ordinates the roles of these staff. A health and safety policy is in place and procedures are good. Fire safety equipment and all electrical appliances are checked regularly by professional firms. Other school equipment is checked for safety and staff conduct a risk assessment on mini-buses each time they are used. The administration of pupils' medication is managed properly, although the storage of medicines in locked filing cabinets in the residential unit is unsatisfactory. Here also the room used by staff for sleep-in duty also acts as an office and pupils are occasionally given access to the computer in this room. All of these purposes should be clearly separated in terms of accommodation.

Partnership with parents and the community

68. The schools' partnership with parents and the community is very good and a strength of the school. There is a high quality prospectus in which the school invites and encourages parents to be partners in their children's education. They can do this through the parent interest group, parent support group, monthly Makaton classes, class visits and coffee mornings, and by attending the parent-teacher evaluation and planning sessions. Parents receive a high quality and comprehensive annual review which reports on pupils' academic progress. Parents are invited to the review meetings, and make valuable contributions to the composition of their children's IEPs. Home : school books are an integral part of the information exchange process, and make a significant contribution to children's learning. An event filled half-termly newsletter keeps parents very well informed about what is happening at school, and there is a regular flow of correspondence that covers a wide range of topics. Parents are invited to contribute their ideas for the school development plan, complete an annual "*how are we doing*" questionnaire, and staff make home-visits once a year. A Parent Information Booklet has an annual update and is a user-friendly guide to school. The Parents and Friends Association is very active, and makes considerable contributions towards improving the school's resources.

69. Strong links are the foundation of the school's community-based education programme. Pupils attend the local youth club, have displayed their art at Gravesend library and Meopham church, and sung carols to the residents of a home for elderly persons. The school invites the community to be involved in its annual sports and prize giving days and to its school concerts. Students from the local secondary school and colleges of further education are provided with the opportunity for work experience. The school makes good use of parents as volunteers, and they are provided with training and work under supervision.

70. The school has strong integration links with mainstream schools and colleges. There are very good planned programmes for a number of students and these are working very effectively. The school makes very good use of the community to provide opportunities for extensive and meaningful work experience, to develop and underpin its social communication skills learning programme, and provide a stage for community-based education. Students partake of the facilities of a local leisure centre, and are not only made welcome, but have equal importance with all other members.

The management and efficiency of the school

Leadership and management

71. The leadership and management of the school are good and the Principal provides a clear educational direction. The NAS is fully committed to the success of the school and maintains a strategic over-view of its development and its contribution to the Society's aims. Together they meet all of their statutory requirements. There is a strong sense of purpose in enabling the school to become a centre of excellence in the education of children with autism, and the Principal and the NAS work together well in pursuit of this aim; for example, the NAS Education Manager visits lessons and inspects facilities regularly. He has a good knowledge of current issues and this is complemented by the role of the seven members of the service support committee (in a role similar to that of

a Governing Body) who, by visiting every half term, act effectively as a 'critical friend' to the school. After careful revision the management systems now possess sufficiently well-defined guidance and procedures for its operation. An effective senior management team has been formed following the appointment of two deputy principals. These have clearly demarcated responsibilities for the curriculum and the services to pupils, and both have worked exceedingly hard to ensure the continuing development of the educational and pastoral provision.

72. There is an effective senior management team representing all the main aspects of the school's functioning. The newly appointed teacher-in-charge of continuing education in the post-16 unit is providing very good leadership in developing this resource, and the Head-of-Care manages the residential provision well. The senior management team is supported by a senior staff group comprising administration, catering and professional services personnel. Responsibility for each of the curriculum subjects is delegated to classroom teachers acting as subject co-ordinators. Whilst they have clearly stated responsibilities, sufficient time to fulfill these has not been allocated. Although each co-ordinator is expected to support and advise colleagues on their subject, they have no role in the monitoring of teaching. A high level of monitoring activity is otherwise in operation, the outcomes of which are good.

73. The senior management team, the Education Manager and the service support committee together play an active role in auditing the school. They maintain a comprehensive picture of all the school's operations. Additionally, the school submits itself to an Autism Quality Audit which serves as a check on the internal monitoring which the school and the NAS undertake. A process of structured observation is being implemented using a detailed proforma to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in each classroom. This is applied regularly by senior staff, and results in evaluations and recommendations for improvements. These are discussed with each classroom team every half-term at an inter-departmental review which produces an agreed action plan. Subsequent progress is measured by future observations and assessed at the following inter-departmental review. Teachers and classroom support assistants value this process for the confirmation and direction it provides. However, the monitoring proforma does not give sufficient weight to judging teachers' subject expertise and the rigour with which assessment procedures are being applied and used to inform future lesson planning.

74. The school seeks to meet the needs of all its pupils and has well articulated aims and policies. While the majority of aims are being fulfilled the NAS's expertise in autism is not always explicit in classroom practice, often due to the relative inexperience of some staff. Some policies are relatively recent and still largely in the process of implementation. The school has needed to move forward rapidly to instigate essential improvements but is not yet taking stock of how well it is achieving its aims, particularly in relation to managing the curriculum and staff development. The behaviour management policy is a success. It provides good systems for dealing sensitively and effectively with some pupils' challenging behaviour. Staff have been trained appropriately and possess the skills to implement this policy well. This ensures the school is a safe, secure and stable environment for all pupils.

75. Development planning is comprehensive and well structured. It addresses all areas of the schools' operations satisfactorily and sets out its priorities clearly. These are mostly appropriate for helping the school move forward, although many issues are included which are trivial, such as the plan for repairing a toilet door. These only serve to distract

from the key priorities for development. The description of necessary actions for some priorities lack sufficient detail and are also, at times, confused with the performance indicators. Performance indicators lack the precision that would make monitoring and evaluation of improvements more accessible.

76. There is a positive and caring ethos in the whole school and a shared sense of purpose on the part of the staff and the NAS. There are good relationships within the school. Pupils with severely challenging behaviour are managed well and meeting their needs is not disproportionate or to the detriment of less demanding pupils.

77. The school is committed to Equal Opportunities and has an appropriate policy and named staff member. It provides pupils with an environment that demonstrates this aim; for example, by meeting the religious and dietary needs of its pupils. Opportunities are equal for both sexes despite the high ratio of boys to girls in the school. The school staff provide good role models for the pupils and the school's current sex education policy helps to address the large difference in number between boys and girls. It provides interpreters for parents at review meetings, there are some staff members who are bilingual and able to provide first language input, but, by having no Afro-Caribbean and only one Asian member on its large staff, the school cannot fully provide the same quality of role model for certain of its pupils. The school is accessible to adults and pupils who may have physical disabilities but the post-16 unit and the residencies are not. To compensate for this parents who are unable to access the building are shown a video of the residencies.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

78. The number of teachers is set at a good level and their qualifications are adequate. A high number of suitably qualified and experienced support and care staff enable teaching, administration and the day-to-day life of the school to function effectively. Though staff work together well a few are inexperienced in their knowledge of autism and in their knowledge of systematic methods and approaches for those pupils at the severe end of the autistic continuum. The high number of recently appointed teaching staff has an impact on the knowledge and expertise available in school. Most teaching and support staff are well deployed, hard working and committed to meeting the needs of pupils. Staff morale is good and the majority of staff work well together as a team.

79. There are extensive arrangements for the professional development of staff, but these do not yet fully meet the needs of the school. Teachers' induction consists of a basic information pack and autism awareness sessions taking place in evening or whole day sessions. Evening sessions cover the working of the NAS and information modules on autism, the code of practice and educational and behavioural issues. Whole-day sessions cover accreditation, the school development plan, curriculum issues and teaching and learning issues. There are training sessions based around promoting visual, object and symbol based programmes individually tailored to meet the needs of the least able and most autistic. However, this extensive programme does not yet sufficiently cover the key areas of methodology, systems and techniques necessary to teach all pupils, particularly those at the severe end of the autistic continuum, who have little or no language skills. There is a teachers' appraisal system, but, due to the high proportion of staff appointed during the past two years, this has yet to have maximum impact on standards.

80. The accommodation provides sufficient class bases for the number of pupils in the school and the classrooms are bright, airy and spacious with good displays. There is a lack of specialist areas such as a laboratory, DT room, sensory rooms, soft play areas and there is no music or IT room. Though the layout of the school is satisfactory there is a lack of indoor floor markings, symbols or visual signs for all areas in the school which would promote further the independence and autonomy of the most autistic pupils. The development of independence for the more able pupils is sometimes inhibited by the use of security locks, resulting in pupils being unable to develop skills involved in interacting with the school office and administration staff and transferring simple information to and from them. The post-16 unit is well organised with well-delineated and separated areas which promote the self-management and independence of pupils who understand more easily the activities to be pursued in each discrete part of the accommodation. The residencies are generally sufficient to meet the needs of boarding pupils but there is no identified separate bathroom and toilet for girl boarders, contrary to statutory requirements. The school has taken immediate steps to remedy this.

81. The school provides a satisfactory level, range and quality of resources for all subjects. The provision is good for information technology and music. Many subjects are benefiting from a recently increased level of resourcing and as such provision is still developing. Good use is made of the provision for physical education, which includes access to rock climbing facilities. Pupils enjoy a wide range of books and have a library facility at school. English is further supported through the use of the local library. Accessing community resources enhances most subjects. Pupils in residence are offered a satisfactory level of leisure resources and also benefit from using facilities in the wider community.

The efficiency of the school

82. The quality of financial planning is good. The school development plan is appropriately prioritised, despite the relatively trivial nature of some issues, and serves as a guide, monitoring tool and aide-memoire. All relevant staff are fully involved in its construction, and all priorities fully costed. The budget is set annually by full consideration being given to current plans, the sustaining of current provision, together with future projects. This information is used constructively to set the annual fee structure from which all income is derived. The school benefits exclusively from all revenue raised and receives a wide range of professional support from the National Autistic Society headquarters through a service level agreement. By definition, therefore, it is free to seek external advice, support and guidance from other sources, although in practice it does not do so, being entirely satisfied with the current arrangements. Planned future capital expenditure, such as, major building extensions, are not included in the fee-setting arrangements, as these are provided for through major fund-raising programmes established by the national society.

83. Within the private residential school sector the fees set are competitive, but true comparisons are not possible as there are too few schools of a similar nature against which realistic comparisons could be made. Referrals for admission are high, including from families living abroad, and as a consequence the school has a long waiting list, suggesting that referring groups, including LEAs, have confidence in its cost-setting.

84. The use of teaching and support staff is good; they are well deployed and are

effective in sustaining pupils' behaviour, progress and attendance. The use of the accommodation is good, and that of the post-16 unit and the residential units, is very good. Resources are similarly well used and this sustains the productive learning environment available for all pupils.

85. The quality of financial control and school administration is good. There is a finance department which manages the day-to-day expenditure process. The work of the finance department is monitored by the Principal who liaises directly with the headquarters' Director of Finance. Financial routines are subject to headquarters' control, and are routinely audited each year. Procedures are manageable and result in an accountancy structure that provides the Principal and NAS advisory staff with sufficient information for monitoring and review purposes. Currently, these accountancy structures are not maintained in a suitable computer software format, but plans are well in hand to convert the present manual system to a fully operational computerised system by the end of the current financial year.

86. The progress pupils make is at least sound, their behaviour is good and their attendance is very good. The quality of educational provision is at least sound, in that teaching is sound or better in the majority of lessons, the curriculum is sound, and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, as is provision for pupil's support, guidance and welfare. The partnership with parents and the community is very good, and a strength of the school. In view of this, and with regard to its context and income, the school provides sound value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

English, mathematics and science

English

87. All pupils within the school are considered to have autistic spectrum disorders and as such their communication skills, their social communication and imaginative skills are impaired in varying degrees. Whilst some are verbal, their abilities to reason and find meaning in language are sometimes distorted. Less able pupils often have no spoken language skills and do not always employ any acceptable communication systems effectively. As such, all pupils are achieving levels well below national expectations.

88. In speaking and listening, pupils at all key stages make satisfactory progress. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils use language to initiate and answer questions, but not always with meaning or understanding. At the end of Key Stage 2, higher attaining pupils can express requests and can use questions and answer techniques whilst lower attaining pupils rely heavily on adult support and intervention in many areas. Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but the relative inexperience of staff involved with pupils in the early years of the key stage, results in quicker than usual deterioration in pupils' behaviour. For lower attaining pupils in particular this results in lessened opportunities for sustained learning. In Key Stage 4, pupils make satisfactory progress so that by the end of the key stage more able pupils able to express ideas, opinions and preferences. Many can initiate and sustain conversations with adults on a range of interesting topics. At post-16, the progress of both able- and less-able students is good.

89. Higher attaining pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 read confidently from familiar books and can use picture clues. They are well supported in this as they make satisfactory progress through the school's commercial reading scheme. Lower attaining pupils are also making satisfactory progress in beginning to develop early reading skills of word and picture matching. Others can recognise simple words in the commercial reading scheme, reading with reasonable fluency and beginning to develop skills of recognising mistakes. This satisfactory progress continues throughout Key Stage 2 with pupils progressing within the school's commercial scheme and also in the supported commercial computer software reading programme. Progress for some lower attaining pupils falters at Key Stage 3 although the more able pupils can read well and continue this throughout the key stage. By the end of the key stage some are reading at National Curriculum Level 3 and employ a range of appropriate strategies to sustain their reading; for example, reading with expression, confidently self-correcting when necessary, using picture clues to help meaning, and gaining sufficient sense from the text to predict possible outcomes. However, less able pupils have not developed systems of working which provide for independence and they need a high level of adult intervention to remain in classrooms. Lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 make sound progress and by the end of the key stage good use of information technology programmes to support their reading which helps to sustain their progress. Work is well matched to pupils' abilities and assessment supports planning. Higher attaining pupils continue to make progress and, by the end of the key stage, some are reading independently for information and pleasure. Students at post-16 continue to make sufficient progress to benefit from the individual programmes provided within their accredited courses.

90. Pupils at all key stages make satisfactory progress in the development of their writing skills, appropriate to their level of disability, which is not uniform across the school. Higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 1 can write simple sentences, sometimes developing these into stories. Lower attaining pupils rely on routines and objects in context to decipher the world about them. Their writing skills centre on making marks on paper. These skills continue in context throughout Key Stage 2, such that, by the end of Key Stage 3, higher attaining pupils can use comprehension methods to write answers to questions. However, lower attaining pupils have not developed systems of working which provide for independence and continue to require a high level of adult intervention to remain in classrooms. Progress continues satisfactorily throughout Key Stage 4 and on into post-16. Higher attaining pupils are now writing with accuracy, neatness and the appropriate use of punctuation and spelling. Lower attaining pupils continue to need contextual clues, with some requiring adult support to complete simple writing exercises.

91. Pupils' attitudes and behaviours throughout the school are satisfactory. Many pupils show an interest in their work; are calm and co-operative. More able pupils can work with, or next to, others, whilst less able pupils need the structure of a workstation or the support of an adult. Many enjoy the concept of finishing their work. For some less able pupils, classrooms are often noisy and over-stimulating and their personal development is affected. Sometimes pupils are withdrawn and lack motivation to interact. Some show distress and confusion and the general lack of visually structured information contributes to this. Difficult behaviours are well managed and pupils are handled carefully. More able pupils readily want to work, whereas the less able often rely on considerable adult intervention to access quite difficult work. Most pupils work well, when classrooms are quiet and verbal instructions are given calmly and simply.

92. Teaching is satisfactory at all key stages. Teachers' knowledge and understanding is good at Key Stage 4 and very good at post-16. Teachers' planning, the methods and organisational strategies they employ, and the use of day-to-day assessment, are unsatisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Where teachers have clear planning and demonstrate an understanding of the aims of the subject, using appropriate methods and strategies for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, teaching is satisfactory. When teaching is good, teachers use clear instructions and supportive visual communication systems for the less able. Classes are then calm and quiet but with an industrious, productive atmosphere. Teachers employ effective assessment and accurate recording procedures. Staff intervene appropriately, after giving less able pupils time to respond. Pupils' work is not always effectively monitored or accurately assessed. Pupils' abilities are understood, high expectations are evident and independence is planned appropriately. Time is well used, students are well behaved and achievements praised. Resources are well used and cared for.

93. The subject has recently undergone a thorough review and now meets statutory requirements. It is well planned and organised but still lacks the full range of communication systems. Assessment and recording procedures are in place but the lack of moderation across the school often results in inconsistency. The support of the Speech and Language Therapist assists in the accuracy of initial assessment of pupils. There is a subject policy to help guide practice. The role of the subject co-ordinator is not fully developed to match the job description. A termly budget is available and adequate resources are evident. There is an appropriate range of both fiction and non-fiction books housed in the school library and in classrooms and effective use is made of the local library to enhance resources.

Mathematics

94. Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school, and good progress in the post-16 Unit. At the end of Key Stage 1 progress is reflected in higher attaining pupils adding and subtracting numbers to 10 and naming shapes whilst lower attaining pupils trace over numbers and match shapes. Some pupils can talk a little about numbers but progress in the use of mathematical terms is limited. At the end of Key Stage 2 the most able pupils can add and subtract in hundreds, tens and units and multiply tens by units. They can calculate the change from a simple money transaction and identify simple times on a clock. Pupils can explain the rules of a simple number game and solve simple problems. The least able can sort, match and join in with counting rhymes, sometimes needing the assistance of staff members to help them display the correct number of fingers. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils can divide amounts correctly, use a calculator, work with carrying figures in mathematical calculations, and solve some mental arithmetic problems. They work on computer programmes, can make charts on the properties of 2 and 3 dimensional shapes and have begun to look at the concept of area. The most able serve in a classroom cafe and calculate change and the day's takings. The least able can sort and match money, name some coins, identify simple times and do simple sums with apparatus and adult support. By the end of Key Stage 4 the most able can use maths computer programmes independently, demonstrate problem-solving skills when reasoning and solve complex monetary calculations. They make graphs and bar charts and use comparisons in answering complex questions about them. The least able can add up to 10, calculate simple monetary amounts and play simple number games. At post-16 the progress pupils make is good; they plan, shop and purchase items, check the composition and weight of compost mixture and further refine their computer skills.

95. Pupils show satisfactory attitudes to mathematics through their interest and behaviour. Most pupils listen and respond well to teachers and remain sitting in lessons. Through good behaviour they show essential personal development by sharing apparatus, taking turns and offering supportive comments in number games. Many pupils maintain a focus on their work even when, on occasions, another pupil is being difficult and noisy. Some pupils require considerable help to enable them to persevere or maintain concentration and education assistants provide the additional support needed; for example, by choosing to use *finish baskets* to indicate completion.

96. The quality of teaching is satisfactory across all key stages and good at post-16. However, inexperienced teachers lack knowledge of autism and in the way that differentiated tasks need to be matched to individual need. Teachers' planning and expectations are satisfactory and their management of pupils is good. They use time and resources well and lessons are appropriately paced. Just occasionally, a lack of clear individual targets and methods results in some poor behaviour of students and unsatisfactory organisation. Often the outcome in these situations is that support staff are placed with pupils to prompt them through tasks rather than facilitate their independent working. Whilst some daily recording does take place, assessment and monitoring of mathematics are not informing the planning of specific teaching methods and objectives that would further aid those pupils who are at the severe end of the autistic continuum. Planning and assessment are good at post-16 and inform teaching on a day-to-day basis. They are used to plan for progression, continuity and to extend community involvement.

97. The mathematics curriculum covers the required programmes of study, with a master index supplying advice on lesson plans. The index covers attainment targets in number,

measurement and handling data, but fails to provide teachers with concrete, visual and symbolic approaches to help them develop mathematical language and reasoning, a characteristically difficult area for autistic children. The subject co-ordinator is assisted by the Deputy Principal : Curriculum in trying to monitor mathematics throughout the school, but the lack of time and additional responsibilities result in a lack of moderation of the subject. The school's mathematical resources are good but the lack of a centralised resource area means that items are less accessible when they are in various classroom cupboards.

Science

98. Pupils are making unsatisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 1 as the work is not well matched to some pupils' attainments. In learning about which foods provide us with energy and why we need energy, for example, the tasks assume a greater level of understanding than that possessed by lower attaining pupils. These pupils do not benefit from well-developed communication skills and so it is not certain they know the connection between food and survival. While they are unable to gain significantly from this work, the few higher attaining pupils learn that jam, bread and shredded wheat are 'energy' foods. One explains energy by performing bodily exertion. They record their work in clear and simple written statements. Higher attaining pupils identify suitable clothing for different weather conditions and name parts of the body such as the arm, leg and head. Some non-verbal pupils can point to body parts linked to their senses such as eyes and ears. At the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have made satisfactory progress in knowing about living things. Those pupils who are able can name insects and animals from illustrations or those found in the school grounds. Lower attainers show an interest in the slugs, snails and worms found and relate them to pictures on a classroom chart. Good progress is made in the course of a lesson exploring hens' eggs and seeing the white and yolk. Pupils make the link between hens, chicks and eggs from looking several pictures and, by tasting them cooked, know that these eggs are also used as food.

99. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' have made satisfactory progress in understanding life cycles; for example, learning the milestones in the development of a baby. They acquire an appropriate vocabulary to communicate what they know of human growth and the necessities for survival such as warm clothing and healthy food. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils have made good progress in understanding the parts and functions of the human body. They can name, for instance, major organs and key components such as parts of the eye. Pupils are skilled in investigating plants and are able to identify the stem, leaf and roots. They know the roots remain underground and supply the plant with food and water. Pupils have studied the water cycle and know that electricity is generated in power stations, taken to homes through cables and used in many household appliances. More able pupils have learned to work independently in making written records and diagrams.

100. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Pupils are usually well settled in lesson time and sustain appropriate periods of concentration. Higher attaining pupils are able to work quietly and independently for relatively long periods, as demonstrated in one Key Stage 2 class when constructing their egg pictures. Pupils mostly respond well to the support given by the teacher and classroom assistants and this helps them maintain their attention. They enjoy the visually interesting and practical work provided in lessons; but where these are

lacking, some pupils, particularly lower attainers, find difficulty concentrating. Key Stage 4 pupils are very well motivated and interested in science work. They are confident in answering questions or putting forward a hypothesis. All pupils are generally well behaved. At Key Stage 4 pupils willingly help with organising materials and equipment for lessons.

101. Teaching is satisfactory in the first three key stages and good at Key Stage 4. Teachers' knowledge of science is satisfactory at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. It is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 1 where work is not related well to the National Curriculum or the learning needs of lower attaining pupils. At other key stages the scheme of work for science is better interpreted so that learning is more relevant to all pupils. This ensures activities are appropriately challenging. Teachers' expectations are unrealistic for some pupils at Key Stage 1 in terms of the complexity of the concepts being used. At Key Stage 4 the expectations set for pupils are good with regard to them performing a structured investigation and recording their findings. While lesson planning is not based well on what pupils know at Key Stage 1, it is detailed on the use of time and on providing an interesting range of work and is satisfactory. At Key Stage 2 some of the work for non-verbal pupils is very appropriately planned to include a rich variety of visual prompts and objects. At Key Stage 3 lesson plans lack sufficient detail particularly on the arrangements for the different abilities of pupils which is unsatisfactory. Good planning at Key Stage 4 results in a variety of activities that promote effectively an investigative and experiential science lesson. At Key Stages 1 and 3 there is sound use of small groups within the classroom to provide discrete activities. Higher attainers at Key Stage 1 are able to work at an appropriate level although the same pupils at Key Stage 3 are not stretched sufficiently by the focus on discussion and lists being written on the white-board. Lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 1 do not benefit from the emphasis on cutting and sticking work. A good balance is achieved at Key Stage 4 between an introduction to the lesson, an investigation and the recording. Pupils are well managed within classrooms and the consistent application of the schools' behaviour strategy ensures a good level of discipline. At Key Stage 1 there is some difficulty keeping pupils interested and engaged. Most lessons are conducted at a reasonable pace and satisfactory use is made of available time. Lesson resources are soundly thought out and mostly used effectively. In the course of lessons at Key Stages 2 and 4 teachers and support staff carefully observe work and question pupils' understanding. They provide satisfactory support to help or extend pupils. These aspects of assessment are unsatisfactory at Key Stages 1 and 3 where there is a lack of consideration for pupils' learning experiences as they occur.

102. The science curriculum is reasonably broad and balanced. The scheme of work is topic based and incorporates a comprehensive coverage of the National Curriculum attainment targets. However, in the documentation it is not made sufficiently explicit how the science scheme addresses each aspect of the National Curriculum programme of study. For teachers, whose subject expertise is not strong, it is hard to see what learning objectives are intended in a series of activities. This makes the planning of relevant activities and their assessment difficult, notably at, Key Stage 1. It also makes more complicated than necessary the planning for the consistent and steady building of pupils' knowledge and understanding over time, which is currently unsatisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

103. Science is co-ordinated by two teachers overseeing the primary and secondary age ranges respectively. While they have a clear definition of role there is insufficient time

allotted to these co-ordinators for achieving their responsibilities. They do not monitor the teaching of science, for instance, although they are expected to give support and advice to teachers. As a consequence, the overall leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory.

Other subjects or courses

Art

104. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in art by the end of Key Stage 1. They make sound use of the opportunities to work with art materials and consolidate basic skills such as applying colour with a crayon. Higher attaining pupils are able to build up a paper mosaic pattern, working independently and maintaining good manual control in glueing and placing the bits of paper. These pupils work with scissors, pencils and paint using a brush. All pupils use their art activity to improve basic areas of learning such as knowing movements can be up, down or around. They extend their understanding and, for some, their vocabulary by identifying images of windmills, trees and houses. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have developed a satisfactory level of skill using paints and colour. They can make bright, well controlled paintings based on the pop art style of the 1960's. The lively colours are neatly applied in fields and dots or formed as swirls. Most pupils are able to fold and cut paper using scissors into three-dimensional geometric designs. They show awareness of the need for regular patterns, are able to measure visually and control their cutting to achieve this. Pupils make portraits and include the main facial features in correct location and proportion. Higher attainers are able to make drawings using some simple conventions of perspective.

105. By the end of Key Stage 3 some pupils make unsatisfactory progress in extending their manual skills with art materials. The poor interpretation of the art scheme of work means that the observational drawing activity sets unrealistic expectations for all pupils. The level of intervention by staff is excessive and this diminishes the interest of pupils and the challenge of the work. Higher attaining pupils are able to make basic representational drawing in and around the school grounds. Here there is sound progress in consolidating drawing skills. Pupils are able to observe details in buildings such as window frames and curtains and employ a range of marks such as straight, broken, regular and wavy lines to express different features. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils make satisfactory progress in the confident handling of art materials and in combining and shaping these to realise their ideas. For example, they join card using glue and roll a ball of clay into a flat disc shape. They have not yet worked independently or investigatively although these skills are emerging in other subjects. Pupils work takes on a vocational and occupational emphasis; for instance, making picture frames from re-cycled paper and a sundial that serves as an ornament. This is a good preparation for transition to the post-16 programme where students art and craft interests and skills are focused on production within mini-enterprise projects.

106. Pupils' response is satisfactory overall. Most pupils are settled and at times indicate their interest and enjoyment in art activities. Higher attainers make good efforts in producing neat and accurate work as when they are cutting out geometric patterns. At Key Stage 4 pupils make very good efforts in constructing their sundials. Pupils' behaviour is generally good and only unsatisfactory where work is unchallenging.

107. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. It is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. Most teachers have a sound knowledge of art and the activities appropriate to the needs of their pupils. There is some weakness in art expertise at Key Stage 3 which leads to planning inappropriate work. Teachers set satisfactory expectations at Key Stages 1 and 2 in relation to pupils being able to experience using a variety of materials. However, at Key Stage 3 the expectation that some pupils produce an observational drawing is unrealistic. Key Stage 4 pupils are well challenged to manage several different materials and stages of development in completing a sundial. Lesson planning is satisfactory other than at Key Stage 3 where it is poor. Here activities do not have appropriate learning objectives and are not related well to pupils' special educational needs. The organisation of lessons and teaching methods used are good at Key Stages 1 and 4, satisfactory at Key Stage 2 and unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. Where they are good, all staff have clear roles in helping pupils manage materials and processes for themselves. There is a good variety of work available which is a positive feature at Key Stage 4. Here opportunities are used well for discussing and demonstrating techniques. Where it is unsatisfactory staff are involved too much in pupils' work, sometimes to the extreme of doing the drawing for them. Pupils are managed satisfactorily at all key stages and effective behaviour strategies are deployed. Lesson time is used satisfactorily at all key stages except Key Stage 2, where it is unsatisfactory as a consequence of insufficient staffing levels to ensure pupils can be kept purposively engaged. Otherwise the pace of lessons is appropriate to the capabilities of pupils. Classroom support assistants are generally well deployed and largely make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Except for Key Stage 3 the use of assessment in the course of lessons is satisfactory. Staff check what pupils are understanding and how well they manage materials. However, no process of assessment is evident in teaching at Key Stage 3.

108. The art curriculum is broad and balanced and largely relevant to the levels of attainment and the special educational needs of pupils at all key stages. The art scheme of work lacks the detail sufficient to assist teachers plan a coherent development of knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject across the full age range. While the procedures for assessing pupils' progress in art are in place the use of assessment to inform planning is unsatisfactory. The responsibility for managing the subject across the school is delegated to one teacher and is unsatisfactory overall. He has insufficient time allotted to ensure all his subject responsibilities are carried out efficiently. He is not expected to monitor art teaching and the curriculum, although in order to provide the expected support and advice to all teachers, this is a necessary part of his role.

Design and technology

109. Pupils follow a series of projects and, at Key Stages 1 through to 3, use kits and structures to explore the properties and components of each topic. At Key Stage 4 pupils use the extensive workshop facilities within the nearby Meopham High school. At Key Stages 1 through to 3, pupils make satisfactory progress and at Key Stage 4 their progress is good.

110. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils are learning how to construct simple toys using a range of construction kits such as Stickle-bricks, Lego 1 and Mobilo. They can manipulate the components into a good replica of the design requested and some higher attaining pupils can follow simple diagrams included with the kits.

111. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils can construct a car using kits such as Lego 2, and to a design specification. All pupils, with varying degrees of adult help, can construct a car which closely resembles an actual vehicle - using wheels, chassis and body. The wheels are positioned correctly in the four corners and all can roll down the ramp. They test the function of their cars by rolling them down a steep ramp and measuring the distance they roll. The furthest roll is indicative of the best design. Higher attaining pupils are able to provide a good reason why some cars roll further; for example, wheels are loose, axles are straight or they are heavier, thereby demonstrating a good understanding of the principle of design.

112. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' skills have improved. Higher attaining pupils are now using a variety of nuts and bolts to construct their cars and use independent axles and wheels to increase the manoeuvrability of their vehicles. The complexity of the kits has increased further; for example, with the availability of advanced Meccano sets. Lower attaining pupils can recognise a vintage car and describe its component parts; for example, wheel, bonnet, seat, steering wheel, radiator and bonnet. Higher attaining pupils can describe the purpose of these parts and all can cut up the car and re-assemble it correctly using labels and names. They use more advance forms of kit that require a greater level of understanding on gears, handles and pulleys.

113. Pupils at Key Stage 4 are introduced to workshop based construction using a range of material and methods, and this makes a significant contribution to the good progress made by pupils at this key stage, as it enables pupils to begin working with a wide range of materials and media. By the end of the key stage, and with varying degrees of adult help, they can construct a box in preparation for a thumb-piano. They recognise the need for design principles by testing the length of lollipop sticks needed to produce deep and high notes. They can use hammer, glue and nails to construct the box from adult-prepared "kits". Higher attaining pupils can record their work on worksheets.

114. At all key stages pupils' attitudes to their work are at least satisfactory and, for pupils at Key Stage 4 in the workshop, they are good. Pupils listen to instructions, follow advice and guidance to the best of their ability, but, the behaviour of a few deteriorates when they become bored, do not understand what is expected of them, or they have to wait their turn for adult support. Behaviour within the workshop is good, even when confidence is low and uncertainty sets in. At Key Stages 2 and 3, pupils wait for their turn to roll their cars and only a minority cannot deal with the tension of what they perceive as competition.

115. The quality of teaching is at least sound and at Key Stage 4 it is good, particularly in managing pupils' behaviour and self-imposed doubt. Teachers' understanding of the centrally created work packs, and the limitations imposed by working from commercial kits is satisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and most are able to compensate for this within their planning. However, this not the case at Key Stage 3 where the teacher's expectations are low. Teachers' planning and methods and organisational strategies are sound at the first three key stages and improve thereafter. Teachers' knowledge and skill at Key Stage 4 are good, resulting in good planning and very good methods and organisational strategies. Resources at Key Stage 4 are good, particularly in terms of access to a large and well-equipped workshop. Assessment of progress is best at Key Stage 4 where regular pauses in activity to review purpose and progress are commonplace.

116. Whilst the availability of work packs in the first three key stages enables the subject to meet statutory requirements, and is effective in guiding teachers' planning and organisation, the lack of access to specialist facilities for pupils in Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. Assessment of progress overall is unsatisfactory as teachers' planning does not sufficiently specify the learning outcome for each lesson, resulting in progress being usually marked against completion of task in terms of the degree of adult support. Insufficient time is made available for co-ordinating the subject and monitoring of outcomes suffers as a consequence. The range and availability of resources are good, particularly in relation to the availability of skilled support staff.

French

117. French is taught in Key Stages 3 and 4 only. At Key Stage 3 pupils are currently working on a topic entitled *en classe*. They listen to the teacher introduce new vocabulary, repeat the new word with higher ability pupils rehearsing these further through reading and writing exercises from worksheets. Lower attaining pupils require considerable help with this part of the lesson and are provided with alternative exercises involving cutting out pictures representing the new vocabulary and then sticking them on a larger sheet alongside the correct word. At Key Stage 4 pupils study a variety of topics associated with their work on "leisure". They rehearse previously learnt words, listen and repeat new words and use these in a variety of situations to develop their understanding further.

118. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory, particularly for higher attaining pupils, as insufficient attention is given to progressively building on their vocabulary and knowledge. By the end of the key stage, higher attaining pupils can recognise and name a variety of pets (*mes animaux*); for example, *chien*, *chat*, *perruche*, *lapin* and *tortue*. Higher attaining pupils can read labels naming pets and objects correctly. They can use masculine and feminine forms, and some write words correctly in gaps left in sentences. Lower ability pupils cut out pictures and stick them correctly alongside the name on a chart. Some can under-write the new words, whilst others require help to over-write. A few higher attaining pupils have an extensive French vocabulary. They complete worksheets with ease, write lists of personal likes and dislikes, recognise places of interest; for example, the Eiffel tower and Notre D me Cathedral. By using a dictionary they can translate from French into English and vice-versa. In conversation they can respond correctly to questions such as *C'est quel num ro?*

119. Pupils at Key Stage 4 are making satisfactory progress, such that, by the end of the key stage, their vocabulary has extended considerably. They are able to correctly repeat a wide range of words based around their study of leisure and hobbies. Higher attaining pupils revise their greetings using *salut* and *bonjour*. From their study of French villages and using photographs they can recognise the *boulang r* working in the *boulang rie*, the *boucher* in the *boucherie*, and the *pompier*, *gendarme* and *pharmacien*. Lower attaining pupils meanwhile are preparing a gourmet experience involving, *le vin*, *le pain* et *le fromage*. These are bought in the local supermarket and the meal prepared for the whole class to come together to enjoy French culture at its best. Highest attaining pupils in Y9 join this experience and demonstrate a good range of vocabulary and confidence as they converse easily and fluently when asking for and serving the food, using a variety of three- and four-sentence exchanges.

120. Pupils at Key Stage 3 respond within the limits imposed by their individual learning

styles. With considerable adult direction they listen to the teacher introducing new words and some try and imitate these. With much persuasion they settle to worksheet activities and, again with much adult direction, some are able to complete the exercises. Behaviour declines when a few cannot sustain the work for sufficiently long periods to maximise learning. At Key Stage 4 pupils respond well to the teacher-directed vocabulary session, and, with help, most come to repeat and rehearse new words with sufficient frequency to encourage learning. Worksheets are completed diligently and new vocabulary is used extensively in a variety of situations. Behaviour is good and most respond well to the well organised session. Throughout both key stages, and particularly at Key Stage 4, pupils' cultural development is effectively sustained by exposure to the life-styles and experiences of French culture.

121. Teaching is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 despite planning and organisation being centrally managed through the provision of curriculum work packs. The organisation of the work does not provide sufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils and is insufficiently differentiated for others in the class. Frustration often follows and pupils' behaviour declines as a consequence. Expectations are low and this also results in work offering little challenge. Methods and organisational strategies do not sufficiently recognise the essential strategies needed for teaching children with autism, and, as a consequence, pupils do not benefit from the work offered. The management of pupils' behaviour by support staff is good and this enables most pupils to return to complete the exercises, but not before much valuable time has been lost. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory with considerable effort spent in extending the work packs to provide well structured and diverse activities to meet the needs of all abilities within the groups. Skilled management ensures that lessons start promptly and pupils remain busy for much of the lesson. Resources are effectively used at Key Stage 4 where provision for lower attaining pupils is enhanced through real-life material; for example, non-alcoholic wine, bread and cheese. Assessment at both key stages is unsatisfactory due to difficulties in distinguishing sufficiently between pupil attainment and adult direction. Records of progress are identified through marking, in-class praise, end-of-session discussions at Key Stage 4 and the completion of evaluation sheets for individual portfolios.

122. The central organisation of the work packs is effective in establishing a common format to the content of the subject, and provides an effective starting point for all staff for teaching up to National Curriculum Level 3. All attainment targets are planned for and consequently the subject meets statutory requirements. The subject is effectively managed though insufficient time and opportunity is provided for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Resources are sound and used effectively and the availability of skilled support staff sustains learning for many pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3.

Geography

123. Judgements cannot be made in respect of progress and teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 as only two lessons at Key Stages 1 and 2 were observed. There is insufficient evidence of work over time. Progress in lessons is satisfactory at Key Stage 1 and good at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 1 pupils make progress by looking at pictures related to farming, listen to the sounds of horses' hooves using castanets, smell hay and handle a real horseshoe. Their language work is not sufficiently developed; for example, when one of the more able pupils called the horse shoe a horse leg. At Key Stage 2 pupils use real Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photos to identify geographical features such as

mountains, rivers and forests. Their geographical language is precise; for example, when two pupils used the term *map key*. Pupils also look at globes and discuss physical features, seasons and the weather.

124. Pupils' responses are good, they sit together to look at items and show good attitudes and concentration. When their interest is captured they are motivated and keen to participate in experiences such as passing objects or pointing at features on maps. At Key Stage 1 they often require support for tasks but at Key Stage 2 some show independent and co-operative work.

125. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 1 and good at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 1, planned follow up work was organised to include a range of sensory experiences, but becomes less so when sessions end prematurely in favour of colouring worksheets. At Key Stage 2 good teaching is reflected in the organisation and planning, accompanied by well differentiated methods, including a support assistant mirroring the teacher in a workstation with a less able pupil. Pupils are managed well at both key stages and time and resources are used well in all lessons. However, the occasional use of support staff cutting-out for pupils does not reach the same high standards. The teacher's constant monitoring of all pupils work promotes good use of the time available.

126. There is a geography policy and a scheme of work, both of which are satisfactory and topics are well-chosen to match National Curriculum programmes of study. The co-ordinator is pursuing a current training course in geographical language. There are weaknesses in monitoring and evaluating the subject development plan and insufficient time for effective monitoring of teaching and the curriculum. The school has a satisfactory variety of resources but no centralised area for display and access.

History

127. There is insufficient evidence to form a judgement on the teaching and progress of this subject across the school. However, the scrutiny of pupils' work shows that pupils have access to a suitable scheme of work that is appropriate to their needs. Pupils make good use of the community to enhance the subject and displays and school photographs also add to their experiences. The subject is managed by a co-ordinator but as yet this role is unsatisfactory. There is a satisfactory subject policy in place and there are adequate resources.

Information technology

128. The school provides for information technology in each classroom and in work stations situated on the two main corridors. Pupils follow a range of activities, using programmes to support their learning in subjects such as English and mathematics, the use of programmes such as *Success-maker* where they learn basic literacy and numeracy skills and against which their progress is monitored, through to design software where they learn how to manipulate shapes in space and orientation. Teaching is usually in individual sessions, and individual progress is such that meaningful end-of-key stage comparisons and generalisations cannot be made.

129. In a manner appropriate to their individual skills and abilities, all pupils are making

good progress in their tailored programmes. With varying degrees of adult support, ranging from direct hand-on-hand direction through to full individual access of software and files, all pupils can access their own dedicated software using a personal numeric code. They can use the mouse and keyboard interchangeably and some can save and retrieve their work for later use. Higher attaining pupils are particularly skilled in the use of word processing software, can access their files and produce and print a story with minimal adult help. A few can manipulate shapes in space and, by using techniques such as *click-'n-drag*, they can move shapes around the screen at will and with ease. Key skills become apparent at this stage as the pupils' perceptual abilities enable them to predict what will fit where. Varying degrees of complexity inherent in the programmes enable pupils to follow graded stages of difficulty irrespective of age.

130. Key skills of literacy and numeracy are developing well. By using software with graded recording of success, pupils learn to manage increasingly sophisticated number problems, from early number recognition, through early number bonds, to more complicated calculations involving all four rules of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. In English a variety of on-screen exercises provides tasks involving letter recognition, word recognition and matching, and sentence reading and writing. Further exercises provide carefully graded tasks in cloze procedure, word meaning (dictionary words), comprehension and quizzes. Individual responses are continually monitored and subsequent exercises make either marked increases in difficulty or more subtle graded manoeuvres to gently move progress ever forward.

131. Pupils respond well to this form of tuition as it allows them to work without the need to relate or communicate with others. They are well motivated, eager to please for much of the time but occasionally demonstrate impatience with the teacher when gently reminded that perhaps their skill does not exactly match their intentions. Behaviour is invariably good, rarely degenerates, and only then when personal skill does not match expectation, leading to occasional frustration. The location of the computers on corridors is a source of major distraction for many pupils when they are entranced by activities in classrooms, or a passing pupil or adult catches their attention.

132. Skilled teaching ensures that purposeful activity is sustained and progress is measurable by the software. Teaching is good, with gentle but persuasive prompting to ensure sustained pupil involvement. Staff knowledge of how to use the software is usually sufficient, and in a few instances it is very good. Expectations are high and this results in the provision of sustained learning through good encouragement, to give pupils confidence to choose, not to fear error and to repeat where necessary the small steps required for learning. Gentle but determined comments ensure pupils listen to the instructions and respond within an appropriate length of time. Planning and assessment are integral to the software and a good quality of records is available to guide future work. However, the problems of relating the work to programmes of study within English and mathematics makes meaningful comparisons with the National Curriculum difficult.

133. The school is well provided for in terms of suitable multi-media hardware necessary for this type of software. Access for all is well planned and staff routinely and effectively trained in its use. Subject management is good but as yet insufficient attention has been given to sighting the computers in less distractible surroundings and to ensure a common match with more conventional means of indicating progress in reading, spelling and number.

Music

134. Pupils at all key stages are making good progress in music. Higher attainers at all key stages have access to individual instrument tuition in which they are beginning to master recorders and the piano. Some are able to read simple music phrases when performing. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have a developing interest in performance and listening. They have improved their span of concentration on the variety of musical activities occurring in lessons. Equally, pupils have improved their co-ordination and are increasingly able to manage a series of physical movements to produce the required rhythms and changes in tempo. Pupils are able to beat out a rhythm set by the teacher and provide an accompaniment in a group performance. They can alter the tempo and understand slow and fast beats. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are able to listen to recorded music and follow its rhythm in their accompanying performance using wind and un-tuned percussion instruments. Over time lower attaining pupils have learned to blow a whistle. Others have improved the accuracy of their accompaniment. They are able to follow the teachers' orchestration; for example, hand-clapping, alternating a fast and slow tempo as well as altering pitch from loud to soft. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils listen attentively to a recording of an orchestra. High attainers are able to identify some instruments such as harpsichord, viola, lute and drum. Pupils are able to sing different parts of a song and time their performance accurately.

135. Pupils' response to music lessons at all key stages is good. They enjoy music and often sway in rhythm when listening to performances. As a consequence pupils sustain periods of good concentration and effort, particularly in mastering their timing or perfecting their playing. They show patience and respect when others are performing and are enthusiastic when they are singing or playing an instrument themselves. Standards of behaviour are good. Pupils show respect for each other and look after the musical equipment they are given.

136. The quality of teaching is consistently good. The teacher is qualified and confident with a good level of subject knowledge and musical expertise. Teaching is well matched to the capabilities of the pupils. High expectations are set and maintained regarding performance and improving playing or singing. Lesson planning is good, providing a balance between performance and listening. Appropriate strategies are used to present music, including a wide variety of practical activities; for example, listening, singing and performing using instruments, hands and feet. The management of pupils is very good. The teacher sensitively insists on high standards and is skilful in holding pupils' attention and achieving their participation. Lessons are busy and productive periods. Good use is made of the range of music resources to enable pupils to listen, appreciate and perform in groups and individually. The teacher listens carefully to pupils playing and will have pieces repeated until an appropriate level of performance is attained.

137. The curriculum is broad and balanced with an appropriate emphasis on practical work. For those pupils who are able there are opportunities to learn an instrument and to read music. All music is taught by the one experienced teacher and this ensures that the subject is managed and developed satisfactorily. This has a positive effect on pupils' learning. There is a good range of music resources including a piano, wind and percussion instruments. The school library has CD-ROMs on instruments and the orchestra. The school hall is well used for lessons and recent improvements to the acoustics contributes to the quality of musical experience available to pupils.

Physical education

138. Pupils' progress is good at all key stages. In movement and in games at the end of Key Stage 1 pupils can walk and run at different paces. They can weave around the hall when someone has to follow and can pick up and run with beanbags to drop them into a bucket. The most able pupils show good balance and co-ordination and can carry out a sequence of co-ordinated running and stopping. The least able can respond to adult help and encouragement in running and stopping and can move independently to a finish mat or area. At the end of Key Stage 2 in music and movement pupils can dance in line co-ordinating their arms and legs in a series of dance and stretching movements. In PE games lessons the more able can follow a simple circuit crawling under and climbing over apparatus. They show growing co-ordination in using a bat to hit a ball and they demonstrate controlled throwing. The least able bend and stride and are prompted to move their arm so that the bat they are holding makes contact with a thrown ball. By the end of Key Stage 3 in music and movement the more able pupils are able to respond independently to the tempo of the music by quickening or slowing their movements and they show anticipation of changes by steadying their balance in preparation. Less able pupils respond to the cues of support staff to similarly adjust their leg movements. In games pupils crouch in starting positions and sprint to a line, most with full independence or spoken encouragement. They run between bollards and move quickly to touch one of a specified colour. They practise their skills in controlled throwing, batting and kicking, the most able showing good co-ordination and anticipation. At the end of key Stage 4, the most able can play quick cricket, bowling underarm and batting with skill, co-ordination and strength, catching the ball on many occasions. The least able take their turn and with help and reminders can face the ball and swing the bat, making occasional contact but usually forgetting to run.

139. At all key stages pupils' response is good. They dress and undress for PE, most of them independently, and approach the lesson with interest and motivation. Most stay focused throughout, though some of the pupils at the severe end of the autism continuum require adult intervention. Pupils co-operate in pairs, group and team work and respond well to the small competitive element presented. Pupils show personal development in waiting for their turn and in co-operative tasks. The older pupils learn to tolerate another pupil's performance being highlighted at the end of lessons when theirs has not.

140. Teaching is always good and at times very good. Good expertise and knowledge is matched by good planning, organisation and high but realistic expectations. Good pace and crisp, differentiated instructions with appropriate gestures lead to very good management of pupils and the maximum use of time. Volume and tone of directions are used to maintain attention and the ongoing assessment of pupils results in new tasks being introduced at appropriate intervals to maintain interest. Staff remain alert to pupils' performance and are quick to intervene to demonstrate and advise on how improvements can be achieved. Where teaching is very good, finish areas, revisions and summaries are incorporated into the lesson.

141. The subject is well managed, resources are good and they are used to full effect. The introduction of a specialist teacher in this area has resulted in a well planned and appropriate curriculum closely matched to programmes of study and divided into termly topics. Good assessment procedures are in place, inform curriculum planning and are being directed to meet the needs of all pupils, including the least able. Support staff are

very well deployed in lessons and there is a very good ethos for learning.

Religious education

142. Insufficient evidence was available for sound judgements to be made, other than at Key Stage 4, where pupils make satisfactory progress. By the end of this key stage, pupils can listen to stories, can sometimes understand the concepts of sharing and helping others. Some can understand the notion of people from other lands being different. Some can recognise facts about different faiths. Little evidence of previous work is available in pupils' files to make a judgement of progress over time, but there are pleasing displays and photographic evidence in school.

143. Many pupils behave well and are attentive in lessons. Some pupils can co-operate with others and try to help each other. Less able pupils are very reliant on adults and demonstrate little independence.

144. The teaching of RE, where observed, is satisfactory. Some support staff are able to lead very good sessions. They have clear plans and sound subject knowledge. This relates well to the school's scheme of work and leads to the presentation of difficult concepts for these pupils.

145. Resources and time are often used appropriately, and staff are well deployed. High expectations are sometimes demonstrated. There is a sound scheme of work in place, which relates to the Shropshire Agreed Syllabus, the preferred choice of the school. The subject is in its infancy with regard to planning for progression. It is planned to address more concrete concepts that have a purpose in everyday life. Assessment procedures are very limited currently. Pupils are encouraged to express their feelings and to attempt to understand the feelings of others less fortunate. There is a satisfactory policy to guide practice and the subject is managed. There is a clear ethos of making it relevant and both concrete, and sensory strategies are well used. Music and stories are encouraged throughout the school to develop a sense of awe. There are appropriate levels of staffing and the subject has adequate resources of books and artefacts from many faiths.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

Summary of inspection evidence

146. Five inspectors spent the equivalent of 23.5 days in the school gathering first-hand evidence. Fifty-seven lessons, parts of lessons or individual learning activities were observed, amounting to a total of 36 hours and 55 minutes. Lunch and break times and assemblies were observed, and time was spent in the residential units. Discussions were held with the Society HQ staff, the Principal, Deputy Principals, teaching staff, classroom support staff, domestic staff and pupils. Visits were made to colleges and schools that students and pupils attended for integration purposes. In addition, a representative sample of pupils' work, their files and teachers' planning was scrutinised, and the statements of special educational need and the annual reviews of a random group of pupils were examined, together with their individual learning plans and the school's register of attendance. Prior to the inspection, inspectors studied the useful and comprehensive range of documents the school provided, including their policies and administrative and planning statements. Parent/foster parents' views were sought through the use of a questionnaire, to which 15 (25%) parents responded. Seventeen parents and carers, representing 14 pupils, attended the meeting arranged to hear their views.

147. Data and indicators

PUPIL DATA

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
YR - Y13	59	59	59	16

TEACHERS AND CLASSES

Qualified teachers (YR - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	12.40
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	4.76

Education support staff (YR - Y13)

Total number of education support staff	48
Total aggregate hours worked each week	1779

FINANCIAL DATA

Financial year:	96/97
-----------------	-------

	£
Total income	£1598918
Total expenditure	£1540383
Expenditure per pupils	£ 28525
Balance brought forward from previous year	£ 0
Balance carried forward to next year	£ 58535

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	59
Number of questionnaires returned:	15

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	67	33			
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my	87	13			
The school handles complaints from parents well	57	36	7		
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	46	40	7	7	
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	67	33			
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	57	43			
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	80	20			
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	50	29	21		
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	86	7	7		
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	80	20			
My child(ren) like(s) school	93	7			

Other issues raised by parents

Summary of responses