



Ilchester Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123735
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292766
Inspection dates 26–27 September 2006
Reporting inspector Julia Coop

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Somerton Road
School category	Community		Ilchester
Age range of pupils	4–11		Yeovil BA22 8JL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01935 840568
Number on roll (school)	309	Fax number	01935 840249
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Paul D'Arcy
		Headteacher	David Jay
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school serves a socially mixed area. The Infant and Junior departments are situated on separate sites a quarter of a mile apart. The majority of pupils attending the school are from families serving in the Armed Forces. A significant number of pupils have family members serving in areas of conflict. High proportions of pupils leave and join the school each year, often with little notice. Less than a third of the pupils complete all of their education at the school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Children start school with standards below national expectations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that successfully overcomes a number of challenging circumstances. The headteacher and staff's strong emphasis on valuing all pupils as individuals is the foundation of the school's work. The school has well-honed procedures to make newly arrived pupils feel very much at home and part of 'the family'. As a result, all new arrivals, whatever their need, settle quickly into the school. Parents appreciate that the school is a 'warm and caring' place to learn. This, together with very good relationships between staff and pupils, makes an effective platform for learning.

The same welcoming family atmosphere also provides the foundation for good behaviour. An interesting curriculum taught well, in a friendly, supportive climate successfully helps pupils grow in confidence, enjoy learning and behave well. Consequently, pupils display responsible attitudes, develop a mature community spirit and learn successfully how to make sensible and generally healthy choices. As a result of these many good features, pupils cultivate a deep respect for all members of staff, the wider community and each other, and are well prepared for future life. Children in Reception make good progress because staff are supportive and plan a range of meaningful activities. As a result, after only a few days in school the children are already settled and happy learners. At the end of Year 6, standards are above average. Overall, pupils make good progress and achieve well during their time in the school because teaching is good. Pupils like their teachers and describe them as 'friendly and helpful'. As a result, the great majority try hard to do well. However, several boys commented that they don't find writing 'interesting' and have difficulty with spelling. This may be a factor in the fact that, throughout the school, boys don't do as well as girls in writing.

The school collects a great deal of information about pupils' learning and the monitoring of school performance results in actions to make improvements being targeted in the right areas, such as to improve writing. Given the high pupil turnover, the current satisfactory arrangements to check on pupil progress require further development. Assessments are not carried out frequently enough to ensure that teachers always have sufficient up-to-date information to adjust their planning to help make teaching and learning even more effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards of boys' writing, ensuring spelling and other activities grab their interest.
- Monitor pupil performance more frequently to ensure that teachers have sufficient information to maximise learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils throughout the school, whatever their background, ability or starting point, achieve well. Children make good progress in Reception. Most meet the expected standards by the time they start in Year 1. The exception is in aspects of communication, language and literacy, where younger children do not quite reach the expected standards, especially the boys, who generally start with more limited skills. Current standards are above average and have improved in the last year. Throughout the school, pupils make much better progress in mathematics, science and reading than in writing. In particular, boys don't do as well as girls. This may be because they tend to find writing a challenging task; several said they find it 'hard to put down their ideas'. They lack confidence to spell more complex words and so use only a limited vocabulary. Consequently, some boys' written work lacks adventure and creativity.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

One important reason why pupils do well is because they have good attitudes to learning and their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. The school successfully produces pupils who are friendly, self-confident and well able to make sensible and safe choices. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and attendance is excellent.' All pupils have the opportunity to be a 'buddy' for new pupils, who say that 'you settle in quickly because it's a very sociable and friendly place'. Although pupils know about healthy eating, some still bring too many chocolate snacks to school. There is a real community spirit in both school sites. Older pupils, for example, have trained to become 'Play Leaders,' ensuring younger pupils play safely. Pupils are responsible and participate well in decision making through the School Council. As a result of these many opportunities to take responsibility, pupils are becoming thoughtful young citizens who are well prepared for the future. Consequently, their personal development and well-being are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Another reason why pupils do well is because of the supportive teaching approach. Children get off to a good start in Reception because routines are well organised and children feel safe and secure. Throughout, very good relationships, together with lots of praise and encouragement and effective use of teaching assistants, ensure pupils are well motivated. This successfully helps to ensure that newly arrived pupils quickly get down to learning. Teachers now plan interesting activities, such as using film clips, digital photographs and interactive whiteboards, to capture the pupils' imagination

and make learning more interesting and writing even more meaningful; but it is too soon to have improved the boys' writing skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy the good and interesting curriculum. A particularly wide range of additional activities such as French, sports, construction and needlework enriches pupils' learning experiences. The Reception curriculum is good, but the school has identified correctly that more use could be made of the outdoor area to support learning. The school has begun to plan meaningful links between different subjects to make writing more interesting. For example, younger pupils are using their early mapping skills to write instructions to guide 'Shrek' to rescue the princess. The school is planning to extend meaningful links to help pupils understand how what they are learning fits together. Community links and the use of local facilities are harnessed particularly well to support learning. For example, pupils regularly use the indoor pool at the local air base. A good range of visits and visitors, including a residential trip to London and a visit to a Hindu temple, successfully extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, support and guidance are a further factor in the school's success. By getting this aspect right, the school ensures that new pupils feel welcomed, supported and have the confidence to do well. Excellent pastoral links with the local air base and other external agencies are used to the full to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities as well as vulnerable pupils receive all the help they need. Pupils receive good academic guidance on a day-to-day basis. They know that their teachers help them if they are 'stuck' and good quality marking points out to them what they need to work on so progress is good. However, whilst pupils have individual learning targets, not all pupils know them sufficiently well because they are not consistently used in all classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leading and managing this school is made more complex because of the split site. In addition, the school often faces the sudden arrival of groups of new pupils. It usually has little prior warning of actual pupil numbers, or of their ages. This makes it more difficult to plan ahead. Despite these hurdles, leadership and management are good. The headteacher sets the tone for the caring and supportive manner that filters throughout the school. The monitoring of pupil progress and whole-school performance requires fine tuning. The current system produces a wealth of data at the end of each year but not enough during the year to keep track of how groups of pupils are doing, given that a high proportion of pupils may not complete the school year. It means that teaching and learning may occasionally not be adjusted sufficiently to meet changing

circumstances. However, staff work hard and the curriculum has improved considerably, making learning more meaningful and interesting. Coupled with a strong team spirit, an effective governing body, astute financial management and very close working relationships with the armed forces and other agencies, the school has a secure and satisfactory capacity to develop further.

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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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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

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

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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	2

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	3
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 so much for the friendly way you chatted to us when we visited. We really enjoyed seeing your smiling faces when you were hard at work and play. We liked these things most:

- you are confident and sensible and you behave well
- the teachers and teaching assistants help you make good progress
- we were impressed with the way you look after each other and warmly welcome new pupils
- you enjoy all the clubs and the special events
- everyone takes great care of you. We know you like keeping fit and active and like helping around the school.

Everyone works hard to make Ilchester a special place to learn. We know your parents think it is a good school and we agree with them, but there are still some things that can be done to make the school even better. These are:

- the teachers need to find even more ways to make writing more interesting, especially for the boys
- they need to check more often on how well you are learning so that they can help you make even better progress.

We hope you go on enjoying all of the interesting activities which your school provides and keep trying hard in lessons.