

# St Mary's Catholic First School, Dorchester

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113827
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	289736
<b>Inspection date</b>	20 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Eileen Chadwick

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>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	139
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Diaz
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jackie Clayton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 May 2001
<b>School address</b>	Lucetta Lane Dorchester DT1 2DD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01305 262258
<b>Fax number</b>	01305 257101

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This average sized first school serves the parish of Holy Trinity and surrounding villages. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is average overall but above average in some year groups. Pupils' attainment on entry is average although wide-ranging. The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2006 after an extended period of uncertainty and unsettled senior leadership.

## 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 with some good features. Pupils behave well and their spiritual and cultural development is excellent. Good provision in Years 1 and 2 is raising standards. The acting headteacher is leading the school very capably. She is building strong teamwork amongst staff, harnessing their talents and creating effective management systems for raising standards and achievement. The recently created leadership team has identified the right priorities for improvement and is tackling them well. Much has been achieved in a short time but there is work to do to make sure pupils make even progress throughout the school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory but progress varies between year groups. In Reception, children make satisfactory progress and by the start of Year 1 children achieve the expected standards in all areas and exceed them in mathematics. Good teaching and progress in Years 1 and 2 lead to rising standards that are now above average in reading, writing and mathematics by Year 2. In Years 3 and 4, satisfactory teaching and progress bring about average standards by Year 4 in English and mathematics. Girls often reach higher standards than boys. The school is tackling this through making sure lessons are relevant to the interests of both girls and boys and by more rigorous progress checks. This is already having a positive impact in Reception where standards for boys now match those for girls. However, in the rest of the school, initiatives are recent and have yet to make a full impression.

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is a significant amount of good teaching but this is not consistent throughout the school. Teachers manage their classes well and make learning enjoyable and relevant to pupils' lives. However, there is inconsistent challenge for more capable pupils, which restricts their progress.

The personal development and well-being of pupils are both good. Pupils enjoy their lessons and this is reflected in good attendance. The curriculum is satisfactory. It is enriched by a wide range of activities outside normal school hours and by interesting visits. There are some good opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity, practical and sporting skills. However, provision for more capable pupils, including gifted and talented pupils, is not yet consistent. The care, support and guidance of pupils are good. Pupils are very well cared for, feel safe and have a developed understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. Academic assessment has been substantially improved recently and systems are good. Teachers are taking more responsibility for measuring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning although there is still work to be done to make sure pupils' learning completely builds on what they already know.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior leaders are leading the school well. School improvement planning now involves all staff but targets lack precision, which prevents staff and governors readily evaluating the impact of initiatives on raising achievement. Subject leaders are satisfactory in their roles but systems for them to check pupils' progress are insufficiently rigorous.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards for boys in literacy and numeracy so they match those for girls by rigorous progress checks to identify what still needs to be achieved.
- Achieve consistency in the quality of teaching so that more capable pupils have every opportunity to make the best possible progress at all times.

- Sharpen the targets in the school improvement plan so that staff and governors can readily evaluate the impact of initiatives on raising achievement.
- Develop systems for subject leaders to check pupils' learning more rigorously so they have a greater impact on raising achievement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory. Their attainment on entry is broadly average and, by Year 4, they reach average standards in English and mathematics. The school has rightly recognised that more capable pupils should be making quicker progress.

Children make satisfactory progress in Reception and, on entry to Year 1 standards are similar to those expected for their age and exceed them in mathematics. Improvements to teaching and assessment are beginning to raise standards and achievement in Reception. However, more capable children could still achieve better in phonics and writing. Pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is good. By the end of Year 2, pupils reach above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Although standards in Year 2 have improved compared with those reached in the last two years there is still scope to increase the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in writing so they match those in reading and mathematics.

In Years 3 and 4, pupils' progress in relation to their starting points is satisfactory as the current Year 4 pupils entered Year 3 having reached only average standards in Key Stage 1. However, more capable pupils do best in reading and there is some underachievement for these pupils in writing and mathematics.

A history of underachievement for boys in the Foundation Stage is now being redressed. However, in the rest of the school standards for boys often lag behind those for girls to some extent despite the progress now being made. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress with good progress in Years 1 and 2.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are extremely well supported by the school's positive and Catholic ethos. They are keen to learn and say that they really enjoy being in school. Pupils are polite, well mannered and proud of their school. They say they cannot think of many things that they would like to change. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall with great strengths in spiritual and cultural development. The school's ethos and art and design make a substantial contribution to both of these areas. Pupils develop very good awareness of life in our multicultural society because they have been taught to value differences between people. Their contribution to the school and wider community is good, for example when they take responsibility as playground wardens or organise and care for the "Huff and Puff" playground equipment. Pupils also support the work of local, national and international charities. They build good decision making and teamwork skills and develop an awareness of the world of work and enterprise. Satisfactory standards and progress

in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) mean pupils have a sound base for their life ahead.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is a significant amount of good teaching but this is inconsistent across the school. High expectations, brisk pace and much challenge are features of the best lessons. All teachers manage pupils well and plan the steps in learning carefully. Recent improvements to assessment systems enable teachers to plan suitable work for the range of pupils' abilities. Teachers make good use of practical resources and make learning relevant by basing learning in real experiences and pupils respond enthusiastically. In Reception, there are appropriate opportunities for children to learn through play, focused group teaching and talking. Teachers make sure pupils are clear about the purpose of their learning and teach the appropriate vocabulary. However, in some lessons teachers' questioning and the pace of this is not fast enough for more capable pupils. More capable pupils also sometimes mark time when there is not enough adult intervention during group work. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, especially for those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum provides a broad range of learning opportunities enriched through a good range of visits, visitors and activities. Participation in music and dance festivals and sports events enhances pupils' progress and personal development. The curriculum for children in Reception is satisfactory and has recently been significantly improved. It fully meets requirements and both indoor and outdoor resources are used well to facilitate learning. Recent curriculum improvements in the rest of the school are also bringing more relevance to pupils' learning and making sure lessons interest both boys and girls. Some cross-curricular work is now making more effective use of curriculum time, for example, when pupils create textile 'food' collages for art and design and technology after learning about healthy foods in science. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. Provision for more capable pupils, including gifted and talented pupils, is patchy at present and the school has recognised the need to develop better arrangements.

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

#### **Grade: 3**

Good care, guidance and support contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school and their well-being. Adults are sensitive to and supportive of pupils, creating an environment in which they grow in confidence and feel safe. There are robust arrangements for safeguarding pupils and all requirements for health and safety are fully met. There are strong links with outside agencies to help vulnerable pupils. Especially good links with the middle school ease the transfer for pupils when they change schools. The school has worked hard and effectively to improve the monitoring of pupils' academic progress. Assessment procedures are now thorough with accurate and regular assessments. Improved assessment procedures are a major reason why pupils'

achievement is improving. These checks are used to set individual targets for pupils. Pupils are made aware of these but cannot always say what they need to do to improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The acting headteacher has brought vision and coordination to the work of the school. School leaders have managed the support provided by the local authority well, and have rapidly developed systems for securing school improvement. The school is beginning to monitor its work systematically and is building up a good range of evidence about its performance. This has led to honest, rigorous and accurate evaluation of what is working well and what is in need of improvement. This has been used to prepare a school improvement plan which focuses on key priorities for raising standards and achievement. However, imprecise targets make it difficult for staff and governors to fully evaluate the success of its actions.

The school has assigned teachers to lead the development of subjects. These teachers are knowledgeable and, by supporting and monitoring colleagues' teaching, they are increasingly successful in bringing about improvements to pupils' learning. However, whilst the acting headteacher rigorously checks pupils' assessments and progress, subject leaders have limited opportunities for this and so they are prevented from fully evaluating the impact of their work on improving achievement.

The governing body is supportive and has recently stepped up its role in holding the school to account. Its members are fully aware that they have been too inclined to listen to the school's view of itself. The deficit budget inherited by the acting headteacher has now been eliminated. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory, and progress has accelerated under recent leadership changes. This shows the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.





## 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>	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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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

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

<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>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Dear Children

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic First School, Dorchester DT1 2DD

Thank you for making us so welcome when we recently visited your school. You certainly seem to enjoy school and it was good to hear about all the extra activities in which you are involved. We think your school gives you a sound education and is getting better.

This is what we thought is particularly good about your school:

- Your headteacher is leading the school well and all the staff are working hard to help you.
- You behave well and are keen to learn.
- You reach good standards in reading, writing and mathematics by Year 2.
- You are kind to each other, carry out responsibilities willingly and help people less fortunate than yourselves.
- You have a good understanding of the importance of eating healthily and keeping fit and are good at keeping safe.
- Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and everyone takes very good care of you while you are in school.

Here are the things we are asking the school to work on now:

- Make sure standards for boys improve in English and mathematics.
- Make sure that those who sometimes find work easy are given more challenging tasks.
- Make better plans for staff and governors to check how well the school provides for you.
- Make better checks on how well you are learning.

You can help your teachers by making sure you continue to work hard at improving your reading, writing and mathematics.

Thank you again.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector