

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School

Queen Street, Dorchester, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 7HR

Inspection date: 1 April 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to this nurturing school, where everyone is valued and included. The school ensures that each child can participate fully, in both the academic curriculum and a wealth of enrichment opportunities. The school's values are central to the work and the culture in the school. Pupils have a deep understanding of the importance of 'compassion', 'knowledge' and 'diversity'.

The school has renewed expectations for pupils to achieve highly. Pupils work hard and take pride in discussing their ideas and work. However, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should do. The school continues to put in place appropriate actions to improve this, but these have not yet had the impact that they need to. Consequently, in some subjects, too many pupils do not have the secure knowledge and skills that they need by the end of key stage 2.

Pupils are polite and respectful. They treat each other with kindness. Pupil leaders contribute to school life as classroom 'monitors' or assembly 'IT technicians'. Social times are joyful. Pupils know that they are cared for and safe. They benefit from warm relationships with staff, who know every child well.

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

There are several aspects of the school that have improved in the last few years, such as attendance and behaviour. However, the school has more to do to ensure pupils achieve highly enough. The school is supported by knowledgeable and passionate governors, who

are determined, along with leaders, to continue to improve the school in the best interests of children.

The curriculum is designed to build from early years to Year 6. The school carefully adapts the curriculum each year so that pupils in mixed-aged classes are taught the breadth that they need in each subject. In some subjects and classes, the essential knowledge that pupils need to know is identified but this is not consistently in place. This means that in some subjects, it is not clear precisely what pupils need to learn.

The school's work to strengthen staff subject knowledge is proving effective. For example, staff model new subject content clearly and accurately. However, some teaching does not identify pupils' misconceptions or errors in their work when they arise. When this is the case, pupils do not develop secure knowledge. Additionally, the tasks that pupils are given to complete do not consistently reinforce the precise knowledge that pupils have been learning. Over time, this means that pupils do not achieve as well as they could by the end of key stage 2. In mathematics, in particular, pupils' knowledge is less secure, and outcomes are below national averages. The school is rightly focused on improving these aspects through staff training and support.

There are strengths in some areas of the curriculum. Phonics has rightly been a focus so that, from Reception, children learn to read fluently. The chosen phonics scheme is followed by staff precisely so that pupils learn sounds quickly. Reading is central to the curriculum with carefully chosen texts linking subjects, where appropriate. If pupils struggle to learn to read, extra support helps them to catch up and build confidence in their reading.

Another strength of the school lies within the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These pupils are identified quickly and accurately. The school implements effective support strategies for these pupils. This means that they are involved fully in learning with their peers. Staff know how to support each pupil and how to adapt teaching, so that pupils can demonstrate their learning and develop increasing independence.

The school has successfully instilled a culture of high expectations of pupil behaviour. Pupils take pride in trying hard and being in 'the struggle zone'. They are mature in their approach to work and in celebrating the achievements of others. The positive relationships that the school has fostered with families means that pupils feel understood, valued and behave well. Likewise, the school's work to improve attendance has had a marked impact over time so that pupils now attend well.

Pupils want to come to this school, where they develop into considerate young people. They learn to make a tangible difference to the school and the wider community, such as leaving books around the village for others to enjoy, raising money for local charities and singing in the nearby Abbey. They are knowledgeable about safety in the physical and online world. During their time here, pupils become curious to know more through the range of experiences that the school provides.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some parts of the curriculum, the school has not identified precisely what knowledge pupils need to be taught. Where this is the case, pupils are not learning the curriculum as securely as they could. The school should make sure that the curriculum is designed with consistent rigour and ambitious end points, so that it is clear to staff and pupils what the important knowledge is within each teaching sequence and how this knowledge builds over time.
- At times, the tasks given to pupils do not enable them to use or practise the knowledge that they have been taught sufficiently well. This means that pupils struggle to learn and recall this knowledge or connect it to what they already know. The school should ensure that activities build pupils' knowledge securely, so that they gain a deeper understanding of each subject.
- Sometimes, staff do not check what pupils know and understand as effectively as they could. This means that gaps in knowledge are not consistently identified and then addressed quickly. Errors then persist in pupils' thinking and their written work. The school should ensure that it supports staff to check for understanding systematically and then adapt teaching to address any misconceptions.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding,

behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 2015.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	123129
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10341551
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jon Stewart
Headteacher	Joanna Staples
Website	www.st-birinus-pri.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 June 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Pupils are taught in mixed-aged classes. At the time of the inspection, these are grouped as: Reception and Year 1, Years 2 and 3 and Years 4, 5 and 6.
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2020.
- This school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of Oxford. The school last received a section 48 inspection in March 2025.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met with members of the governing body, a representative of the diocese, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- During the inspection, the inspectors met with a range of pupils to discuss their views about the school.
- The inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. The inspector also took account of staff and pupil responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Alexandra Aldridge-Gibbons, lead inspector His Majesty's Inspector

Kimberley Kemp Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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