

St Mary and St Peter's Church of England First School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 123741 |
| Local Authority | Somerset |
| Inspection number | 314700 |
| Inspection date | 27 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Hancock |

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

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| Type of school | First |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 4-9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 62 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Caroline Ireland-Jones |
| Headteacher | Karen Brooker |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 March 2003 |
| School address | Ilton Base Copse Lane Ilminster TA19 9EX |
| Telephone number | 01460 52574 |
| Fax number | 01460 52574 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary and St Peter's First School is smaller than average and is unique in that it occupies two sites in different villages, four miles apart, and each base has children aged between four and nine years. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds, with a small proportion from minority ethnic families, including a small traveller community. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There have been significant changes in the headship over the last few years. The new acting headteacher has been in post since September. The school has achieved the Healthy School Award, Investors in People status and Active Mark status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some good features. Strengths in pastoral care and the support given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities contribute much to pupils' good personal development and well-being. Parents are very positive about the school and many wrote complimentary comments such as, 'The teachers are always happy to help if I have any questions. My child can't wait to get to school each morning.' The outcomes of the good care can be seen in happy pupils who enjoy their lessons, behave well, feel safe and get on well together. They exercise frequently and have a good understanding of adopting a healthy lifestyle. Attendance matches the national average.

Academic achievement is satisfactory overall. Children enter school with broadly average standards. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is stronger in one base than the other. This has an impact on children's progress, which is satisfactory overall. It is better when work is closely matched to the needs of young children, but sometimes progress is not as good as it should be, for example, when this does not happen, or when learning is not properly aligned to their early learning goals. The limited outdoor facilities and resources restrict children's opportunities for free choice and independent play. By the end of Year 2, standards are average in reading and mathematics but below in writing. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 make good progress and standards are above average in reading and mathematics, but broadly average in writing when they leave the school. Most pupils make satisfactory progress but many of the average and higher-attaining pupils do not do as well as they could. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good individual support and progress well.

The many changes in headship over the last few years have hindered the rate of improvement, although issues identified in the last inspection have been satisfactorily addressed. The curriculum is satisfactory and new approaches have resulted in a more interesting and stimulating curriculum that is beginning to capture pupils' imagination and increase their enjoyment of learning, but, as yet, these have not made a real impact on raising standards in writing.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but variable, with the result that pupils' progress is inconsistent as they go through the school. Assessment systems are rudimentary and so information about progress is limited when planning lessons. Consequently, work is not well matched to the individual needs of pupils and so is not consistent in helping them to achieve their best. The strong and effective leadership by the new headteacher is a major feature in the school's satisfactory leadership and management, but not all senior staff and governors play a full part in monitoring the school's performance to bring about further improvement. The school is committed to improvement and staff know where it needs to go and what areas require development. With the more settled leadership and the gradual success of its recent actions, the school demonstrates satisfactory capacity for further development.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Attainment on entry to the Reception classes is broadly in line with that expected, with some strengths in personal, social and emotional development and in number. Children make satisfactory progress overall and most enter Year 1 working securely within the early learning goals. There has been improvement in developing the indoor accommodation recently in both bases to enhance the learning environment, which has had a positive impact on children's

interest and enjoyment. However, the outside area has limited resources and is not used as well as it might be. This restricts opportunities for independent outside play to promote children's physical and creative development.

The quality of provision is variable. In one base, provision is more geared to the needs of young children. Stimulating work is planned which prompts curiosity and a desire to learn. There is a satisfactory balance between teacher-led and child-initiated learning. Consequently, children make good progress in most areas of learning. Provision is less effective on certain days in the other base. Teaching is not centred closely enough on the early learning goals. The development of independence is inhibited because activities are too adult led. This leads to some underachievement for certain children. In both bases, assessment is not carried out on a sufficiently regular basis to ensure that all children are making their best possible progress. Individual needs, therefore, are not met well, particularly in developing writing skills. Groups of younger children are supported well by teaching assistants who take an active part in children's learning. Children in both bases are happy and confident in class and work well alongside each other and with older pupils. The school has good links with pre-school providers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage by ensuring that teaching methods and activities consistently support and challenge all children appropriately.
- Raise the expectations and challenge for average and higher-attaining pupils.
- Develop effective systems for assessment, tracking and target setting, particularly in writing, so that teachers can monitor pupils' progress closely and pupils know more precisely how to improve their work.
- Make sure all senior leaders and governors play a full part in monitoring the school's performance to bring about improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils achieve satisfactorily. As they move through the school, variations in the quality of teaching result in differing rates of progress. Although progress is satisfactory overall for the younger children in the Reception classes, some work is not sufficiently well matched to their needs to ensure that all children do as well as they should. Satisfactory progress is made in Years 1 and 2. As a result, standards are average in reading and mathematics but slightly below in writing by the end of Year 2. Although most pupils' achievements are in line with expectations, many average and higher-attaining pupils are not always given work well matched to their ability, and they are capable of achieving more. Good progress in Years 3 and 4 comes about because of more consistently better teaching. Consequently, by the end of Year 4, standards are above average in reading and mathematics, and average in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school because their needs are clearly identified and their individual progress regularly assessed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is in line with national expectations. They say they 'like everything in school' and that 'school is fun'. Their happiness is evident in the way they show respect to each other and to the adults who work with them. Behaviour and attitudes are good both in lessons and in the playground, where older pupils are seen playing

harmoniously with younger children. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall but their understanding of life in multicultural Britain is less well developed. Pupils feel safe and know they can go to an adult with any worries. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and eating healthy food. They know the importance of exercise and feel the school works hard to keep them fit and healthy. The school council plays an active role in the school community and is proud of its purchase of equipment for the 'Huff and Puff' club. Pupils' key skills in reading, numeracy and information and communication technology prepare them well for their future education but their writing skills are not yet fully developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the Reception classes and Year 1, the quality of teaching is variable between the two bases but children make satisfactory progress overall. In Years 2 to 4, lessons are generally interesting and there is always a calm, purposeful atmosphere, with constructive relationships. Most pupils are keen to take part, and especially so when lessons have a practical, dramatic or topical content that makes learning more 'real' and exciting. The key weakness in teaching is that lessons do not consistently meet the needs of all pupils. The level of teaching is not consistently well matched to leading pupils on from what they already know and understand. This is particularly the case of average and higher-attaining pupils, who are not reaching their full potential. Marking is not used consistently well enough across the school to help pupils know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Teaching assistants are fully involved in teaching activities and provide effective support to individuals and small groups of pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This has a positive impact on their good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is satisfactory overall. A good range of visits, including regular trips to Barrington Court, enhances the curriculum and the popular extra-curricular activities support pupils' learning well. The recent review of provision has produced a more creative and innovative curriculum that matches the interests of pupils far more closely, capturing the imagination and enjoyment of many. An appropriate emphasis is placed on developing and using basic skills, but pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their independent or extended writing skills. All too often, writing activities are restricted to words or phrases on worksheets, which has a negative impact on pupils' achievements in writing. High emphasis is placed on developing pupils' personal, social and health education. This prepares them well for their future and helps them stay healthy and safe. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good; where individual education plans are used carefully to make sure pupils make good progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Teachers place a high priority on pupils' safety and well-being. They know pupils well. They have a good knowledge of their social and emotional needs and provide them with good pastoral

support and guidance within a warm, supportive, family atmosphere. Parents are positive about the care shown to their children, reflected in comments such as, 'We chose this school for its caring nurturing environment.' Child protection procedures are fully in place and risk assessments are carried out conscientiously. Substantial links with external agencies support all pupils and their families well, including Traveller families.

Provision for the academic support of pupils is not as robust as the provision for their pastoral care. Insufficient information is available about pupils' attainment from the time they enter school to monitor individual progress. As a result, work is not matched well enough to individual needs to enable them to do their best. The school has recently devised new tracking systems and introduced individual targets giving teachers a better understanding of what pupils need to do to improve their work. These initiatives are not yet sufficiently embedded to have a positive impact on raising standards, particularly in writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The significant changes in the headship over the last few years has now settled down to enable the school to get a firmer grip on improvement. The strong leadership of the new headteacher drives the work of the school. She has high expectations to improve standards and achievement and shows no room for complacency. She is ably supported by the two base leaders and has plans to develop their roles and that of subject leaders, who are keen to take on extra responsibility in order that they can all make a more positive contribution to school improvement. The senior staff have begun to reconsider the school's self-evaluation procedures to identify key areas for improvement. The monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous in pinpointing precisely where and how improvements are to be made. This is beginning to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school. A more creative curriculum is capturing pupils' interest and enjoyment of learning but has not yet had time to impact on improving pupils' achievement in writing. New systems for tracking pupils' progress have recently been introduced, with the intention of using them to match work more closely to individual needs. These systems need further development to be an effective tool to bring about improvement in achievement and standards. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They are supportive of the school and have a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are attending more school-based training to gain a greater understanding of how they can monitor the school's effectiveness more accurately.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| 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? | 3 |

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

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| 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 | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| 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

28 November 2007

Dear Children

St Mary and St Peter's First School, Ilton Base, Copse Lane, Ilminster TA19 9EX

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we came to your school. We enjoyed talking to you very much and thought you were friendly and polite.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education and these are some things we thought were good.

- You enjoy school and behave well.
- You have a good understanding of how important it is to eat healthy food and keep fit by regular exercise.
- You like the clubs that you attend and visits outside school.
- Teachers and adults look after you well.
- Your headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to make your school better.

These are a few things the school should do to make it better.

- Improve the things you do in Reception classes so that all of you are given activities that will help you learn more and make better progress.
- Teachers should expect more from those of you who can manage your work easily.
- Make sure that teachers know how well you are doing in all your work, especially writing, so that they can give you work that is hard enough and help you know how to improve your work.
- Make sure all teachers and governors are involved to help your school get even better.

Best wishes for the future.

Ian Hancock Lead Inspector