

St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 113897 |
| Local Authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 289762 |
| Inspection dates | 25–26 April 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Nasim Butt |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 489 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Wendy Holden |
| Headteacher | Carl Winch |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 May 2001 |
| School address | Puddletown Dorchester DT2 8SA |
| Telephone number | 01305 848293 |
| Fax number | 01305 848801 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The number of pupils attending the school has steadily increased over the last three years. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is close to the national average. Only a very small number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The school has just received confirmation that its bid for specialist science status has been successful. The school was, until very recently, part of a pilot project (directed by the Dorchester Area Schools' Partnership) for a two-year Key Stage 3. The new headteacher and senior leadership team have been in post for less than a year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, and one that is improving rapidly because the leadership team is strongly focused on raising pupil achievement. It has a very positive, welcoming ethos and the parents speak of it very warmly. As one parent put it, 'St Mary's is excellent at caring for the individual needs of each child.' Another satisfied parent remarked, 'There has been a marked improvement in my child's confidence and attitude towards work since joining the school. We couldn't ask for more.' The school has been successful in its bid for science college status as part of a consortium of three middle schools. The strong focus on science has resulted in pupils consistently making outstanding progress in this subject. The school's membership of the Dorchester Area Schools' Partnership (DASP) has made a significant contribution to developing teachers' skills, supported by a good curriculum, responsive to the needs of all pupils. Teaching and learning are good and, as a result, pupils achieve well and standards are high. Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and well above average at the end of Year 8. Progress in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory, though more able pupils, in particular, do not make as much progress as they could in English because, in some instances, teaching does not always plan for their needs. Progress is very good in Years 7 and 8, particularly in mathematics and science, where pupils make huge strides in their learning and achieve outstanding results. The better progress pupils make in Years 7 and 8 is linked with the quality of teaching which is more consistently good in these year groups. However, sometimes teachers' planning sets out what pupils are expected to do in the lesson rather than what they are expected to learn and insufficient attention is paid to the different needs of all of the learners in the class. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. This derives from the good care, guidance and support provided by the school. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are highly courteous and amiable individuals who show exemplary attitudes throughout the school. Regular Acts of Collective Worship make a significant contribution to pupils' moral and social development. The effective partnerships forged with other agencies also contribute to the good progress made by pupils with learning difficulties. Leadership and management are good. The concerted effort of the new senior leadership team has resulted in rapid progress being made in a short space of time. Self-evaluation is used effectively as a tool for improvement to raise standards of achievement further. This is reflected in the fact that the school has identified inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and put effective strategies in place to combat these. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection and gives good value for money. The rising trend in pupils' achievements, managed by the strong leadership team, demonstrates that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in English at the end of Year 6 by setting appropriately challenging work for pupils of all abilities, and especially the more able.
- Ensure that teachers plan for and explain to pupils what it is they are expected to learn and not just the tasks they are due to carry out.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at the end of Year 6 are above average. They are well above average at the end of Year 8. Standards are exceptionally high in science at the end of Years 6 and 8 and high in mathematics at the end of Year 8. Analysis of current school data shows that the slight dip in

standards in 2006 is on course to be reversed in 2007. Pupils join the school with standards that are above average and so their progress in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory. During Years 7 and 8, pupils make more rapid gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Hence, progress is very good and pupils achieve well. The school is rightly focusing on raising standards and achievement in writing, particularly that of boys, in Years 5 and 6. In Years 7 and 8, pupils make outstanding progress in mathematics and science. Apart from mathematics, where boys' achievement is slightly better than that of girls, there is no significant difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils. This reflects the inclusive nature of the school and its aim of ensuring that all achieve as well as possible. The school sets itself challenging targets based on a range of data. These targets are, in the main, consistently met. Pupils are well supported in their learning and report that they enjoy it. The most able pupils have the potential however, to make even more progress in English, particularly in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy all aspects of school life, particularly the sporting and musical opportunities and science lessons. They really appreciate the many different opportunities the school gives them to take part in a wide range of activities through lunchtime and after-school clubs. They are outstandingly well behaved in and out of class, and attendance levels are above the national average. In class, they work with concentration and enthusiasm. Though they leave the school with high levels of academic achievement and are involved in supporting local and national charities, opportunities are limited for pupils to make positive contributions to their local community. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to stay safe and to keep themselves healthy. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a very good understanding of right and wrong and feel confident that they are part of a community where adults take their concerns seriously whilst being approachable and friendly. They are aware of other faiths and cultures beside their own. Pupils take on a variety of roles around the school, some acting as trained listeners and a first line of support for anyone who feels bullied. A very well organised system of sport at all levels gives everyone the experience of teamwork. All pupils provide a warm welcome to visitors, happy to discuss their work and talk enthusiastically about their school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good relationships and purposeful attitudes characterise the learning. Pupils want to do their best and are keen to please their teachers. Thought provoking activities are often well planned to make topics interesting. For example, good empathetic diary writing was prompted by the effective use of a short film in a Year 5 literacy lesson. However, while learning is often fun, there is also a seriousness of purpose in classrooms and pupils' first-rate attitudes make a significant contribution to their good progress. Lessons are well structured with a range of different activities and good opportunities for review and consolidation at the end. Pupils with learning difficulties are provided with sensitive and well targeted support by teaching assistants. However, learning is not always exciting and challenging, especially in Years 5 and 6. Teacher's planning does not always set out what pupils of different abilities are expected to achieve and, as a result, levels of challenge, particularly for some of the more able pupils, are not consistent. In addition, too much attention is given to what pupils will be doing rather than what they will

be learning. As a result, pupils are not always sure what is expected of them and what they should be aiming for. Marking is good, and pupils appreciate being given targets for the next step in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a full and interesting curriculum that stimulates in pupils a desire to learn. All statutory requirements are met. The curriculum is tailored to allow pupils in Years 7 and 8 to complete their Key Stage 3 programmes of study in English, mathematics and science in two years without adversely affecting other areas of learning. Art, for example, continues to be a strength of the school, stimulating pupils' creative imagination. A significant review of the curriculum has been undertaken, although more planned opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics and English have yet to be implemented. The school provides a good range of after-school activities and lunchtime clubs which add to pupils' enjoyment and learning during their time at school. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are provided for well and so make good progress. The use of a specialist teacher and facilities for science enriches the curriculum in Years 5 and 6 and contributes to pupils' outstanding achievement in that subject. A strong emphasis on personal, social, health and citizenship education helps to ensure pupils understand the importance of staying safe and being healthy, and makes a good contribution to their personal development. Very effective links have been established with schools that are part of the Dorchester Area Schools' Partnership (DASP), and this has had a significant impact on improving the quality of provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The provision for care, guidance and support is good. Although the arrangements for the assessment of pupils' personal development are outstanding, academic assessment is satisfactory, as the school itself is aware. This is because the collation and analysis of assessment data is not as effective as it could be. The very detailed arrangements for pastoral care ensure that appropriate support strategies are provided for every child. Problems are quickly identified and dealt with. Staff work closely with parents and make very good use of outside agencies to provide additional support when necessary, for instance for pupils whose first language is not English. Robust procedures are in place to ensure the safety of all working within the school community and all legal safeguarding requirements are met. A variety of excellent systems for reward and celebration encourage all pupils to give of their best. Relationships are exceptionally good; staff really get to know their pupils and try their best to ensure that they feel happy and secure at school. The vast majority of parents are very appreciative of the way the school looks after their children, and the support they themselves receive. Arrangements for supporting pupils who join the school after Year 5 are well planned and ensure speedy integration.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school with integrity and shares with the senior team a determination that every pupil will achieve their potential. This has resulted in pupils making outstanding progress in mathematics and science by the end of Year 8 and achieving well in their personal development. Subject leaders are making increasingly significant and valuable contributions

in the drive to further raise standards. Although the impact of a number of recent initiatives has yet to be felt, much has been achieved since the last inspection in maintaining and improving standards. Self-evaluation procedures are good and governors and staff are fully involved in evaluating what is going well and what needs to be improved. Regular procedures for checking on teaching are in place. These have been used well to improve the quality of teaching in Years 7 and 8. The senior leadership team are now rightly concentrating on securing consistently good quality teaching across the school. Governors play a good part in both forward planning and monitoring. As a result, they know the school well. The new chair of governors, in particular, brings an incisive edge to her questioning of the school's provision and performance. Governors ensure legal requirements are met.

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Annex A

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? | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 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

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

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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 | 1 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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.

Annex A

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 | 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 |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

- 27 April 2007 Dear Pupils, St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8SA Thank you for the very useful contribution you made to this inspection. You were very helpful and extremely polite and courteous throughout the two days we spent at your school. Your school is a good school and works hard to provide you with a good education. All of you say you enjoy going to school and you like the school very much. Your behaviour is exemplary. Teaching is good and, as a result, you make good progress in your work, especially in mathematics and science in Years 7 and 8 where your progress is outstanding. The school does particularly well in caring for you and ensuring you stay healthy and safe. Through the curriculum it provides, it gives you many opportunities to build your self-esteem and confidence. School leaders do their best to ensure you achieve as well as you can. Links with the community are very good. We asked the school to work harder in two areas to make the school even better:
 - Help you to do better in English in Year 6 by making sure you all do work that stretches you – especially those of you capable of doing more difficult work.
 - Ensure that the work planned for you describes more clearly what you are expected to learn rather than what you are expected to do. You can help by taking a great interest in the progress you are making in all your subjects throughout the year and discussing with your subject teachers and tutors how you can improve your work. I wish you and your school the very best for the future. Nasim Butt Lead inspector