

Blandford St Mary Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113795
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311378
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	John English

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Brown
Headteacher	Judith Baker
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2004
School address	Birch Avenue Blandford St Mary Blandford Forum DT11 9QD
Telephone number	01258 453331
Fax number	01258 455865

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small primary school which changed its status from a first school in September 2005. It has a very high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although none has a statement of special educational need. Most of the pupils have White British backgrounds, and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. There are slightly more boys than girls in the school.

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 with some outstanding features, which is improving further as it adapts to its new status as a primary school. This is because the school has used this opportunity to develop its senior management team, who have together implemented the changes required and enhanced what the school provides. Their planning for the academic and personal development of the older pupils has been excellent and, in many ways, very imaginative. Some of the duties and activities undertaken by these older pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school community and have a considerable impact on their personal development. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and of how to improve it. As a result, standards are rising, and the pupils are being supported in developing as outstandingly well-rounded individuals. The new buildings enhance the quality of provision. They are well designed to provide a bright and lively learning environment and are being well used for this purpose by pupils and adults.

'Blandford St Mary is a warm and welcoming school where the children feel encouraged and important in their own right', and 'My son... has developed into a well-rounded thoughtful child... he has made fantastic progress academically': these are typical views of parents. Virtually all the parents agree that their children enjoy school very much and feel very safe, but a small minority express concern at what they see as some inappropriate behaviour in the playground, and feel that supervision might not be adequate. Inspectors believe that, whilst there are adequate numbers of adults supervising, they are not deployed effectively enough in the new playground, which, although not extensive, has many areas not easily seen from any given point. However, inspectors found that the behaviour of the pupils, in lessons and in the playground, is excellent.

Pupils start school with standards that are below expectations. They attain standards that are above the national average by the time they leave, showing that their overall achievement is good. It is particularly good in English, but mathematics is not as strong. The curriculum is outstanding because of the way it is taught in topics so that basic skills are reinforced by practising them whilst studying other areas of the curriculum. For example, in Year 4, a mathematical problem was investigated in the context of the ancient Egyptians, and was later used to improve information and communication (ICT) skills. In addition, the school offers an outstanding range of other activities outside the classroom.

The pupils achieve well because, although varying in quality between satisfactory and outstanding, teaching engages the children and makes learning fun. It achieves this within a well-disciplined environment where pupils develop a good degree of independence and learn collaboratively. English teaching is exceptionally good, but despite there being some outstanding teaching in mathematics, overall the teaching is less consistently good, because some of the teachers are less confident in the subject. Because the teachers track the levels at which pupils are working very carefully, they quickly identify and support any pupils who are at risk of underachieving. Pupils know their targets and what they have to do to improve. They understand the principles of healthy living and they exercise extensively and eat sensibly. Children in need of additional help and support are well cared for by the staff and, where needed, by outside agencies. It is a very inclusive school where children of all levels of attainment achieve and all needs are cared for equally.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with skills that are below average for their age. Their speaking and listening and aspects of their mathematical development are especially weak, as are some aspects of their personal and social development. Lively teaching, with interesting questions directed to individual children and a nurturing and supportive classroom environment, ensures that children make good progress and are happy. Activities are well planned and hold children's interest, although there are not enough outside play opportunities. Day-to-day assessments of children's learning are good. By the end of the Reception Year almost all achieve the skills expected for their age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in mathematics by providing appropriate support and training for teachers.
- Develop better outdoor provision for Foundation Stage learning.
- Ensure effective supervision of the playground to cover all areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter Year 1 with standards that are broadly in line with expectations. Progress in the next two years is good and by the end of Year 2, standards are average overall and above average in writing. This good progress continues so that, by the end of Year 6, standards are above average, although they are lower in mathematics than in English and science. The school responded to weaknesses in literacy, and particularly in boys' writing, that existed two years ago and, as a result of a whole-school focus, progress in English has been particularly strong. Pupils at all levels of attainment achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted or talented.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really enjoy school and say that 'lessons are great fun'. They develop into confident, enthusiastic and empathetic young people. Every child in Year 6 is involved in one of five working parties with teachers and parents which looks at how best they themselves can enjoy, achieve, stay safe, keep healthy and contribute to school. This helps pupils develop an exceptional sense of community responsibility and independence of mind. Behaviour is excellent because of a generally shared understanding of what is right and wrong. Pupils are very happy and feel very safe at school. Attendance is above average.

Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and many of them take part in additional sporting activities. They take part in an exceptionally wide range of responsibilities around the school, including helping younger pupils. These roles provide excellent preparation for the next stage in their learning and in promoting important qualities such as enterprise and initiative.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress because they enjoy lessons. They can see how learning is linked to success in later life. They become fully involved because the teachers tell them exactly what it is they are going to learn and how. In outstanding lessons, the pupils are continually challenged to think independently about issues, and the teachers frequently review learning during the lesson so that any pupils in danger of losing track of what they are learning are able to catch up. Lessons are well structured and provide a good variety of activities to engage the pupils, with tasks that differ in difficulty according to their needs. Teachers use ICT well to make the lessons more interesting. In a minority of lessons, the pace is too slow, especially in mathematics, where some teachers are less confident in the subject.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The integrated curriculum is an exceptional feature which has a strong impact in enabling the pupils to achieve well. Through the use of topics, pupils develop their skills, understanding and knowledge across different subjects in a way that makes learning more interesting and comprehensible. For example, one class was studying the Fire of London. They set up a baker's shop where they re-enacted the fire starting, and then estimated and weighed bread and cakes in numeracy lessons. This cross-curricular approach very effectively helps develop extra skills such as teamwork and problem solving. It also very effectively meets the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as those of higher-attaining pupils.

Art, music, sport and drama are exceptionally strongly promoted and bring a richness and depth to provision. Multicultural awareness days help develop the pupils' awareness of those from other backgrounds. Clubs are well established and exceptionally well supported. There is an unusually extensive provision of residential visits, which promotes many qualities such as independence and resilience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are given good guidance on how to improve their work through a consistently used marking system and through the excellent system to track their progress in all subjects. Pupils particularly like and understand the 'tickled pink' and 'green is growing' system to praise and indicate areas for improvement. Organisation and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from teachers and the well-trained teacher assistants is good. Social and emotional needs are particularly well supported because of the care with which leaders identify needs and organize appropriate support, including that provided by outside agencies. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Policies to promote racial awareness are firmly in place. Adults provide very good day-to-day care for the children, except for supervision on the playground, where coverage of all the play areas is not complete.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led by a senior management team which was expanded when the school changed to primary status. They provide exceptionally good direction for the staff so that the focus is on improving standards, achievement and care. Review of the pupils' performance is thorough, and leaders and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. The school sets itself challenging targets and uses these to determine the focus of its efforts. Several years ago this was literacy, and it is clear that this led to a considerable improvement in standards. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve. This year the focus is, appropriately, mathematics. Many subject leaders make an effective contribution to improved standards in their area, but a number of them are new in their roles and are still developing their capacity. Governors have considerably improved their effectiveness since the last inspection. They provide good support and monitor the work of the school well.

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	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?	2
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?	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?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

31 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blandford St Mary CE VA School, Dorset DT11 9QD

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school, and particularly those of you who gave up some of your playtime to talk to us. We really enjoyed meeting you and finding out what you think. You told us that you thought yours was a good school and we agree with you. There are, in fact, some outstanding features of your school. These include the curriculum, which we know you find interesting and often exciting, particularly because of the way the topics you study enable you to develop skills and knowledge in different subjects. There are also some wonderful opportunities for you outside the classroom through visits and extra activities and clubs.

The thing that stands out most about the school is the way you are developing as sensible, independent-minded young people. You learn the importance of helping others and contributing to your community. You behave very well in school. We were glad to see how enthusiastically you take part in games activities and keep yourselves fit. Above all, you enjoy school very much and are making the most of the opportunities offered to you.

Well done for making good progress in your lessons, especially in English. You must work especially hard now to make sure that your mathematics becomes as good, and we have asked the school to concentrate on this, as we know they have already started to do. We have also asked them to make sure the playground is well supervised, and also to improve the outdoor learning areas for the little ones in the Foundation Stage.

We wish you all the best in the future.

John English Lead inspector

Annex B



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Lead inspector