

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School, Colehill

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113891
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325908
Inspection date	17 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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 (total)	548
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Lewington
Headteacher	Paul Nation
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Colehill Lane Colehill Wimborne BH21 7AB
Telephone number	01202 883433
Fax number	01202 840145

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- the impact of the school's recent focus on improving teaching in mathematics and why progress in science at Key Stage 3 is not as strong as that in mathematics
- whether groups such as boys and girls, lower and higher attainers achieve equally well
- whether progress is better in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6.

The inspector gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, pupils, governors and others. A range of school documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing pupils in lessons and elsewhere. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own self-evaluation assessments were not justified, and these have been included in this report where appropriate.

Description of the school

This average-sized middle school was awarded Specialist School status in Sports and Science in 2008, in conjunction with the upper school and other local feeder schools. Numbers on roll have grown in the last few years. The proportion of pupils from families claiming free school meals is very low, as are the numbers from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who speak native languages other than English. About 9 per cent of the highest attainers leave the school at the end of Year 7 to enter selective schools, making the degree of pupil mobility higher than usual. Amongst the awards held by the school are Healthy Schools Award, Sports Mark and Investors in People.

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. Excellent leadership, management and governance have improved the school extremely well since its last inspection and the significant strengths reported then have been consolidated further. Senior and middle managers have gained in experience and confidence. Leaders have worked very effectively to improve teaching and the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement, and both are now outstanding. These improvements, combined with excellent provision, lead to exceptional academic and personal outcomes and demonstrate outstanding capacity to improve the school further. Based on prior attainment at Year 2, two years before pupils arrive, standards are usually above average. Subsequent school assessments show that not all skills are equally strong, with verbal competence being highest. The school has made significant changes to the curriculum recently, compressing the three years of Key Stage 3 into two. Year 8 are the first group to take tests usually taken by pupils in Year 9. 2009 results now give a very clear picture of the outstanding progress which pupils make across the school, particularly in English and mathematics. By the time they leave the school, standards are exceptionally high. Standards and achievement in subjects such as information and communication technology, music and physical education are similarly high. Science was not quite so strong at Year 8 this year because of staffing and curriculum difficulties in that department, but these issues are resolved and Year 7 pupils are on track to do better. Pupils have excellent skills in, for example, very effective teamwork and cooperation, which pupils themselves recognise prepare them exceptionally well for future education and work. The school is aware that progress is not quite as swift to Year 6 and now that curriculum changes are embedded and better achievement is evident, staff are properly evaluating the implications for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' outstanding personal development is reflected in their excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding, as it was at the previous inspection. One parent summarised the views of many in saying that her child's 'confidence has sky-rocketed since joining the school'. Through outstanding care, guidance and support, pupils develop into mature, considerate young people who strongly value relationships with others in their immediate community and those well beyond. The school's excellent contribution to community cohesion is evident in all levels of discussion with pupils, for instance about their letters and emails to pupils in the Sudan, with fundraising to support their studies and tree planting in the local community. They enjoy school enormously, bubbling with enthusiasm about everything they do, wanting to help and speaking spontaneously about their contributions and achievements. The 'buddy system', for instance, made Year 8 pupils feel safe and secure when they entered Year 5 because they had an older pupil to make sure they were happy and settled. These pupils are the first year group to have their 'own' Year 5 charges this year and talk with justified pride about their own mentoring. Pupils know clearly how to stay healthy and fit and are exceptionally well involved in school decision-making, feeling that their views are listened to and acted upon. Despite the school's best efforts to improve attendance, this remains average, relating mainly to holidays taken in term-time. Behaviour is excellent, in lessons and elsewhere. Pupils are shrewd enough to recognise when distracting behaviour from a small minority has occasionally disturbed learning. They are similarly wise enough to understand, discuss and support what the school is doing about it, commenting thoughtfully about the positive impact of interventions to improve these pupils' attitudes. Pupils and their parents comment very positively on the high quality of teaching and the excellent contribution which staff make to pupils' academic and personal achievement. Many parents especially commend the high level of staff commitment, responsiveness and approachability. A few would like more feedback and communication, for

instance about cancellations or changes to the timing of clubs, but the overwhelming majority are exceptionally pleased with the school's provision. Aspects of the curriculum which parents and pupils appreciate in particular are the 'special days' such as the recent House Day. These give pupils valuable opportunities to work with older and younger ones on a rich range of activities which enhance their experience significantly, as does the extensive range of popular extra-curricular opportunities available in many subjects. The outstanding care, guidance and support reported at the last inspection have improved further, especially in the strength of academic guidance provided through significantly better assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. These procedures give staff, parents and pupils a sharp, comprehensive view of targets and progress towards these, signalling clearly when further support or greater challenge are required. This has led to work which matches individual pupils' needs much more finely. Recent staff appointments have improved provision for the highest attainers and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so both groups achieve as well as their peers. Although many of the most able leave for selective education at Year 7, the ablest pupils remaining are guided and challenged very effectively to achieve exceptionally high standards at Year 8. The headteacher's outstanding leadership is a major contributory factor in the school's success, and a large proportion of parents' comments recognise this. He has created high morale and a focused drive towards continuous improvement which is shared by adults and pupils alike. Challenging targets go well beyond those related to pupils' progress, encompassing innovative curriculum changes and a strong commitment to the development of every child equally. Though sometimes a little modest, the school's self-evaluation is accurate, including judgements about the quality of teaching. Recent disappointing results in mathematics, for instance, triggered extensive analysis and subsequent successful focus on subject teaching, which has improved pupil achievement. A strong governing body supports staff very well and offers outstanding levels of challenge to move the school forward. The impact of the school's new specialism is becoming evident through an improved curriculum in sports and, as pupils say, 'much better equipment for lots of different sports activities'. Very effective work with an extensive range of partners is a strength of the school, which enjoys a justifiably high reputation in its community and beyond.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with parents and other partners such as the local authority to improve pupils' attendance.

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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 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/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Middle School, Colehill BH21 7AB

Thank you very much indeed for your warm welcome when I visited your school for the inspection. It was a real pleasure to be there, to talk to many of you in the playground and to some of you in a more formal discussion. As I was only there for a short time, I could not visit many lessons, but it was good to see you working so well in those I saw. I am writing to tell you what I found out.

On such a short inspection, we focus on specific areas which we agree in advance with the school. In this case, I concentrated on the following things. I looked at whether the school's recent work to improve the teaching of mathematics has made your progress quicker and I found that it has. Achievement is excellent in English and in mathematics by Year 8. I also looked at progress in science. This was not quite as good in Year 8 this year because of staffing problems and the difficulty of organising the Key Stage 3 science curriculum into two years. Both these issues are now fixed, and progress in science is better. I looked at the progress of different groups – boys and girls, faster and slower learners for instance – and found that you all progress excellently. This has improved because staff now have much better systems which check how much progress you are making, and they provide better support or challenge when you need it. Finally, I looked at whether progress is better in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6. That was the case this year, especially in English and mathematics, but is not always so, and it was better in science in Years 5 and 6. The school has spent a lot of time and energy successfully reorganising the Year 7 and 8 curriculum, which has significantly improved progress and standards there. Staff are now planning well for future changes in Years 5 and 6 to make your progress more even across the school.

In general, I found your school to be outstanding. I was particularly impressed with your personal development, confidence and friendliness. You become considerate, sensible young people who value relationships with adults and other children, those you know and others less fortunate. The leadership and management of the school are excellent, and I agree with many of your parents who commented on this and on the exceptional quality of teaching you receive. To improve things further, I have asked the school to work with your parents and other partners such as the local authority, to improve your attendance, for instance by avoiding holidays during term-time. You can help too, for example, if you are one of the pupils whose attendance could be better you would be helping your future chances by improving it.

Yours faithfully

Janet Simms Lead inspector