

Weare Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123813
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314728
Inspection date	17 October 2007
Reporting inspector	John English

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	147
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hayley Ryder
Headteacher	David Williams
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	Weare Weare BS26 2JS
Telephone number	01934 732270
Fax number	01934 732560

Age group	4-9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small rural school, with five pupils who have a statement of special educational need, which is high for a school of this size. There is a hearing impaired unit attached to the school, with two pupils. Only a small proportion of pupils belong to minority ethnic groups, or are eligible for free school meals.

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. Inspectors agree with the school's own assessment and that of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. Many parents, including a number whose children have special educational needs, commented on the excellence of the school. 'The school is so alive that it literally buzzes', wrote one. Another described the school as 'very caring, very aware of the individual needs of my child'. At the heart of the school is its belief in the potential of all children – even the pupils themselves felt that a strength of the school was that it valued and supported 'all types of children', as one older child expressed it. Children at this school not only do outstandingly well at their work, but also develop their personal and social self-confidence, often quite dramatically.

The school is exceptionally well led by a headteacher and senior managers who set a very clear direction for the school. It is very well organised. One parent delivering her child on the morning of the inspection said, 'Everything is well thought out, I am absolutely delighted.' Every inch of the school is exploited for its learning potential – from the displays everywhere inside the building to the outside with its unique wildlife area sheltering a rare, protected species of newt.

The school has high expectations of every child. Pupils join the school with standards that are below expectations for their age and they leave with exceptionally high standards. This represents outstanding achievement overall, and the progress in the first three years is particularly exceptional. A major factor is the outstanding teaching, based on planning that meets the needs of all the children, well supported by a highly effective team of learning assistants, many of whom have developed their expertise specifically to meet the complex needs they encounter. Lessons are vibrant, varied and enjoyable. Pupils are set challenging targets and their progress is carefully monitored so that any at risk of underachievement are identified and appropriate support is provided. The curriculum is stimulating and includes extensive international links, which give the pupils a good understanding of wider Europe and the world. There is also a strong emphasis on providing pupils with first-hand experience on which to base their growing knowledge and understanding. For example, they visited a Hindu temple to develop their understanding of different religions and of multicultural Britain.

Inspectors agree with the parent who said that 'the children are a total delight'. They are bright and alert, enjoy school and treat each other with courtesy and respect. They feel safe at school and have a good sense of their capacity to contribute to it, through a buddy system and the school council. Their skills in information and communication technology (ICT), numeracy and literacy prepare them thoroughly for their future economic well-being. Although attendance is above average, a few pupils are absent for unauthorised reasons and do not always arrive on time in the mornings.

All children are exceptionally well cared for, but the quality of the care for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is so exceptional that it is no surprise to find that a number of them travel from outside the normal catchment area to attend Weare school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make excellent progress in the Reception class, as reflected especially in their communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. The rich curriculum is well adapted to meet the needs of the children. The extremely stimulating environment motivates

and enriches the learning as apparent in the 'tell me a story' activity table, complete with storyteller's cloak. There is a carefully planned balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, which ensures that children gain and apply basic skills, whilst developing their confidence and their social skills. The children enjoy their learning and all are actively involved in a wide range of activities such as exciting bread roll making.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve punctuality and attendance by working closely with parents of those pupils concerned.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the Foundation Stage with standards that are broadly in line with the expectations for their age in most of the areas of learning, but below in literacy and numeracy. They make outstanding progress during the Foundation Stage and enter Year 1 with standards in literacy and numeracy that are broadly in line with expectations. By the end of Year 1 standards are above expectations and by the end of Year 2 standards are high. This is exceptional progress, and although the rate slows slightly in Years 3 and 4, the pupils leave for middle school with sustained high standards. For a number of years, standards of writing, particularly for boys, lagged behind the very high standards achieved in reading and mathematics. However, in the last two years there has been a considerable improvement because of the focused strategies put in place by the school. As a result, the standards in writing have improved, and the gap between boys' and girls' levels of attainment has been narrowed. The achievement of the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly notable. Despite the high levels of difficulty encountered by some pupils, their achievement is also outstanding because of the exceptionally good arrangements for individual support. From entry to the school to leaving at the end of Year 4, the pupils' achievement is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils behave extremely well both in and around the school and are polite and friendly to adults and caring towards each other. They have an excellent understanding and appreciation of a very wide range of cultures because of strong links with other countries gained through the Comenius Project. They reflect earnestly on spiritual and moral issues in assemblies. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils eagerly take on responsibilities such as supporting younger children and laying tables at lunchtimes. They enjoy school, both for its social opportunities and because they find lessons interesting and they like learning. They take plenty of exercise, and have a very good understanding of the requirements for healthy eating. Good attendance is reflective of very positive attitudes, although a small minority are absent more than is strictly necessary, and sometimes arrive late in the morning, which hampers their readiness to start lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The whole school is a rich learning environment which contributes considerably to pupils' progress. For example, 'success ladders' are on the walls of every classroom so that pupils can

refer to them while working. This helps them to understand the stages they are going through in a particular unit of learning. Lessons are typically very well planned and varied, and the pupils enjoy them. They are keen to know what it is they are going to learn, and they like taking an active part by volunteering answers and getting on with tasks set them by the teachers. Teachers build exceptionally well on pupils' previous learning by making good use of assessment to set tasks which provide good levels of challenge to all their pupils. The excellent relationships between pupils and teachers, and the way the pupils collaborate with each other in their learning, result in outstanding progress in their learning. The teaching is always good and often outstanding, with good use of ICT and exceptionally good support from the learning assistants.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The stimulating curriculum motivates and enthuses pupils. As a guiding principle, it provides pupils with practical experiences wherever possible to enhance their understanding. For example, a grandparent recently spoke to the older pupils about his evacuation as a child into Somerset, providing a rich resource to inform their writing about Second World War experiences. The curriculum is very well integrated, so that basic skills are developed and consolidated in all subjects, ensuring high standards. For example, in the work on the war, pupils were developing their letter writing skills. Enrichment weeks greatly enhance the learning of all pupils by providing opportunities such as educational visits out of school. ICT is used very effectively in a range of different subjects. The curriculum is very well adapted to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils enthusiastically take part in a wide range of clubs, with activities such as sports, cookery and drama.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The safety of the children is assured by very thorough child protection procedures. The care and guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exceptionally good, through the dedicated work of a well-trained team of learning assistants, and good support from appropriate external agencies. Children know they can talk to an adult if they have any worries or concerns, and as a result they feel safe and secure at school and are able to make considerable progress in their personal development. Parents commented on this aspect of the school, many expressing extreme delight at the way their children had developed in self-confidence. The school works hard to maintain high levels of attendance, normally above average. Despite these efforts, it remains concerned about the attendance and punctuality of a very small minority. Children are given high quality guidance on how to improve their work through effective target setting and through the marking of work. The 'success ladders' help them to plan the next stages of their work, and develop their capacity for independent learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding, well supported by his senior staff. He ensures that the focus of all the school's efforts is on raising attainment levels, with a strong emphasis on valuing all pupils whatever their background, or learning, or other difficulties. His vision is shared by all the staff, and an exceptional feature is the way in which it is also shared by the pupils, who show a clear understanding of the way that everyone in the school family is valued

and has something unique to contribute. The support given to the relatively high proportion of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as the support for able pupils, demonstrates the powerful commitment to inclusion. Senior managers have a very good knowledge of the school through the comprehensive systems for self-evaluation. The school identifies and takes effective action whenever areas of underachievement are highlighted, for example the relative weakness in boys' writing. As a result, capacity to improve is excellent. The school sets challenging targets and meets, but more usually exceeds, them. The governing body is fully involved in the evaluation of the performance of the school and provides support and encouragement, laying out clear expectations of the high standards required. Finances are well managed and all resources well used.

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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?	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

18 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Weare CE First School, Weare, BS26 2JS

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school when we came to inspect it. Thank you for being so friendly and courteous. We were very impressed at how much you obviously enjoy your school, and how well all of you are doing, both in lessons and in developing as sensitive, independent young people.

This is what we told your headteacher and your chair of governors, Dr Ryder, before we left.

- Weare is an outstanding school and everything it does for you is excellent.
- You have an excellent headteacher, who values all of you and makes sure that all of you can achieve as well as you possibly can.
- Your teachers prepare lessons that are exciting and enable you to achieve high standards by the time you move on to your middle school.
- Those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped exceptionally well by your teachers and learning assistants.
- Your school is a safe and stimulating place to learn and enjoy yourselves.

Most of you show your pleasure in school by attending regularly and on time. A very few of you could try a bit harder in this respect.

Best wishes and good luck to all of you in the future,

John English Lead inspector

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