

Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Chard Street, Thorncombe, Chard TA20 4NE

Inspection dates 19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well in both their personal and academic development in all year groups because the school places pupils' personal and academic well-being at the centre of all it does. By Year 6, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is above average.
- Leadership and management are good. The school has coped well during a period of changes in leadership and management since the previous inspection. The appointment of two co-headteachers has had a positive impact on the school's overall effectiveness.
- The headteachers, staff and governors have worked very effectively together to improve the quality of teaching since the previous inspection and ensure that the curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good, some is outstanding. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and those for whom the pupil premium provides support, achieve well over time.
- There is a strong sense of community in the school. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and display a high level of respect for the feelings and well-being of others.
- Parents are pleased with the school and the progress their children are making. All the parents spoken to by the inspector, or who used the on-line Parent View survey to express their opinions about the school, said they would recommend it to others.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although pupils attain well overall in English, the more able pupils do not always attain the higher levels they are capable of reaching in writing.
- Although the school has developed effective systems to track the progress of individual pupils in English and mathematics, there are no similar systems to track pupils' progress in other subject areas.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector spent a total of four hours observing eight lessons taught by three teachers. Two were joint observations with the co-headteachers.
- The inspector heard pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 read and made short observations of sessions on the teaching of phonics (pupils learning letter patterns and the sounds they represent).
- Discussions were held with the two co-headteachers, members of the governing body, school staff, pupils and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour and scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures.
- The inspector took account of the 22 responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection.
- The inspector observed the work of the school and looked at documentation, including teachers' planning, the school development plan, tracking documentation of individual pupils' progress in English and mathematics, performance management documentation and minutes from meetings held by the governing body.

Inspection team

Michael Barron, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school set in a rural village.
- Pupils are taught in three mixed age-group classes: a Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 class; a Year 3 and Year 4 class; and a Year 5 and Year 6 class.
- All pupils attending the school come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs supported at school action, school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is also below the national average. These needs include specific learning difficulties.
- The leadership of the school is presently shared between two co-headteachers. One of the headteachers was in sole charge of the school until taking maternity leave. During her absence, the school was led and managed by an acting headteacher.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attainment of the more able pupils in writing to match their well-above-average attainment in reading and mathematics through:
 - ensuring that the more able pupils are provided with frequent opportunities to use their above average literacy skills to develop their ability to complete longer pieces of extended writing successfully, including when working in other subject areas.
- Extend the school's effective systems to track the progress of individual pupils in English and mathematics into the other subject areas in order to continue to improve pupils' progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding that are broadly in line with age-related expectations, although this can vary because of the small numbers of children entering the school each year.
- Children make good progress during their Reception Year and continue this good progress in both Key Stages 1 and 2 because teaching caters well for their individual needs, and the work they are asked to complete is well matched to their different ages and abilities.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics and this was clear from pupils' work, from records of their progress and from the school's effective systems to track the progress of individual pupils in English and mathematics.
- However, these tracking systems do not yet extend to other subject areas and the school does not therefore have the same amount of detailed information about pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. This can have an impact on the effectiveness of teachers' lesson planning in these subjects and therefore pupils' progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those known to be eligible for the pupil premium make similar progress to all other pupils because they receive an effective level of support, especially in lessons.
- An example of this was observed in a mathematics lesson in the Year 3 and Year 4 class. Pupils made good progress in developing their understanding of the place value of numbers because the class teacher made learning interesting by involving the pupils in a series of practical tasks well matched to their abilities. Those pupils requiring help with their learning made good progress because they were well supported by the effective teaching assistant.
- The parents and carers who completed the on-line survey in Parent View believe that their children are making better than expected progress and achieving well throughout the school.
- However, the more able pupils do not always reach the levels of attainment of which they are capable in writing, especially in Year 6. The work in their books confirms that the more able Year 6 pupils have developed the range of writing skills necessary to attempt longer pieces of work at a higher level than other pupils of their age. It also confirms that they often find this difficult to achieve both in their writing in specific English lessons and also in their written work in other subjects.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching, including in English and mathematics, is good overall and some is outstanding. This was reflected in observations of teaching during the inspection and in the monitoring notes kept by the co-headteachers and also from observations of teaching by the local authority. All teaching staff fully meet the Teachers' Standards.
- The leadership of teaching and the management of teacher performance are rigorous and performance management is used well by the school to improve teaching. Inadequacies in the quality of teaching noted by the previous inspection have been eliminated and this is reflected in the consequent rise in pupils' achievement.
- Teaching usually meets the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities well, especially in English and mathematics. As a result, by the end of Year 6, attainment in these subjects is above average and this was clear from pupils' work and from records of their progress.
- Teachers display good subject knowledge and have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Lessons are designed to stimulate pupils' interests. They are well paced and teachers use information from the school's tracking systems to ensure the work pupils are set in English and mathematics is well matched to their abilities and, as a result, pupils enjoy these lessons and work hard.

- However, teachers have less information about the progress of individual pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics because the school has yet to extend its tracking systems to include these subjects.
- Teachers' relationships with pupils are very good, and pupils say teachers are friendly and help them with their work if they have a problem. Teachers work well with effective teaching assistants to ensure that those pupils requiring extra help with their learning, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or who are eligible for the pupil premium, receive the support they need in order to make similar progress to all others.
- The quality of teachers' marking is good and pupils say that teachers' comments are useful in helping them to improve their work. As a result, pupils are clear about what they are learning and know when they are successful in meeting the learning objectives. Older pupils commented that teachers ensure pupils understand clearly what they must do to move to the next level of learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' outstanding behaviour around school and in lessons is a key factor in ensuring that pupils make good progress in all year groups.
- The school offers a welcoming and very safe environment for pupils, who say that they get on really well with each other and that all pupils know each other well. Several pupils commented that being at school was like being part of an extended family.
- The school has high expectations of how well pupils conduct themselves and pupils show a high level of regard and respect for others. Older pupils say they enjoy the opportunities they have to look after the younger ones.
- Pupils say that they really enjoy school and this is reflected in their excellent attitudes to learning and in their above average rates of attendance. Punctuality is very good and there are no instances of persistent absence.
- Pupils are aware that a very small minority of pupils very occasionally find it difficult to behave well but say there are very few instances of unsocial behaviour.
- Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying. However, they are adamant that very little bullying takes place and older pupils say that they find it difficult to remember any specific instances of any type of bullying at all. They are also confident that, should any ever occur, adults would deal with it quickly, fairly and firmly.

The leadership and management are good

- The shared headship between the two co-headteachers is working well and has enabled the school to recover quickly after a period of change in leadership and management. The co-headteachers have successfully united the staff and governors in a vision and ambition for school improvement. This has been the driving force in raising pupils' achievement and attainment and is a clear indication of the school's capacity for further improvement.
- The school does not receive any support from the local authority other than the services of a SEP (school evaluation partner) in common with all other Dorset schools. The school monitors its performance well and uses the results of frequent self-evaluation to ensure that actions are taken to maintain and improve its effectiveness and that any gaps in pupils' learning are identified and acted on. As a result, the school leadership, for example, is well aware of the need to improve the attainment of the more able pupils in writing and to extend the school's tracking systems to other subject areas.
- Staff work closely together as a team and their morale is high. They know that their opinions are valued and that the school has a commitment to their continuing professional training in order to support their development as teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved because targeted performance management has been successfully

linked to school development planning and staff professional development.

- The curriculum provides all pupils, regardless of their abilities, with a good range of quality learning experiences. It promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively and this is evident in pupils' good behaviour and respect for others. It is also evident in the way pupils talk enthusiastically about the wide range of visitors to the school and visits to places of interest, including the residential visit to London which helps to broaden their understanding of the wider culture in the United Kingdom.
- The school has developed good links with parents, including those who might find communicating with the school difficult, and uses these well to promote pupils' academic and personal development.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- is good and governors are well informed about the school's effectiveness through regular written reports from the co-headteachers and make frequent visits to the school in order to have regular opportunities to discuss school matters with staff
 - makes sure that the school is provided with both the support and challenge it needs in order to improve its practice
 - ensures that all statutory requirements are met and that arrangements for safeguarding are implemented thoroughly in order to keep children safe
 - is pro-active in implementing effective performance management systems which challenge staff to improve not only their teaching skills but also their individual leadership and management skills in order to improve the effectiveness of the school
 - ensures that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated and that all pupils achieve well in a setting which supports the good promotion of equal opportunities
 - ensures that the school's finances are managed effectively.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	113767
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	401388

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	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerald Bray
Co-headteachers	Tanya Robinson, Tina Wilkes
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 October 2009
Telephone number	01460 30535
Fax number	01460 30154
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