

Swanage St Mark's Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113814
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325891
Inspection date	1 May 2009
Reporting inspector	David Collard

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	106
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marion Marchant
Headteacher	Jeremy Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bell Street Swanage BH19 2SA
Telephone number	01929 422949
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This small, rural school serves its immediate local community. Almost all pupils are from a White British background, although there are a very small number of minority ethnic pupils who are at an early stage of learning English. Children start school when they are four years old. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above that found nationally. Most of these difficulties are related to language, communication or behaviour. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs.

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 that has improved significantly since its last inspection. Through his good leadership and management qualities, the headteacher has been instrumental in driving forward these improvements since his arrival in the academic year of 2005/6. Good teaching ensures pupils achieve well and, from below average abilities when they start school, they leave with standards broadly in line with those expected for their age. This indicates that progress is good. In addition, pupils have well-developed personal skills and relish the opportunities that are offered to them through the good curriculum that is provided. Parents are highly supportive of the school and how it has improved. The Ofsted parents' questionnaires were unanimous in their praise and very many wanted to add comments such as, 'The school has radically changed for the better. The staff seem even more motivated and the children benefit from this.'

Pupils behave well. They are quick to settle to their tasks and enjoy working independently or in small groups. The small numbers of pupils with behavioural problems benefit from a nurture group that enables them to develop their personal skills so they can then reintegrate with their classmates more readily. Consequently, pupils are looked after well in a safe, caring and secure environment.

Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage means that children make a good start to their school life and achieve well. Standards by the start of Year 1 vary because of the differences in the abilities within age groups. Those presently in the Reception class have broadly average standards. Through Years 1 and 2, good progress continues. Pupils are given many opportunities to work independently and are expected to gather their own resources and think for themselves about what they are being asked to do. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average, a fact supported by the 2008 national tests. Comprehensive school data indicate that pupils in Year 4 are reaching at least the standards expected of them, with a significant proportion reaching above this in reading. The school's emphasis on mathematics and writing is having positive effects. For example, in Year 3 many pupils are already exceeding the writing expectations and working closer to the expectations for Year 4. At the previous inspection there were some issues regarding information and communication technology (ICT). New resources and better teaching have improved pupils' achievement.

Leadership and management have improved since the last inspection, although a great deal of the early workload fell to the headteacher. More recently, other leaders have taken better control of their own areas, although, as yet, they are not fully responsible for whole-school decisions. For example, the paper-based assessment systems, while providing good information that can be used for rapid interventions with individual pupils, have not been refined to track trends of groups over time. Governance, which is now good, has been improved so that governors have a clear idea of the school's strengths and what still needs to be developed. Improvements in the quality of the school's provision, with the resultant effect this has had on pupils' personal and academic standards, demonstrate a good capacity to continue improving into the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good leadership ensures that the Reception class is a well-planned and organised environment. When they start school, children's skill levels in communication, language and literacy as well as in number are notably lower than in other areas of learning. Children settle quickly into daily

routines and all adults successfully encourage them to be independent and happy and to enjoy their learning. For example, children take responsibility for deciding on their timetable by putting their name in a pocket against the activity. Adults make sure they themselves engage with small group work such as by involving themselves in role play as a chef or nurse. They encourage new language for instance by naming shapes when using pastry to make cheese straws. On just a few occasions opportunities are missed to encourage early writing skills, particularly with those who find this more difficult. In addition, more interactive displays need to focus on writing as this is an area identified as being relatively weaker. Outside play is used effectively to provide opportunities for developing all areas of learning. The staff have worked successfully to overcome the restrictions of the outside play area as it cannot be seamlessly accessed from the classroom. Assessments are used effectively to direct the learning opportunities. These focus on all areas and, with regular annotation, provide a useful analysis of the good progress being made by all children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more sophisticated assessment systems to ensure that trends in pupils' progress can be tracked and improved effectively.
- Widen the use of senior and middle leaders' expertise in whole-school planning so that they can take a more active role in influencing school improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including the above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, achieve well throughout the school. This is not only in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science but also in a number of other subjects such as ICT and art. There has been a rising trend of improvement in Year 2 national test results from a low point in 2006. The trend is set to continue this year with pupils in Year 2 working at or above the levels expected for their age, particularly in reading. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are also working at or above the levels expected of them and have particularly well-developed creative writing skills. When comparing the standards of those presently in Year 4 with the below average standards this group achieved in Year 2 national tests, there is notably strong progress. The small proportion of pupils at an early stage of learning English are quickly able to communicate with their friends and make similar levels of progress to others. School data indicate that there are still some pupils capable of achieving better and this is being prioritised through specific small group work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' good personal development is a result of the school's good provision. Pupils enjoy school and can talk enthusiastically about how things have improved. They increasingly take responsibility for their own actions and older and younger pupils happily play together. At playtime, they use their imaginations well such as by pretending to be ice-cream sellers. Pupils know how to stay safe and healthy. They take great care and help each other when crossing to the school field and by talking about what makes a healthy snack. Almost all parents say that their children are very happy at school, although, because of many families being employed in seasonal work, attendance is average rather than good. This is despite the best efforts of the school to improve it. Independence is effectively encouraged through pupil representation on the school council with the governing body. The school council also help decide on which

local events should be supported. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are links with schools in the Midlands and in Gran Canaria. These, along with various charity events, all help pupils understand different cultures and make a good contribution to community life. The improved skills in literacy, numeracy and technological skills in ICT along with growing independence all indicate that pupils are being well prepared for their futures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan their lessons well using a variety of approaches. All have good subject knowledge and provide high levels of challenge through different ability groupings. In a number of lessons, teachers used pertinent questions to make pupils think harder about their answers and so make the subsequent written work of higher quality. Displays are often used well to support what is being learnt, although they do not always help with highlighting or driving up writing standards, which is one of the school's main development areas. The new marking system is being developed efficiently. For example, in one class the teacher used it to improve some draft descriptive writing so that when the final copy was produced it had improved considerably and had turned into something that the pupils were very proud of. The recent development of a good personal, social and emotional learning programme has been evaluated through staff and pupil questionnaires. Teaching of this has proved very successful in helping develop pupils' understanding of the wider world.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Much work has been undertaken to ensure the curriculum meets and balances the individual needs of pupils. At the time of the last inspection the major priority had to be on raising basic standards. As teachers have become more confident in their own ability so more comprehensive long-term subject plans have been put in place which, as the school rightly says, have 'been made more meaningful for the children'. Modern foreign languages have been introduced in Years 3 and 4, ICT is regularly featured in lessons and topics are chosen to help inspire learning. The school has successfully gained a national Healthy School award, demonstrating its commitment to personal as well as academic success. The school is now correctly focusing on making sure that all subjects are fully embedded into the new curriculum programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care of pupils is a strength of the school's provision, a fact unanimously supported by the parents. Careful safety arrangements are in place and regular risk assessments are carried out. Assessment procedures are thorough and help identify those at risk of underachieving. Evaluation of this data has led to a number of interventions such as through nurture groups, booster classes or the use of outside agencies. These have been successful, particularly in supporting the most vulnerable pupils, as can be demonstrated through their improved academic results and from them being able to apply themselves to their work more readily. However, because these assessments are mainly paper based, it is difficult to track trends over time or for groups of pupils or to ensure that timely priorities are set.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has successfully raised the school's self-esteem by confidently and efficiently improving the school environment, teachers' expertise and governors' expectations. The success of this can clearly be seen in the pupils' rising academic standards and in the calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school. The headteacher is increasingly supported well in this endeavour by the senior and middle leaders, who effectively take on responsibility for their own areas. This has had a marked impact on pupils' achievement. As yet, staff are not as involved in the whole-school decision-making processes and so have less influence in school self-evaluation or priorities for improvement. Nevertheless, these processes are conducted well and the governing body maintains a good overview of how well the school is doing. Governance is good, but governors have been less influential in holding the school to account, an area they are rightly setting as their own priority. The school has made a good start on evaluating its development of community cohesion through discussions and analysis of many of the good links that already exist to promote local, national and global understanding.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	2
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

5 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swanage St Mark's C of E First School, Swanage BH19 2SA

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. We enjoyed talking to many of you and finding out all about what happens during your day. I am sure you will not be surprised to know that we have said that you go to a good school. As I promised some of you, I have written the main points of our report below.

- You told us how much you enjoy school. We can see why. Your teachers give you many exciting things to do and there are a lot of activities for you to get involved in.
- We have said you behave well. We were impressed with how quickly you settle to your work. Your teachers make sure that they help you think for yourselves and you respond well to this.
- You are taught well and so you make good progress while you are at St Mark's. We can see from all the assessments that this progress is improving each year.
- We have also said that you are looked after and cared for particularly well. This makes sure you know how to stay safe, fit and healthy.
- Your headteacher has worked hard to make things better. The staff and governors are always looking for ways to change things for the better so we have asked them to do two things which will help your school become one of the best. Firstly, we have asked that all the assessment information that the school has be used more effectively to help see which groups are doing better than others. Secondly, we have asked that the staff who are responsible for different areas have more opportunity to help decide on the best priorities to move the school on.

Finally, we would like to wish you all the best for your schooling. You can do your bit to help by continuing to suggest ways that things can improve and working hard. This will help the school go from strength to strength.

Yours faithfully,

David Collard

Lead inspector