

Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123129
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380601
Inspection dates	9–10 January 2012
Lead inspector	Alison Cartlidge

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Becky Waller
Headteacher	Russell Leigh
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2009
School address	Queen Street Dorchester-on-Thames Wallingford OX10 7HR
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	9–10 January 2012
Inspection number	327854



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Introduction

Inspection team

Alison Cartlidge

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed nine lessons taught by four teachers. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at questionnaires from 63 parents and carers, 14 members of staff and 94 pupils. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, parents and carers, and pupils. The inspector looked at pupils' books, information on pupils' progress, safeguarding information and other documents presented by the school.

Information about the school

This is a much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a few coming from other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The school also has a low proportion of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The school has met government floor standards during the past three years.

In the last year there have been several changes in staffing including a new headteacher and chair of governors.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. Achievement is satisfactory, with pupils making better progress up to the end of Year 2 than they do in Years 3 to 6. The quality of pupils’ writing does not always match what they are capable of. Pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
- Attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6, with above average attainment in reading.
- Teachers in Years 3 to 6 use a wide range of activities to make learning interesting but do not always identify specifically what pupils of differing abilities are expected to learn or provide enough challenge, especially for the more-able pupils and in writing tasks.
- The teaching of the sounds that letters make (phonics) is successful in supporting pupils’ reading but is not used enough to improve spelling.
- Teachers’ marking shows pupils the next steps in their learning but is not always followed up straight away to ensure that pupils improve their work quickly.
- Pupils’ attendance is high, showing their enthusiasm for school, and they behave well and feel safe.
- The headteacher and governing body understand what the school does well and how it needs to improve. Leaders have made a good start towards making the school more successful and can demonstrate that it is improving following a slight dip in performance. Attainment is improving in reading and is rising rapidly in mathematics.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, enabling pupils to be confident and considerate.
- Parents and carers are very pleased with the school and find it to be friendly and supportive.
- Subject leaders have had a limited role in improving teaching and pupils’ progress so that dips in performance are not identified and rectified swiftly enough.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in writing, by:
 - providing writing tasks that engage the pupils' interest and expecting pupils to always do their best work
 - ensuring advice from teachers' marking is followed up quickly and pupils edit and improve their work
 - helping pupils to make better use of their knowledge of the connections between letter patterns and the sounds they represent when spelling.
- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better, by:
 - identifying more specifically what pupils of differing abilities are expected to learn in each lesson
 - increasing the challenge for more-able pupils.
- Enable subject leaders to take a more active role in monitoring and evaluating provision and progress so that dips in performance are identified and rectified swiftly.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers believe their children achieve well at the school, although a few would rightly like there to be greater challenge for more-able pupils. The inspection found that pupils' achievement is satisfactory, although learning and performance in lessons vary. Overall, pupils' progress, including for those with disabilities and with special educational needs, is satisfactory. There is no significant difference between the learning and progress of girls and boys. Pupils learn quickly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2, leading to above-average attainment in recent years. For example, in the Reception and Year 1 class, the children were very enthusiastic about making treasure maps and pirate ships and good questioning helped them to learn about the properties of materials when testing the ships on the water. In a mathematics lesson in Years 1 and 2, the teacher explained clearly how to estimate and compare the mass of various parcels and provided work of varying difficulty to challenge more-able pupils to move on from simple comparisons to using grams and kilograms. In Years 3 to 6, progress is more variable and more-able pupils in particular are not consistently challenged. For example, during whole-class activities, whilst tasks are interesting, on occasions, more-able pupils finish quickly and are not challenged enough.

Pupils' attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6. There is some fluctuation in attainment from year to year because year groups are small. The above-average attainment up to the end of Year 2 in recent years has not yet worked its way through to Year 6 but is evident in Years 3 and 4. Across the school, attainment is

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highest in reading, being above average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. One pupil in Year 2 demonstrated her confidence in reading by saying, 'It's easy to read words because teachers help you.' Pupils are very articulate but are not encouraged sufficiently to write to the best of their abilities and make careless spelling errors. They are not always enthusiastic about writing, although they enjoy writing about real experiences and about history, and have appreciated the recent use of photographs and sound effects to stimulate their imaginations.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers agree that their children are taught well at the school. The inspection findings show that there are good elements to teaching in all lessons but that overall it is satisfactory. Teaching is more effective up to the end of Year 2. For example, in a design and technology session in Years 1 and 2, the teacher had high expectations of the vocabulary pupils should use when discussing how axles work in winding mechanisms, and, in the Reception and Year 1 class, challenging questions were asked to help children to learn about addition and subtraction.

Each class has pupils with a wide range of abilities, and in Years 3 to 6 in particular, their differing needs are not always being met in full. Teachers do not consistently have high enough expectations, especially for the more-able pupils. Whilst work includes helpful comments to support pupils, teachers do not always ensure that pupils take notice of this advice quickly. The planned curriculum supports pupils' personal and academic progress satisfactorily. Whilst teachers' lesson planning describes the interesting activities planned, it does not always state clearly enough what pupils of differing abilities are expected to learn in each lesson to ensure that the curriculum always meets their needs. There is a good emphasis on speaking and reading and, consequently, progress is more rapid in these subjects than in writing.

There are good relationships across the school between members of staff and the pupils, and good support for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Clear guidance during acts of collective worship and in lessons supports this development well and pupils learn to empathise with others. Interesting activities engage the pupils' interest and make pupils cooperative and keen to learn. For example, in Years 5 and 6, pupils enjoyed questioning other pupils who were pretending to be characters from a poem, and in Years 3 and 4, pupils showed empathy when discussing photographs depicting children during the Second World War.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have good attitudes towards learning and behave especially well in lessons. An overwhelming majority of parents are pleased with behaviour at the school and the way pupils are kept safe. A small minority of pupils are critical of behaviour at playtime, but there is evidence that the new behaviour policy is having a positive impact, with a reduction of minor incidents occurring at these times. Most pupils work and play together sensibly.

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The high rate of attendance demonstrates pupils' enthusiasm for school and most agree that they are kept safe and that instances of bullying, including the occasional falling out with friends, are dealt with to their satisfaction. Pupils support each other in their learning and as one pupil said, 'We encourage each other.'

Pupils are good at taking responsibility. For example, they know to switch lights off to conserve energy and are keen to support charities and to sing for the community, including in the Abbey. Pupils are proud of their school and have a strong sense of belonging. They extend their knowledge of the wider world through lessons, clubs and visits and display a good understanding of various emotions.

Leadership and management

Leaders have the capacity to improve the school and are tackling with rigour the slight dip in performance that occurred shortly after the last inspection. Their determination to raise attainment and the positive impact of recent work can already be seen in the improved progress of pupils in reading and mathematics. They have improved the way they track pupils' progress so that more rigorous targets are now being set and this is also helping to raise attainment. The headteacher and governing body are aware of strengths and weaknesses in provision and are setting the right agenda for further improvement. They have maintained and then built on strengths in pupils' behaviour and safety and the recent focus on mathematics has improved pupils' interest and keenness to learn in the subject. However, subject leaders have had limited opportunity to become involved in monitoring and evaluating provision and progress and this means that some areas of weakness are not identified and tackled as soon as they arise. Nevertheless, training has increased their awareness of what to do to help the school to become good in the future.

Equal opportunities are promoted well and discrimination tackled competently. Pupils from different backgrounds are supported and encouraged equally; they are included well socially, and the school is working appropriately to eliminate unevenness in learning and progress between classes and subjects by providing staff coaching and training as required.

The relationship between parents and carers and members of staff is a strong feature of the school. Parents and carers make many positive comments such as, 'My child thoroughly enjoys coming to school and speaks positively each day about her learning experience,' and, 'The teachers are kind, caring, supportive and professional. This school is a credit to the community.'

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and most pupils and their parents and carers have confidence in the safeguarding arrangements and know that the school takes action when concerns are raised. The curriculum is being improved so that it more successfully meets pupils' differing needs. It already provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with sensitive guidance on recognising and respecting cultural differences and how to respond to the various emotions and needs of others.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 January 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School, Wallingford
OX10 7HR**

I enjoyed coming to see your friendly school, talking with you about your work and hearing some of you read. Thank you for being so helpful during my visit. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education.

These are the best things about your school.

- You learn quickly in the Reception Year and up to the end of Year 2, and do well in reading across the school.
- I agree with you that you behave well in class and enjoy coming to school.
- You are good at helping around the school and in the local area. It is good that you save energy by turning off lights.
- You are right when you say that teachers care for you and make learning interesting by giving you different things to do.
- The headteacher and the governing body know what needs to be done to make the school better.

These are the things I have asked your school to do next to help it improve.

- Help you to improve your writing by giving you tasks that you find interesting, making sure you take notice of marking to improve your work and check it for mistakes, and use your knowledge of phonics to help with spelling.
- Make sure that you are always given work that is just right for you and expect those of you who are quick at learning to do harder work.
- Make sure that leaders who look after subjects check that you are all learning quickly and put things right straight away when you are not.

Thank you once again for telling me about your school and letting me see your work. You can help your teachers by always taking notice of their marking and doing your best writing all of the time.

Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge
Lead inspector

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