

Inspection of Sturminster Marshall First School

78 High Street, Sturminster Marshall, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4AY

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

This school was last inspected 15 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders, including governors, are ambitious for all pupils and want them to achieve well. However, the quality of education pupils receive is not good enough. Aspects of the curriculum are not implemented well. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge of wider curriculum subjects.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They form positive relationships with adults. Pupils understand what it means to be a good friend. They enjoy taking on responsibilities such as being members of the school council and as play leaders. Pupils appreciate their voices being heard.

Staff have high expectations of behaviour. Pupils are polite and considerate towards others. They behave well, both in class and around the school site. Pupils understand what bullying is. They are adamant that bullying does not happen. They know if it did, adults would sort it quickly.

Parents talk extremely positively about the school. They speak highly of the guidance that staff provide their children. One parent commented that the current headteacher 'has transformed the school. She works quietly and hard'. Other parents spoke about the positive impact her leadership has had on the school over the past year.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The headteacher has worked systematically and with determination. A positive and supportive learning culture across the school exists. Staff value the teamwork approach, including those new to the school. They recognise and appreciate the importance placed on everyone's well-being. However, many staff changes have impacted the quality of education provided.

Leaders prioritise reading. Children are taught phonics from the moment they start school in the Reception Year. Staff expose children to a range of songs, nursery rhymes and stories to engage their interests. Books match the sounds pupils learn. Staff carry out regular checks to ensure that those at risk of falling behind catch up quickly. As a result, pupils are developing into confident and competent readers.

Older pupils say they like reading. One pupil said that reading 'relaxes and calms' them. They understand why it is important to be able to read. Pupils enjoy learning new words. They talk confidently about the books they read both in school and at home, demonstrating their understanding of the texts.

Leaders have reviewed the way mathematics is taught. They have introduced a mathematics curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge throughout the school. Staff provide children in the early years with a wide range of mathematical experiences. For example, adults model relevant mathematical vocabulary, so children secure

their understanding of number. The early years environment supports children's independence across all areas of learning.

Leaders have designed a curriculum that sets out how pupils' knowledge will be built in a carefully sequenced way. However, teachers do not implement the wider curriculum in the way leaders intend. Teachers do not systematically check pupils' prior knowledge. For example, in geography, pupils do not have secure locational knowledge about rainforests. Therefore, they struggle to make connections and build their understanding when learning about deforestation.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the same curriculum as their peers. Staff work hard to ensure the curriculum in English and mathematics enables them to work independently. However, in subjects across the wider curriculum, teachers do not adapt learning successfully to meet pupils' needs.

Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They behave well. Pupils understand what is expected of them. As a result, the school is a calm and purposeful place to learn. There is mutual respect for all.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the needs of their community. Staff provide high-quality pastoral support. They understand the importance of considering pupils' mental health and well-being. Pupils are aware of differences and how all people are equal, whatever their beliefs. Leaders promote the school's values in assemblies. This secures pupils' understanding of how to become responsible citizens. However, their understanding of fundamental British values is less well developed.

Governors have supported leaders through a period of staffing instability at the school. They recognise that further work is needed to ensure the quality of education meets the needs of all learners, including those with SEND. Governors have checked the impact of leaders' work in English and mathematics. However, they do not have a detailed understanding of what improvements are needed across aspects of the wider curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are vigilant and keep pupils safe from harm. They ensure staff receive appropriate training. Staff know how to identify a child who might be at risk of harm. Systems for recording and reporting concerns are effective. Leaders carry out the necessary checks on staff to ensure they are safe to work with children.

Pupils know how to stay safe. This includes when using the internet. They know that trusted adults will listen and help if they have any worries. The curriculum supports pupils' knowledge of staying safe, including an understanding of healthy relationships.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not checked the quality of the curriculum in enough depth. As a result, they do not know if subjects are being implemented successfully. Leaders need to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum across all subjects so they can assure themselves that pupils know more and remember more across the curriculum.
- In subjects across the wider curriculum, pupils, including those with SEND, have gaps in subject-specific knowledge. Learning is not adapted well enough to meet individual needs. Teachers need to check pupils' understanding in all curriculum subjects so pupils secure and embed the essential knowledge they need to know and remember.
- Governors do not have an accurate view of the quality of education pupils receive. They do not challenge leaders rigorously across subjects in the wider curriculum. Governors need to ensure they gain a clear understanding of the effectiveness of these subjects to hold leaders to account.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	113675
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10211824
Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Damien Watt
Headteacher	Nina Charman
Website	www.sturminstermarshall.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 June 2007

Information about this school

- There have been significant changes in leadership and staff since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has taken on the permanent role following a period of acting headship.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the early years coordinator, the designated safeguarding leads, groups of staff, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with

subject leaders, visited samples of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to an adult.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in science and history with leaders.
- Inspectors considered the documentation around safeguarding, including the safeguarding checks made on staff. They talked to governors, staff and pupils about how the school keeps everyone safe.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to see how leaders support their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors considered the 21 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 17 free-text responses, and 17 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Heather Barraclough, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Carl Thornton

Ofsted Inspector

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