



Crowcombe Church of England VA First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123830
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292807
Inspection date 16 January 2007
Reporting inspector Carole Skinner

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

Type of school	First	School address	Crowcombe
School category	Voluntary aided		Taunton
Age range of pupils	4-9		TA4 4AA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01984 618273
Number on roll (school)	38	Fax number	01984 618346
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	R Williams
		Headteacher	A Deane
Date of previous school inspection	18 February 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small village school which draws its pupils from many of the surrounding towns and villages. Very few live in Crowcombe itself. Pupils come from a wide variety of social backgrounds. There are very few pupils in each year group. Children's attainment on entry to the school varies considerably from year to year, but is broadly similar to that seen in most schools. All of the pupils are of White British origin. The school was federated with Stogumber C of E First School in September 2005. The two schools share the same headteacher and governing body. They were both inspected on the same day as part of a pilot co-ordinated inspection, which resulted in two separate reports. The school holds the Healthy School Award and has qualified for the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

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 which is highly thought of by parents and the local community. Its federation with Stogumber First School has enhanced pupils' learning through, for example, a wider range of expertise amongst staff and more opportunities for enriching the curriculum. As one parent put it, 'The federation of Crowcombe and Stogumber is flourishing with obvious benefits to children, staff and parents alike.' Crowcombe offers pupils a warm and welcoming family atmosphere where teachers know individual children well and are able to cater successfully for their needs. Regular assessments and careful tracking of pupils' progress enable teachers to plan work that builds on each pupil's existing knowledge and skills. In this way teachers ensure that pupils make good progress in their learning.

As a consequence of this personalised approach to learning, pupils achieve well. Although standards vary from year to year, owing to the small numbers of pupils involved, they are generally above average. Standards in writing are not quite as good as those in reading and mathematics. This is because pupils are not yet using a sufficiently rich vocabulary or more complex sentence structures to express their ideas. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage, especially in developing early literacy and number skills. As there are so few Reception children, they are taught in a class alongside Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. They do not always have enough opportunities for independent learning through self-selected activities.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident in their enthusiastic response in lessons, their positive attitudes to learning and their very good behaviour. Several pupils said they enjoy school because 'the teachers make lessons fun'. This and the teachers' high expectations of all pupils are key ingredients in the good teaching, leading to effective learning. Close collaboration with the teachers at Stogumber brings a wider range of knowledge and expertise to bear on planning the curriculum, which offers pupils a good, broad range of experiences. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good because they sit firmly at the heart of the school's strong Christian ethos. Pupils are cared for very well and receive good quality academic support and guidance that helps to boost their achievement.

The good leadership and management keep school improvement at the top of their agenda. Regular checks on how well the school is doing lead to prompt action to remedy any shortcomings. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection and staff and governors have a clear view of how to make the school even better in the future. Effective teamwork and a strong desire to strengthen the federation and ensure both schools' continuing viability give Crowcombe a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend pupils' ability to use imaginative language and complex grammatical structures in order to increase their achievement in writing.

- Provide more opportunities for Reception children to learn independently through choosing activities for themselves.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school's performance in the Year 2 national tests does not always reflect the achievement of the pupils because the statistics tend to be skewed by the small numbers involved. The school's records clearly show that the majority of pupils make good progress and achieve well in relation to their starting points. Standards in Year 4 are significantly higher than expectations. They are slightly above average in Year 2, although not as high as in 2006, when they were exceptionally high. This difference illustrates the wide variations between year groups. The few pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because they receive skilled support. Pupils achieve well in the Foundation Stage, where most children reach or exceed the goals expected by the end of their first year.

Writing has been identified by the school as a main focus for improvement because pupils are not making such good progress in this subject as they are in reading and mathematics. Some good strategies have been introduced to raise standards, but these are still being refined and developed. A recognition of the role played by speaking and listening, drama and role play in developing writing skills has led to an increased emphasis on these aspects of learning. This is already beginning to have an impact, as was evident in the imaginative poems written by pupils in Years 3 and 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Close links with the church, a very good programme of personal and social education and an exciting partnership with Tanjeh School in The Gambia all make a significant contribution to pupils' all-round personal development. Pupils show respect for others, are kind and helpful and sensitive to each other's feelings. Their very good attendance reflects how much they enjoy school. They say they like being in a small school because it makes them feel safe.

Pupils are keen to explain that they eat healthy food and know why this is important. They take part in a good range of physical activities, including weekly sports coaching and exploring the adventure playground. Pupils are beginning to understand wider issues such as conservation and recycling. One suggested placing notices by every light switch to encourage pupils and staff not to waste electricity. Pupils willingly accept responsibility for jobs around the school and show initiative in making suggestions for improving aspects of the school. These are followed up by the school council, which also represents the school in the West Somerset Pupil Parliament. Pupils have organised projects such as running a Fair Trade stall to raise funds for Tanjeh

School. The school is aware of the need to provide more opportunities of this sort to equip pupils with a wider range of life skills.

Careful planning, which sets out clearly what pupils are expected to learn, is a key factor in the pupils' good achievement. As the pupils rightly say, teachers make learning fun, and this engages boys and girls alike in lessons. Teachers remind pupils of the purpose of the lesson as it progresses, which helps to keep them on track. They have also begun to involve pupils in assessing how well they have understood new ideas, although this is a fairly recent initiative.

Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and provide work that challenges and extends them. This is informed by regular assessments of pupils' attainment and challenging end-of-year targets. Teachers group pupils effectively to maximise their learning, planning work at different levels of difficulty for all of the pupils in each class. This sometimes involves pupils moving between the two classes to take advantage of further challenge or additional support. Information and communication technology is used imaginatively in some lessons to add another dimension to learning, but teachers' expertise in this field is variable.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

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Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned to match pupils' needs and interests and makes effective use of the local area. It focuses particularly well on developing skills that can be applied across a range of subjects. For example, there is a current focus on extending pupils' problem-solving skills, not just in mathematics but in tackling real-life situations that are not confined by subject boundaries. This drive to make more meaningful links

across the curriculum is helping teachers to be more creative in planning how pupils will learn. Good progress has been made, but there is still scope for improvement, for example, in teaching literacy skills through other subjects.

Pupils enjoy a number of shared activities with their friends at Stogumber, such as making Anglo-Saxon houses and Celtic banners. Children in Class 2 have the opportunity to participate in a summer camp along with two other schools, and all pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Reception children also enjoy a well-planned curriculum, but the constraints of catering for three year groups in one class tend to limit opportunities for them to choose their own activities and learn through play and exploration.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are valued as individuals at Crowcombe and all adults who work with them take great care to ensure that they feel happy and safe. Warm and supportive relationships give pupils confidence that they will be listened to. Recognition for good work and kind deeds builds pupils' self-esteem. Regular assessments, targets for individual pupils and careful tracking of their progress all contribute well to pupils' good achievement. Pupils' involvement in setting targets and checking their own progress is gradually being developed. Good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is mostly focused in the classroom and makes effective use of the expertise of a good team of teaching assistants. Additional external support is sought where appropriate.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management have successfully tackled the shortcomings identified by the previous inspection. Assessment procedures are much more effective and children in the Foundation Stage now have a secure outdoor area and a better range of resources to support their physical development. Federation with Stogumber has presented opportunities for both schools to benefit from the combined expertise of staff. For example, the two schools are seeking ways to improve provision by working together in curriculum teams. These are currently under review following the appointment of new teachers at Stogumber. All staff play an important role in monitoring the quality of provision which, in turn, contributes well to the school improvement plan. Governors give good support to staff and are instrumental in determining the future direction of both schools. They have identified the need to refine their monitoring in order to form a clearer understanding of pupils' achievement.

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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?	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

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	1

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	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	1

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	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

Thank you for helping me when I visited your school. I enjoyed meeting you and finding out all about all the things that make Crowcombe a good school. Joining together with Stogumber has given you some exciting new opportunities, such as sports coaching. It also helps the teachers because they are able to share ideas and plan work together. I was very pleased to see how well you behave and how much you enjoy school.

These are some of the other things that are good about your school:

- You make good progress and achieve good standards.
- Your teachers make lessons fun for you and plan activities that make you work hard.
- They keep a close eye on how well you are doing and give you extra help if you need it.
- You learn about lots of interesting things, including information about the area where you live.
- All of the adults take good care of you and this helps you to feel safe.
- You try hard to eat a healthy diet and take part in lots of energetic outdoor activities.
- The school council makes good suggestions about how to improve the school.
- The people who run the school always keep looking for ways to make it even better.

Even good schools have things that could be improved. Your school knows exactly what needs to be done and the school has been asked to improve two of the things they are already working on:

- You are not doing quite as well in writing as in reading and mathematics so I have asked the school to improve your writing even more. You can help by trying to use really exciting words and by making your sentences more interesting to read.
- Those of you who are in your first year at school get off to a good start, especially in learning to read, write and count. I have asked the school to give you more time to choose your own activities so that you can learn more through exploring.

Keep up the good work and enjoy the rest of your time at Crowcombe!

With very best wishes,