

St Osmund's Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School, Dorchester

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113892
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311422
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	David Townsend HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	619
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Power
Headteacher	Ron Jenkinson
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Barnes Way Rothesay Road Dorchester DT1 2DZ
Telephone number	01305 262897
Fax number	01305 251395

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is a larger than average middle school and serves the towns of Dorchester and the surrounding area. Most pupils are of White British heritage; around 6% are from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils come from generally advantaged socio-economic areas. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average. Pupils' attainment on entry to school is broadly average.

The school works closely within the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership. It was designated a Specialist Science and Mathematics school in April 2007. It is also an Extended School, offering a range of additional learning facilities and support services to the wider community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

When asked to sum up St Osmund's, one pupil said to an inspector, 'It is a safe and happy school. We really enjoy learning. It feels like one large family where everyone listens.' This tribute gives a real insight into what makes St Osmund's the outstanding and inclusive school it is. The personal development of pupils is excellent. Pupils are happy because the exceptional care they receive makes them feel secure, safe and very enthusiastic about school. As a result, their attendance is well above average. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in class and around school are exemplary, as is their respect for each other and adults. They readily exhibit the personal values and learning attributes the school has been actively promoting with them.

Pupils' achievement is excellent overall and outstanding in mathematics and science, the school's specialist subjects. In Key Stage 2, pupils make good overall progress. In Year 6, pupils reach above average standards overall although, because standards in writing were lower, fewer pupils reached the higher levels in the national tests in English than in mathematics and science. In Key Stage 3, pupils build on these standards and by the end of Year 8, standards are above average in English and exceptionally high in mathematics and science. This excellent achievement is the product of consistently good and often outstanding teaching, an outstanding curriculum and their consequent effect in making pupils so enthusiastic to learn. The school recognises that it can do even more to ensure the proportion of outstanding lessons is uniformly high across all subjects by having teachers share their expertise with each other through training, lesson observations and feedback that are highly focussed on particular skills, such as the provision of work that meets pupils' different learning styles.

The driving force behind the delivery of such consistently high quality provision is the headteacher's outstanding leadership. He has brought to his role a vision that the school should be a 'learning organisation' and that every child matters. Together with an expert and dedicated leadership team and an insightful governing body, he has successfully pursued high standards in all of the school's work. A key to the school's effectiveness is that there is a sense of shared responsibility among all staff and pupils too for the school's success. They are all closely involved in the process of school self-evaluation, as are other stakeholders such as parents and governors. This has led to precise evaluations of the school's performance and a very effective improvement plan, through which challenging targets are set and shared. There is also effective close, continuous assessment of the school's progress towards such targets and the impact of related improvement initiatives. A range of effective professional development opportunities is on offer to staff, including coaching and mentoring. The school also makes the most of development opportunities which arise from the school's close links with its partnership schools. These strengths have enabled the school to improve markedly since the last inspection and indicate its excellent capacity to improve still further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in English so that the progress pupils make in this subject is as rapid as that made in mathematics and science
- Use the pool of considerable teaching expertise in the school to raise the quality of teaching and learning across all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. They consistently reach exceptionally high standards at the end of Year 8, particularly in the school's specialist subjects.

Pupils' standards at the end of Year 6 have been above average for several years. In relation to their level of attainment on entry, pupils make good progress during their first two years in the school. Inspection findings indicate that there are no underperforming groups of pupils, although standards attained this year in English were lower than in mathematics and science, particularly for higher attaining pupils in writing. The school has improved the quality of teaching in writing through a closer focus on how to help capable writers with their composition skills and by introducing a range of intervention programmes of support for less confident pupils. Progress in English in Years 5 and 6 is good.

Pupils continue to make rapid progress during Years 7 and 8 in mathematics and science and good progress in English. Pupils sit the Key Stage 3 national tests a year early. Standards attained in these tests are above average in English and exceptionally high in mathematics and science. Pupils' current standards are of a similar level and are set to rise in English. The school has set challenging targets for test performance in the coming year and it expects that pupils will meet them. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make very good progress in both key stages. Boys and girls do equally well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive well-matched support and challenge and generally achieve very well too, with some pupils making rapid progress in Years 7 and 8, especially in mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. In the headteacher's own words, 'Pupils arrive here as children, we nurture them for four years and they leave as young adults.' Pupils are justifiably proud of their school and are enthusiastic about their educational experience. Their love of school is reflected in their well above average attendance. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they display highly positive attitudes to learning and high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They are polite, considerate, confident and caring. They feel safe in school, know to whom to turn when problems arise and are developing a keen sense of safety awareness. The amount of bullying is minimal and if incidents do occur, the school investigates swiftly and effectively. There is an excellent understanding of and commitment to adopting healthy lifestyles. Pupils participate well in physical education and the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. They know the importance of eating healthily and drinking water regularly. Pupils particularly enjoy the many opportunities to contribute effectively to the school and the local community. For example, all Year 8 pupils have a specific allocated school responsibility, including the role of mentors to younger learners. Pupils throughout the school contribute well to local community activities and raise money for charity. By the time they leave Year 8, they are well prepared for later life, equipped with a range of well developed leadership and enterprise skills. They attain excellent standards in numeracy although their literacy skills, whilst above average, are not yet as high.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers are skilful practitioners who understand well how to challenge pupils in order that they make the best possible progress in their learning. There is a clear atmosphere of purpose and learning in all lessons. Pupils correctly report that teachers make learning stimulating, challenging and fun. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and pupils respond with excellent attitudes to work. Teachers insist on very high levels of maturity and responsibility in practical lessons. Pupils show great care for one another and support each other in assessing their own learning and this helps to quicken the progress they make. Indeed, learning is at the heart of how teachers plan their lessons and they have a very good understanding of how well their pupils are progressing. Very occasionally, teachers do not clarify the learning objectives for a lesson or provide a sufficient range of learning activities for pupils of different needs who then make less progress than is the norm. Pupils are very keen to manage their own learning and they thrive on opportunities to work on their own and in groups. The best lessons provide for this and build confidence and the ability for pupils to assess their own work. Pupils are very willing to take risks and many lessons give them the chance to question, explore and rehearse their opinions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum provides challenge and true enjoyment of learning for all pupils, regardless of ability. The emphasis placed on ensuring pupils gain an in-depth understanding of the specialist subjects, mathematics and science is one that all departments strive for with success. Teachers are increasingly making the curriculum more personal for each individual, by interviewing pupils about their hopes and academic needs in order to inform their planning. Teachers successfully identify links between learning across subjects, so that, for example, pupils are able to apply basic skills in English and write at length regularly when studying other areas of the curriculum. There is a clear focus on cross subject learning and reading. There is a substantial programme of enrichment for gifted and talented pupils, such as lessons in Latin and extra sport. Teachers meet the individual needs of the less able pupils by offering them tailor-made adaptations to the curriculum on offer. The school has very close links with its partnership schools, and senior leaders view these links as crucial to their 'one school' ethos. This means that pupils experience a smooth continuum of learning experiences whilst at St Osmund's and when they transfer. For example, the curriculum prepares pupils very well to make the leap, often a year early, into GCSE studies. Pupils clearly appreciate the range of opportunities they have through the extended schools programme. There is a wealth of out-of-hours clubs and activities and many pupils attend these regularly. These range from dance and music to girls' football, as well as clubs that support skills in organisation, making friends and sport for those who find it challenging.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The individualised care, guidance and support given to all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are excellent and help ensure pupils' personal development is as successful as it is. The arrangements for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of the pupils

are very good. Risk assessments are in place for various activities around and outside the school. The school monitors pupils at risk of underachieving very closely to enable them to receive the support appropriate to their needs. Robust child protection and safeguarding measures are in place and the level of day-to-day pastoral care is high. Pupils are full of praise for how approachable staff are and how well their views and concerns are addressed. The school works well with parents who, in their response to the Ofsted questionnaire, were overwhelmingly supportive of what the school provides. One comment sums up that of many, 'We feel that Ossies is a shining example of what school in the 21st century should be.'

The school ensures that all staff closely monitor the academic and personal progress of every child. Marking provides very good guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work. A wide range of strategies provide effective pastoral support, including peer mentoring by Year 8 pupils, a trained counsellor and specialist staff employed by the school and its partners.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides excellent leadership focused on raising standards and promoting the personal development of pupils. The headteacher has been very well supported by his expert and dedicated senior and middle leaders. Together, they have brought about significant improvements, most recently in terms of the quality of provision for teaching writing. Central to this process is the effective use of challenging targets based on pupils' prior achievement. The impact of leadership is clearly seen in the outstanding personal development of pupils and the impressive progress pupils make during their time at the school.

The school monitors and reviews its own performance extensively and accurately and this is an outstanding feature. Consequently, the senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well, although its judgements about the quality of leadership and management were modest. These searching reviews have led to the formulation of a very effective school improvement plan. There are in place excellent procedures at subject level for reviewing and planning, which mirror and inform the process at school level.

Governance is outstanding. The governing body is highly committed and governors are actively involved in lesson observations and subject reviews. Governors have an impressive range of expertise and are not afraid to ask challenging and probing questions to help the school move forward.

Financial procedures are strong and the school provides very good value for money. The school has made good use of funding provided by specialist school status, particularly with regard to the development of information and communication technology and e-learning. The school promotes equal opportunities very well through its curriculum and strong inclusive culture.

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 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	1
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	2

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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Osmund's CE Middle School, Dorchester, DT1 2DZ

Thank you for the super welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you and finding out what you had to say. We learned a lot from your comments.

You believe your school to be excellent and the inspection team wholeheartedly agrees! The key ingredient for success is that because you and the teaching team work so closely together, St Osmund's has become one 'large family', where you make very good progress in your learning and often reach much higher standards than other pupils of your age. You are very enthusiastic about school, really enjoy learning and report that the adults who work with you help you gain the confidence you need and the skills you require to do very well with your work. We were very impressed with how well you concentrate and take part in lessons and with how readily you take on responsibilities such as supporting the younger children or seeking to raise money for charity. It was a particular delight to observe how polite and caring you are. Your excellent behaviour is another key ingredient for success; you all help each other to do so well. What also struck us is how much you enjoy the wealth of out-of-hours clubs and activities on offer every day at St Osmund's and just how busy with new learning experiences you all are!

You are very lucky that your teachers are so committed to and skilled at bringing lessons alive, making them fun as well as challenging. You told us how well you are cared for and we as inspectors certainly agree. Your headteacher is dedicated to helping each one of you to succeed. Together with his committed staff team, he is always checking to ensure you get the very best support and teaching possible. This has helped make the school the success it already is but I know the adults in school have further aims for the future. We have suggested that an important goal will be to achieve even higher standards in English. We have also asked that teachers continue to share their expertise with each other even more, so that teaching techniques that work very well in one subject are used in others. I know you will all play your part by continuing to work hard at meeting your targets, and for writing in particular.

We are very aware that you are already developing a number of qualities you will take with you into your future lives, such as the ability to appreciate how others feel and think. This is a credit to you and to your school.

On behalf of the team, I wish all of you the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Townsend Her Majesty's Inspector

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Yours sincerely

David Townsend
Her Majesty's Inspector