

# Sturminster Marshall First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113675
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	289690
<b>Inspection date</b>	20 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Bradley Simmons HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	133
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Frank Cassidy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rhian Tomkins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 January 2002
<b>School address</b>	High Street Sturminster Marshall Wimborne BH21 4AY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01258 857348
<b>Fax number</b>	01258 858439

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Sturminster Marshall First School admits up to 30 pupils each year. The school is popular; around 40% of children live beyond the school's catchment area. There are five single-age classes, and pupils leave to join a middle school at the end of Year 4. A very low proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals, and the number of pupils who have learning difficulties is below the national average. Over 95% of the pupils are White British. In comparison with schools nationally, the school works in a favourable socio-economic context.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

'Sturminster Marshall has proven to be fantastic'. So wrote one parent about this school. She reflects the views of many others, and this inspection revealed that parents' confidence is not misplaced. A range of strong features, together with some that are exemplary, combines to make this school outstanding. One of the factors that parents really appreciate is the accessibility of the headteacher. They know that, each morning, the head will be at the school gate to greet them and their children, and that they can pass important information to her, or share concerns.

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher demonstrates very strong leadership. She is very well supported by the assistant headteacher. Together they work assiduously with the subject and middle leaders to constantly evaluate and improve teaching and pupils' achievement. Governors have worked closely with the headteacher to publicise the work of the school and to attract pupils in numbers that allow the school to be organised in single-age groups.

When pupils start school, their ability levels are generally above those expected for their age. Good transition procedures mean that pupils hit the ground running when they join Reception and they make at least good progress in this class because of the strong teaching. As they move through the school, pupils experience teaching that is good overall and that has some significant strengths. There is, however, some slight unevenness in the progress made by pupils because of differences in teachers' expectations and in provision from year to year. In addition, at times, opportunities are missed to use questions that challenge or extend individuals or groups. Nevertheless, the big picture is a positive one: pupils make good progress overall and attain very high standards by the time they leave. They are well prepared for middle school education.

The care, support and guidance provided by staff for pupils are exemplary. Several parents wrote to inspectors about the extremely sensitive way in which their children's medical or emotional needs have been met at the school. A parent of a minority faith wrote to praise, rightly, the school's inclusivity in dealing with those whose lifestyles differ from the wider school body. In academic terms, pupils receive unusually strong guidance so the vast majority of children from Reception upwards know their targets in writing and mathematics and know exactly what they have to do to improve.

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Attendance is high and behaviour is good. Parents and the school council say that bullying is virtually unknown and, where it does occur, staff deal with it swiftly. Pupils demonstrate a real enjoyment of school. They relish the good curriculum, which is enriched by a very good range of after-school and lunchtime clubs and opportunities to learn a musical instrument.

This is a school where pupils feel that they are highly valued, they feel safe and they have a say. Its popularity with parents and the determination of the headteacher, staff and governors to ensure the school continues to strive to maintain and exceed present high standards underpin the outstanding capacity for further improvements.

### Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage Grade: 2

Provision in the Reception class at the school is very strong and is on its way to becoming outstanding. Parents speak very highly of the good transition links between the pre-school provision on the school site and the Reception class. They note, too, how much their children love their teacher (one parent said, 'a complete parents' dream for their child's first teacher')

and how happy their children are at school. There are significant strengths in teaching. Thus, at the very least, children make good progress in the Reception class, and they leave it with skills, knowledge and abilities that are well above the levels normally expected. The school acknowledges the need to plan to maximise the use of the outdoor space. Occasionally, too, interventions by assistants are too quick to allow children sufficient time to demonstrate their capabilities. Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. 'Plan, do, review' sessions are just one of the factors underpinning the increasing independence of this group of confident learners who discuss, negotiate and help each other. The teacher organises and manages the Reception class effectively. She knows the children very well; assessment procedures are very strong and ensure that tasks are very well matched to children's needs. Intervention to support both children and parents is swift and effective and demonstrates the outstanding level of care provided by the staff within the class.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Reduce unevenness in pupils' progress by ensuring provision and expectations are more closely aligned throughout the school.
- Plan to maximise the use of the outdoor space for Reception children to broaden their experience and thus further speed their progress.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The school recognises and capitalises on the advantages that children have when they start school; they get off to a flying start in Reception and make good progress overall as they move through Key Stage 1. As a result, by the time pupils reach the end of Year 2, their attainment is significantly higher than the national average. Pupils continue to make good progress in their final two years at the school, so that, by the time they depart for middle school at the end of Year 4, they are attaining standards which are well above those normally expected for their age.

Senior leaders are not complacent, however. They recognise that achievement is good, rather than outstanding, because pupils experience some inconsistencies in expectations and provision as they move through the school. The very rigorous data analysis undertaken by the school demonstrates that vulnerable pupils, the small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those pupils with learning difficulties are making progress in line with their classmates.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

This area of the school's work is outstanding. Behaviour is good throughout the school; the school council confirmed that this is not just the case when the school is being inspected! Pupils are polite and considerate. They really enjoy coming to school, and say that they feel safe and secure there, knowing that there are always adults on hand who will listen to their triumphs and take their disasters seriously. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. During assemblies, pupils reflect on moral issues, and they sing and celebrate each other's achievements. They raise considerable amounts of money for charity. The school has, and makes good use of, a wide range of resources which help to prepare pupils to take their place in an increasingly plural and diverse society.

The school gives due prominence to the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Every child has their own drinking water bottle which they access throughout the day, and earlier this year in an organised event, every child in every class walked at least part of their journey to school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good overall and elements of it are outstanding. It is the prime reason that pupils are making such good progress. Where it is at its best, very crisp explanations by teachers clarify new concepts for pupils very effectively. Mini- plenaries are used to build on pupils' understanding and to check the progress they are making. In an outstanding writing lesson for Year 4 pupils, the teacher exemplified the appropriate use of connectives by reading out a complex sentence just written by a pupil and praising his endeavours. This teacher used time targets so that pupils were able to plan their time, and felt a sense of urgency. As a result, pupils were extremely productive.

In some classes, teachers rely too much on volunteers to answer questions, and do not target questions at more reticent individuals or groups to test and extend their understanding.

The teaching of cursive handwriting is given a very high priority in this school. As a result, pupils develop a good cursive hand very quickly and achieve standards in this area which are extremely high by the time they leave.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school has successfully begun to tailor its curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of its pupils, but concedes that that it could be more adventurous in its provision, with the aim that pupils, where possible, identify strongly with and enjoy what is being taught while broadening their outlook and aspirations.

Nevertheless, the curriculum is good. In planning it, the school has taken proper account of national and local guidance. Dedicated English and mathematics sessions take place each morning, and the afternoons are planned more flexibly so that, at times, other subjects may be pursued in depth or links may be made between different subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught as a discrete subject, but the skills learned by pupils are used to support learning across the curriculum. Provision for pupils in Key Stage 2 includes French. This is well planned so that, by the time they are in Year 4, pupils are beginning to formulate and say more complex phrases.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

A number of parents wrote effusively about the high levels of personal, emotional and social care provided by staff for their children. The headteacher has a remarkably good understanding of the needs of many individual children. She achieves this in two ways. Firstly, as evidenced by parents' questionnaires, she greets every parent and child at the school gate daily and thus keeps a weather eye on the changes in pupils' lives. Secondly, each week she holds a 'learning talk' with each class. One such talk was observed during this inspection; pupils are enabled to

discuss their worries about school issues, work and play, and, together, the headteacher and staff address these.

Academic guidance is superb. Pupils know and can discuss their targets in writing and mathematics, and the quality of marking, particularly in English, is exemplary. It gives pupils outstanding support so that they know the steps they need to take to improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

This is a well-led and highly organised school. The headteacher demonstrates a clear vision for the direction of the school, knows the school well and is ably supported by the assistant headteacher in putting the vision into practice. The monitoring of teaching and learning and standards by the headteacher, assistant head and some subject leaders has been effective in bringing about improvements – the excellent marking in writing books, a slight cause for concern when the school was last inspected, is testament to this.

Governors play an integral role in steering, supporting and challenging the school. They ensure that spending, insofar as is possible, reflects the priorities in the school improvement plan. Link governors for English, mathematics and special needs enhance governors' ability to inform themselves and make a contribution to debate. At present, governors are not linked to other curriculum areas, which limits their ability to support curriculum innovation and change.

Finally, the elected school council provides very effective leadership for pupils. They rightly point to improvements made in areas of school life because of their interventions. They are particularly proud of the introduction last year, at their behest, of a 'winter hat'!

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	1
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**

21 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Sturminster Marshall First School, Sturminster Marshall, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4AY

Thank you for your very friendly and polite welcome when I came to visit your school recently. As well as talking to some of you in your classrooms, I met with the school council. I told them that I would write to you to tell you what I found out.

The headline is that you go to an outstanding school. There are lots of good things about it. Here are just a few:

- Your headteacher is a very good leader. She meets you at the school gate every morning, knows each of you by your name, knows what makes you happy and why you might be sad.
- All the teachers and grown-ups make sure that you are tremendously well looked after at school.
- The teaching you get is good and sometimes outstanding so you make good progress. One of you told me that the best thing about your school is the way that your teachers explain new ideas so clearly.
- Most of you know your targets and how to improve your work.
- You love school and only stay away when you are really ill!

I have asked your teachers to make sure that they all expect you to work as hard as you can, so you can make even better progress. For Reception children, I asked your teacher to plan some really exciting things to do when you are outside!

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting your school. It's a great place. Look after it, work hard, play happily and good luck in the future.

With best wishes

Bradley Simmons Her Majesty's Inspector