

Sandford St Martin's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113818
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325893
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	David Westall

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)	222
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	Jack Haworth
Headteacher	Simon Donlon
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sandford Wareham BH20 7AJ
Telephone number	01929 552949
Fax number	01929 552 949

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Almost all pupils are White British, and the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage identified as having learning difficulties is average. On entry to the school, children's skills and knowledge are generally in line with those expected for their age.

The number of children of first school age in the local area has declined in recent years, and the school roll has fallen. Staffing was reduced from September 2008, and the organisation changed from single-age classes to classes where Year 1 and Year 2 pupils are taught together and Years 3 and 4 are also mixed. Recent staff changes have resulted in the loss of established members of the senior leadership team.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. The headteacher is a key strength and is the driving force for change. He has high expectations for pupils' academic and personal development, and communicates his vision clearly so that all staff share a common sense of direction. Since his appointment in 2008, he has used a range of rigorous strategies to check the school's performance, and has developed an accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement. As a consequence, the correct areas for development are being addressed, and pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate. However, the headteacher is keenly aware that there is still work to be done to make the teaching more consistently good, and to raise standards further. Despite the good work and tenacity of the headteacher, leadership and management are only satisfactory. This is because the senior leadership team is only recently established, and the subject teachers for literacy and numeracy are new to their roles. While the senior leadership team has made a good start, and the work of subject leaders is improving, too much responsibility for setting and achieving the school's goals rests on the headteacher's shoulders.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, reflecting pupils' sound progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and in Key Stages 1 and 2. As a result, standards are broadly average in Years 2 and 4. In mathematics, standards are a little lower than in English, largely because the most capable pupils sometimes 'mark time' when they are given tasks which are too easy. The quality of teaching and learning, though mainly satisfactory, is variable. This means that pupils' progress is uneven. Some lessons are well taught, especially in Key Stage 1, and help pupils to make rapid progress. However, good teaching is not sufficiently widespread, and some lessons include weaknesses that inhibit pupils' progress. In these, teachers do not always match work accurately to pupils' needs, the pace of teaching is rather pedestrian, and questions are not used effectively to check pupils' understanding. The curriculum is satisfactory, and includes good opportunities to promote pupils' personal development. However, in the EYFS, too few opportunities are provided for children to work independently, to use their initiative and to use the outside environment as a learning resource.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, and stem from the supportive relationships that exist across the school. It is clear that pupils like and respect their teachers, and that these feelings are reciprocated. Pupils know that teachers have their best interests at heart, and they develop a sense of self-worth because they know they are valued as individuals. All of these factors contribute to pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour. They are polite, work amicably with others and accept differences of opinion. There are also key strengths in the care and pastoral support for pupils, and parents are justifiably confident that their children are well looked after at school. For example, one parent commented, 'The teachers will always go the extra mile to make sure your child is happy at school.' Support and guidance for pupils' academic development is satisfactory, although they sometimes require clearer guidance about how to improve their work.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection, and is soundly placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The quality of provision is sound, and children make satisfactory progress. Consequently, their skills and knowledge are generally in line with those expected nationally at the end of the EYFS. There are some variations in children's progress, with many doing well when learning to link sounds and letters, as a result of carefully structured teaching. Their progress is slower in creative development and physical development. Children's personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They enjoy school, work and play happily with others, and know about healthy foods and how to keep safe. However, their skills as inquisitive, independent learners require further development. The quality of teaching and learning, and of the curriculum, is satisfactory. The adults take care to provide an inviting and interesting learning environment, and develop positive relationships with the children. They pitch their explanations carefully so that children understand them, and know what they expect children to learn. However, sometimes children sit and listen to adults for too long, and this limits the time available for more active learning. The curriculum covers all areas of learning but its balance requires adjustment. At present, the amount of time allocated for adult-directed tasks is rather high, and children require more opportunities to make choices and to develop independent learning skills. In addition, too little use is made of the outside environment as a learning resource. The care of children is good. They are nurtured well in a safe and secure environment. The leadership and management of the EYFS are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good in order to raise standards, including those of the most capable pupils in mathematics.
- Develop the roles of the senior leadership team and subject teachers so they play a bigger part in school improvement.
- Provide more opportunities for children in the EYFS to work independently, to show initiative and to use the outside environment as a learning resource.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, including for those with learning difficulties. Pupils make satisfactory progress in literacy. However, pupils in Key Stage 2 do not always sufficiently develop their skills by creating extended pieces of writing. Pupils' oracy skills are generally developing well. This is particularly evident in Key Stage 1, where teachers regularly encourage pupils to discuss their ideas with a partner, and to feed these back clearly to the class. In mathematics, pupils' progress is satisfactory. The school has recently introduced more focused teaching of mathematical problem-solving skills, and this is beginning to accelerate pupils' progress. However, the most capable pupils sometimes underachieve in mathematics because their potential is underestimated.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well, enjoy most lessons and generally concentrate well on their tasks. Occasionally, however, their attention wanes if they have to sit and listen to their teachers for too long. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is a key strength. Pupils appreciate the wonder of the world, and benefit from the school's Christian ethos. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong, and get on well together. While pupils' cultural development is satisfactory, their awareness of the richness and diversity of British culture is a weakness. Pupils respond positively when given responsibility, for example as members of the school council or when helping others at playtime. Despite pupils' positive attitudes, attendance is only average. This is mainly because too many parents choose to take their children on holiday during term time.

Pupils are safety conscious and are concerned for the welfare of others. They enjoy a good range of physical activities and understand the importance of healthy eating. Pupils help to make the school community harmonious and caring, and make a valuable contribution to local events. Their ability to work constructively with others, and their satisfactory academic progress, mean they are soundly prepared for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are some common strengths that thread through the teaching. Teachers work hard, manage behaviour well and develop constructive relationships with pupils. They know what they expect pupils to learn and explain tasks clearly. Consequently, pupils are usually confident about tackling their work. Some lessons are particularly well taught. In these, teachers know just when to step in to provide well-focused support and when to stand back and let pupils work things out for themselves. These lessons are also characterised by teachers' good subject knowledge and accurate assessments of pupils' learning needs. However, there is not enough good teaching, and there are some common weaknesses in those lessons that are only satisfactory. The pace of some lessons slows because teachers talk for too long and pupils are not actively involved in their learning. In these sessions, the wide range of learning needs of pupils in the classes is not always met with sufficient precision. Sometimes questions are not used effectively enough to check what pupils already know, and to assess their next steps in learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Provision for the development of pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. Pupils' language skills are soundly promoted through work across the curriculum but Key Stage 2 pupils require more opportunities to write longer pieces to extend their literacy skills. In mathematics, the school has sensibly adjusted the curriculum to give more time for the development of pupils' mathematical problem-solving skills. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their scientific investigation skills are rather limited, especially in Key Stage 2. The school provides well for pupils' personal development and this is reflected in pupils' positive relationships, attitudes and behaviour. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is sound,

and these pupils often receive well-focused support from teaching assistants. Provision for the most capable pupils is broadly satisfactory, although these pupils are sometimes given unchallenging tasks in mathematics.

A good range of visits and visitors enrich the curriculum. These are popular with the pupils and benefit their learning. After reflecting on a recent residential visit, Year 4 pupils talked enthusiastically about their experiences. One pupil remarked, 'We found out all about smugglers, even visited the place they landed their boats. I wanted to write about it because it was really interesting'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of pastoral care is good. The school promotes a nurturing family atmosphere, which contributes to pupils' sense of security. Pupils know that adults will listen if they have any problems at school. Child protection procedures are robust, regular health and safety checks are carried out, and many of the staff are trained in first aid. The school works well with external agencies to provide support for pupils when this is required. Effective arrangements help children to settle quickly into the EYFS and to transfer confidently to their next school at the end of Year 4. Support and guidance for pupils' personal development is good. The support and guidance they receive for their academic development is less consistent, but is satisfactory. The quality of teachers' marking is variable, with some pupils benefiting from valuable feedback but others being given limited guidance about how to improve. In addition, while all pupils have learning targets, most are at an early stage of evaluating their progress towards these targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Self-evaluation procedures are sound and are helping the school to improve. Teachers receive useful feedback about their performance from the headteacher, and this benefits their professional development. The monitoring and evaluation roles of other key staff are developing, but are not securely established. Improvements have been made to systems for tracking pupils' progress, and teachers are now much more aware of pupils who need to do better. As a result, these pupils are now receiving more effective support, and this is helping them to catch up. A sense of school community is promoted, and is reflected in the positive way that pupils understand and respect the views of others. The school's role in making pupils more aware of the diverse cultures and beliefs of people in the wider community is an area for development. The school has established constructive relationships with parents, although some parents regret that the school has been organised into mixed age classes. School governance is satisfactory. The governors are supportive and have a sound grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, they accept that their insights would be further developed by more visits to see the school in operation.

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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?	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?	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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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/or disabilities make progress	3

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sandford St Martin's Church Of England First School, Nr Wareham BH20 7AJ

Thank you for welcoming us into your school and for being so friendly, polite and helpful. Here are some of the things we found out.

- Sandford St Martin's is providing you with a satisfactory education, and your work is as good as is found in most other schools.
- The headteacher is doing his job well, and the staff work hard.
- You enjoy school, like your teachers and have lots of friends.
- Your behaviour is good.
- You understand the importance of healthy eating and exercise.
- The staff take good care of you.
- You particularly enjoy visits and visitors who help to make learning interesting.

We found a few things that the school needs to improve.

- We would like some of the teaching to be even better, so you can learn faster.
- We would like the teachers to always make sure that children who are quick learners in mathematics are not given work which is too easy.
- We would like the headteacher to have more help from other staff to lead and manage the school.
- We would like the children in the Reception unit to be able to make more choices and to be more involved in finding things out for themselves.

Thank you again for your help. We really enjoyed our time at your school.

Yours sincerely

David Westall

Lead Inspector