

Courthill First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113688
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	311338
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Burghart

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	358
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Andrew
Headteacher	Jane Davies
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2004
School address	Courthill Road Parkstone Poole BH14 9HL
Telephone number	01202 747381
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Age group	4–8
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large oversubscribed first school drawing pupils from a wide area. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds. All pupils are fluent in English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Staff would be the first to say that this does not mean perfect. Children make the most of the excellent start that high quality teaching and support give them in Reception. They make exceptionally good progress throughout the school, achieve well and reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave for the middle school. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds do very well, but girls in particular do much better in mathematics than those in most other first schools. In a big improvement since the last inspection, standards are above what is expected in information and communication technology (ICT), fully justifying the injection of new resources and expertise. A measure of the school's commitment to further improvement is that senior leaders have identified that boys do relatively less well in writing than they do in reading and mathematics. The staff are determined to improve performance despite knowing that this is only a relative weakness and that boys already reach standards appreciably better than the national average. Whilst there are still some elements that could be improved, teaching is outstanding and the main reason for pupils' success. Teachers' planning is excellent and ensures that the curriculum strikes the right balance between basic skills, developing cross-curricular opportunities and encouraging pupils' ability to solve problems. Learning objectives are clear in every lesson and pupils' performance is tracked and evaluated against expectations. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning.

This is a happy school. Everyone benefits because relationships are outstanding. Staff take excellent care of pupils and make very good use of assessment information. Targets are set to show how work can be improved and to challenge individuals, and the school in general, to higher levels. Pupils respond extremely well by trying hard. They obviously enjoy school; no wonder attendance is above average. Personal development is outstanding with pupils showing great consideration for the feelings and beliefs of others. Behaviour management, which was criticised in 2004, is now a strength. A consistent approach, alongside the commitment to raising pupils' self-esteem, results in nearly all pupils behaving well virtually all the time.

Outstanding leadership and management, involving not only the headteacher and governors but also staff in their senior and middle manager roles, ensure that the school knows what its strengths are. There is a very productive partnership with parents, other schools and outside agencies. Everyone contributes to monitoring, evaluating and forward planning. Excellent teamwork, coupled with tried and tested systems and procedures, underpins an outstanding capacity for further development. Although a very small minority have some reservations, the overwhelming majority of parents clearly value not only the school's academic success, but also the way the 'whole child' is nurtured. 'Fabulous school!' and 'We couldn't want for more!' are typical comments.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to a flying start in their first year at school as a result of the outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage. The carefully structured and extremely attractive learning environment provides a wide range of experiences that enable pupils to establish themselves as independent learners very quickly. Children make outstanding progress. This is achieved by making use of detailed assessments to find children's starting points and by adeptly matching teaching and activities to each individual's needs. This applies to all areas of learning but is

most notable in communication, language and literacy where a few children begin school with below expected skills. From the outset, specific help is also provided for those who need to catch up. The creative curriculum motivates and engages children extremely well. A range of strategies, very descriptively referred to as 'sparkly starters' and 'fantastic finishes', helps children to become engrossed in their learning. The high expectations of all adults within the Foundation Stage team mean that children's personal development is exceptional and enables individuals to reach standards well above those usually found at this age.

What the school should do to improve further

- In the context of this outstanding school, standards are significantly above average and the following is only a 'weakness' relative to the school.
- Make sure that boys perform as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards at the end of Years 2 and 3 are significantly above average and have been so for the last four years when the school was last inspected. Children make outstanding progress in Reception from slightly above what is expected when they first enter the school to well above average when they join Year 1. Strong progress and outstanding achievement continue throughout the school with pupils attaining markedly better than the national profile between Year 1 and the end of Year 3. Girls' performance in mathematics is much better than in most other first schools. More able pupils do very well in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a relative weakness in boys' writing compared with the same pupils' performance in reading and mathematics. However, standards are, nevertheless, well above national expectations and the school is already successfully working on further improvements.

Standards in ICT, found lacking in 2004, are now above average with skills being effectively used and developed across the curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school with outstanding pupils' personal development. Multicultural awareness is very good for this age group. Pupils learn to appreciate different customs and lifestyles, and benefit considerably from the experience of those from minority ethnic groups. Pupils very much enjoy school and obviously feel secure. Only two parents report that their children do not like school. Pupils show that they are able to stay safe and act responsibly. Their behaviour is outstanding, notwithstanding the few pupils who could, and occasionally do, present problems. Pupils have a well developed sense of right and wrong and show excellent attitudes to their work and school in general. Outstanding relationships make learning possible with pupils not afraid to make mistakes and then learn from them. Pupils know how to stay healthy and keep fit and enthusiastically take part in physical education and the many extra-curricular opportunities the school has to offer.

Positive attitudes towards school are reflected in the above average attendance rates and the low incidence of unauthorised absence, which is entirely due to holidays quite rightly not sanctioned in term time. Despite the school council having too few opportunities to manage its own affairs and allow councillors to show the independence they are capable of, pupils make a very good contribution to school life. For example, they help set class and school rules and

act as monitors and playground buddies. There are especially good links with the local community and pupils are very active in their support for charities. An excellent capacity to work with other pupils, well above average literacy and numeracy skills, and above expected ICT capabilities prepare pupils extremely well for future study and for life in general.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is good in nearly all respects and is outstanding in some significant elements. The impact that it has on pupils' learning is outstanding and, as a result, standards are high and pupils make excellent progress. Highlights are in the way teachers question and support pupils, giving them the opportunity to explain their strategies and express their opinions. Teachers value pupils' work and are extremely good at celebrating it in vibrant, high quality displays. Classrooms are well organised and pupils are well managed. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the quality of teaching, making very good use of teachers' planning and taking a full part in recording what pupils know, understand and can do. Work is pitched effectively at different ability levels with particular success in how more able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported. Teachers' marking effectively shows pupils how they can improve their work. It makes good links with pupils' individual targets and the learning objectives which are made clear in all lessons. Increasing the pace and challenge of learning in a very small minority of sessions, and making homework more consistent, are areas for further development which the school is already working at.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school works very hard to tailor the curriculum to the needs of its pupils. The strong emphasis placed on personal, social, health and citizenship education means that pupils develop extremely positive attitudes towards learning. Throughout the school, the ways in which resources are made accessible encourage pupils to take initiative, make choices and develop independent learning skills. Pupils' basic skills, particularly in literacy and ICT, are developed very successfully across the curriculum with lots of opportunities to make learning relevant. Structured theme activities, such as role play, contribute very well to the development of communication and mathematical skills. The 'travel agency' is especially popular! Very good use is made of staff expertise to teach subjects such as music and sport. An excellent programme of visits, visitors and the use of the local environment enrich the curriculum. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is promoted particularly well, especially through creative arts provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding pastoral and physical care makes sure pupils are safe and underpins excellent personal development. Procedures to maintain health and safety are extremely effective. All required checks are carried out and appropriately monitored. Although the success criteria of some individual education plans are not sharp enough, support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as for the few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, is very successful in making sure these pupils achieve as well as their classmates.

Academic guidance is very successfully founded on accurate assessments of how well pupils are doing and an analysis of what they need to do next. This has a major impact on pupils' achievement. Staff make excellent use of their awareness of pupils' needs to set targets for individuals, and the school as a whole, to keep up the momentum required to maintain high standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Teachers, teaching assistants, middle and senior managers are led extremely well by the headteacher as an excellent team. Together, they guarantee the school's educational direction. They rigorously monitor and evaluate what is successful, and identify areas of relative weakness. The school's self-evaluation, although over modest in some respects, is incisive and is effective in driving improvements. There are notable strengths in the management of the Foundation Stage and, in a huge improvement since the last inspection, in the leadership and management of ICT.

Strategic management is particularly good with funds used very effectively to provide staff and resources. Governors play an excellent part in the running of the school. They are regularly in school monitoring first hand the impact of decisions made on pupils' learning. The ways in which they support and challenge the school are outstanding. Behaviour management was criticised in the report of 2004. However, there are now clear procedures in place. Pupils' outstanding behaviour is a testament to the success of a consistent approach across the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

4 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Courthill First School, Poole BH14 9HL

Thank you for all your help and your warm welcome when we inspected your school. A special thank you to the school council and to those pupils who in class, and at lunchtime, told us about life at Courthill.

You are very fortunate to go to an outstanding school. It is not perfect, but staff and governors are working hard to try to make it so!

- Here are some of the highlights.
- You make exceptional progress and reach standards that are much better than in most other first schools in reading, writing, maths and ICT.
- Staff take excellent care of you and are especially good at helping you to be responsible and grow into level headed young people.
- You are particularly well taught by teachers and teaching assistants who are doing their best to make work interesting and, at the same time, make it possible for you to reach your targets.
- You behave very well.
- The school is led and managed extremely well by the headteacher, staff and governors as an excellent team.
- This is what the school should do to be even better.
- Make sure that boys do as well in writing as they do in reading and maths. (Not forgetting that boys as well as girls already reach standards better than those in most other schools!)

The school is doing extremely well. You can help to it to keep up the good work by continuing to try hard and listening to what teachers tell you about how to improve your work. Good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart Lead inspector