

INSPECTION REPORT

ST ALBERT THE GREAT CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hemel Hempstead

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117471

Headteacher: Mr Robert Mundy

Lead inspector: Mrs Carole Skinner

Dates of inspection: 1st-3rd December 2003

Inspection number: 257390

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	206
School address:	Acorn Road Bennetts End Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire
Postcode:	HP3 8DW
Telephone number:	(01442) 264835
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body, St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Joe Quinlivan
Date of previous inspection:	November 2001

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School draws its pupils from a wide range of social backgrounds. There are 206 pupils on roll, including 28 children who attend part-time in the Nursery. Approximately eight per cent of the pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds and there are three pupils from traveller families. Only one pupil is at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is above average. Most of the 53 pupils on the school's register of SEN have moderate learning difficulties. Although attainment on entry to the school is broadly typical for the children's age, it is below average in communication, language and literacy skills. The turnover of pupils is similar to that seen in most schools and does not have a significant impact on achievement. The school received an Achievement Award from the Department for Education and Skills in 2002. It aims to provide an education for its pupils that is founded on its Catholic ethos and mission statement. The school enjoys close links with a local Beacon School

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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9446	Helen Griffiths	Lay inspector	
19142	Audrey Quinnell	Team inspector	Science, history, music, foundation stage curriculum, English as an additional language.
14596	Tony Fiddian-Green	Team inspector	Mathematics, design and technology, geography, physical education, special educational needs.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school. It provides very good value for money. Pupils achieve very well, especially in Years 3 to 6 (Key Stage 2) where progress accelerates as a result of very good teaching. Standards in Year 2 are broadly in line with national averages and standards in Year 6 are above average. The quality of teaching is very good overall; it is good in Reception and Key Stage 1 and very good in Key Stage 2. Leadership and management are very good overall and have brought about rapid improvement in a relatively short time.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Outstanding leadership by the headteacher has created a very effective staff team, who are committed to achieving the highest possible standards in all areas of the school's work.
- The leadership and management of the school are very effective in planning for and bringing about improvement and in their commitment to the inclusion of all pupils.
- Pupils achieve very well during their time in school, but standards in reading and writing in Year 2 are not as high as in mathematics.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, especially in Years 3 to 6, and enables all pupils to achieve very well.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes to school and relationships with adults and their very good behaviour have a positive influence on their learning.
- Attendance figures are well below the national average, despite the school's best efforts to improve them.
- The school provides very good levels of care for pupils' welfare, health and safety.
- The school works very effectively in partnership with parents.

There has been very good improvement since the school was inspected in 2001. Pupils' achievement is significantly better and they achieve higher standards in English, mathematics and science. The quality of teaching has improved because teachers have been monitored and supported effectively. They have much higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and use assessment information very effectively to provide work that meets individual pupils' needs. Subject leaders have been well trained to lead development and raise standards in their subjects. The very good governance, leadership and management of the school, and in particular their shared pursuit of excellence, have been key factors in the school's rapid improvement. The school has made rapid progress despite having a high turnover of staff and has benefited from very good support from the Local Education Authority and a local Beacon School.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	E	B	A	A
mathematics	C	B	B	A
science	E	C	A	A

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.*

Achievement is very good, as shown by the table above. In the current Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The school has set very challenging targets for pupils to achieve and the very good quality of teaching is helping pupils to make very good progress. In Year 2, standards in reading, writing and science are average, and in mathematics they are above average. This represents good achievement as many of these pupils started school with below average skills in communication, language and literacy. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes achieve well and most are on course to achieve the goals children are expected

to reach by the end of Reception in all areas of learning. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Pupils' attitudes are excellent and their behaviour is very good, which helps them to progress very well, as do excellent relationships with teachers. Attendance is unsatisfactory mainly because too many pupils take holidays in term time. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is very good and contributes very effectively to the school's aims and its Catholic ethos. Cultural development is satisfactory but there are limited opportunities for pupils to learn about different ways of life and belief in modern multicultural Britain.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The strongest features of the provision are the quality of teaching and learning, the provision for pupils with special educational needs, the levels of care for pupils' welfare and the school's links with parents and the community. **The quality of teaching is very good overall.** It is good in the Nursery, Reception and Years 1 and 2 and very good in Years 3 to 6. Assessment information is used very well to plan work that meets pupils' individual needs. Pupils learn well because teachers provide an interesting, well planned curriculum which is enriched by a wide range of visits, visitors and extracurricular activities. Very good levels of care help pupils to feel secure and happy in school and to learn effectively. The school works very well in partnership with parents to enhance pupils' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and his high aspirations for the school are shared by all staff and governors. Senior managers and governors are very effective in planning for and bringing about improvement and ensuring that all statutory requirements are met. All are strongly committed to achieving excellence in all aspects of school life and have a clear vision for the future.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

A very high proportion of parents are satisfied with the school, especially with the quality of teaching, the leadership and management and the way their children are cared for. Pupils are also very happy at school. They find lessons interesting and enjoy taking responsibility.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue the work already being undertaken to raise standards in English, and particularly in reading.
- Continue to promote the importance of good attendance and to discourage parents from taking holidays in term time.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 is good; for pupils in Years 3 to 6 it is very good. Standards in English, mathematics, science and history are above average in Year 6. Although girls generally do better than boys, the school has worked successfully to raise boys' attainment. It has also successfully eradicated the underachievement that was identified by the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, especially in communication, language and literacy.
- Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2, although standards in reading and writing are not as high as those in mathematics.
- In Years 3 to 6, pupils achieve very well because of the very good teaching they receive.
- Pupils with SEN make very good progress overall, and many achieve the standards expected of 11 year olds by the time they leave the school.

Commentary

1. There has been a very good improvement in the school's performance in the national tests in English, mathematics and science since the previous inspection. In 2001, standards in Year 6 were well below the national average in English and science, and average in mathematics. In 2003 they were well above the national average in English and science and above average in mathematics. The results show that those pupils made very good progress between Year 2 and Year 6 and they compare very favourably with those of other schools in similar circumstances. They also show that the school has been successful in narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment, especially in English. A relentless focus on driving up standards and improving the quality of education for the pupils has ensured that weaknesses were addressed quickly and strategies introduced to ensure that all pupils' needs are met. The key factor in this rapid improvement has been the very high expectations of all teachers, who provide suitably challenging work for pupils of all capabilities. The table below illustrates the marked upward trend in the school's performance, which is higher than that seen in most schools.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	29.1 (28.2)	26.8 (27.0)
mathematics	28.2 (28.2)	26.8 (26.7)
science	30.1 (28.9)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 29 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. The findings of this inspection show that high standards are being maintained. Standards are currently above average in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. However, the school has set very challenging targets for the national tests in 2004 and is aiming to achieve well above average standards in all three subjects. Standards in history are also above average because teachers develop pupils' historical enquiry skills very well. The quality of teaching for these pupils is very high and is helping them to make the progress necessary to achieve these targets. The pupils' achievement is very good in Years 3 to 6. Pupils with SEN achieve very well and many reach average standards in Year 6. More able pupils do particularly well: for example, 41 per cent of the

year group reached Level 5 in English in 2003, 38 per cent did so in mathematics and 52 per cent in science.

3. The school's performance in the Year 2 national tests has also improved significantly, but not to such a great extent as in Year 6. In 2001, standards in reading and writing were well below average, while those in mathematics were in the lowest five per cent of schools nationally. In 2003, standards were in line with the national average in reading and mathematics, which shows a significant improvement. The improvement in writing was outstanding and was largely due to the very high proportion of pupils reaching Level 3 in the tests, which was well above the national average. However, the percentage reaching Level 3 in reading and mathematics was below average. There has been a much stronger emphasis on writing than reading since the last inspection, and the school is now shifting this emphasis to encompass both. The table below shows an upward trend of improvement greater than the national picture.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	15.9 (15.4)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	16.0 (13.4)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	16.3 (15.8)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 27 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. The inspection findings show that standards in Year 2 are average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. More pupils are currently achieving the higher levels in mathematics than in reading and writing, although the school is aiming to achieve higher standards in writing, as in 2003. Many pupils start school with below average skills in language and literacy, especially in reading. The school has introduced strategies to accelerate progress in these aspects of learning. For example, pupils in Year 2 now have a separate daily 20 minute reading session which is intended to raise standards further, and there is an increased emphasis on improving pupils' speaking skills and range of vocabulary across the whole curriculum. Standards in science are also in line with the national average as for the previous year group. Overall, achievement is good in Years 1 and 2. Pupils with SEN make good progress towards their targets.

5. Achievement in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Children make good progress because the quality of education provided for them is good and meets their individual needs. By the end of the Reception year, indications are that most children will meet the expected standards in the six areas of the recommended curriculum for children of this age. Children do particularly well in communication, language and literacy because there is a strong focus on developing their speaking and listening skills in both the Nursery and Reception classes.

6. Through careful assessment, target setting and tracking of pupils' progress throughout the school, teachers ensure that all groups of pupils achieve equally well. This includes pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, pupils from traveller families and those who are at an early stage of learning English. Another strong feature is the quality of presentation of pupils' work. They are encouraged to present their work neatly and carefully and clearly take a pride in their achievements. Pupils' competence in language and literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology are good and enable to make good progress in other areas of the curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes are excellent. Their behaviour and punctuality are very good. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils show a very high level of interest in learning, concentrate very well and are very enthusiastic.
- Their behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school.
- Relationships between pupils and among pupils and adults are excellent.
- Pupils are very willing to take responsibility.
- They are confident, highly articulate and supportive of one another.
- Pupils show very good respect for one another's feelings and beliefs.
- The attendance rate is well below the national average.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is very good.
- Cultural development is satisfactory but opportunities for pupils to appreciate cultural diversity are somewhat limited.

Commentary

7. At all stages, pupils enjoy school and all it has to offer. Children in the Nursery settle quickly into school routines. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and want to do well. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils were engrossed in their work and maintained a very high level of concentration. They listen attentively to the views of others, co-operate very well and are very trustworthy. All pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations of them: for example in a Year 6 history lesson on the Greek way of life, the challenging task sustained pupils' interest very well. Pupils are open, confident, highly articulate, friendly and very polite.

8. Behaviour is very good throughout the school in lessons, assemblies and playtimes. This reflects the views of the parents who responded to the questionnaire and attended the pre-inspection meeting. The school has very effective systems for promoting good behaviour. Pupils know and understand the school rules very well. Older pupils act as role models for younger ones. All pupils are very well aware of how they should behave and fully understand the difference between right and wrong. No bullying or harassment was observed during the inspection and pupils knew what they should do if it should occur. There was one fixed-period exclusion last year and none in the preceding two years.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	132	1	0
White – Irish	8	0	0
White – any other White background	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	10	0	0

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

9. Pupils are very enterprising and respond very well to the many opportunities for taking responsibility. Relationships between pupils and adults and among the pupils themselves are excellent and this makes a very important contribution to pupils' learning: pupils respond to their teachers' very high expectations and show high levels of maturity, thoughtfulness and independence. They are very keen to take part in school activities. There is a high degree of racial harmony.

10. Despite the school's strenuous efforts, attendance remains well below the national average. Although parents are regularly urged not to take holidays in term time, some continue to do so. There is also a small number of families with attendance problems. An audit of absence taken during the inspection shows attendance as below average. Punctuality is now very good. Staff monitor attendance effectively. There was one fixed-period exclusion last year and none in the preceding two years.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.5
National data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.2
National data	0.4

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

11. The family ethos and the social and moral development of the pupils are very good. Pupils behave with consideration for others and have a well-developed sense of how their behaviour might affect others. In discussions, pupils particularly liked the friendly atmosphere of the school and felt confident that they could ask for help at any time from any adult in the school. Staff provide good role models, presenting a calm and thoughtful approach to life and the school and discussing issues with pupils during the school day. The school council makes a very good contribution to pupils' social development. Pupils are encouraged to think of others and regularly raise money for charities.

12. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect on the beliefs of others through religious education and during collective worship. They show very good self-knowledge in discussions and are challenged and inspired by their teachers – for example in Year 5, pupils are encouraged to think about their hopes and aspirations and all pupils are happy to compose their own prayers for assembly. They are well supported by their local church. Pupils have the opportunity to study their own community through the visits and activities provided for them. The school has held multicultural days such as the Apache art and the Trinidad and Tobago music days. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to learn about different ways of life and belief in modern multicultural Britain.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The strongest features of the provision are the quality of teaching and learning, the school's assessment procedures and the use of assessment information to inform teaching, the provision for pupils with SEN, the levels of care for pupils' welfare and the school's links with parents and the community.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. It is good in the foundation stage and in Years 1 and 2, and very good in Years 3 to 6. Assessment in the foundation stage is good; it is very good in Years 1 to 6.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teachers' planning is very good in Years 1 to 6 and takes into account the differing needs of the pupils in each class.
- Throughout the school, teachers' very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the excellent relationships between pupils and all adults create a very positive environment for learning.
- Teachers are very good at motivating and engaging pupils in lessons because they use an interesting variety of teaching methods and strategies.
- Pupils apply themselves conscientiously to their work and are very productive.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide appropriately challenging work for them.
- Pupils work very well independently and in collaboration with others, which helps them to acquire skills and knowledge at a fast pace.
- Teachers and assistants work effectively together to support pupils in their learning.
- Assessment procedures are very thorough and constructive and help teachers to meet pupils' individual needs very effectively.
- The very good standard of marking seen in English is not yet applied consistently across all subjects of the curriculum.

Commentary

13. The quality of teaching and learning is a significant strength of the school and is the most important contributory factor to the school's rapid improvement over the past two years. As the table shows, all of the teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory and almost nine out of ten lessons were good. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6 was particularly strong, with just under six lessons in ten being very good or excellent. All of the teachers and assistants in the school are committed to improving their practice and are very open to advice and guidance. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and very good support from the Local Education Authority have been successful in encouraging all staff to strive for excellence, which has brought about a very good improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection, notably in the way work is planned to provide appropriate levels of challenge for all pupils.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 42 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (7%)	12 (29%)	22 (52%)	5 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

14. The quality of teaching and learning in the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Teachers provide a wide range of stimulating experiences across all areas of learning, which engage the children's interest well. The children respond very well to the teachers' expectations of high standards of behaviour. The teachers understand how young children learn, helping them to feel secure and happy, which enables them to make good progress in their learning.

15. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 1 and 2 is good. The quality of teaching in English, including the development of literacy skills, is good. High expectations in Year 1 ensure that the teacher builds effectively on the good progress made in the foundation stage. The teaching of writing skills, including handwriting, is stronger than the teaching of reading because it has been a focus for development for some time. Teachers are now, appropriately, shifting more emphasis on to the development of reading skills. Good teaching in mathematics, and particularly numeracy

skills, has already raised standards significantly over the past two years. Teachers have a good knowledge of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy and have adapted them well to meet pupils' needs. Teachers plan lessons very well to meet the needs of different groups of pupils within each class. Their high expectations of pupils' behaviour are met with a willingness to work hard and do well.

16. The very good teaching in Years 3 to 6 is founded on very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. It is particularly strong in Years 5 and 6, where five of the 11 lessons seen were very good and three were excellent. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is very good and enables pupils to make very good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills to a high standard. Lessons are planned very carefully to meet the needs of all pupils and the excellent relationships between adults and pupils help to create an encouraging and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers make lessons interesting by using a variety of teaching methods and resources, including interactive whiteboards. Teaching assistants are deployed very well to provide focused support for pupils and they work effectively in partnership with teachers.

17. Pupils' learning is enhanced greatly by their excellent attitudes towards school and their very good behaviour in lessons. They concentrate very well on their work and apply themselves conscientiously to all activities. The high quality of the teaching ensures that learning is both interesting and enjoyable and teachers are very good at building pupils' self-esteem and belief in their own abilities. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively and independently and encourage them to take responsibility for their own targets and for organising themselves. Pupils rise to the challenge and take a pride in their achievements. Teachers make learning interesting and relevant for pupils by making sure that they understand the 'big picture' and where each lesson fits into the overall purpose of a unit of work.

18. Teaching and learning for pupils who have special educational needs are very good. Teachers provide suitable work so that these pupils are able to join in lessons fully. Support assistants are very good and provide the extra help that is needed. This very good support from teachers and assistants enables these pupils to learn very well and make very good progress towards their targets.

19. The school's assessment procedures are very good and they are used very well in teachers' planning. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Pupils' progress is tracked very carefully and individual targets are shared with pupils. There is efficient and early identification of pupils with SEN. There are good procedures for monitoring children's achievement on a day-to-day basis in the Nursery and Reception classes. Marking is very good in English, but this very good practice is not consistently used in all subjects of the curriculum. Teachers do not always indicate to pupils how improvements could be made.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school supports the pupils' learning outside of the school day and develops the range of their interests very well. The accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school plans its curriculum well and adjusts it successfully in order to cater for the changing needs of the pupils and national requirements.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and targets are matched well to their individual needs.
- The youngest pupils make a good start and progress well because of the good range of curricular activities organised for them.
- The pupils' learning is enriched very well through the good range of visitors and educational visits and the very good range of out of school clubs provided by the school.

- The school's staffing, in terms of teachers and support staff, is good and assists the teaching of the curriculum well.
- Although the accommodation is satisfactory overall, the ICT suite is very small and the library is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

20. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils. The time for the school day has been extended to ensure that there is sufficient time for all subjects. This is a good improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. The school keeps the effectiveness of its curricular provision under constant and effective review and implements changes well. For example, the school has recently introduced the 'Big Picture' approach to the teaching of many areas of the curriculum. This innovative approach is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. It enables pupil to have a complete overview of an area of learning, including the skills to be developed and the knowledge to be acquired, and how their new learning is related to previous work.

21. The school supports the curriculum well through a very good range of visitors and educational visits. This judgement supports the parents' view that the school provides a good range of extracurricular activities. On 'Maths World Day', a visitor came in to work with all pupils on mathematical investigations. British Petroleum sponsored a local inventor to come into school to help pupils to copy nature in order to solve problems. Pupils in Year 6 enjoyed a presentation of *Macbeth* and the whole school enjoyed the Apache art day and performances by a string quartet, a brass ensemble, music from Trinidad and Tobago and a samba workshop. The residential visits to Devon and to The Loft Retreat help older pupils to learn to live away from home and to form good relationships with their peers. A good number of pupils are becoming proficient instrumentalists playing the recorder, violin, guitar, clarinet and flute. There is a very good choice of out of school clubs, such as football, dance, netball and chess, which are well supported.

22. Pupils who have special educational needs have very good access to the school's curriculum. Individual education plans focus well on the needs of the pupils. Targets are appropriate and achievable. The support these pupils receive and the very careful planning by teachers enables them to do very well. Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is good. They are integrated well into all aspects of school life. Good, extra support is provided, which enables them to feel confident and become proficient in English. The school has good links with outside agencies, which provide good advice and support, as and when required, in order to support both the parents and pupils.

23. The school has a good number of teachers and teaching assistants which enables them to organise classes appropriately to support the needs of the pupils well. As a result, pupils receive good equality of opportunity. A good initiative to employ a part-time teacher who knows the school and the pupils well enables all teachers to be given management time to fulfil the full range of their responsibilities.

24. The accommodation is well cared for and enhances pupils' learning in most areas of the curriculum. Pupils benefit from very pleasant grounds, including a spinney, which is used well to develop learning in science and geography. However, the ICT suite is very small and cramped and can only be used by half a class at a time. This causes complications with planning for and staffing lessons and the situation is far from ideal, although teachers make the best possible use of the suite and organise lessons effectively. The library is currently situated behind a curtain at the back of the hall. It is small, under-used and insufficiently well stocked. The school has planned and budgeted for a new 'communications suite' to incorporate both ICT and a library, work on which was due to start soon after this inspection. This is a further example of efficient strategic planning and vision which is continuing to improve the quality of education for the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. The provision of support, advice and guidance based on the monitoring of pupils' achievement is very good. The involvement of pupils through seeking and acting on their views is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The induction arrangements for pupils in the Nursery and Reception are good.
- There are very effective procedures for health and safety, child protection and first aid.
- All adults know pupils very well and provide very good levels of care.
- There are very good systems for monitoring pupils' academic standards and progress.
- Arrangements for monitoring pupils' personal development are very effective.
- The involvement of pupils in the school's work is very good.

Commentary

25. The induction arrangements for children in the Nursery and the Reception class are good. Parents are invited to a meeting with the headteacher and the Nursery and Reception class teachers to learn about the curriculum for their children. They are invited to bring their children into school to meet their new teacher prior to starting school in either September or January. Very good relationships are quickly built up with the children's parents, which help them to know how well their children will be looked after in school. The good induction procedures enable the children to settle easily into school and to make good progress.

26. The school has very good health and safety procedures. The headteacher is the designated person for child protection and for pupils in public care: procedures are effective and the headteacher has been recently trained. Training is given to all staff and logs are kept of concerns. Staff are very aware of child protection issues and there are good guidelines for all staff. Arrangements for the administration of first aid and for monitoring pupils' medical conditions are very good and good numbers have been trained. Security is good. Regular risk assessments are undertaken and the conscientious site manager is effectively involved, with the governors, in health and safety procedures.

27. There is a strong bond of trust between pupils and all adults who work in the school. Nearly all pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt there was at least one adult to whom they could turn for advice. Adults know the pupils very well and monitor their personal development on an effective basis. Academic monitoring is used very well to inform pupils' reports. Very good tracking systems are used to check on pupils' progress and pupils really understand what they have to do to improve. Pupils' views are sought consistently through circle time, assemblies and PHSE. Pupils in their questionnaire felt confident that their views could be heard and acted upon.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are **very good**. Links with the community are **good** and those with other schools are **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have very positive views of the school.
- The school provides parents with a very good range of information.
- Very good links with other local schools provide many benefits for the pupils.
- The school has good links with its local community.

Commentary

28. In a very high return to the inspection questionnaire, parents and carers expressed very positive views on all aspects of the work of the school. Information provided for parents is very good, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The induction pack for the parents of new pupils is of a high quality. 'Story sacks' are used very well to help parents support their children's learning at home. Details about the work pupils are to cover are provided each term and home/school books are used very well as a means of dialogue between school and home. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed of events and teachers are always available for informal consultation at the end of the day.

29. At review meetings, targets and concerns are shared with parents. All parents have signed the home/school agreement and the new behaviour policy was discussed with them. The school ran a questionnaire for parents to ascertain their degree of satisfaction with the school after parents' meetings. The school prospectus and governors' annual report are clearly written and informative. Written annual reports are good: they provide diagnostic and thorough information on children's progress, set targets and offer parents the opportunity to comment.

30. There are effective links with the local Beacon school, which are helping to raise standards, and with other local Catholic schools. The school is setting up links with a school in Afghanistan and, under the sponsorship of the British Council, with a school in Eire. Links with the local secondary school are good. The school hosted a summer school for gifted and talented pupils from several local schools.

31. Parents support the school very well through the PTFA, which runs a good range of social and fund-raising events and has raised good sums to support the school. A small number of parents help in school on a regular basis.

32. The school has good links with the local community. A local company has sponsored educational visits to the school. Pupils take part in local music festivals and sports competitions and recently sang in St. Albans Abbey with other local schools

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and that of other key staff is very good. The management and governance of the school are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very effective strategic planning, fuelled by a drive for excellence, has brought about very good improvement in a relatively short time.
- Outstanding leadership by the headteacher has created a very effective staff team, who are committed to achieving the highest possible standards in all areas of the school's work.
- The senior management team share the headteacher's vision for the school and are influential in leading new developments.
- The governing body makes a major contribution to determining the vision and direction of the school.
- Staff and governors are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness and are very receptive to external advice and support.
- A strong commitment to developing leadership skills ensures that subject co-ordinators make an effective contribution to the development of the curriculum.
- The school's commitment to the inclusion of, and equality of opportunity for, all pupils is excellent.
- Shrewd financial management ensures that the school provides very good value for money.

Commentary

33. In its last inspection in 2001, the school was judged to be underachieving. In two years, it has become a very good school, which offers a high standard of education to all of its pupils. Standards have risen from well below average to well above average in the Year 6 national tests and the quality of teaching has improved considerably. The leadership and management of the school have grown in effectiveness and they have played a highly significant role in bringing about change at a fast pace. The commitment of the governors and the leadership team to a drive for excellence in all areas of school life has been a key factor in its success. The school has benefited greatly from the very good support and guidance provided by the Local Education Authority, and also from its links with a local Beacon School. The very high turnover of teachers in the past two years, which could have been a potential barrier to improvement, has been managed exceptionally well and used to the school's advantage.

34. At the time of the last inspection, the headteacher was fairly new to the school. His vision to create a centre of excellence has been the driving force behind the changes that he has brought about. His high aspirations for the school are shared by all because he has inspired and motivated staff, governors and pupils and is greatly respected by parents. He leads by example in the classroom, teaching classes across the school to gain a better knowledge of the pupils and to provide staff with time to carry out their other responsibilities. His own teaching is of a very high standard. A reflective, self-critical approach to management and a strong commitment to developing leadership skills in others have helped to create a very strong team who know what they are working towards and what they have to do to achieve it. The headteacher has been successful in improving the school's academic performance while maintaining and strengthening its Catholic ethos, and has ensured that pupils' spiritual and moral development remains a very high priority. As a result, the school's ethos is exceptionally good and reflects its aim to nurture pupils' self-esteem and love for others within the context of the Catholic faith.

35. The senior management team, most of whom have been appointed since the previous inspection, provide very effective support in bringing about the changes that are necessary to achieve it. Most importantly, they all lead by example in the classroom, providing models of very good practice and demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment to raising pupils' expectations and self-esteem. All are fully involved in analysing and evaluating the school's performance and in promoting effective strategies for improvement. The deputy head works very closely with the headteacher in analysing the results of national and internal tests and using the information to guide strategic planning. His expertise as assessment co-ordinator is exceptional, and includes devising computer programs which interpret and analyse performance data to enhance teachers' understanding of the outcomes of their work and to highlight any differences in achievement between groups of pupils.

36. The governing body plays a vital role in shaping the direction of the school and supporting the headteacher and leadership team in bringing about improvement. Two aspects of their role are particularly worthy of mention. Firstly, their determination to appoint the right staff has been instrumental in improving the school. They and the headteacher have insisted on the highest possible standards when making appointments and have been equally rigorous about addressing and eliminating weak teaching. Secondly, governors are very effective in the way they both challenge and support the leadership team and the staff. Confident to ask searching questions and to request explanations for why things are the way they are, they are also very supportive of the headteacher and staff and value their efforts. The governors have a very good understanding of what the school does well and what needs to be improved and they work very closely with the headteacher to maintain an overview of developments and to ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

37. Staff and governors are fully involved in and committed to ongoing self-evaluation and monitoring of the school's effectiveness. Rigorous analysis of test results, careful tracking of pupils' progress and the setting of targets for individual pupils ensure that any signs of underachievement

are detected quickly and strategies put in place to address them. For example, when it became evident that boys were underachieving in English, immediate steps were taken to provide more 'boy-friendly' reading materials, strategies such as the 'Reading Olympics' in Year 5 were put in place and teachers were made more aware of the different ways in which pupils approach learning. The headteacher and deputy head observe every teacher at least once per term, and there is a rolling programme of monitoring for subject co-ordinators, who also scrutinise colleagues' planning and pupils' work. Staff and governors have sought and acted upon the advice of external consultants and all are very receptive to constructive criticism and guidance.

38. There are very good procedures to ensure the continuing professional development of all staff and to develop leadership skills. As a result, each subject is led and managed well by a teacher who is committed to its development and who knows how to bring this about. Each subject leader has a written action plan for the year, which shows the main priorities for development and how they are to be achieved. The senior teachers who have led developments in English and mathematics provide models of very good practice for others to follow. The school's procedures for the performance management of staff are very good and make a significant contribution to its ongoing improvement.

39. Another outstanding feature of the leadership and management is its commitment to running an inclusive school in which equality of opportunity is a very high priority. Recognition of the uniqueness of each individual and respect for diversity underpin the school's ethos and set the tone for the way all adults and pupils are treated. Pupils' views are taken into account when decisions are made and teachers value their contributions in lessons. Teachers and assistants feel valued and appreciated and staff morale is high. All of this enhances the quality of education provided for the pupils.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	552482	Balance from previous year	21983
Total expenditure	545171	Balance carried forward to the next	29294
Expenditure per pupil	2500		

40. The governors and leadership team budget systematically for all expenditure, ensuring that spending decisions are closely linked to the priorities in the school development plan. A decision to employ a part-time teacher has both reduced the school's outlay on supply teachers and ensured that absent teachers are covered by a colleague who knows the school and the pupils and shares its high ideals. It also provides all teachers with time out of class to fulfil their other responsibilities and has helped to make their workload more manageable. Best value principles are embedded in the leadership and management of the school and are applied rigorously. The headteacher and governors are enterprising and resourceful in seeking grants to improve the school further. As a result, a building project is about to begin which will provide a new 'communications centre', combining a suite of computers and a new library.

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

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

41. Provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is **good**. This is similar to the judgement made by the previous inspection. At the time of this inspection, eleven children were attending full time in the Reception class and twenty-nine children were attending part-time in the Nursery. There are good arrangements for introducing the children to school. This means that most are happy to leave their parents and quickly get used to school routines. The quality of teaching is good and most children make good progress. Although attainment on entry is similar to that seen in most schools, many children have below, and sometimes well below, average attainment in their communication, language and literacy development. Indications are that most children are on course to achieve the expected standard in each area of learning by the end of the Reception year. Good leadership and management, effective planning for an interesting curriculum, combined with good teaching all unite to provide the children with interesting and varied experiences. This results in good achievement. The two teachers provide good leadership for all adults in the department, who work very closely together to form an effective team. As the two classes are some distance apart, the children cannot easily mix or play together. However, the teachers plan together to ensure an interesting curriculum for each area of learning, which effectively link together to reinforce learning and make it more relevant and meaningful for the children.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are given many opportunities to make independent choices and to take responsibility for themselves.

Commentary

42. This area of learning is given a high priority and supports children's learning well. The well-established routines and caring nature of the provision allows children to feel secure and to grow in confidence. From early on, in both the Nursery and Reception class, children are given many opportunities to make choices. There is a good mix of focused teaching and children choosing activities for themselves. Each morning, children in the Nursery self-register and confidently make choices between a range of activities, which most remain focused on until asked to gather together for a formal registration. Children are given effective help to establish boundaries for acceptable behaviour through the good relationships which are quickly established between the children and adults within the department. Children are also helped to understand the importance of always telling the truth through stories with a moral, such as *Really, really*. Children behave very well and positively respond when they are asked to stop their activities and to be ready to listen.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Children's communication and language skills are developed well.

Commentary

43. Most children make good progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills. Many have a limited vocabulary when they start school and great importance is placed on developing all aspects of these skills. The teachers and other adults within the department speak clearly and are good role models for the children. The teacher in the Nursery sets a good example in helping to develop the children's language skills. However, some opportunities to develop these skills to the full are missed by other adults in the department, such as in role-play activities and while digging in the garden. Teachers make learning fun, such as the teaching of initial letter sounds by playing games to match the printed letter to the spoken sound and matching pairs of words, such as *ten, pen* and *hen*. In the Reception class, children attentively listened to the story, *Mr. Marvel and the cake*. Most could recognise the rhyming words, such as *cake, bake, snake* and *book, look* and *took*, as the teacher read the story to them. Children's own mark making and emergent writing are accepted, which helps them to feel confident to write. They read their own writing to the class and are praised for their effort.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Practical activities enable the children to gain well in their understanding of early mathematical skills.
- Adults question children well to support their learning.

Commentary

44. Teaching and learning are good. Children develop their ideas well through practical experiences, such as counting the vegetables in the *farm shop* or holding an object in either hand and saying which they think is the heavier. They are encouraged to count by playing games and singing number songs. The direct teaching of mathematics is often imaginative and takes full account of children's knowledge and understanding. Adults question the children well while they are engaged in these activities, always trying to draw out and encourage mathematical thinking. This was evident when children in the Reception class were learning about three-dimensional shapes. The teacher had various shapes hidden in a large bag and a child had to feel one and describe it to the rest of the group. They were quickly learning to describe the shapes using mathematical vocabulary, such as *faces, edges, corners, sphere* and *cylinder*. Sand and water play enables the children to gain well in their learning about quantity.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Provision for developing children's knowledge and understanding of the world is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Children are provided with a good range of suitable experiences to explore and observe real life.
- Good teaching of skills.

Commentary

45. Good use is made of the school grounds for the children to explore and observe the natural changes in the seasons. They visited Whipsnade Zoo where they were able to see and learn at first hand about a wide range of wild animals. The children use a good range of commercial construction kits and large building bricks to explore and make models. Good teaching of early computer skills is enriching the children's learning of these skills combined with literacy, numeracy and creative skills.

By the end of one lesson, children in the Reception class could make a simple repeating pattern using *square*, *circle*, and *triangle* and filling in the shapes with different colours.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Provision in physical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children can use the large wheeled toys with increasing skill and control.
- They are given many opportunities to improve their hand / eye coordination.

Commentary

46. The children achieve well in developing physical control and awareness of space in and outdoors. Children move freely between the indoor and outdoor classroom, showing confidence and independence in selecting activities. They enjoy riding on the large wheeled toys, which provides them with good opportunities to share equipment and to extend their physical development. Although the designated outdoor areas for the Nursery and Reception class are used well, neither has a covered area and this restricts the use of the outside areas when the weather is bad. In a lesson in the hall, children in the Reception class quickly learned a simple sequence of aerobic movements. The children are provided with a good range of experiences to develop their hand control, such as completing jigsaws, and cutting and sticking different materials.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Provision in creative development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good intervention during *child initiated activities*.
- The range of well-planned role-play and creative activities.

Commentary

47. The children are provided with a wide range of activities to explore and use their imagination. During *child-initiated activities*, adults engage the children well in conversation to extend their thoughts and ideas. The children enjoy buying and serving in the *farm shop* and *selecting holidays* in the *travel agents*. Children's artwork is colourful and they are helped to extend their art skills through good, appropriate dialogue between the children and an adult. They are encouraged to look carefully at the shape of fruits before using pastels to draw these. They learn a wide range of songs by heart and enjoy creating their own music playing a good range of percussion instruments.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**. It is **very good** in Years 5 and 6.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and a shared commitment to improvement by all staff have brought about very good improvement in a short time.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good, and sometimes very good.
- Pupils achieve very well and reach above average standards by the time they leave the school.
- The school has been successful in narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment.
- Standards in reading, although much improved, have not risen as much as those in writing, especially in Years 1 and 2.
- Very good emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills is having a positive effect on their overall achievement.
- Pupils' targets are clear and helpful and they know what they have to do to improve their work.

Commentary

48. In the two years since the previous inspection, standards have risen significantly because there has been a considerable emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the subject. Senior managers have worked closely with external advisers to identify weaknesses and eradicate them. Teachers have worked closely together to improve their practice and to introduce strategies to raise standards. The subject leader has high levels of expertise and maintains a very comprehensive overview of the whole school. Detailed analysis of the pupils' performance in national and internal tests, and rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress ensure that weaknesses are quickly identified and addressed.

49. The outcome of all this work is that the quality of teaching and learning is now consistently good throughout the school, and there are many examples of very good practice, especially in Years 5 and 6 where teachers' expectations are very high and lead to very good achievement. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection when the quality of teaching was satisfactory but inconsistent. Teachers have a good knowledge of the National Literacy Strategy and have adapted it well to meet the needs of the pupils. They plan lessons very skilfully to ensure that all groups of pupils are given work that is suitably challenging and that builds upon their earlier learning. Teachers make lessons interesting and enjoyable for pupils by using a variety of teaching methods. A Year 6 lesson got off to a very exciting start as pupils watched and listened to a Power Point presentation about H G Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. They were immediately enthralled and remained so as the teacher skilfully developed their ability to use the styles and conventions of journalistic writing to report on the event. Lessons progress at a brisk pace, which ensures pupils remain fully challenged and promotes productivity. Effective support for pupils with SEN helps them to make good progress towards their individual targets.

50. Standards in speaking and listening are average in Year 2 and above average in Year 6. This represents very good achievement overall as many pupils' skills are weak when they start school. Teachers develop these skills well by providing pupils with many opportunities to explain their thinking, ask questions, discuss their ideas with a partner and take part in drama activities. There is a very good emphasis on developing the range of vocabulary used by pupils in lessons across the curriculum. This is helping to raise standards in English and other subjects. The development of pupils' speaking skills is also having a good effect on their writing, as they are learning to use more adventurous vocabulary and also to improve the grammatical accuracy of their work.

51. Pupils achieve well in reading as they progress through the school. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Standards are broadly average in Year 2 and above average in Year 6.

The proportion of pupils who reach above average standards in Year 6 is greater than in Year 2. A recent decision to timetable guided reading sessions outside of the literacy hour in Years 2 to 6 is providing a renewed focus on reading and is designed to raise standards still further. However, teachers are still trying out different activities in these sessions to find the most effective ways of ensuring that every group of pupils benefits fully from the lesson. Some of the chosen activities, such as designing a book cover, do not extend pupils' reading skills sufficiently. In one session, some younger pupils were given a task that involved identifying adjectives in a piece of text. However, the pupils' knowledge of adjectives was insufficient to ensure that they derived the maximum benefit from the activity.

52. There has been a successful focus on improving boys' attainment in reading, especially at Key Stage 2, where teachers are very aware of the need to choose texts that appeal equally to boys and girls. The introduction of group novels, 'Reading Olympics' and reading trails at Key Stage 2 have also been successful strategies that are contributing effectively to raising standards. Although the school has updated resources, the range and quality of books, both in the library and the classrooms, are insufficient. The library is unsatisfactory. It does little to develop or enhance pupils' reading skills or to ensure that reading enjoys a high enough profile in the school.

53. Teachers have worked very successfully to drive up standards in writing. These are currently average in Year 2 and above average in Year 6. There is good teaching of all aspects of writing, both in the literacy hour, when teachers focus on grammar, spelling and the mechanics of writing, and in 'extended writing' sessions when pupils are given a longer time to develop their ideas. In Year 2, pupils express their ideas in logical sequence and use a variety of connecting words to enliven their writing. They use a good range of genres such as factual writing, retelling a story, writing instructions and imaginative stories and poems. Writing on display in the classroom shows that pupils are capable of producing work of a good standard. However, pupils' unaided writing shows that they do not always remember to use punctuation correctly or use their knowledge of phonics to spell words accurately.

54. The quality of pupils' writing in Year 6 is good, with some that is very good. After listening to and discussing an audio-visual presentation about *The War of the Worlds*, pupils produced a lengthy piece of writing in 30 minutes, making adventurous choices of vocabulary and including similes, metaphors and powerful descriptive language to create atmosphere and capture the excitement and terror caused by the events portrayed in the radio broadcast. They successfully used some of the conventions of journalism in writing their report and understood how this style differs from other genres. The range of work covered by the pupils is impressive: they have studied part of *Lord of the Rings* and described the differences between the book and the film, as well as writing a letter to Gandalf.

55. Key factors in the improvement in pupils' attainment in English are the setting of individual targets for pupils and the very good assessment procedures, which enable teachers to identify potential underachievers quickly and track all pupils' progress carefully to ensure they achieve as well as they can. Pupils know what their targets are and constantly refer to them when working in lessons. Teachers make sure they are addressed when planning lessons and remind pupils of them frequently. More importantly, evidence that targets are being used constructively can be found in pupils' work. For example, Year 2 pupils' writing clearly reflects the emphasis on using a wide range of connecting words at the beginning of a new sentence and avoiding the use of 'then' or 'and'. Teachers' marking is very good. It gives praise where it is due for good work and effort, but also shows pupils how to make their work even better.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

56. The use of literacy across the curriculum is very good. All subject co-ordinators included in their action plans for the year the development of opportunities for writing in their subjects. There is considerable evidence that this has been a successful initiative. Teachers plan effectively a wide range of opportunities for pupils to use and develop reading and writing skills, such as writing

instructions in DT, researching and writing about Victorian Britain in history and writing about mountain environments in geography.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are much higher standards than at the time of the last inspection, brought about by overall very good teaching.
- Analysis and assessment are of a very high quality.
- Leadership and management are very good, promoting high standards.

Commentary

57. Pupils in Year 2 attain above average standards in mathematics and make good progress. This includes pupils who have special educational needs, and the higher attaining pupils. This is a very good improvement since the last inspection when standards were very low. Results from the summer 2003 national tests show that pupils were average overall. Although the percentage of pupils gaining Level 2 or above was very high, the percentage gaining Level 3 was below average.

58. In Year 6, pupils attain above average standards. However, there are strong indications that many are beginning to attain well above average. Overall, pupils achieve very well and generally make very good progress. Pupils with SEN make very good progress towards their targets because teachers plan very effectively for them. Standards in the 2003 national tests were above average, but were judged to be average in the last inspection report. Mathematics is much improved.

59. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 1 and 2 and very good in Years 3 to 6. Teachers are very confident with the National Numeracy Strategy and the topics that they teach. One very good feature is the very careful planning of work for the different groups of children in each class. Lessons generally have very good pace and challenge and pupils really enjoy their work. For example, in Year 2, the lesson began with a brisk starter session. Pupils played "number tennis," where they had to double or halve the number given by a pupil from the other side of the 'net'. In this, and throughout the lesson, pupils were fully involved and working well.

60. A further very good example was seen in a Year 6 lesson. Pupils were given a very good measure of independence. Everyone was asked to find suitable equipment that would enable them to draw a graph to convert from imperial to metric measures. They scattered about the classroom and came back with rulers, tapes, measuring jars, and scales. The room became a hive of activity and pupils were totally absorbed in their work, learning very well and thoroughly enjoying being 'young mathematicians'. The teacher made very sure that all groups of pupils were included in this activity.

61. The subject is very well led and managed, and this has both improved mathematics and also raised standards since the last inspection. The co-ordinator leads from the front and sets a very good example with some very good teaching. There have been many very good initiatives, such as the very good planning by all teachers, and the very high quality of assessment and analysis of data. Targets are shared with pupils effectively, and they have the term's learning objectives pasted into the front of their books. Teachers know exactly where each pupil is, in terms of progress and achievement and there are regular reviews to see how well pupils are getting on. All aspects of the curriculum are addressed well and pupils have a broad and balanced programme of mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum.

62. Mathematics is used effectively across the curriculum, especially in science where pupils in Year 3 measured liquids in millilitres in one of their experiments, and in Year 2, where they used

block graphs when they surveyed and recorded favourite foods. It is also used well in some ICT lessons, as in a Year 5 lesson where pupils learned how to analyse and present data.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- There are good assessment procedures and effective use of assessment information.
- Good leadership ensures the subject is developed well.

Commentary

63. By the end of Year 6, many pupils are achieving above average attainment, which is a good improvement from the judgements of the previous inspection. Most pupils in Year 2 achieve the levels expected for their age in the national tests. Pupils achieve well in science due to good teaching, which enables pupils to make good progress in their learning. The quality of teaching is strongest in Years 3 to 6; it is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2. Pupils enjoy and are interested in their science work. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning, which enable everyone to learn. Teachers use correct scientific vocabulary with clear explanations so that pupils understand and extend their learning well. Teachers provide pupils with a stimulating range of resources, which arouse pupils' curiosity. They are able to closely observe and gain first-hand experience of a wide range of resources.

64. In a good Year 2 lesson, the teacher explained that pupils were going to find out how they could light a bulb using a battery and a strip of foil, which ensured that they knew what they were going to learn about. He used open-ended questioning well to find out what pupils remembered from their previous lesson, when they had taken a torch apart to find out how it worked. Pupils were provided with the equipment and experimented to try to make the bulb light. Pupils concentrated very well on their task and there were great shrieks of delight of "I've done it" when the bulbs lit. At the end of the lesson, pupils explained how they had placed the foil on the battery and the bulb. The teacher referred back to the task set at the beginning of the lesson and pupils realised that they had achieved this.

65. In an excellent Year 6 lesson, the teacher enabled pupils to find out how the force applied to an elastic band affects how far it stretches. The 'Big Picture' approach was used effectively to first review what pupils had already learned in previous lessons about forces, before the teacher explained what they were to learn in the lesson. The teacher's positive approach encouraged pupils to feel that they would be successful in their task. Pupils adopted a very scientific approach, planning and predicting what they thought might happen and designing their fair test before working well in pairs or small groups. Work was challenging for the pupils and even more demanding for more able pupils, as they had to find out if the width of the band affected the stretch. They were aware of the safety aspects when using elastic bands, weights and Newton meters. The class was a hive of sustained activity, with every pupil involved and they made excellent progress in their learning of the effect of forces.

66. Assessment is used well to ensure that the work provided is suitable for every pupil's needs. Work is set by prior attainment so that the more able are appropriately challenged and sufficient support is provided for lower ability groups within each class. Teachers now use a consistent approach to assess pupils' level of attainment at the end of each topic. This information is used well to plan future work in order to build on pupils' science skills. Good marking enables teachers to know what pupils can do and understand, and helps pupils to know what they need to do in order for them to achieve higher standards.

67. The science coordinator has good subject knowledge and leads the subject well. He is a good role model and provides good support for other teachers. One aspect of this has been to encourage teachers to allow pupils to explore, with many “why?” and “how do you know?” questions and for pupils to set their own criteria for observations. The coordinator feels that the teachers are very receptive to new ideas.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is good and enables pupils to achieve national expectations despite the limitations of the accommodation.
- Effective leadership in the subject ensures that it remains a suitably high priority for continuing developing.
- Very effective financial management and strategic thinking has ensured that current shortcomings in the accommodation have been addressed.
- Teachers are skilful at combining ICT with other subjects to enhance pupils’ learning across the curriculum.

Commentary

68. The quality of teaching and learning is good because lessons are well planned, there is a strong emphasis on teaching skills and pupils are given sufficient time to experiment with different programs and become familiar with using both the keyboard and mouse to achieve different effects and carry out a range of operations. As a result, pupils in Years 2 and 6 reach standards in line with expectations. Achievement is satisfactory. This represents an improvement in Year 6 since the last inspection, when standards were below those expected of pupils. Pupils in Year 2 improve their word processing skills as they type labels for pictures and create a book. They learn to control a toy robot by programming instructions to make it move in a certain way, and they collect and present data in simple graphs. In the lesson observed in Year 2, pupils demonstrated competence in clicking on to different icons to use a range of tools and techniques as they created fireworks pictures. They were confident in logging on independently to find the right program and knew how to create and save a file.

69. Pupils in Year 6 use search engines to find information on the Internet. They know how to copy and paste text into a document and have produced a multimedia presentation about an animal in the Amazon, enlivening their work with sound and animation. In a Year 5 lesson, very good teaching of skills, and, in particular, very skilful questioning, led to high levels of achievement as pupils were challenged to find the most effective way to present a variety of data. Pupils experimented with different types of graph while the teacher challenged them to consider which was the most appropriate for the data they were trying to represent. Pupils were also led to appreciate the consequences of entering incorrect data and to discuss the possible outcomes. This shows that standards have risen significantly since the last inspection when they were below average in this aspect of the subject. The use of control technology and sensors has also improved and was observed in Year 4.

70. The subject is given a high priority and is led well by a knowledgeable co-ordinator who has a good overview of the curriculum and the resources needed to teach each aspect. Good leadership has helped to ensure that teachers make effective use of the eight computers in the mini-suite. To compensate in part for the limitations of the suite, timetabling arrangements ensure that all pupils have equal opportunity to benefit from it, although this sometimes detracts from the quality of the lessons in other subjects. Effective strategic thinking and planning have secured the financial backing needed to create a much improved ‘communications suite’. The vision of the headteacher

and governors has inspired teachers to improve their practice in preparation for the installation of the new suite, which all are eagerly awaiting. Work was due to begin shortly after this inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

71. Teachers' planning is very effective in identifying ways in which ICT skills can be developed through other subjects and also enhance pupils' learning across the curriculum. Very effective use of the interactive whiteboards in Years 3 and 6 greatly enhanced the quality of teaching and learning in literacy lessons. In a Year 4 science lesson, pupils made effective use of a device for monitoring and recording temperature as they investigated which materials made more effective insulators for keeping soup warm. The collection and presentation of data in mathematics is enhanced through the use of ICT as pupils determine which type of graph is most appropriate to the task.

HUMANITIES

Inspectors observed two lessons in geography and four in history. In addition, samples of pupils' work were analysed and discussions held with pupils in some year groups. Religious education was inspected and will be reported on separately under Section 23 of the Education Act.

GEOGRAPHY

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses.

- Teaching was good in the lessons seen.
- Discussion with Year 6 pupils shows an above average grasp of the topic for this term.
- Year 4 pupils' knowledge of environmental issues is good.

Commentary

72. Only two lessons were seen during the inspection, one in Year 4 and one in Year 5 but work was analysed and discussions held with staff and pupils. It is not possible to make overall judgements about standards or teaching. However, indications from the evidence gathered are that standards are at least average, and in some cases above. For example, Year 6 pupils have been studying rivers this term, and in discussion, the group of pupils talked very confidently about their work. They are very knowledgeable about the various aspects of rivers such as meanders and erosion, tributaries, estuaries, and deltas. During a lively discussion, they were keen to demonstrate what they know. They are looking forward to a visit to the two rivers in the town, and they are able to talk about grid references and symbols in the map work they have done.

73. Analysis of pupils' work shows that Year 1 pupils have heard all about Barnaby Bear's visit to Pakistan with a family from school, and this included hearing about a farm and goats. Year 2 pupils have made effective links in their work in history and geography, and have written and drawn about the seaside, both in the past and the present. Year 3 pupils wrote about holidays all over the world such as the Great Barrier Reef, Weymouth, and Florida.

74. In the lessons that were observed, teaching was good. For example, in Year 4, pupils carried out a survey in each class, weighing the waste paper at the end of each day. They made a frequency chart, which links well to mathematics, and they are researching the whole aspect of recycling. Their aim is to be the most environmentally friendly class in the school. They already know a good deal about the topic, and their attitudes and behaviour in the lesson were excellent. A further example of good teaching was seen in the Year 5 lesson, where pupils have been studying mountains as a topic. Each group were given a collection of items such as an ice axe, maps, a compass, and crampons. They were asked to choose some for survival, and explain their choices.

The resources were very imaginative and brought the lesson to life. Pupils explained well and listened attentively to each other's descriptions.

75. The subject is well led and managed and the co-ordinator has good plans for developing resources and taking the subject forward.

HISTORY

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Innovative teaching of the history curriculum.
- Pupils have a good understanding that history is about the past.
- Investigative skills are developed well to enable pupils to understand how people know about the past.
- Visits to places of historical interest enhance pupils' learning.
- Literacy skills are used well.

Commentary

76. Standards in Year 6 are above average, which is a good improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. Achievement is good. In Year 2 standards are average, which is similar to the judgement in the previous inspection. Pupils of all capabilities are doing as well as they can because of the good quality of teaching. In the analysis of work for Years 1 and 2 and in the observed lesson, teaching and learning were satisfactory. However, the visit to Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood had clearly helped these young pupils to gain well in their understanding of the differences between modern day toys and those from the past.

77. The new, innovative 'Big Picture' approach to teaching is having a positive effect, as it is enabling many pupils to achieve above average attainment. The 'Big Picture' enables pupils to have a complete overview of the skills and knowledge they will develop, while learning about a period in history. In a very good Year 3 lesson, the teacher used the 'Big Picture' approach effectively. The main areas of learning and skills to be developed about the theme of the invasion of the Romans in Celtic Britain were written on a flip chart. In a previous lesson, pupils had started to learn about the Roman invasion and were eager to know more about Roman society. Effective, open-ended questioning enabled pupils to express their opinions about gladiator fights and slavery. The teacher helped pupils to develop a sense of empathy with the gladiators and Romans through her very good subject knowledge, clear questioning and use of a good range of resources.

78. Younger pupils know that history "is about the olden times" and "things that happened a long time ago". Pupils in Year 2 used photographs well to discover factual evidence about seaside holidays from different eras of the twentieth century. They were able to see the differences in styles of dress and most could suggest that the vehicles in one photograph were from "many years ago". However, they found it very difficult to judge differences in styles of dress between the mid 1930s and late 1960s, possibly due to the lack of material for clothing during, and soon after, the Second World War.

79. Teachers provide an interesting range of resources and artefacts, which help to motivate pupils very well to find out more about a period of history. The good range of resources helps pupils to develop their investigation skills, such as *Roman armour*, authentic writing from different eras, photographs and artefacts. In a very good Year 6 lesson, photographs of pieces of Ancient Greek pottery, Greek writing and a map of an area inspired pupils to discover that these represented the ancient Olympics. Pupils were eager to translate the Greek writing by matching the symbols to the English alphabet. Pupils in Year 5 have used the Internet and a wide range of books well for their research into aspects of Victorian life. In a good Year 4 lesson, pupils gained well in their

understanding between the rich and poor in Tudor times through primary and secondary sources of information. Pupils were able to explain that text written in Tudor times is a more reliable source of what actually happened than what is written much later in retrospect.

80. Visits to places of historical interest help to extend and enhance pupils' learning about different periods in history well. In Year 3, pupils visit St Albans Verulamium, which helps them to gain well in their understanding of the Roman invaders. The visit to Bethnal Green Museum by pupils in Years 1 and 2 extended their understanding well of what it might have been like to be a child a hundred years ago.

81. Pupils use their literacy skills well in history. Pupils in Year 5 have produced some very good work on the Victorians. They have used their research skills well to learn more about aspects of the era that interest them, such as fashion, toys, buildings and differences between a rich and poor home life. They used information and communication technology well for their research and for the presentation of their finished work. Good leadership of the subject ensures that it is developed well and has a high priority within the curriculum.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Only one lesson was seen in design and technology and none in music. It is therefore not possible to make a firm judgement about provision in these subjects.

Only one lesson could be seen in DT and so it is not possible to make overall judgments about standards or the quality of teaching. Discussion with pupils and the work on display show that pupils enjoy the subject and are using and developing skills of research, design, making and evaluation. Pupils in Years 2 and 6 talked very knowledgeably about their projects. Discussions with pupils in Year 2 show that they find suitable materials, sew, glue, use templates and decorate their models. Pupils in Year 6 have designed and made slippers. They investigated different kinds of slippers and materials, used templates and added novelty effects. A good feature of the pupils' work in DT is their evaluation of what they have done, looking for ways in which they could improve their work, and writing about it.

In music, there is insufficient evidence to make judgements about standards or the quality of teaching and learning. A good proportion of pupils learn to play musical instruments, such as guitar, violin, flute, clarinet and the recorder. In Good News assemblies, there is often a solo performance by one of the pupils playing a musical instrument. The school choir and some of the instrumentalists help to lead pupils' singing in assemblies, where pupils sing tunefully and with good rhythm.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective leadership in the subject is raising its profile throughout the school.
- Good teaching of skills was seen during the inspection.
- Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology in the subject.

Commentary

82. Two years ago, the leadership and management of art were found to be unsatisfactory. There was no subject leader and the subject had low priority within the curriculum, which was reflected in the small amount of art work displayed around the school. This situation has improved considerably with the appointment of a co-ordinator who has drawn up a useful action plan for the development of the subject. A review of the existing scheme of work found that it did not guarantee progression in

the teaching of skills, knowledge and understanding. Consequently, a new scheme of work has been produced which is in its first year of operation. This is already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.

83. Overall, standards are in line with national expectations for the subject and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. However, in the lessons observed in Years 2 and 6, the quality of teaching and the pupils' achievement were good. In a Year 3 lesson, very good teaching led to very good achievement. In Year 2, pupils had been taught well to study and appreciate the work of Andy Goldsworthy, and in particular to focus on his use of natural materials to create abstract works of art. Pupils had collected an interesting variety of leaves, twigs and pebbles, which they arranged carefully to create their own work of art. They were clearly fascinated and excited about working with unusual materials and creating a 'picture' on the desk rather than on a piece of paper. Pupils' individual creativity was somewhat limited, however, by trying to copy one of the artist's works rather than being given completely free rein to design their own.

84. The quality of learning in the Year 3 lesson was very high because pupils had benefited from very good teaching of painting skills in previous lessons, which they were now using to create an abstract work of art in the style of Kandinsky. The teacher had also given pupils a very good insight into the artist's techniques which enabled them to talk very knowledgeably about him and his work. Similarly, very good teaching of the skills involved in mixing colours resulted in pupils achieving very subtle use of shade and tone in their work. There were high levels of challenge for more able pupils as they attempted to create a three-dimensional interpretation of Kandinsky's work. Pupils were able to speak confidently about the techniques they were using and conversations with them reflected very good teaching of the vocabulary of art and design. This highly stimulating and enthusiastic teaching, based on expert knowledge of the curriculum, provides a very good model for work throughout the school and shows how skills are taught effectively over several weeks to culminate in work of a very high standard.

85. The last inspection found that there was limited use of ICT in art and design. There has been a good improvement in this aspect of the subject. As part of their work on Kandinsky, Year 3 pupils used a painting program on the computer to experiment with his style of art and produced some interesting abstract pictures. Pupils in Year 2 used the 'spray can' effect to create fireworks pictures, using splashes of light colour against a dark background. This helped to increase their understanding of visual elements through experimenting with different effects. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils were using a computer program to adapt the logo of an international corporation in a lesson whose main objective was to appreciate how using a computer can enhance the control and accuracy needed by a graphic designer. The teacher made very effective use of an interactive whiteboard, involving pupils to demonstrate the features of the program they were to use. The pupils experimented with line, tone and pattern as they created and adapted logos, some using computers while others used paper and coloured pencils. In an effective conclusion to the lesson, pupils paired up to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both methods.

86. Overall, there has been good improvement in the provision for art and design, and indications are that the increasing emphasis on teaching skills is beginning to raise standards, as illustrated by the lesson seen in Year 3. Other initiatives, such as the 'Apache Art' week earlier in the year, and the allocation of a day for local artists to visit the school and demonstrate a variety of techniques to the pupils are helping to raise its profile throughout the school and to encourage a celebration of artwork.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The overall provision for physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was very good, with some excellent.
- There are good out of school activities, promoting sports.
- In some lessons, attainment was above average.

Commentary

87. Although standards overall are average, in some lessons seen they were above average, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. There is a good range of activities for pupils to take part in, both in school time and after school. These after school activities include football and netball, and matches against other schools. Pupils were so keen to play football on one evening, during the inspection, that they played on until well after dark, using the light from the school buildings! Swimming is available to pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 in turn through the year. By the time pupils leave, the great majority are able to gain the basic certificate, with many achieving higher standards.

88. In a very good Year 2 lesson, pupils began by moving around as jumping beans, runner beans and baked beans as warm-up activities. They worked on throwing and catching skills in the main part of the lesson and attainment was above average for this. The pace of the lesson was very good and provided a constant challenge. Evaluation played a large part in the lesson, and the teacher drew in as many pupils as possible to demonstrate good work. Teachers are well aware of the need to make the lessons safe and they remind pupils frequently about moving about the hall avoiding others. Nearly all pupils understand fully what happens to the heartbeat and pulse during the warm up, and several classes discussed this.

89. Year 5 pupils, in an excellent lesson, devised routines for dance sequences and the whole lesson moved at a very good pace. Pupils took real pride in their work, and their standard of behaviour was outstanding. They attained above average standards in their sequences and provided very good performances for evaluation. On a cold winter's afternoon, Year 6 pupils were kept busy in an outside lesson, practising Gaelic football skills. They pass, dribble and kick well. Later, they learnt how to pick up the ball from a soft kick in the Gaelic fashion, and when they spilt into two games to apply these skills, they did well and used them successfully. In all lessons, there was a strong emphasis on teaching pupils' the skills necessary to achieve good standards.

90. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There are very good plans for the future which include the improvement of resources, the introduction of golf, and new schemes for dance and for football which will give the school more equipment, as well as more training for the co-ordinator.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

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

91. Provision for pupils' PHSE and Citizenship is covered well under the school's "Here I am" programme through RE and science. Circle time and assemblies are used effectively. Under an imaginative and innovative project, the school's Year 6 pupils have been chosen to work with the SENCO to produce a booklet on drugs education, which is to be distributed to all Hertfordshire primary schools. The school council provides pupils with a valuable opportunity to develop personal and social skills. It was not possible to observe any lessons during the inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	1
Attendance	5
Attitudes	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	2

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