



St Mary's Church of England First School, Charminster

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113784
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 279248
Inspection dates 9 May 2006 to 10 May 2006
Reporting inspector Emma Ing HMI

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

Type of school	First	School address	Charminster
School category	Voluntary controlled		Dorchester
Age range of pupils	4 to 9		Dorset DT2 9RD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01305 263880
Number on roll	188	Fax number	01305 263880
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Judy Copper
Date of previous inspection	27 September 1999	Headteacher	Mr Ian Donnelly

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school serving a largely rural community with some areas of high density social housing. There are few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, and just one for whom English is an additional language. The school is a Church of England foundation school and Christian values are central to its work.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school with some outstanding features. It is a happy and caring place. Pupils enjoy attending and their personal development is very good. They behave well, they care for one another and they contribute well to their community.

The Foundation Stage offers wonderfully rich and vibrant learning opportunities and trains pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own work so that they make good progress despite having below average attainment at the outset. Progress continues to be good as pupils move through the school, such that by the time they leave pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The curriculum is varied and well planned with many opportunities for lively and creative learning. Much learning is focused around topics that are for many pupils the most exciting part of their work. Many pupils take part in clubs and participate in sport and the school tries hard to ensure that these are accessible even to those who rely on school buses. Teaching is generally good, but at times lacks pace and challenge. In the best lessons, staff share learning objectives with pupils and enable them to understand what they need to do in order to improve. However, this is not fully consistent through the school.

The school is led with great care and attention and the rigorous evaluation procedures ensure that it knows itself well. The school offers good value for money and has demonstrated good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Seek to further raise standards by ensuring consistently high expectations, good pace and challenge in lessons.
- Enable all pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning by consistently sharing and revisiting learning objectives and giving helpful feedback that sets out an individual's next challenge.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the Foundation Stage with attainment that is below average, particularly in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress and are much more confident by the time they start Key Stage 1; nevertheless, standards remain below average in writing by this stage. The school's recent focus on speaking and listening is beginning to improve the ability of the pupils to write effectively.

Good progress is made by pupils in Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 2 attainment is in line with national averages. The school knows its pupils well, tracks their progress carefully and sets challenging targets. Those who find work difficult are given additional support and the impact of this is carefully monitored. The school has recently focused on raising the number of pupils reaching the highest levels and has been successful

in this. By the time they leave the school the attainment of pupils is above average, particularly in reading, and all groups achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

As a result of well planned and consistent efforts by the staff as a whole, the personal development and well-being of pupils is good. Strong links with parents and carers help children settle into their Reception classes and they go on to enjoy school. Vibrant assemblies ensure good spiritual development and pupils' cultural awareness has been strengthened since the last inspection. Pupils make outstanding progress in behaviour and most behave very well both in and out of class. Pupils are particularly caring of one another. They speak highly of their buddy system and regard their 'Playtime Pals' as an important source of support. They feel safe and secure and for the most part share their parents' confidence that any bullying or bad behaviour will be effectively dealt with. They have begun to contribute to the wider community by sharing their singing with various local groups.

Pupils know about healthy lifestyles, they participate in plenty of sport and are aware of what constitutes healthy eating. They are responsible, understand about safety and have begun to develop the skills needed to ensure their economic well-being.

Attendance overall is satisfactory and has improved with the reduction in unauthorised absence as the result of measures undertaken by the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress because the teaching is good overall. Lessons are well planned in sequence to ensure that learning is incrementally developed and pupils are able to make steady and effective progress. In the best lessons learning objectives are clear and are shared with the pupils so that all can explain what they are learning and what they need to do to make their work better. In these lessons explanations are clear and activities are stimulating and fun. In many lessons pupils evaluate their own understanding and indicate this to the teacher through 'traffic light' symbols. They also assess each others' work and give useful feedback. However, in a few lessons pupils are not clear enough on what they are trying to learn and how to improve their work. Some lessons lack pace and are insufficiently challenging and teachers' expectations in these instances are too low.

In the Foundation Stage, pupils are able to make choices about their work, but are effectively guided to ensure that they make good progress towards each of the learning goals. Questioning is used very effectively to enable pupils to develop their communication skills and understanding. There are lots of rich opportunities for developing knowledge and understanding of the world.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The well planned curriculum meets the needs and interests of pupils exceptionally well. A wide range of experiences contributes to pupils' enjoyment of learning and of school life. Pupils have lots of opportunities from an early age to develop their learning through fieldwork, trips and the outside environment. Topic work enables pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding through many aspects of one topic and is much enjoyed by pupils. The provision for music is outstanding and pupils clearly enjoy performing complex work well. Curricular plans meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities well.

There are a range of well supported after school clubs. The headteacher is careful to ensure that all older pupils have access to these and invites pupils to participate in clubs which will help them make progress in particular areas such as the use of computers. Joint initiatives arising from very good links with local partnership schools also contribute valuably to their learning and enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The central concern to build pupils' social and emotional development underpins advances in their progress, well-being and enjoyment of learning. The school has excellent systems for monitoring the progress of pupils and well developed intervention programmes to support those who need them. Individual targets give effective guidance, although reviews of work in lessons are not as consistently strong. Good work has been done to support the pupil for whom English is an additional language. There are very good levels of focused care and support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities which enable most to make good progress. Nurture groups and circle time help pupils develop self-belief and confidence to interact more successfully with others. Measures to ensure pupils' safety, including child protection arrangements are secure, with key members of staff receiving regular training in how to deal with any potentially vulnerable pupils. Regular health and safety and risk assessments are carried out. Pupils say they feel safe at school and are confident they know someone to turn to if they have a problem.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led. The headteacher cares a great deal for the pupils and together with the staff has created a good environment in which pupils can learn. As one parent commented to us: 'The children are taught in a nurturing and safe environment. The teaching staff are (...) caring and dedicated to the children and the school as a whole'. However the school is aware that there has not been the same drive to raise standards and is turning its attention to this.

The governing body is committed and bring a range of useful skills to the school. They are able to provide challenge and support to the headteacher. Governors and senior managers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their school and have good systems in place for gathering the views of stakeholders. They have recognised areas where a number of pupils need support, such as the development of speaking and listening and in emotional well-being and have taken important steps to meet those needs. They have demonstrated their good capacity to effect improvements. Staff are held to account effectively through a performance management system and work with them to create the best opportunities for students.

The leadership of the Foundation Stage is outstanding. The headteacher supports the team leader well and there is a keen understanding of the ways in which the youngest children learn and the importance of getting them off to a good start. Middle managers lead their subjects with a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement but have not yet been able to develop fully their monitoring and leadership role. Staff of the school contribute a great deal to the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership taking many lead roles. The sharing of resources and skills through the partnership has had significant impact in raising standards and ensuring smooth progression to middle school and beyond.

Since the last inspection improvements to accommodation have enhanced the learning environment including easier access for those with physical disability.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our visit to your school we wanted to say thank you for welcoming us, talking to us and telling us so much about the things that you do and what you enjoy. I am writing to let you know what we found out about your school.

First, we were very impressed by what a warm and caring school yours is. We saw that nearly all of you behave well and look out for each other and you told us how well the play pal and buddy schemes work. Your teachers look after you very well and make sure that you are able to learn and join in with school life. Mr Donnelly knows you all well, and works hard to ensure that you each get a good education.

You make good progress with your learning and you have lots of good opportunities to learn new things. Many of the older children do lots of sport and go to different clubs and after school activities. We really enjoyed being at your assemblies and particularly loved your singing.

We have asked Mr Donnelly to continue with all the good things that are happening in your school and to make sure that all of you are encouraged to do as well as you possibly can. We have also suggested that teachers set tough challenges, tell you what it is you are going to learn in a lesson and help you look back later in the lesson to see if you were successful.