

INSPECTION REPORT

THORNFORD CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Thornford, Sherborne

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113816

Headteacher: Mrs I. Galliver

Reporting inspector: Mr F. Carruthers
21285

Dates of inspection: 20th – 21st June 2001

Inspection number: 192473

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant & junior
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Boot Lane Thornford Sherborne Dorset
Postcode:	DT9 6QY
Telephone number:	01935 872706
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. B. Davies
Date of previous inspection:	March 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	12
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	13
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	14

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This Church of England, voluntary aided primary school is situated in the village of Thornford, near Sherborne, and draws pupils from the village and further afield. There are 90 pupils on roll, 13 more than at the time of the last inspection. There are a few more girls than boys. The socio-economic circumstances of most families are above average and there are very few pupils eligible for free school meals. There are no pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and none is learning English as an additional language. At 25 per cent, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average for primary schools nationally and five pupils have statements of special educational need. The attainment of pupils on entry to the mixed reception / Year 1 class is broad and overall is in line with the county average. This is above the average of pupils nationally. Most children have attended pre-school playgroups locally. The pupils are organised so that they are taught in four classes each morning, a mixed-age Reception / Year 1 class, a Years 2 / 3 class, a Year 4 class and a mixed Years 5 / 6 class. Each afternoon, there are three classes. The pupils in Year 4 join those in Years 5 and 6.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The effectiveness of the school is good. It promotes good standards of attainment and behaviour through effective teaching and very good support for the pupils' personal development. The leadership and management of the school are good and senior staff are very good at identifying how well the school is doing and what areas need to be improved. Though the cost of educating a pupil at the school is above the average of primary schools nationally, it is more in line with the cost in small, rural schools. As a result, the school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher and senior staff are very effective in monitoring how well the school is performing and taking the necessary action in order to make further improvements
- Teaching and support staff are deployed well to make best use of their expertise and to create effective teaching groups
- There is a rich variety of experiences in the subjects taught that interest and motivate the pupils
- The support and guidance for the pupils' personal development, including those with special educational needs, are very good
- Links with parents and the wider community make a valuable contribution to the effectiveness of the school and the progress that the pupils make
- As a result of all these factors, the pupils achieve good standards of attainment and behaviour.

What could be improved

- Provision for teaching information and communication technology (ICT)
- Resources for children in their reception year to promote their physical development.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997. It has improved well. Since then there have been changes at senior management level, with the appointment of a new headteacher and chair of governors. Continuity and progress have been good. The two key issues, one to develop the planning of what is taught and the other to improve provision for more able pupils, have both been resolved well. In addition, good standards of attainment have been either maintained or improved. For example, there is an increasing proportion of pupils achieving higher levels in national tests at the ages of seven and 11.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	C	E	A	B
mathematics	A	C	B	C
science	A	A	A	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Because of the small size of different year groups, there are variations in the school's results over the years. The trend has been broadly in line with the national trend. Standards were good in last year's national tests for pupils aged 11, when they are compared with all schools and with similar schools. This is evident in the table above. The school exceeded the challenging targets it set for pupils last year. Standards in English, mathematics and science in the current Year 6 are slightly below those of last year but are nevertheless above average for schools nationally. This slight fall is accounted for by a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 6. The school will fall slightly short of its target for 85 per cent of its 11-year-olds to achieve the expected levels in English and mathematics. Able pupils achieve well and a small number of pupils each year are entered for the Level 6 paper in the national tests.

Pupils have a keen interest in reading and they write well, not only in English lessons, but also in geography, history, religious education and science. Standards of literacy across subjects are good. The pupils solve problems in mathematics well and have a good command of mathematical operations, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Work in science is wide-ranging and pupils have good skills of investigation and enquiry. They set up investigations and follow through their predictions, writing clear reports on their findings. Pupils make good use of investigative and numeracy skills when they explore census forms in a local history project.

Standards in art and design, and design and technology are good and often very good. In religious education, pupils develop a good understanding of Christianity and other world faiths. Attainment in geography, history, ICT, music and physical education is broadly in line with expectations. Some pupils achieve above average standards. The presentation of work is generally very good. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported, making good progress. They are involved in the same activities as their classmates and the extra support from classroom assistants means that they keep up and achieve well. Children make a good start in their reception year. At the age of seven pupils achieved well in reading, mathematics and science in last summer's national tests and assessments. Standards in writing were below the national average. In the current Year 2, standards are better than last year in reading, writing, mathematics and science. A good proportion of pupils are achieving above expectations.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have good attitudes to their work; they enjoy school and try hard.

Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good overall and at times very good. This is especially evident when the pupils are playing outside at play and dinner times. Pupils with behavioural difficulties on the register of pupils with special educational needs respond well to the care and support that they receive from staff.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils are sensible and mature. Older pupils take on responsibilities for looking after younger pupils and this is especially evident in the dining hall. They make good suggestions about how things can be further improved around school.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are well above the national average for primary schools and are very good. Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching and learning is good in all classes and this is a similar finding to the last inspection. Ninety-three percent of teaching is good or better, of which 14 per cent is very good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching or learning. Effective teaching is an important factor in the good results that pupils achieve.

The school has taken a number of steps over the years to successfully improve the quality of learning. For instance, each morning, Year 4 pupils are taught English and mathematics with a separate teacher from the rest of the pupils in Years 5 and 6. This initiative reduces class sizes and allows more time to be devoted to teaching that year group, which has an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Good use is made of teachers' specialist interests when they teach classes other than their own. For instance, to improve the achievement of more able pupils in science, the co-ordinator teaches the subject to all pupils in Years 2 to 6. Specialist teaching also has benefits in religious education and helps to account for the good standards evident in that subject. The support provided by teaching assistants throughout the school is especially effective in helping pupils with special educational needs to achieve well. In addition, the assistants help to teach groups of pupils in the mixed-age classes and play a large part in teaching pupils in design and technology, which is again leading to good standards. Further, teachers plan work very well to cater for the needs of all pupils in the mixed-age classes and teaching assistants take a full part in the planning. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good in all classes. Pupils get through a good amount of work in all subjects during the course of a year and this was very evident when inspectors sampled their work. There are very good opportunities for pupils to use their creative talents too in art and design. The teaching of ICT, however, has been interrupted by problems with hardware and software. Because of a limited range of resources to develop the physical skills of children in their reception year, this aspect of the teaching could be improved.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a rich variety of experiences for pupils within the taught curriculum as well as out-of-school visits, visitors to school and activities outside lessons. This variety motivates the pupils well and helps to account for the good standards they achieve.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good. There is very good support for pupils with statements of special educational need. Pupils achieve well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is good overall. Provision for pupils' social and moral development is very good. The Christian ethos of the school supports the pupils well in developing mature, responsible attitudes. There are good opportunities for the pupils to explore aspects of other cultures through English, art and music.
How well the school cares for its pupils	This is a strength of the school and helps to account for why the pupils behave and achieve well. Staff know the pupils very well and track their academic and personal development, helping them to take responsibility for their own work and achievements.

Partnerships with parents are good. Parents play a full part in supporting the work of the school and the work of their own children. These links play an important part in the achievement of pupils.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and senior teacher have a very good awareness of strengths of the school and what needs improving. As a result of clear action plans, they are successful in improving provision.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Working parties of governors monitor all aspects of the school and governors are beginning to take a specialist interest in individual subjects of the curriculum to provide the school with even more support.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is good. Governors and staff know how well the school is performing and what should be done to improve even more.
The strategic use of resources	All funding and specific grants are used well to promote good standards of attainment. Governors and senior staff apply principles of best value effectively, consulting a range of people, including parents, about important matters, obtaining the best resources at the most economic prices and using them appropriately in raising standards.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children enjoy school, behave well and make good progress • Teaching is good • Parents are kept well informed about the children's progress • Parents feel comfortable approaching school with questions or concerns • School works closely with parents • The school is well led and managed • There is a good range of activities outside lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some inconsistency with which homework is set

Inspectors strongly support the positive views that parents express and consider the school should monitor the regularity with which homework is set.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher and senior staff are very effective in monitoring how well the school is performing and taking the necessary action in order to make further improvements

1. The headteacher has been in post for 18 months and during that time has, with the support of the senior teacher, developed clear procedures to monitor how well the school is doing. For instance, they scrutinise the information about pupils' achievements in national tests and have shared this with governors and staff, alerting them to potential areas for improvement. In recent years results, that pupils aged seven have achieved, have been disappointing in reading and in writing and science, where there have been few pupils achieving above the expected levels. The senior staff realised that was not good enough and was the result of the difficulties encountered in teaching a mixed class of Years 2 and 3 pupils, which crosses two key stages. To address the problem, decisions were taken to extend the time available for classroom assistants in the infant-aged class and to put a greater focus on planning for literacy skills for Year 2 pupils. There has been further staff training in how to develop young pupils' writing. The co-ordinator for science now teaches the subject to pupils in Years 2 to 6. The staff teaching the reception / Year 1 class have increased the amount of practical work in their science teaching. The results of these actions are evident in the better standards currently being achieved by pupils in Year 2. Twenty-one per cent of pupils are achieving above the expected levels in writing and 28 per cent of pupils in science.

2. In order to support the large class of pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6, the decision was taken to employ a part-time teacher four mornings per week and to deploy the headteacher for the fifth morning to teach English and mathematics to pupils in Year 4, separately from the rest of the class. In addition, a classroom assistant was deployed to work with the year group in each of these lessons. These actions have helped to reduce class sizes and focus attention where it is most needed in Year 4. There are above average numbers of pupils with special educational needs and results in national tests, when the pupils were seven years old, were below expectations.

Teaching and support staff are deployed well to make best use of their expertise and to create effective teaching groups

3. Despite the fact that the school is smaller than average, the quality of teaching is maintained at a good level by deploying teachers so that best use is made of their specialist interests. For instance, science is taught by the subject co-ordinator to pupils in Years 2 to 6; physical education is taught by the subject co-ordinator to Years 2 to 6; and music and religious education are taught by the co-ordinator for both subjects to pupils in the reception / Year 1 class and to Years 4, 5 and 6. Staff plan very well for the different

age groups within classes. As a result, standards of attainment are good. For instance, very good work is evident in religious education. Older pupils are taught about the creeds and tenets of the world's major religions at a standard above that normally expected. Pupils develop a good grasp of the significance of symbolism and ritual across religions.

4. Similarly, support staff are deployed well. Those working with the youngest children in the mixed reception / Year 1 class contribute much to the planning and teaching of small groups in the class. This was very evident in a mathematics lesson, where the two assistants worked on practical activities with reception-aged children, while the class teacher concentrated her attention on pupils in Year 1. In the mixed Years 2 / 3 class, two assistants give much attention to pupils with special educational needs and also support the learning of groups of other pupils. The attention given to pupils, especially those with behavioural difficulties in various classes across the school, means that not only do the pupils make progress but the class teachers are more available to devote their energies to supporting pupils of average and above average attainment. A good example of this was seen in an English lesson involving pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6. The focus of the work was writing book reviews. The assistant provided one-to-one support of high quality on this same aspect for a pupil with a statement of special educational need. As a result, the pupil produced a good review of one of her current favourite books. In addition, classroom assistants make an important contribution to other subjects, for instance, design and technology. While the class teacher worked with junior pupils designing, making and evaluating slippers, two assistants took a large group for food technology, with a focus on bread. The quality of their work was evident not only in the lesson observed, but also in the folders produced by the pupils, which they were very keen to share with the inspector.

There is a rich variety of experiences in the subjects taught that interest and motivate the pupils

5. Over the years, the school has developed strong links with the local community, other small schools in nearby villages, as well as the associated high school in order to enrich the curriculum offered to pupils. The school makes particularly effective use of visits to places of interest, such as an ancient-technology centre, a famous swannery and further afield to the National Gallery. There are two residential experiences for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Many of these events are made possible by making mutually beneficial arrangements about travel and accommodation with local schools. The senior teacher at the school is very efficient in co-ordinating these arrangements for the schools involved. These activities promote the pupils' awareness of art and design, environmental issues, geography, history and science as well as skills in outdoor physical activities. In addition, the local village is an important focus for investigation in geography, history and science. For instance, staff make good use of primary historical sources for a study of village life.

6. A recent, highly successful project involving a number of schools focused on African art and culture and included visits by artists and dance specialists. The results of some of the work, using techniques of batik and sculpture, on display in school after being exhibited in Sherborne in May, are stunning in their vibrant use of colour, shape and texture. Plans for next year's project, again reflecting a multi-cultural theme, were being prepared at the time of the inspection. In addition, local people support the school in teaching skills of sewing and cooking and raising the pupils' awareness about art, drama and local geological features. There is a very good range of activities outside lessons, such as gardening, recorders, drama and various seasonal sports. A club for more able pupils produced a video recording last year on a drama theme. These experiences interest pupils of all levels of attainment and motivate particularly well more able pupils that the school has identified.

The support and guidance for the pupils' personal development, including those with special educational needs, are very good

7. In her written presentation for the inspection, the headteacher wrote, 'We take pleasure in the fact that we are small. We do not regard this as a limitation, more an advantageous beginning, a chance to...make the most of our qualities, be valued and cherished...' The school is successful not only in providing a rich curriculum, but also in supporting the pupils' personal development very well. Staff know the pupils and track their progress very effectively, both academically and personally. The school's ethos, firmly based in Christian traditions, helps the pupils to develop spiritually, socially and morally.

8. The results are clear in the good attitudes the pupils have to their work and their responsible support for each other, evident in group activities in class and in the family dining arrangements each lunchtime. The support for pupils with special educational needs is based on care and consideration for each pupil's needs. Staff gently persuade rather than confront pupils with behavioural difficulties, while at the same time providing them with boundaries beyond which poor behaviour is not tolerated. As a result, these pupils are keen to come to school, make good progress and get through a good amount of work in class.

Links with parents and the wider community make a valuable contribution to the effectiveness of the school and the progress that the pupils make

9. Links with parents and the wider community are strong. This means that the pupils are well supported in work they do at home and members of the village community contribute to activities of the school, as outlined earlier. Parents take a close interest in how well their children are achieving and appreciate the quality of information that they receive at parents' meetings and in annual reports. These views were evident from the parents' questionnaires returned to inspectors and from the meeting held with parents at school. A number of parents help as volunteers in class and accompany pupils on trips. There are good links maintained with parents of pupils with special educational needs and these also help the pupils to make good progress.

10. There is a very supportive Parents and Teachers' Association, which raises money with particular targets in mind, for instance computers and playground games. It is actively involved in promoting the well being of pupils by managing the school kitchen as a private enterprise. Unlike other small schools around the country, where many kitchen facilities have closed, the provision of hot meals cooked on site has been maintained at this school. About 75 per cent of pupils use the hot meal service. The provision also extends to residents in the community, who can have a hot meal delivered to their homes. In addition, the enterprising managers and volunteers also raise money by providing 'Take away nights' for the village and the food for celebrations at times such as Christmas and New Year.

As a result of all these factors, the pupils achieve good standards of attainment and behaviour

11. Standards achieved by pupils by the time they are 11 are good in English, mathematics and science. In last summers' national tests for 11-year-olds, the results compared very favourably with schools nationally and similar schools. The school exceeded its challenging targets for those pupils. This year, despite the higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in Year 6, standards are still above average and a

good number of pupils are achieving at levels above those expected of pupils at this age. A few pupils have been entered for the higher Level 6 paper in the tests. Standards of literacy and numeracy are good and these skills are used well in other subjects. Standards in art and design, design and technology and religious education are above those expected of 11-year-olds. Standards in other subjects are at least in line with those expected and are often better than that.

12. Pupils have good attitudes to their work and enjoy school. Their behaviour is good and this is seen both in lessons and at playtimes and lunchtimes. Pupils are sensible and mature, helping around school and taking on specific roles. A small group of older pupils meet regularly with the headteacher to advise on how they see the school is doing, how pupils are managing and what might be done to help even more. This led, for instance, to the establishment of a rota of playground games at break times so that the pupils would value these occasions.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Provision for teaching information and communication technology (ICT)

13. Provision for ICT is satisfactory overall but has suffered as a result of difficulties with hardware and software. This has meant disruption to the availability of and access to computers at times. Nevertheless standards are satisfactory overall and in some aspects are good, such as word processing, using a digicamera, combining text with pictures and accessing the Internet. Plans to develop the quality of computers and support the staff's expertise to teach the subject have been included in the current school development plan and agreed by governors. Part of the budget carry forward has been earmarked for this purpose.

Resources for children in their reception year to promote their physical development

14. Children in the reception class lack the opportunity to develop physical skills by using large wheeled toys and play equipment outdoors. This is because some elements of the necessary resources are missing. There are, however, regular opportunities to use apparatus in the main hall. On entry to school, the physical skills of some of the children are below average when assessed by the county assessment procedures and some children enter school with specific needs. This underlines the importance of providing for the children's physical development.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

15. Governors and senior staff should

- (1) Pursue plans in the current school development plan to improve provision for teaching ICT and increase the teachers' and assistants' expertise to teach the subject (paragraph 13)
- (2) Add to resources for children in the reception year group to promote their physical development better (paragraph 14)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

14

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

9

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	14	79	7	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		90
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		22

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.3
National comparative data	5.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Because there were only ten pupils in Years 2 and 6 last summer, the tables of statistics have been removed.

In the 2000 national tests and assessments for seven-year-olds, standards were above the national average in reading but below the average of standards in other similar schools. They were below the national average in writing and well below the average of similar schools. Standards in mathematics were well above the national average and above the average of similar schools. In the science assessments, standards were very high compared with all schools, including other, similar schools.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

In the 2000 national tests for 11-year-olds, standards in English and science were well above the average achieved by all schools and above the average of similar schools. In mathematics, standards were above the national average and in line with standards in similar school.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		

Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	68
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23
Average class size	25

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	112

Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	193 836
Total expenditure	188 057
Expenditure per pupil	2213
Balance brought forward from previous year	9575
Balance carried forward to next year	15354

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	90
Number of questionnaires returned	63

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	40	2	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	52	3	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	61	5	2	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	52	17	3	0
The teaching is good.	62	37	2	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	51	44	5	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	76	24	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	53	45	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	43	56	2	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	60	32	6	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	37	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	48	3	0	3

Not all responses add up to 100 per cent because of rounding up and down.

Other issues raised by parents

None