

Exford Church of England First School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 123756 |
| Local Authority | Somerset |
| Inspection number | 292774 |
| Inspection date | 10 July 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Tom Simpson |

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

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| Type of school | First |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 4-9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 30 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Chris White |
| Headteacher | June McGavin |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 March 2001 |
| School address | Exford Minehead TA24 7PP |
| Telephone number | 01643 831365 |
| Fax number | 01643 831365 |

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|--------------------------|--------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small first school serving a rural community. Nearly all the pupils come from White British backgrounds and none is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Attainment on entry varies from year to year but is below average overall, especially in language skills. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has recently federated (formed close links) with another local first school and the middle school that the pupils move on to. It has just been awarded national 'Dyslexia Friendly School' status.

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 popular school provides a good education for its pupils. The headteacher, staff and governors are committed to raising academic standards while still striving hard to provide an interesting and enriched curriculum and a high level of personal care. The school has a strong ethos and prides itself in helping to develop well-rounded pupils who are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The pupils are very well known to staff as individuals and effective care, guidance and support ensure that their personal development and well-being are good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and they are very well behaved in all situations. They have positive attitudes towards one another and relationships are very good at all levels. The pupils are generally keen to do well but a minority do not have high enough expectations for themselves and do not take enough initiative in their learning. Nearly all parents express confidence in the way the school provides for their children. One parent summed up these positive views by writing: 'We feel that our daughter had the best possible start to her schooling at Exford.' Another commented: 'As a parent, I have been able to have an open, honest and close working relationship with the school, my views are always listened to and both my children are valued as individuals in their own right.'

Teaching and learning are good and an enriched curriculum is provided, although information and communication technology (ICT) is not used effectively enough to support learning in other subjects. Good provision for children in the Reception Year ensures that they get off to a good start in their education. This good progress is maintained as pupils proceed through the school. By the time they leave, they reach standards that are usually at least average and their achievement has been good. However, despite the school's substantial efforts and recent improvements, achievement in writing is still not as strong as in other subjects. Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that these pupils make good progress against their individual learning targets.

Leadership and management are effective and good systems for self-evaluation inform the school's developmental strategies well. The school's recent move towards a closer working relationship with other local schools, including a joint governing body, is already having a positive impact on its provision. The management of ICT, however, is underdeveloped and this is having a negative impact on provision for the subject. The school has improved well since the last inspection. For example, planning for children in the Foundation Stage is now effective. As a result of the commitment of staff at all levels and the potential of the new organisational arrangements, the school has good capacity to improve further in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' ability to work independently.
- Extend the use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum, but particularly to raise standards in writing throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In very small schools such as this one, standards inevitably vary from year to year according to the abilities of different groups of pupils. However, in this school, they are usually at least average overall by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 4, and this represents good achievement.

Children's below average skills on joining Reception are built on well as they move through the school, but this good progress is not consistent within subjects. For example, progress is stronger in reading than it is in writing. The school has taken steps to address this situation and it is beginning to get better, with more able pupils in Year 4, for example, now doing well.

In 2006, the Year 2 national assessment results were slightly above average. Preliminary results for 2007 are lower and likely to be below average, but as this year group included a significant number of pupils with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the results still represent good progress. The school's tracking data and the results of non-statutory assessments show that standards in this year's more typical Year 4 are currently above average in reading, mathematics and science but slightly below average in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their lessons and like coming to school. They feel safe. They appreciate the advantages of being in a small school and value the opportunities to discuss sensitive issues as a class group, the provision of a worry box and a 'friendship bench', saying: 'This is a nice school because the teachers understand us.' The pupils are pleased that the school is working towards 'Healthy School' status and have a good understanding of the need for healthy eating and physical exercise. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Attendance is now above average. The pupils enjoy taking responsibility through, for example, helping those less well off than themselves. The pupils themselves suggested supporting 'Children in Need'. They contribute to the school's development through the completion of questionnaires and through informal discussions with staff. They feel that they were a contributory force in gaining a new play area for younger children at the school. In lessons, however, some pupils are passive learners and do not take enough control over their own learning.

Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced well through links with the local church and through being encouraged to appreciate the consequences of their actions and those of others. They gain an understanding of other cultures through religious education lessons and visiting speakers from the wider community. They are successfully developing skills such as social responsibility and empathy which are preparing them well for the adult world and can distinguish effectively between right and wrong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good quality of the teaching and learning is having a significant impact on pupils' achievement and their personal development. A particularly strong aspect of the teaching is the positive and effective way the pupils are managed. As a result, they are particularly well behaved and keen to please. From time to time, however, discussions are dominated by the teacher and less assertive pupils are not involved enough. The pupils are provided with interesting activities and the work they are set is challenging and well matched to their needs. The school is beginning to develop a form of teaching which reflects the different learning styles of individual pupils, and is appropriately planning to extend this further to encourage pupils to hone their independent learning skills. There are robust procedures in place to assess and track pupils' progress as they move through the school. Until recently, these have had more impact on achievement in reading and mathematics than in writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

As well as having a good regard for pupils' basic skills, the school provides an enriched curriculum that encourages a love of learning. For example, out-of-lesson sports clubs and a wide range of visits and visitors support learning across a good range of subjects. The local environment is used well and the school is exploring ways of developing this further. French has been introduced in Years 3 and 4. Good links with partner schools support the curriculum. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 3 and 4 visited the middle school to attend a music day. Careful planning ensures that the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met well. The school is currently in the process of updating its equipment to support better use of ICT across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The level of personal care is excellent and has a very good impact on pupils' personal development. Being a small school, they are exceptionally well known as individuals to all staff and are provided with very good pastoral guidance. The pupils themselves say that they would feel comfortable in going to any of the adults at the school if they had a problem. Robust procedures are in place for child protection, health and safety, and safe staff recruitment. Good links with outside agencies such as the Family Advice Liaison Officer support pupils well. The process of setting targets is used effectively in English to guide pupils on what they need to do next to improve their work. It is not, however, so well developed in mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well by teachers and support staff, and this contributes effectively to the progress they make.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has been going through a significant period of organisational change and has an unusual management structure. It has recently joined a federation of schools, which includes the middle school to which most pupils transfer and another first school, and has a joint governing body. This is intended to ameliorate the staffing and curricular issues that are often associated with small schools. It is already having a positive effect with the schools, for example, discussing joint projects to enhance curricular provision and working on ways to share facilities and expertise. Funding has been obtained to enhance ICT links between the schools. Leadership of the school is shared between a part-time headteacher and an acting headteacher who takes responsibility for the school when the part-time headteacher is not there. Both have clearly defined roles, shared planning time and a high level of commitment to the school's continuing development. The arrangement works well in practice and is having a positive impact on all aspects of the school's provision.

Robust monitoring by the headteacher and other staff ensures that the school has a good appreciation of its strengths and areas for further development. For example, the school was aware of weaknesses in writing and put in place a number of strategies to improve the situation, although these have not yet had a full impact on standards. The management of ICT remains a weakness. The new governing body is highly committed to school improvement and is

enthusiastic about the potential of the new arrangements. It has already come a long way in establishing the necessary structures to make this a success.

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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 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

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| 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

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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 | 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.

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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Exford First School, Minehead, TA24 7PP

Thank you for making me so welcome at your school. I enjoyed meeting you and hearing about your work. This letter is to tell you of my findings. The school provides you with a good education.

Here are some of the other things I found:

- You are making good progress in your work and reaching average standards, although your writing is not as good as your reading.
- You are very well behaved and your personal development is good. For example, you know how to lead healthy lifestyles.
- You are very well cared for by the adults at the school.
- You are taught well and are regularly given interesting things to do, both in and out of lessons.
- The headteacher and other staff are working hard to make the school even better.

Here are some of the things I have asked the school to do next:

- Encourage you to aim higher in terms of what you can do by yourselves in your lessons.
- Improve the use of computers to support your learning in all subjects, but particularly in writing.

I hope that you will all work hard to make sure that you do as well in writing as you do in the other subjects.

Thank you again for your help.

With best wishes

Tom Simpson Lead Inspector