



St Mary's Church of England VC Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113385
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289606
Inspection dates 4–5 December 2006
Reporting inspector Laurie Lewin

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

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|---|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Chanters Road |
| School category | Voluntary controlled | | Bideford |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 | | EX39 2QN |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01237 477288 |
| Number on roll (school) | 340 | Fax number | 01237 423450 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Marie Bird |
| | | Headteacher | Robert Fancourt |
| Date of previous school inspection | 26 September 2002 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large school, which serves the town of Bideford. Nearly all of the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average but varies significantly from year to year. Pupils come from a mixture of private and social housing, and there has been an increase in the proportion coming from social housing over recent years. Most children attain the expected levels when they start school, although a significant minority have attainment that is below the expected levels. The school's deputy headteacher was promoted to headship two years ago after a period as acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school that has some good features. Good leadership and management and the hard work and enthusiasm of the staff and governors have resulted in considerable improvement in standards and achievement. Satisfactory provision in the Foundation Stage ensures children make sound progress so that most reach the expected levels by the start of Year 1. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with good and occasionally outstanding teaching in some lessons. As a result, by the end of Year 6, pupils' achievement is satisfactory, but with strengths in the progress made in mathematics and science. Pupils reach average standards, although their achievement and attainment in writing are relatively weaker than in other subjects. The school has developed an excellent system to record pupils' progress. Some teachers make good use of this information to set clear and precise targets to help pupils improve their work. However, this is not always the case, and too often pupils are not clear what their targets are; this is especially so for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

As a result of good care, guidance and support, and especially strong pastoral provision, pupils' personal development is good, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Pupils behave well, enjoy all activities, feel safe in school and have a good knowledge of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Curriculum provision is good, with many initiatives underway to make it even better and to make full use of local expertise and resources. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. Staff do very well in ensuring that pupils enjoy a full range of activities, despite the cramped nature of some classrooms and the playgrounds.

The headteacher has moved the school forward well over the last two years. In particular, he has created an atmosphere in which staff and governors work well together. He ensures that there is a very clear vision of the school's future educational direction. Staff and governors accurately monitor and evaluate the school's performance and play a full part in assembling good quality action plans to build on recent successes. The school has a good capacity to succeed in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in writing.
- Ensure that full use is made of assessment information to create clear and precise targets for all groups of pupils including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage. The sound progress and achievement continue across the school. The 2005 national test results showed pupils reaching above average standards in Year 2 and Year 6. However, with much larger

than usual proportions of pupils with learning difficulties in both year groups, standards as indicated in the 2006 tests and in pupils' current work are average.

The test results and the school's assessment information show a clear picture of improving trends in standards and achievement over recent years. Particular strides have been made in achievement in mathematics where exceptional achievement was reflected in the 2005 Year 6 results. Pupils' work indicates that they make satisfactory progress in science, with test results indicating a significant improvement in their progress recently, moving it closer to above average achievement. Despite signs of recent improvement, the school correctly lays strong emphasis on the need to improve writing further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school. They say, 'Teachers and teaching assistants always try to help you ... and this makes you want to do your best.' These positive attitudes are reflected in lessons, where the atmosphere is purposeful, and pupils are well motivated and enthusiastic. Behaviour is good around the school, with just the occasional instances when pupils need reminding about working quietly and staying focused on what they are doing.

Pupils feel safe in school and say they have no qualms about seeking help from an adult if they have any concerns. They have a good knowledge about how to keep themselves safe. The school's strong focus on healthy eating, daily exercises and a good range of sports activities ensures pupils have a good sense of how to stay healthy and fit. Pupils' contributions to the school council, charity fund raising work, conservation projects and strong links with schools overseas lead them to become very reflective about local and world issues. They also gain a good level of social and cultural awareness and a good sense of the need to contribute to the community. Pupils develop a sound range of basic skills to help them secure their well-being in the future. Although they have a voice in school matters through their school council, discussions with them indicate that enough is not always done to seek their views. Attendance is satisfactory and the school has been very successful in improving this from a previously below-average level.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are sometimes good, and occasionally excellent, but the quality varies and this is why pupils make satisfactory, rather than consistently good, progress. Teaching is improving due to staff training and initiatives. For instance, the good progress of pupils in mathematics is an example of teachers demonstrating confident subject knowledge and setting work that precisely matches pupils' needs. In all classes,

staff ensure lessons have clear objectives and teachers generally explain activities well so that all pupils know what to do.

'Our teachers are good fun ... they always try to make work interesting for us.' These views from the pupils are reflected in lessons. Teachers and support staff are enthusiastic and their positive approach is readily transmitted to the pupils, who consequently try hard with their work.

Teachers set targets to match the needs of individuals in their classes, but this is done more effectively in some classes than others. The school recognises that assessment information needs to be used with greater precision in some cases to ensure that all teachers set clearly focused targets to aid the improvement of all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad-ranging curriculum that caters well for pupils' interests. It focuses successfully on boosting their personal development, for example, with lots of opportunities for them to learn about how to stay fit and healthy. The school makes increasingly good use of local expertise and resources. For instance, a local artist has worked with pupils on large scale art projects and other pupils are involved in environmental work through the 'Forest Schools' project. The school is working hard to improve its satisfactory provision in the Foundation Stage and has made significant improvement in this area since the school was last inspected. Current provision gives children an appropriate range of practical activities. However, there remains scope for improving the way in which these activities are organised to ensure children make progress with their skills in a systematic way.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school adopts a vigilant approach to ensuring pupils' safety and all the required protocols are fully in place. Child protection procedures are rigorously applied. Staff are very well trained in areas such as first aid. The school has very good procedures for ensuring staff are all well informed about pupils with particular medical and social needs. Pupils feel that members of staff are very caring. Year 6 pupils, for example, were especially impressed by the school's systems for rewarding and encouraging their efforts. The strong pastoral guidance is there for all pupils and very effectively boosts their personal development, especially in terms of raising their confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Rigorous monitoring and good quality initiatives put in place over the last two years have been especially effective in helping the school improve pupils' achievement. This

is seen clearly, for example, in the increasingly good progress pupils make in mathematics and science as reflected by national test results. Although writing progress lags behind, the school's carefully focused approach gives strong potential for similar improvement. The school has invested wisely in staff training to improve their skills. As a result, staff have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and those with key responsibilities do a good job of developing individual subject areas. Governors are fully involved in the school's work and provide good support for the headteacher and staff.

The school has established very good links with other partner organisations and uses these well to boost staff training and to share local expertise in promoting new initiatives. The school understands the need to draw more heavily on pupils' and parents' views in its future performance reviews and planning for improvement.

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Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

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

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

- I am writing to let you know how much we enjoyed coming to visit your school. Thank you for making us so welcome and helping us during the school's inspection. We especially enjoyed hearing about the activities you said you liked. We think the school is doing a satisfactory job, is improving and has some good features. Here are some of the things we found out:
- You work hard in lessons and show lots of interest in everything you are asked to do.
- You behave well and get on well with one another and the staff.
- Teaching is satisfactory and you appreciate the way your teachers and teaching assistants work hard to make the lessons as interesting as possible.
- You have a good range of work to study and you get lots of interesting after school activities.
- The school does a good job of taking care of you.
- All the staff and governors work well together to plan how to make your school even better in the future.

You reach average standards and make satisfactory progress in your work, and especially good progress in mathematics. We have asked the school to make sure that you improve your standards of writing. We agree with the school that it is important to improve the targets you are given, so that all of you know exactly what you have to do to improve your work.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.