

Thornford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113816
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	289734
Inspection date	9 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen Chadwick

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	95
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Dolbear
Headteacher	Tina Wilkes
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2001
School address	Boot Lane Thornford Sherborne DT9 6QY
Telephone number	01935 872706
Fax number	01935 872706

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school serving the village of Thornford, although a high number of pupils come from outside of the immediate area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average whilst the proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. Children's attainment on entry is broadly average although there is a wide range. The headteacher took up post just over one year ago after a prolonged period of disruptions to senior leadership and several temporary headteachers. The school has won Eco and Active Mark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils achieve exceptionally well. The school has a very welcoming atmosphere and pupils really thrive both personally and academically. Pupils appreciate the high levels of care given by staff, and parents are extremely pleased with the education provided. As one parent wrote, 'This is an excellent, caring school where my child has blossomed.' Leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headteacher is a very strong leader, bringing vision and co-ordination to the school's work and builds on its many strengths. Senior leaders, governors and all teaching and non-teaching staff are a seamless and very effective team. It is to the staff and governors' credit that the school continued to improve during the period of disruption to senior leadership.

Pupils' overall achievement is excellent. Children make good progress in Reception and Years 1 and Year 2 with excellent progress in reading. By Year 2, standards are very high in reading, well above average in writing and above average in mathematics. In mathematics, most pupils progress well but fewer reach the high levels than in reading, indicating more capable pupils could do better. Standards in Year 2 have improved in recent years and pupils are now better prepared for their junior education than in the past. Pupils make excellent progress in Years 3 to 6. By Year 6, standards are exceptionally high in English and well above average in mathematics and science. Pupils make very good progress in information and communication technology (ICT), an area that has improved particularly well over the past few years.

The overall quality of teaching is excellent overall and never less than good. Teachers are very knowledgeable and have excellent relationships with their pupils. Pupils are very clear about the purpose of their learning. However, occasionally in younger classes when the whole class is taught together, tasks are easy for the brightest pupils or hard for those who find learning difficult.

Pupils' personal development, well-being and behaviour are excellent. Pupils are extremely proud of their school and say they thoroughly enjoy their lessons. This is reflected in their good attendance. The excellent curriculum is particularly strong in music and sport, exemplified by some excellent singing heard during the inspection. The curriculum is enriched by interesting visits and a wide range of activities outside normal school hours. The quality of care, support and guidance of pupils is excellent. Pupils feel safe and develop an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy. They make an extremely good contribution to their community through caring for their environment and by using their initiative to raise funds for charities.

Academic assessment is extremely good. This has recently been improved. There is now very close monitoring of pupils' progress across the whole school. The two great strengths of the school are its ability to evaluate itself accurately and then use this knowledge to drive improvements. The school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve, as shown by its good progress since the last inspection under difficult circumstances.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure teaching is consistently matched to pupils' learning needs and that more capable pupils do as well in mathematics as they do in reading.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' overall achievement is excellent. Their attainment on entry is broadly average and, by Year 6, they reach exceptionally high standards in English and well above average standards in mathematics and science. For several years, Year 2 standards were only average, which meant there was much to do in Years 3 to 6 to raise standards to the high standards now reached by Year 6 pupils.

Children make good progress in Reception and standards in all areas are above those expected for their age. Pupils' good progress continues through Years 1 and 2, and by Year 2 standards are excellent in reading, well above average in writing and above average in mathematics. Progress in reading is excellent from Reception to Year 2. The school's work to improve standards of writing for more capable pupils is having a positive impact and the proportion working at higher levels has increased this year. However, in mathematics fewer reach higher levels than in reading.

In Years 3 to 6, pupils' progress accelerates and is excellent. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress as shown by the high proportions reaching at least average standards by Year 6 in all three subjects. Pupils make particularly impressive progress in English. By Year 6 pupils write extremely well for a range of purposes, revealing high levels of creativity, a rich vocabulary and mastery of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Standards in national tests in English have been consistently excellent for the past three years whilst mathematics and science standards have been well above average. Mathematics standards were not as high as English because one third reached the higher level compared with over a half doing so in English. Throughout the school, pupils make very good progress in ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent personal development makes a significant contribution to the school's success. They take great pleasure in all aspects of school life and flourish in the school's strong family atmosphere. Relationships are excellent. Pupils accept each other's differences and they display very good manners in class and around the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The Christian ethos has a very beneficial effect on this. Strong support from the local church and the community provide a strong sense of security and belonging. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoyment in keeping physically fit. Pupils eagerly take part in the many sporting activities offered by the school. Well balanced, nourishing hot school lunches are visible examples of how to eat healthily. Pupils' teamwork, leadership, decision making and enterprise skills are good. These are now being systematically developed, including through links with the local secondary school for older pupils. Pupils are excellently prepared for their economic well-being because of their extremely good progress in developing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and applying these to problem solving activities, for example in studies of the school grounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are excellent overall. All teaching is at least good and exemplary in Years 3 to 6. Across the school, teachers motivate pupils to attain high standards and have high expectations of their behaviour and application. High quality relationships in class stimulate pupils' confidence, keenness to get involved and to answer questions. Pupils are encouraged to become independent learners and to develop research, thinking and problem solving skills. Strong features are the way lessons are made meaningful to pupils' daily lives and teachers' use of practical resources to bring learning alive. Teachers deploy ICT resources very effectively to facilitate learning. Their planning is good for the particularly wide range of ability in each class. However, in practice when the whole class is taught together, tasks are occasionally too hard for lower attaining pupils or too easy for the more capable. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is broad, interesting and high quality, with some excellent opportunities in sport and music. Additionally, the school has a wide range of well attended activities outside normal hours. These encourage the pupils to be active and healthy, take an interest in caring for their environment and to become interested in sport and music. Provision in Reception is good and the curriculum is carefully planned to make sure both the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum can be taught in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The well organised provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including effective support by teaching assistants, enables these pupils to achieve well and usually reach national standards. There are some stimulating cross-curricular links between science, mathematics and ICT, including the very effective use of ICT to support pupils' learning in literacy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school works very hard to make sure the needs of every pupil are addressed. Pupils are cared for very well and benefit from excellent systems to ensure they are safe. Pupils say they have excellent relationships with staff and know they will be listened to if they have problems. Induction and transfer arrangements to secondary school are strong. The school has very productive partnerships with parents, other schools and with outside agencies for supporting pupils' well-being and achievement. Academic assessment is extremely good and has been much improved recently. For example, there are now consistent systems for tracking pupils' attainment across the whole school. Target setting is well established and pupils are very clear about their targets and know the steps they need to take to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is giving the school an excellent educational direction. She is building on the strong foundations provided by a committed and able teaching team and governing body. She

has a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There are much improved systems for checking teaching and monitoring pupils' progress so the school can accurately identify what is working well and what is in need of improvement. This process of whole school self-evaluation now involves other staff. This is because the headteacher is successfully giving them the opportunity to manage their areas of responsibility. The school has identified the right priorities for development which are focused on improving standards further. Governors are fully involved in monitoring the school and this enables them to have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. Finances are well managed. There has been a significant investment in building improvements and in new technology. Pupils appreciate these improvements and show this by respecting the resources, premises and grounds.

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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	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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

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

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

9 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Thornford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Thornford, Sherborne DT9 6QY

Thank you for making me so welcome when I recently visited your school. I enjoyed meeting you and seeing you at work and at play. I am writing to let you know what I found out about your school. Firstly, you need to know you go to an excellent school.

These are some of the things that are first class about your school:

- You make excellent progress and, by the time you leave, you reach high standards in English, mathematics and science.
- You make excellent progress in reading in Reception and Years 1 and 2.
- You are a credit to your school and behave extremely well.
- You really enjoy school and get on very well with each other.
- Teaching is often excellent.
- You have really good opportunities for ICT and for sport and music.
- Teachers take superb care of you and make sure you are kept safe.
- Your headteacher leads you all extremely well and your teachers and the school governors are working very hard to make the school even better.

Here are a few things we are asking the school to change:

- Make sure your work is never too easy or too hard.
- Make sure you reach as high standards in mathematics as you do in reading.

You can help your teachers by trying your best, and I am sure that you will.

Thank you again for your help and for being so friendly.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector