



Swanage St Mark's Church of England First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113814
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 279255
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 7 June 2006
Reporting inspector Kevin Jane HMI

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

Type of school	First	School address	Bell Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Swanage
Age range of pupils	4 to 9		Dorset BH19 2SA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01929 422949
Number on roll	113	Fax number	01929 425504
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	16 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Harrison

Age group 4 to 9	Inspection dates 7 June 2006 - 7 June 2006	Inspection number 279255
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Mark's is a small first school serving the seaside community of Swanage in Dorset. Nearly all of the pupils are White British with a higher than average proportion of pupils having learning difficulties and disabilities than is found in most schools. Attainment on entry to the school is below average. There has been a significant turnover in teaching staff in the last year, including a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. Despite these changes, the school has maintained very good relationships with the parental community and has their full confidence.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mark's is a satisfactory school. The recently appointed headteacher is leading the school with determination to bring about improvements in standards and progress for the children in partnership with staff and the whole-school community. However, this is currently in the early stages of development. Nevertheless, the current standards achieved by the children in reading, writing and mathematics are not high enough and there has been only limited improvement since the last inspection. Whilst the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, there are some weaknesses in the level of challenge and pace to learning which partly account for the limited improvement in standards and progress. Although the curriculum has recently been reviewed, the use and application of information and communication technology (ICT) is too limited. Through rigorous and regular analysis of individual pupils' progress and improved monitoring and evaluation, the school is aware of the need to raise standards further and, as a consequence, knows itself well. It has aligned its resources to development priorities appropriately, and this results in the school providing satisfactory value for money. The school's own evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate and very close to the findings of this inspection and therefore the capacity for improvement is highly promising. The school cares for its pupils and knows them well. They know that they are safe and the adults will act swiftly to respond to their concerns. As a consequence, they are happy to come to school and have positive attitudes to their work and behave well. Children in the Reception class make especially good progress in their personal development because of the good teaching they receive but remain below the expected standards in most areas of learning by the time they start in Year 1. Parents are very happy with their children's education and are fully supportive of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the planned intentions to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics are pursued rigorously.
- Improve the quality of teaching by raising the level of challenge to all pupils and increasing the pace of learning in lessons.
- Ensure that the provision and application of ICT are used more effectively across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards in Year 2 are close to, but below, the national average, which represents reasonable achievement given the pupils' low starting points. However, higher attaining pupils do better in reading and mathematics than is the case nationally. Overall, standards and achievement are satisfactory. By 2005, there has been modest improvement in reading and writing, but very little difference in mathematics since 2001 where the trend over time in attainment is generally flat. The school has rigorous systems in place to monitor the progress of pupils and rightly recognises the need to raise standards further. As a consequence, this features as a key priority in the school's

development plan but strategies currently employed have yet to show significant improvement. There are no significant differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Most pupils make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 4. However, insufficient challenge and pace in teaching and approaches in pupil grouping arrangements are barriers to further progress and higher standards. In the Reception class, children make good progress, especially in their confidence and independence. Attainment on entry for the youngest children is below the nationally expected levels in all areas of learning but, despite their good start, remain below average in reading and writing by the end of the year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their work and to wider aspects of school life. Behaviour in lessons and around the school, and relationships with each other and with adults, are good. Most pupils attend regularly and arrive punctually, although overall attendance is stubbornly below average. This is affected by a few persistent absentees and when families take holidays in term time. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, successfully reflecting the school's Christian ethos and encouraging respect for cultural and religious diversity. As a consequence of this, pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Initiatives such as healthy snacks, readily available fresh water, 'walk to school' weeks and swimming lessons for all help pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that any issues they raise will be quickly and effectively resolved. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school and to the wider community through the work of the school council and participation in a wide range of charitable activities and community festivals and events. Projects related to the care of the environment by recycling and developing sustainability helps to prepare them for future life. In general, pupils learn well together and are developing good skills of collaboration, although there are not enough opportunities for them to develop independence in their own learning after the Reception class. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills, although ICT is not used sufficiently to support and extend learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. New staff have settled in and operate well as a team which bodes well for future improvement. Classroom organisation and management are good and results in good behaviour and positive attitudes in the pupils. This is because the planned activities take account of the different abilities of the pupils and interest and engage them in their work. The teachers demonstrate their good knowledge of the core subjects through their clear explanations, constructive marking of pupils' work and skilful questioning techniques. Additional adults are deployed well in the classroom

to support learning. Nevertheless, teachers could expect more from their pupils, set more challenging tasks and provide activities for them to promote greater independence in their learning. In addition, the pace of teaching and learning is too measured. These two factors partly account for the just satisfactory rates of progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which meets statutory requirements. The curriculum has recently been reviewed to make more effective use of time and allow for the better development of skills. Plans show an appropriate emphasis on literacy, in line with school's priorities for improving standards and achievement. Most of these changes are fairly recent, however, and have not had time to take full effect. During the inspection, ICT was not used effectively across the curriculum. In the Reception class, the curriculum places an appropriate emphasis on personal development. This accounts for the good progress that children make in developing confidence and independence. The formal curriculum is complemented by a good range of enrichment activities, such as educational visits and contributions by visitors to the school. In addition, pupils appreciate the good range of extra-curricular activities available and these make a positive contribution to their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good. The school's strong Christian ethos, together with the good knowledge staff have of children and their families, have created an environment in which children care for and respect one another. Members of the school council quickly listed a range of 'best things about our school' and struggled to suggest anything they would like to change. Parents unanimously feel that the school cares well for their children. This is mainly because teachers monitor pupils' academic and personal development carefully, although additional support programmes have yet to realise higher academic standards. The school has taken all reasonable steps to safeguard pupils and promote their well-being, health and safety. Weaknesses identified by the previous inspection have been remedied and the school is now a more secure environment. The tracking of pupils' progress enables staff to offer additional support where this is needed. Targets are set for pupils' future achievement and these are now shared with parents and carers. In addition, the marking of pupils' work is good because it diagnoses strengths and weaknesses in the work and offers constructive suggestions for future improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

In a relatively short space of time, the recently appointed headteacher has provided firm and decisive leadership of the school. He has successfully diagnosed its strengths and weaknesses through the rigorous evaluation of individual pupils' progress. This,

together with the increasingly effective partnership between staff and governors, has created the conditions to bring about the necessary improvement. The school actively seeks the views of children and parents and takes them into account when setting priorities in the school development plan. Governors are well informed about the school and support its general development but they are not fully effective in holding the school to account. Subject leaders are beginning to monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility more effectively. There are clear plans to redesignate roles so that optimum use is made of expertise and time. These developments are still in the very early stages but the prospects for bringing about improvement are highly promising. Nevertheless, there is a very close correlation between the findings of this inspection and the school's own evaluation, demonstrating how well the school knows itself because of the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation. Resources are aligned well to priorities for development which, in turn, are focused on raising attainment and improving teaching and learning. Consequently, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	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	2	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	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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

Dear Children We very much enjoyed meeting you and coming to see some of your lessons when we visited your school recently. Thank you for making us so welcome, telling us about your school and letting us see your work. What we like most about St Mark's First School:

- You behave well and look after each other.
- You are interested in your lessons and try to do your best.
- Your teachers and other adults look after you well. They take care to make sure you are safe and encourage you to be healthy.
- You have lots of exciting clubs and activities to attend.
- Your headteacher is a good leader and is doing a good job in helping your school to be even better.
- The youngest children are confident and independent in their classroom activities.

What we have asked your headteacher to do to make your school even better:

- We would like your teachers to make sure that you are helped to do as well as you possibly can in reading, writing and mathematics.
- We would like your headteacher to make sure that the plans to help you do very well in your work and to improve the school are carried out.
- We would like to see you use computers more in your lessons.

We hope that you carry on helping your teachers and other adults in your school. Yours sincerely Mr Kevin Jane HMI (Lead Inspector)