

Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School

Queen Street, Dorchester, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 7HR

Inspection dates: 2–3 December 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is a warm, family-like community. Good relationships have been forged between staff and pupils. A friendly, purposeful atmosphere has been created where pupils feel safe and cared for.
- The headteacher works harmoniously with governors to implement effective plans to raise the school's performance. He leads and manages the school well. As a consequence, the quality of teaching is improving and pupils are making good progress in their learning.
- Pupils love coming to school. Attendance is regularly above average.
- Parents speak of how their children enjoy school activities and their increased confidence. The school promotes pupils' personal development well.
- Pupils say they feel valued and can voice their opinions. They conduct themselves well around school and look out for one another. They try to live the school's values, including respect, friendship, compassion and forgiveness.
- Pupils usually work hard and listen to their teachers. They take pride in their achievements.
- Children settle quickly into Reception and make good progress in their development.
- School leaders know the school's strengths and where its weaker areas lie. Effective systems are used regularly to check pupils' progress. Teaching is monitored closely and teachers get good support to continually improve their teaching expertise.
- Parents say they can easily talk to teachers about how well their children are doing and how they can be best supported at home.
- The governing body offers strong support, for example, visiting the school frequently to check the impact of initiatives. Governors also challenge school leaders to provide convincing evidence of improvements.
- Governors make sure safeguarding procedures are effective. The school keeps pupils safe and pupils learn how to keep themselves safe.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The way that teachers give feedback in mathematics is not as helpful as it is in writing.
- A few pupils are making slower progress in reading than in writing and mathematics because they do not read regularly at home. In school, reading is not given the same high status as writing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership further by ensuring that all teachers consistently follow the school's marking policy and provide feedback to pupils in mathematics to the same high standard as they do in writing.
- Improve pupils' achievement in reading by emphasising the importance of regular reading and encouraging parents to listen to their children reading at home.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Governors and school leaders have a clear vision for the school and a strong ambition to make it outstanding. The headteacher has promoted a school culture in which teachers are reflective about their own practice and continually strive to improve their teaching. Teachers are held accountable for pupils' achievement. Following some changes in staffing, the headteacher has established clear roles for subject leaders and high expectations for pupils' productivity and achievement. Consequently, teaching continues to improve and pupils' progress in all subjects is improving.
- Teachers regularly check how well pupils are doing and provide additional help, for example, through small group work sessions with a teaching assistant for any pupils in danger of falling behind their classmates. Teachers work with other schools to make sure they are accurately assessing pupils' work. The accuracy of teachers' assessments has been verified by the local authority.
- All pupils are given an equal opportunity to achieve well and no form of discrimination of pupils is tolerated.
- The school's plans for improvement are comprehensive and based on a sound understanding of its strengths and the further improvements needed. Good progress has been made against the recommendations in the previous inspection report. For example, subject leaders are closely involved in monitoring and improving teaching in their areas and pupils' writing is significantly better.
- Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are rigorous and there is a well organised programme of professional development to support teachers' own learning. For example, a mathematics specialist has worked with teachers to improve skills in using problem-solving in mathematics, and teachers have visited other schools to observe good practice. Targets for teachers' improvement are challenging and underperformance is identified promptly and tackled robustly.
- The local authority has provided good support through a series of visits and advice from an experienced school leader and skilled subject specialists.
- The school provides a broad range of subjects, combined into topics and with a good, separate focus on numeracy and literacy. This meets the requirements of the new National Curriculum. A wide range of trips, visitors and whole school activities enrich pupils' experience well. For example, pupils visited a chocolate factory, handled scary insects and welcomed a donkey to school in order to stimulate their imagination for different writing projects.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, as seen in the very good relationships among pupils across all years and between pupils and teachers. Pupils respect others with different faiths and cultures and, through lessons and assemblies, learn about the importance of such things as friendship and cooperation. Pupils have learned about British values. For example, pupils see democracy in action when a pupil parliament meets monthly to discuss aspects of school life. Pupils are involved in key decisions and help organise charity fundraising activities. They are being well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The headteacher has taken over the role of special educational needs coordinator, ensuring that pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs have well defined and effective programmes of support.
- The school uses the pupil premium effectively to help eligible pupils. For example, the school makes sure that these pupils have full access to trips and clubs. Extra targeted support is effective in helping them to catch up with their classmates.
- The primary sports funding is used well to improve teachers' coaching skills, provide a wide range of sports and effectively encourage all pupils to be more physically active. As well as attending clubs for such things as athletics, football, hockey and archery, pupils take part in regular sporting competitions.
- The school keeps pupils safe. Regular audits of health and safety by the local authority ensure that the school maintains a safe environment. The designated safeguarding lead is tenacious in following up any concerns about pupils with the local authority. Records of concerns are analysed and stored securely. All staff have been fully trained in safeguarding. Attendance is monitored and analysed well and any absences are followed up promptly.
- At the school's breakfast club, valued by parents, pupils can get a healthy breakfast and have the opportunity to socialise with their school friends. The small group in the breakfast club includes all ages and helps cement friendships across the school.
- Parents are very supportive. They say that their children are happy at school and are making good

progress and that teachers are easy to talk to and helpful. They get regular updates on how well their children are doing as well as help in understanding how they can support learning at home, for example in workshops for writing and mathematics. However, not all parents listen to their children reading at home regularly.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- the governing body has effective oversight of the school’s work. Governors keep themselves well informed, through the headteacher’s reports, presentations from subject leaders and their own regular visits, which include talking to pupils about their experience of school life. They follow the progress of different groups of pupils and check that teaching continues to improve. As well as offering strong support, governors ask challenging questions about the effectiveness of the school’s provision and pupils’ performance
 - governors, working with the local authority, manage the performance of the headteacher effectively, based on targets in the school’s improvement plan. They manage the pay awards for teachers, ensuring that they are warranted. Governors ensure that underperformance is tackled promptly
 - governors are aware of the financial vulnerability of small schools and ensure that funds are used prudently and to the benefit of all pupils. Governors ensure that all disadvantaged pupils receive effective support through the pupil premium. They also check that the primary sports funding is used to improve pupils’ physical activity and love of sport
 - the governing body regularly checks that all safeguarding and health and safety requirements are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers continually seek to improve their practice. Together with the headteacher, they consider the strengths of their teaching and where they have been less successful. Through a range of training activities, such as visiting other schools to learn from colleagues and coaching from subject specialists, teachers are effectively addressing weaker areas in their expertise. Teaching has improved and is consistently good. Consequently, pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and how they should behave. They usually model expected outcomes and give clear explanations so pupils know what they have to do. They ask questions that make pupils think hard and explain their answers.
- Good relationships have been established with pupils so that teachers manage their groups with little fuss. Pupils are confident to ask questions and usually listen to their teachers closely. Teachers try to make activities fun so that pupils enjoy their work, but also try to make them challenging so that pupils are stretched. For example, a task involving statistics revolved around investigating which flavour of crisps was the class favourite. This appealed to Year 2 and 3 pupils. After a brief tasting session, they made good progress in planning their investigation.
- Teachers regularly check on pupils’ progress and plan activities that build upon what pupils already know and understand. With guidance from the headteacher, teachers plan activities that ensure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs get effective support. Where appropriate, pupils work in small groups with a teaching assistant, for example in mathematics, and have more individual attention. Teaching assistants are skilful and are effectively deployed in the classroom.
- The strong focus on writing has raised pupils’ confidence and ability. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of genres. As well as practising calculations, teachers are giving pupils more activities in mathematics on problem-solving and reasoning so that their mathematical understanding is becoming deeper.
- Homework contributes well to learning. Pupils’ writing in particular has benefited from the involvement of parents in planning writing activities with their children. Pupils’ written work is marked in detail, and teachers give clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their writing. Pupils understand the marking system and have regular opportunities to respond to their teachers’ feedback. Teachers also mark pupils’ mathematics work regularly. Mathematics marking is improving but is not yet as good as in writing. School leaders do not always check that clear guidance on how to improve work in mathematics is always given.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are kept safe and say they are well looked after at school. They are taught how to keep themselves safe in different situations, for example, using the internet, and through lessons and visitors, such as Childline.
- Pupils know what constitutes bullying and say that bullying is rare. They know adults at school would sort out any issues quickly and fairly.
- Pupils have learned about healthy living and enjoy playing different sports at school and the regular visits to the swimming pool.
- Pupils show self-confidence and are happy to ask or answer questions in class. They support one another well when working collaboratively, for example by sharing resources or giving advice on how to complete tasks.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. It helps make the school a calm and welcoming place.
- Pupils conduct themselves well as they move around the school. Pupils, younger and older, play happily together and children in early years quickly settle into school routines.
- Pupils know they need to behave sensibly in order to do well at school. They understand the system of sanctions and rewards and are keen to stay on the 'green' step of the behaviour ladder.
- Pupils are proud of their school and feel part of a close community. Generally, they present their work neatly and look after the school environment. For example, older pupils take turns to tidy up the dining hall after lunch. Pupils look out for any schoolmates on the friendship bench so that they have someone to play with.
- Records show very few incidents of misbehaviour. Exclusions have been warranted as part of planned strategies to handle pupils with challenging behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants competently and sensitively manage the behaviour of the very few pupils who have difficulty in managing it themselves. Occasionally, a few pupils can become distracted if activities are not interesting enough.
- Pupils look forward to coming to school. Attendance has been maintained above average.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- School performance information and work seen in books show that pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.
- Following the previous inspection, changes in how writing is taught have helped pupils make better progress in writing. Exciting trips or events provide a great stimulus for pupils' writing. Pupils in Key Stage 2 have a well established routine of reflecting on their writing, at home and at school, and of redrafting pieces to improve their quality. Pupils present their written work well and this habit spills over into other subjects.
- Pupils are gaining a deeper understanding of mathematics. Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 were seen making good progress in solving problems that required them to devise and explain their strategies. They are commonly asked to 'convince me' by their teachers, thereby helping them to develop their reasoning skills.
- A well planned and improved programme of extra support ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making similar progress to others. Similarly, the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported to achieve well. The school enables disadvantaged pupils to have full access to all opportunities at school, such as experiencing enriching trips and one-to-one tuition.
- The most-able pupils often engage in activities that stretch them. For example, for mathematics, pupils in Year 6 have attended master classes at a secondary school and worked in sessions with the headteacher on more challenging activities. Overall, the most-able pupils are making good progress.
- Due to the small size of cohorts, the results at the end of key stages are subject to much variability from year to year. In 2015, the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 2 was similar to the national average in all subjects. School performance information indicated that Year 2 pupils had made good progress.
- Year 6 pupils at the end of 2015 attained around the national average in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. The most-able pupils made good progress in writing and

mathematics. The very small number of pupils who were eligible for the pupil premium or who were disabled or have special educational needs cannot be reported on without identifying individuals. However, overall this group of pupils makes good progress.

- In 2014 a bigger proportion of Year 1 pupils than nationally achieved the expected standard in phonics (the sounds that letters make). In 2015, with a much smaller group of pupils, the proportion was just below average. Although phonics is taught well, historic school performance information shows that pupils' progress in reading is not as strong as in writing and mathematics. Reading does not have the same high profile in pupils' eyes as writing does.

Early years provision

is good

- Children usually start in the Reception year with skills which are broadly typical for their age, although in some years the group starting has skills below those that are typical. Regular checks by the local authority confirm the accuracy of teachers' assessments of children's development. Children make strong progress in all areas of learning. The proportion of children who reach a good level of performance by the end of their first year has risen and in 2015 was above the national average.
- Leadership and teaching in the early years are good. Adults continually identify the gaps in individual children's development and plan suitable activities to address them. Children's achievements are recorded carefully in well organised records. The school encourages parents to contribute to the record of development.
- Activities are fun and they interest and engage children. Activities are often based on children's own suggestions. For example, some children were seen counting, then adding the number of bean bags they had successfully managed to throw into different buckets. In a small phonics session, children watched expectantly as the teacher revealed a tray of objects before identifying the odd one out by its initial sound.
- The learning environment is bright and vibrant and features many examples of children's work. Books are to be found all around the Reception area, which has sections that encourage early writing and opportunities to learn about numbers. The school makes the best of a small and awkwardly shaped outside area, providing good opportunities for gardening and other physical activities. Adults check pupils' progress carefully, encouraging conversation and responding quickly if children lose interest. Generally, children persevere with the tasks they have chosen.
- Children behave well. They develop their social skills quickly and get along well with each other. They usually share resources and take turns fairly. Most children respond promptly to adults and show resilience in completing tasks. Children soon show self-confidence and learn how to do things for themselves.
- Children are kept safe. Adults are well trained, experienced and vigilant. Transition arrangements for moving up into Year 1 are effective. Reception children often work with Year 1 pupils and gradually get used to more formal teaching settings.

School details

Unique reference number	123129
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection Number	10002328

This inspection 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	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Lester
Headteacher	Russell Leigh
Telephone number	01865340081
Website	www.st-birinus-primary.org.uk
Email address	office.3186@st-birinus-pri.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average primary school. It has three classes in total: one for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6; one for pupils in Years 2 and 3; and one for Reception children and Year 1 pupils.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or children who are looked after) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector, frequently accompanied by the headteacher, observed pupils in all year groups engaged in a range of activities in different subjects. He looked at pupils' written work in all years and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other school leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. The inspector also spoke to the school's improvement leader from the local authority.
- The inspector spoke to a group of pupils and, informally, with other pupils in lessons and around the school. He also listened to pupils reading and spoke to them about their reading habits.
- Several school documents were examined. These included the school's evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan, notes of governors' meetings, information about pupils' progress and attainment, evidence about the quality of teaching, and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- The inspector took account of the 30 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views expressed informally by parents as they arrived at school. The inspector looked at online comments from staff.

Inspection team

Jim McVeigh lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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