

Cerne Abbas Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113759
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311362
Inspection dates	27–28 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Chris Nye HMI

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Cochrane
Headteacher	Helen Williams
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 0001
School address	Duck Stree Dorchester DT2 7LA
Telephone number	01300 341319
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cerne Abbas First School is a much smaller school than average. There are two mixed age classes and one year 2 class during the mornings and two mixed age classes during the afternoon. Pupils transfer to middle schools at the end of Year 4. The school serves the village of Cerne Abbas and the surrounding area, which, although mainly socially advantaged, contains pockets of rural deprivation. The school population is almost all White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average. The headteacher has been in post for just over a term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is providing a satisfactory education to its pupils, and it is well placed to improve in the future. The new headteacher and the governors are effective and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Recent improvements have resulted from detailed monitoring and analysis, and these are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of education. The school makes effective use of external services, such as the educational psychology service, to support learning.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average, but there has been a weakness in mathematics for some time, particularly in Key Stage 1. The school is aware of this and has already put in place initiatives to tackle the problem, but they are too recent to have had an impact on standards. Satisfactory teaching means that pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, although a stronger focus on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science means that progress accelerates in Key Stage 2. The assessment of pupils' progress during lessons is underdeveloped. As a result, lessons sometimes lack pace and challenge and pupils can lose concentration. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school because their needs are identified early and they are given good support.

A particular strength of the school lies in pupils' personal development and well-being. The key to this, as recognised and appreciated by parents, is the high quality of care, guidance and support provided for all pupils. Pupils feel cherished and in turn are keen to play their part in terms of contributing to the school and the wider community. Pupils have an especially keen awareness of how to live safe and healthy lives because of a wide range of planned opportunities to take part in regular physical exercise and a strong and consistent focus on safety.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. A wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities enriches it, but there is not enough balance between the different subjects. Planning has improved since the last inspection, although it lacks sufficient detail. This is because the management of the curriculum is at an early stage and is not yet having a full impact on improving the quality of what is provided.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of children and they make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning, although progress is slower in communication, language and literacy. The recent support provided by an external teaching mentor is having a positive impact on teaching and learning. The curriculum takes suitable account of the needs of the youngest children in the mixed age class and they enjoy coming to school. Children work and play well together and are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. There are good arrangements to ensure their health and safety, and links with parents and pre-school providers are effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics.
- Raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that lessons consistently challenge all groups of pupils to do well.

- Improve the quality of curriculum planning and management.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall, with some strengths, particularly amongst the older pupils. In the Foundation Stage, children make satisfactory progress from slightly below average starting points and achieve expected levels in most areas, particularly in personal, social and emotional development and in physical development. This is an improving trend. In Key Stage 1, pupils continue to make satisfactory progress, achieving expected levels in reading and writing and slightly below in mathematics. The school has recognised the need to improve standards further, particularly in mathematics, and has introduced a number of improvements recently to deal with this, for example by making better use of electronic whiteboards to support teaching. These changes are beginning to have a positive effect, but it is too soon to see their impact on pupils' overall progress and standards.

In Key Stage 2, the pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics and good progress in English and science. In mathematics, standards have been lower, but recent innovations in the curriculum are beginning to show an improvement in the depth of pupils' mathematical understanding. By the time they transfer to middle schools at the end of Year 4, pupils are working at or above the standard expected for their age, especially in English.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. This is because of the early identification of their needs and the good quality support that they receive from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are confident, polite and friendly. They enjoy coming to school and their attitudes towards their work and each other are very good. This is illustrated by how well older and younger pupils play together. Behaviour is good in the playground, and mainly good in class, although a few are too easily distracted from their work. Parents are very pleased with the supportive ethos of the school. One commented that 'the school feels like an extended family'.

Pupils' awareness of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe is excellent. The school has been successful in overcoming barriers, such as the lack of a school hall, to provide a wide range of sport and regular physical exercise. There are well-designed programmes to make pupils aware of the dangers of drugs. Very good use is made of external support, such as the school health and dental services, to help pupils learn about how to keep healthy.

Pupils' social, moral and cultural development is good. A strong emphasis is placed on valuing and respecting each other. Teaching about other cultures is a developing area and cultural diversity is celebrated through such activities as music workshops and the school's involvement in an Eastern European festival. Their spiritual development is satisfactory, but planning for assemblies does not always reflect the needs of pupils sufficiently.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community. The school council plays an active part in improving facilities, ensuring the success of the playground 'buddy' system

and organising fund-raising events. Pupils are keen to take part in community events such as the village fair and pantomime. Good team working and literacy skills are supporting pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being, and there are emerging strengths in developing information and communication technology (ICT). Numeracy skills are less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The best teaching is exemplified by good planning for different ages and abilities, good use of electronic whiteboards and teaching assistants to support the learning and good management of pupils' behaviour. However, the less effective lessons lack pace and challenge and some pupils do not concentrate hard enough on what they are learning.

The marking of pupils' work is good because it is detailed, positive and provides accurate judgements on progress towards their individual targets, which are suitably challenging. Systems to assess and track pupils' progress are extensive but the link between assessment and the planning of lessons is not always sufficiently clear, so that opportunities to teach what pupils need to learn next are sometimes missed.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are taught well because their progress is accurately monitored and teaching assistants work well with teachers to ensure that they receive well-planned and focused support. Pupils who are gifted and talented are identified and a good range of additional support from the school and the wider community, such as in sport and music, is provided for them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection the curriculum has improved and it is now broader and better resourced. However, although there have been improvements recently in curriculum planning, particularly in English, mathematics and science, these are not yet sufficiently well established. In some other subjects curriculum planning lacks sufficient detail. There are examples of good short-term planning, such as in a project surrounding a visit to a sea-life centre, but longer-term plans lack sufficient balance between all the subjects that pupils study.

The curriculum is enriched well by a wide range of clubs, visits, visitors and special events. These particularly support music and art. The school makes good use of skills and resources within the local community to support the curriculum, for example in ICT.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents say that their children feel safe and well looked after. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are good and all statutory requirements are in place. Attendance is better than average, and good systems follow up any absences. Procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils are rigorously applied, including risk assessments. All staff and volunteers have had criminal background checks. Bullying and racism are very rare, but clear and well-established systems deal with such incidents appropriately, when and if they do arise. The school uses assessment data effectively to analyse the progress of individuals and different groups, such as boys and girls, and ensures that they have the support that they need. The quality of academic guidance

is good overall, but written guidance, although detailed, is not always expressed in language that younger children can easily understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is new to the school and has achieved a great deal in a short time. She has rapidly gained the trust and respect of parents, staff and governors and there is a clear sense of whole-school commitment to improving the quality of the provision. Rigorous systems for monitoring teaching and setting challenging targets have recently been introduced, but these are not yet fully embedded. The headteacher has an accurate knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. These have been suitably identified and prioritised in the school's development plan.

Governors are well organised and provide a good balance between challenging the school to improve and supporting the leadership. Many governors visit the school regularly and know it well. Because of this, they are able to make helpful and positive contributions to the school's progress and development.

The management of the curriculum has improved since the last inspection, but the quality varies across different subjects. A curriculum management structure and an improvement cycle that link monitoring, planning and review are at an early stage of development and have not yet had sufficient impact on improving the quality of the curriculum or teaching and learning.

Teaching assistants are effective. They are well managed, trained and supported. As a result, they provide good support for teaching and learning.

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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?	3
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

1 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Cerne Abbas CE VC First School, Cerne Abbas, DT2 7LA

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when I visited your school. I really enjoyed seeing your lessons, talking to you and the grown-ups and looking at the work that you have been doing.

I think that yours is a satisfactory school that is in a good position to do even better. This is because the people who lead the school are clear about how to improve things. The school makes sure that you all feel happy and keep especially safe and healthy. You told me that you really enjoy coming to school and your parents are very pleased with how you are cared for and helped to do well. You make reasonable progress and most of you reach levels expected for your age, although in mathematics this is not quite as good, and some of you could do even better. What really impressed me was how well everyone plays together in the playground. Well done!

There are three things which I have asked the school to work on, so that it is even better:

- Improve the standard of your work in mathematics.
- Make sure that in lessons teachers find out how much you know and have learnt, so that they can always give you work that keeps you interested and on your toes. You can do your bit by trying really hard to do your best in every lesson.
- Make sure that the subjects that you learn about are well organised and planned.

Thank you again for helping me with the inspection.

Yours faithfully

Chris Nye Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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