



Symondsbury Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary
School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113815
Local Authority Dorset
Inspection number 289733
Inspection date 19 September 2006
Reporting inspector Anna Sketchley

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Symondsbury
School category	Voluntary aided		Bridport
Age range of pupils	4–11		DT6 6HD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01308 423502
Number on roll (school)	99	Fax number	01308 421164
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Selwyn Holmes
		Headteacher	Helen Farmer
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
4–11	19 September 2006	289733

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Symondsbury is a small rural school on the outskirts of Bridport. Most pupils live in the village, but almost half are from further afield. The school is popular and oversubscribed. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average and currently only a very small number of pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are a few pupils from minority ethnic groups and no pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Symondsbury is a good school. The school's assessment of its own effectiveness was somewhat more cautious. During the last year, after a period of considerable instability, it has quickly re-established itself as an effective school. Through her dynamism and commitment, and with the help of the whole-school community, the new headteacher has built a team thoroughly dedicated to improvement.

The school's Christian ethos helps it to develop pupils well personally and socially. They are happy and confident, their attendance has improved and they enjoy coming to school. This makes a substantial contribution to their good achievement. Pupils are very well cared for and their health and welfare are of paramount importance to the school. A small minority of pupils do not yet have the skills they need in literacy and numeracy to prepare them well for the future.

Standards on joining school fluctuate from year to year between below average and average. Pupils make a good start to their learning in Reception. In 2005, the school did not meet its challenging targets for higher-attaining pupils in Year 6. However, in 2006, most pupils achieved their targets and standards are beginning to rise and are now average, indicating good achievement overall. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well.

Recognising where standards and achievement needed to be improved, the school acted decisively last year, introducing a number of new initiatives to improve reading at Key Stage 1 and science throughout the school. The success of these initiatives, as measured by test results, shows that the school has a good capacity to improve further. Plans to improve writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2, especially for the higher attainers, are already in place and are beginning to have a positive impact upon pupils' progress.

Teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers relatively new to the profession have been given good support over the last year from the headteacher and her assistant. This has enabled them to improve their teaching skills and methods of assessment so that they, the pupils and parents know what has to be done to improve the progress of individuals. New initiatives in mathematics within the curriculum are becoming successfully embedded, although the full impact of these changes is still to be realised. A strength of the curriculum is its enrichment through good links with other schools and the community and its wide variety of school clubs. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good, as is the provision for information and communication technology. This is being very successfully used as a teaching and learning tool and for assessment purposes.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher and governors have steered the school successfully through an unsettled period in recent times.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement, especially for more capable pupils in mathematics, for example, by fully implementing initiatives already started.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year and recently it has been below average. Pupils have achieved well to attain average standards by the time they leave, although the rate of progress varies between the key stages. Pupils make a good start in Reception and almost all achieve well and reach the expected standards by the start of Year 1.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and current standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. In the last two years there has been a substantial rise in standards.

Despite an unsettled period, during which there were changes in leadership and management and teaching, the most recent results for pupils in Year 6 show a marked improvement and most pupils are now making good progress. They achieve well and reach average standards despite the high number of pupils with learning difficulties in this particular cohort. This is a direct result of successful new initiatives, improved teaching techniques and careful tracking of pupils' progress. However, a very small minority of more able pupils still do not make as much progress as they could, especially in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The Christian ethos of the school and the good relationships which now abound play a significant part in this successful development. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the way the school has improved over the last year.

Behaviour is good throughout the school. Pupils report that there is very little bullying and when it does occur, it is dealt with promptly and effectively by teachers. Attendance has improved considerably over the past year and is now average. Pupils have good attitudes to school and clearly enjoy their education. This is supported by the positive comments made by parents, one of whom has two children with learning difficulties and said, "the school has been excellent at helping them".

Pupils say they feel safe at school and know who to go to when they need support or guidance. They are also well informed about healthy eating and exercise. They take part in a wide range of physical activities, such as football and swimming. The strong links the school has with the church and the village enable pupils to make a valuable contribution to the community, joining in various events such as celebrating a 'Victorian

Christmas' and raising money for charities. They enjoy serving on the school council and have been instrumental in making changes to school life. A few pupils do not have good enough writing and numeracy skills to help them prepare for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is characterised by thorough planning that aims to meet the needs of all pupils in the mixed-age classes, good questioning techniques, well-managed behaviour and very good use of highly trained teaching assistants to support pupils with learning difficulties. Very occasionally, overlong introductions and insufficient attention from the teacher when pupils work alone cause some restlessness and inattentiveness.

The needs of children in Reception are well met and activities are appropriately planned across all areas of learning. They learn well because activities are practical and fun. Great attention is paid to their personal, social and emotional development so that they acquire good work habits at an early stage in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum provided by the school meets the needs and interests of the pupils appropriately. All statutory requirements are met. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT. A recent thorough overhaul of planning has improved the breadth and balance of the curriculum. However, the needs of some more capable pupils are not yet fully met, especially in numeracy.

There is a strong emphasis in many subjects on providing education for safety and health. For example, the multi-skills sessions provided by visiting coaches contribute substantially to pupils' physical well-being.

The enrichment of pupils' learning through educational visits and extra-curricular activities is good. Productive links with the community and other local schools also enhance the curriculum. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the wide range of activities and clubs provided and say that these significantly add to their enjoyment of school life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils. All staff maintain high levels of care and concern and the school has a feeling of calm and happiness where everyone is respected and valued.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good and they make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. They are very well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. The school works very effectively with parents and outside agencies.

Pupils say that they are well informed about the next steps in their learning and parents agree. Targets are clear and they know how to improve their work. Although tracking procedures are now in place, they are at an early stage of development. There are good links with the secondary school that help pupils settle when they transfer in Year 7.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The school's ability to carry out improvements has been hampered until recently by leadership and management difficulties and several long-term teacher absences. However, in the last year, since the appointment of the new headteacher, progress has been rapid and the school is being steered towards even greater improvement. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous in identifying correct priorities for improvement. These form an effective and coherent plan for development in which there are clear targets and actions. Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress are now in place and teachers are beginning to make effective use of the new computer-based tracking system. This is allowing the school to respond quickly to any dips in achievement both for individuals and particular groups of pupils. New initiatives in literacy and numeracy are also being carefully monitored. These are beginning to be effective in raising standards.

Governors are very supportive of the school, are fully involved in self-evaluation and are therefore knowledgeable about its strengths and weaknesses.

The great majority of parents are very supportive of the school and are involved in its life and work. They are very appreciative of recent improvements and feel that the school is being well led and managed.

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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

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?	2
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

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	2
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

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for being so polite and helpful. We found that your school is good, and this is why:

- Your teachers make sure that your tasks are at the right level for you, helping you to make good progress.
- You enjoy coming to school and taking part in all the extra activities that the school offers, and this is helping you to grow into healthy and interesting people.
- You behave very well and get on well together.
- You know your targets and are good at knowing what you can do next to try to improve your work.
- You are very well cared for.
- Your headteacher and staff are working well together to make the school even better.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- Help you to improve your progress in literacy and numeracy, especially those of you who are capable of more difficult work.