

Mells Church of England First School

Mells Green, Mells, Frome, Somerset BA11 3QE

Inspection dates

14–15 September 2016

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 new headteacher provides clear direction and has inspired the staff team to make improvements to the quality of their teaching. As a result, teaching and pupils' achievement are now good.
- The recent partnership with a local school, together with the appointment of an executive headteacher, has greatly improved the quality of leadership and management.
- Senior leaders check the quality of teaching effectively. They follow up their checks with helpful advice and training. This has ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved.
- Teachers know their pupils very well and plan to make learning challenging and interesting. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress.
- The good progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is the result of careful analysis of their needs and the effective support provided.
- The most able pupils are stretched well in their learning so that they reach high standards.
- The needs of disadvantaged pupils are well catered for, so they make good progress and achieve as well as other pupils nationally from similar starting points.
- The provision in the early years is good. Children make a positive start to school and make good progress because of effective teaching.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They feel safe in school because the adults provide a secure environment in which to learn.
- Governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, enabling them to challenge leaders effectively. They have been successful in maintaining the confidence of parents during a time of considerable change.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the variation in teaching by ensuring that teachers follow an effective approach to teaching handwriting.
- Enhance the provision in the early years by offering a wider range of interesting and challenging experiences in the outside area, especially for the most able children.
- Extend the skills of subject leaders so that they make a fuller contribution to the monitoring and development of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, governors have taken positive steps to establish a partnership with a local first school and have secured effective leadership for the school. The new headteacher has set a clear direction and instilled a strong sense of ambition. The pace of improvement has increased considerably and recent changes to staffing have strengthened teaching. As a result, pupils' achievement and behaviour are now good.
- Self-evaluation is incisive and accurate, ensuring that leaders, including governors, have an extremely clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvement plans have a clear focus and precise timescales for actions, enabling leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work easily.
- A key improvement has been the introduction of a new system to track and evaluate the outcomes for different groups of pupils. This has helped leaders to judge accurately how well the school is performing and to hold teachers to account more readily for pupils' achievement.
- Leaders have introduced some effective strategies to improve teaching, especially in English and mathematics. They check teaching regularly, following up their checks with helpful support and training. In this way, they have been successful in improving teaching and learning.
- Leaders of other subjects have not yet had sufficient opportunities to check on the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. This limits their effectiveness in improving teaching and pupils' outcomes in their areas of responsibility.
- Leaders give teachers precise and helpful feedback on the strengths of their teaching and where they need to improve. The performance of staff is linked to school priorities to raise achievement. Governors set challenging targets for the headteacher.
- The curriculum is interesting and varied and motivates pupils to succeed. Residential visits and extra-curricular activities, as well as experiences in art, music and sport, have a very positive impact on raising pupils' aspirations and broadening their horizons.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils' understanding of British values is developed through events such as 'Black History', week where drama and role play help pupils gain valuable insights. This ensures that they are suitably prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well and tackles discrimination of all kinds effectively. The support for disadvantaged pupils is tailored effectively to maximise both their learning and their personal development through individual support or small-group work.
- Leaders have transformed the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Programmes of support are carefully planned, helping these pupils to overcome their difficulties. Close monitoring shows that they are making strong progress and achieving well from their starting points.
- The school sport premium has enabled pupils to take part in a wider range of sports and competitions than previously and also to improve staff skills in teaching physical education.

- Valuable support from local authority advisers and those from the diocese, a local leader of education (LLE) and other external consultants has helped leaders to improve their effectiveness. Work undertaken in partnership with local schools has facilitated the sharing of good practice and secured the accuracy of teachers' assessments.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and all that leaders are trying to achieve. They have great confidence in the governors and the new headteacher to continue with the improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour. They are very appreciative of the good levels of communication that exist between home and school.

Governance of the school

- Governors have steered the school effectively through a time of considerable change, successfully maintaining the confidence of parents. They have been tenacious and determined in securing effective leadership for the school and fully recognise the positive impact of the actions taken by the new headteacher. They have used the expertise of the local authority, and diocesan and external advisers, wisely to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to check on the school's performance. As a result, they provide leaders with unwavering support and very rigorous challenge.
- Governors make frequent visits to school to monitor the school's work for themselves. They are well informed about the achievement of the different groups of pupils and how well this compares to national figures. They have a clear view of the quality of teaching and how the performance of staff is managed to reward effective practice and address any underperformance.
- Governors monitor the school budget very closely and manage funds well. They know how additional funds are spent to help disadvantaged pupils and to develop sport in school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a culture where safety and support for pupils' welfare are of high priority. They are extremely diligent in making sure that staff training is up to date in areas such as child protection, that staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and that policy guidelines are followed. Governors undertake training alongside staff to improve their knowledge and understanding. Parents wholeheartedly support the view that their children are well looked after and kept safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is typically good. Since the previous inspection, improvements made to teaching ensure that all groups of pupils achieve well, in all subjects. Pupils are inspired to be successful by an effective learning strategy introduced to develop good concentration and resilience as learners.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan work that is challenging and enjoyable. They use good subject knowledge to build on pupils' prior knowledge well. They give clear explanations and check pupils' understanding frequently, reshaping their questions to clarify thinking and aid progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are very skilled in providing the precise support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are adept in helping pupils to manage their feelings and integrate successfully with their classmates.

- Disadvantaged pupils benefit from carefully targeted support, either individually or in small groups that help them to catch up to their classmates and achieve well. Specialist teaching in music and poetry has helped these pupils to develop new skills in playing an instrument and communication.
- The most able pupils are challenged strongly in their learning as teachers set suitably demanding tasks that stretch their thinking. For example, when teaching reasoning in mathematics, teachers expect pupils to use precise mathematical terms to explain their ideas.
- Pupils are very conversant with the school's marking policy and say that they find teachers' comments in the different colour pens very helpful. These comments enable them to make improvements to their work each day, speeding up their progress.
- Reading is taught well and comprehension skills are developed systematically through small-group work. Teachers encourage pupils' reading across a wide range of literature, including non-fiction books.
- Good teaching in mathematics ensures that pupils acquire and develop competence in calculation skills. They have daily opportunities to develop their reasoning skills and use them to solve problems successfully.
- Writing is taught effectively and teachers encourage pupils to apply their extensive knowledge of grammar and punctuation and improved spelling skills to their written work. Pupils enjoy editing their work to produce outcomes of good standards. However, some inconsistency in the teaching of handwriting has hampered the fluency of a few pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Warm and effective relationships characterise the school's culture and make this a welcoming and orderly environment in which to learn. Pupils are positive that they feel very safe in school. Parents who completed the online questionnaire or spoke to the inspector agree that their children are happy and secure.
- Pupils understand about the different types of bullying, including the use of racist name-calling and derogatory language. They have confidence in the adults to sort out any problems should they occur and say that they would try to stand up for others because they believe bullying is always wrong.
- Pupils have learned about injustices that have happened to people in the past through drama and role play, developing empathy with others. They have a good knowledge of other faiths and cultures, showing appropriate awareness and respect for the many different types of people that live in modern Britain.
- Pupils judge this school to be a 'fair' school where everyone is treated equally, with boys and girls having the same opportunities to participate in the activities on offer. 'We all have to wash up after cooking' was one comment from a pupil, and others agree with this.
- Online safety has a high priority and pupils are taught how to stay safe on the internet, taking care not to reveal personal details and to report cyber bullying if it occurs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils move around the school building sensibly and are prompt to lessons. When playing, they look out for younger pupils or anyone in need of a friend so that the playground is usually a happy and harmonious place.
- Pupils try hard in lessons and endeavour to be 'purple' learners who enjoy challenges and achieve their best. Increasingly, they take pride in their work and the standard of presentation in their books is excellent.
- Very occasionally, pupils say that a very small minority of pupils lose concentration and are inattentive in lessons, which slows their progress. This is why behaviour has been judged good rather than outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their improved attendance and punctuality over the past year.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Achievement is good for all groups of pupils across the curriculum, particularly in English and mathematics. Since the previous inspection, pupils have made faster progress. There is a rising trend in attainment across the school and a very large majority of Year 2 pupils reached or exceeded the expected standard for their age in 2016.
- The work in the books of current pupils demonstrates consistently strong progress from their starting points. The standard of art work is impressive. By the time pupils leave the school in Year 4, they have successfully acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills required for their age, which prepares them well for the next stage of their education.
- Effective use of the pupil premium enables disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as others from similar starting points. This has diminished any differences in their attainment.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as their support is finely tuned to precisely meet their needs, and their attainment shows improvement. Extra help to improve attitudes to learning and self-confidence is successful in speeding up academic progress.
- The most able pupils make good progress as their work requires them to extend their thinking and apply their knowledge well. They are able to explain their ideas clearly in lessons and discuss their work with increasing confidence.
- Pupils develop good fluency in calculation skills with a clear understanding of number and other aspects of mathematics. They enjoy having to use their reasoning skills and solve problems.
- In the past two years, much higher proportions of pupils reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check than found nationally. This helps them to become fluent and accurate readers.
- Older pupils demonstrate good levels of understanding of their reading across a range of literature. The level of difficulty in their reading is challenging, especially for the most able pupils, and helps to extend their vocabulary. They enjoy the wide range of books on offer in the library, which caters well for all tastes.

- Achievement in writing is much improved. Pupils write to good standards across subjects and take great pride in their work. For example, Year 2 pupils' descriptions of a Roald Dahl character contained interesting and varied vocabulary that conveyed meaning well. Occasionally, a lack of fluency in handwriting hampers the progress of a few pupils in writing.

Early years provision

Good

- Good leadership has created a cohesive staff team who are well trained in effective early years practice. Leaders know the strengths as well as areas requiring development in the provision and are implementing action plans to address them.
- Parents are appreciative of the effective arrangements for starting school that ensure children settle quickly into their new routines. They speak highly of the approachability of staff and welcome frequent opportunities to become involved in their children's learning.
- Good attention is paid to safeguarding so that children are kept safe both indoors and outdoors. Adults are vigilant in ensuring that any children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and others considered vulnerable, are supported sensitively.
- The very large majority of children start school in the Reception class with the knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. From these starting points, they make good progress in all areas of learning. Consequently, most start Year 1 as confident learners, with the skills and understanding typical for their age, though some exceed these.
- Adults check children's learning frequently and use this information wisely to adjust the activities to take account of any children who require extra support, as well as challenging the most able children.
- Children enjoy warm relationships with staff and with each other. They behave well and show great curiosity and delight in their learning. For example, children had great fun as they made their 'marvellous medicine' potions, developing their concept of capacity in mathematics very effectively as they did so.
- The quality of teaching is good and pupils benefit from well-planned adult-led teaching, including teaching of phonics, which underpins the development of early reading well. This was apparent when children were searching for their name cards hidden in the outdoor area, as they used their phonics knowledge successfully to find them. However, handwriting has not been taught systematically alongside phonics and this hampers fluency in writing for a small number of children.
- Children also learn well from following their own interests and the adults support them skilfully to develop their language skills as they play. However, the range of activities on offer in the outdoor area does not always provide sufficient stimulation and challenge, especially for the most able children, to extend their learning further.

School details

Unique reference number	123767
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10017409

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Baggott
Headteacher	Claire Chantler
Telephone number	01373 812 380
Website	http://www.mellsschool.co.uk
Email address	office@mells.somerset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 September 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This school is smaller than the average first school. Pupils are organised in three classes, all of which are mixed-age; one class for the Reception children and a small proportion of Year 1 pupils; one class for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils and one for Year 3 and Year 4 pupils.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school is part of an informal partnership with Beckington Church of England First School. The executive headteacher, who previously supported the school's leadership as a local leader of education (LLE), took up post in May 2016.
- The school also belongs to the Frome Learning Partnership, consisting of 17 local schools.
- The school provides care for pupils through a breakfast and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place over two days. The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school, mostly in conjunction with the headteacher. In addition, she made visits to classrooms, the dining hall and the playground, as well as observing an assembly.
- Meetings were held with pupils, governors and school leaders. The inspector also spoke with two representatives from the local authority who support the school.
- The inspector took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as consulting informally with parents at the end of the school day. She also took account of the nine responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans. She examined information on current pupils' progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, safeguarding procedures and the plans for the use of the primary physical education and sport premium.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, talked to them in classrooms and evaluated samples of their work.

Inspection team

Sandra Woodman, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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