

St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown

Puddletown, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8SA

Inspection dates

23–24 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Current pupils' achievement is not consistently strong in English and mathematics in all year groups.
- Pupils' achievement in science is poor because of weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. The science curriculum does not support good progress from Year 5 to Year 8.
- Around one in five of disadvantaged pupils and around one in five of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are persistently absent.
- The headteacher quickly identified the school's weaknesses when he arrived over a year ago. He has introduced all of the basic systems the school lacked. However, he is not supported consistently well by some other senior leaders to secure all of the improvements needed rapidly enough.
- The school's leaders have not eradicated weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. While English and mathematics have improved, teaching is not consistently good enough. Teaching in science is weak.
- Leaders have improved pupils' attendance overall and for some individual pupils, but not managed to reduce the persistent absence of some groups of pupils sufficiently.
- Previously governors did not challenge school leaders well enough to deal with weaknesses in teaching and pupils' achievement, or with some pupils' poor attendance. Current governors are much better placed to provide a good balance of support and challenge.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects including art, history, design and technology, music and physical education.
- Across the school pupils read well and many with obvious pleasure.
- Most subject leaders and the two key stage leaders support the headteacher well.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and when moving around the school buildings.
- Pupils are cared for well. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy through a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education, supported by a wide range of other activities.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further in English and mathematics by ensuring that all teaching:
 - builds on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - sets high expectations for the quality of pupils' work, including the most able pupils
 - makes sure that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their work and make progress.
- Raise pupils' achievement in science by:
 - developing a curriculum that establishes progression from Year 5 to Year 8
 - clearly identifying the expected steps in learning through key scientific processes, concepts and ideas, and the links between them
 - using these steps to build and evaluate pupils' progress
 - making sure that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their work and make progress
 - ensuring that there are clear principles for the way science is taught.
- Improve further the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The achievement of pupils declined following the previous inspection in March 2013. It has improved under the strong leadership of the new headteacher and expectations are now much higher, but the outcomes are not yet consistently good for current pupils across all year groups.
- The headteacher is now supported well by the two key stage leaders and by most subject leaders. However, teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics is not consistently strong and is weak in science. Too many disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are persistently absent from school.
- The school recently joined with four of its six partner first schools to form a multi-academy trust. It had previously been a stand-alone converter academy. This has strengthened governance. The headteacher is now supported well by the trust's executive headteacher.
- Evidence from a wide range of sources supports the headteacher's view that, when he took up the post over a year ago, many of the basic systems and procedures that make a school run effectively were not in place. In the past, this had not been challenged with sufficient rigour by governors.
- Pupils' progress and attendance were not monitored well and there were no effective systems for evaluating the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. In English, for example, teachers were unsure of the standards expected in writing because of lack of involvement in any external moderation procedures. Consequently, expectations were far too low. All of these systems are now in place and are currently being reviewed and refined.
- Despite previous weaknesses, there is a positive ethos and culture in the school. Most pupils like coming to school, behave very well, enjoy much of their learning and are well cared for. They fully support the school's clear set of values.
- A comprehensive assessment system, with a good focus on tracking progress from the start of Year 5 to the end of Year 8, has been introduced but not yet consistently applied. The system is not currently generating reliable information about pupils' progress in all subjects, for example in science.
- Leaders use performance management to identify teachers' professional development needs at an individual, subject and whole-school level. This leads to a full programme of professional development for teachers and support staff. Individual teachers who are not performing at the level expected are given the support they need, prior to leaders using capability procedures if necessary. However, this has not yet dealt completely with the weaknesses in teaching in some subjects.

- There is a broad and balanced curriculum for all of Years 5 to 8, supported by a good range of extra-curricular activities. Under the leadership of the new headteacher, the school is now using a good balance of primary expertise and specialist subject skills across the full age range. This is beginning to establish much improved progression from Years 5 and 6 to Years 7 and 8, with the notable exception of science. The lack of a coherent science curriculum that builds clear progress through key scientific concepts, ideas and principles is significantly limiting pupils' progress.
- Pupils' personal development is strong. The school's focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development permeates the curriculum and is supported well through work in, for example, religious education and through assemblies and whole-school events.
- Pupils are mostly prepared well for life in modern Britain and for their next steps when they leave at the end of Year 8. However, some are limited by their poor attendance and by underachievement in writing and mathematics. Good links with the upper school overcomes this to some extent and pupils from St Mary's do well in GCSE examinations when they reach Year 11.
- Additional funding is used well. Good use of the pupil premium has raised the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Catch-up funding has helped those with low reading and writing skills become more involved in lessons across a range of subjects. The sport premium has enhanced teachers' skills to benefit pupils, who enjoy the range of sporting activities available.
- The additional support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is led well. However, the variable progress made by these pupils, arising from inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, has not been addressed effectively.

Governance

- Until recently, the school's decline in performance, weaknesses in teaching, and pupils' significant underachievement and poor attendance had not been challenged robustly by the governing body.
- The current local governing body has a good depth and breadth of expertise, although a few gaps have been identified and are being filled. It is now better placed to provide an effective balance of support and challenge to the school's leaders. Focused training is equipping governors with the skills needed to be much more rigorous in holding the headteacher and other leaders to account.
- The local governing body is supported well by the trust. There is still some 'settling in' as the responsibilities of the trust and the local governing body are established. As a result, some policies are still being reviewed and updated.
- Members of the local governing body fully understand their responsibilities in making sure that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The lead governor works closely with the headteacher, as designated safeguarding lead, and other senior staff to monitor the effectiveness of procedures, record-keeping and staff training.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher, other leaders, trustees and the local governing body have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality.
- Staff training, including in preventing radicalisation and extremism, is comprehensive and effective. Individuals' understanding of safeguarding is checked carefully. The school follows good procedures for safer recruitment. Records of incidents are maintained and checked for any lessons to be learned.
- Pupils, and their parents, say that they feel safe and are kept safe. They have a good understanding of potential risks and how to avoid them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because there is too much inconsistency across subjects and across classes within subjects.
- There is some effective learning in English and mathematics, but the quality varies across classes and year groups in both key stages 2 and 3. Although some effective teaching in science was observed by inspectors during the inspection, provision is generally weak in science in all year groups.
- Teaching does not build consistently well on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve are too low. Learning is not checked well enough for teachers to intervene effectively. Too little account is taken of groups of pupils, such as the most able disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The curriculum in science does not build pupils' understanding of key scientific ideas in a well-planned and progressive way. This makes it difficult for teachers to monitor pupils' progress.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are stronger in a wide range of other subjects, such as the humanities, music, design and technology, and physical education. In these subjects, teachers give pupils clear feedback on their work so that they know how well they are doing and how to improve and make more progress. Some teachers in English and mathematics also do this well.
- Better use is being made of teachers', and subject leaders', expertise in teaching in the upper primary or lower secondary age ranges. This is leading to better use of teaching skills and the sharing of good practice, such as a shared understanding of what good progression in developing pupils' understanding from the start of Year 5 to the end of Year 8 looks like in English and mathematics.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are cared for well. They are well informed about potential risks to their health and safety and how to avoid or reduce these. They have total confidence that there will always be an adult they can talk to if they have any concerns. Staff are very quick to stamp out the very rare use of derogatory language or lack of respect for other pupils.
- Pupils enjoy the new programme of personal, social and health education. They are confident that the topics covered are relevant and matched well to their age and what they need to know.
- Pupils are mostly very positive about all aspects of their life in the school. However, they are realistic about the inconsistency of teaching, as are their parents, and how this can affect their work.
- Pupils say that there is some bullying in the school and, through online bullying, out of school as well. However, they say it is not common and is dealt with quickly and effectively. Their parents agree.
- A good programme of careers guidance has been introduced for pupils in Year 8. This dovetails well so that there is good progress when they move to the upper school.
- The ethos and culture of the school, supported well by a wide range of activities within and outside the formal curriculum, support pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils are mostly prepared well for the move to upper school at the end of Year 8. However, there are ongoing weaknesses for some in developing their writing and mathematical skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Currently, around one in five disadvantaged pupils and around one in five of those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are persistently absent from school. While the attendance of many individual pupils has improved, the overall attendance of these two groups of pupils is still too low.
- Overall attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons.
- Many classrooms are enjoyable places to visit with pupils taking obvious pleasure in their learning. When teachers give them clear feedback on their work, pupils respond well and their work improves. They work well with each other and often work at a good pace when undertaking individual work. In art, physical education, and design and technology, they are skilled at giving feedback on each other's work.
- Pupils also behave very well around the school's buildings, despite many crowded spaces. They move around safely and sensibly and arrive at lessons on time and ready to learn. Pupils value the work of anti-bullying ambassadors and school prefects.

- Behaviour outside at break and lunch times, while always safe, is sometimes a little boisterous. Pupils say they 'need to let off a little steam' and that 'it is always well controlled'. The lively games of football do not affect other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement is not strong across all subjects and year groups, but it is improving.
- Pupils do not make consistently strong progress in English and mathematics in all year groups. Although it is improving, the weak achievement of pupils in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 over a number of years has not been completely resolved.
- The work in English and mathematics of pupils currently in Year 6 is better than previous results indicate, but not yet at the level expected. Pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 are making better progress but their achievement is still limited by their previously poor progress.
- Many pupils, in all year groups, have a very poor understanding of their work in science. It lacks any depth and they cannot link related scientific ideas. The most able pupils are not helped to deepen and apply their understanding. Those who find the work difficult are not supported well.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6 and in Years 7 and 8 make better progress in a wide range of other subjects, although it is occasionally limited by weaknesses in their writing.
- Pupils' work shows strong progress in geography, history, music and physical education. High-quality work was seen in art, and in food and textiles within design and technology. Pupils' work is highly creative and they demonstrate excellent skills in critiquing their own and each other's work.
- The progress made by the most able pupils is widely variable across subjects and classes within subjects, such as in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those among the most able, are making strong progress overall. Many are making more rapid progress since they joined the school. However, their progress varies, as for other pupils, depending on the class they are in. Good use has been made of the pupil premium to identify the most effective strategies to support individual pupils, but the impact of this is still too variable.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong progress through the additional support they receive. The progress they make in subject classes varies significantly and is highly dependent on the quality of provision they receive.
- Pupils who join the school with low levels of reading and writing skills are helped to catch up so that they can join in lessons across a range of subjects. Additional funding is used creatively to ensure that the pupils who need most help get it.
- Across the school, pupils' skills in reading are often stronger than in their writing. Pupils read well and many with obvious pleasure.

School details

Unique reference number	138189
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10024976

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	502
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Kate Connolly
Headteacher	Darren Ayling
Telephone number	01305 848293
Website	www.stmarysmiddleschool.co.uk
Email address	dayling@stmaryscemiddle.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is an average-sized middle school with pupils from Years 5 to 8.
- The school formed the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust, with Frome Valley First School, Milborne St Andrew First School, Puddletown Church of England First School and Piddle Valley Church of England First School on 1 April 2015. It also works closely with its other two partner first schools and with the upper school (The Thomas Hardy School).

- Almost all pupils move to The Thomas Hardy School when they leave at the end of Year 8.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average, although the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- Few pupils are from other than White British backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The school makes use of alternative, off-site provision in order to support some of its most vulnerable pupils.
- There is no specially resourced provision on the school site.
- The school met the current government floor standards in 2016.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Two inspectors were on site for both days of the inspection and an additional two inspectors on the second day.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, key stage leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff, and the chair of the local governing body.
- Conversations were held with a large number of pupils of all ages around the school at break and lunchtimes. Inspectors listened to some pupils reading. Inspectors also met the school council and a mixed group of Year 7 and 8 pupils.
- In lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work and discussed it with them. These activities covered pupils in all year groups, across the full ability range, disadvantaged pupils and some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors also looked at Year 6 pupils' work in English and mathematics. Inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders for many of the visits to lessons.
- Inspectors met the headteacher in his role as the school's designated safeguarding lead and looked at a wide range of documents and records about safeguarding, as well as checking that arrangements such as the maintenance of the single central record met all statutory requirements. Discussions with the chair of the local governing body included the arrangements for safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the school leaders' self-evaluation and used this with senior leaders to establish main lines of enquiry on the first day of the inspection. They also looked at a wide range of other documents and information supplied by the school about the analysis of current pupils' progress, achievement and attendance.
- Inspectors also took account of the 120 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 72 with additional comments. They also took account of the 30 responses to the online pupil survey and 27 responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

James Sage, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Butler	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Colledge	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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