

Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123129
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327854
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	102
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	Mr David Herlihy
Headteacher	Mrs Melissa Fry
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Queen Street Dorchester-on-Thames Wallingford OX10 7HR
Telephone number	01865 340081

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves the villages of Dorchester on Thames and Drayton St Leonard, and draws almost half of its pupils from further afield. The overwhelming majority are of White British origin, and none speak English as an additional language. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs, and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The needs of these pupils include specific learning, speech, language and communication difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low.

The school was awarded an Activemark in 2008 and gained Eco-schools status in 2007.

There is an on-site pre-school playgroup which is managed independently of governing body. This provision is inspected separately and reported upon elsewhere.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school continues to provide a good quality of education, as it did at the last inspection. The appointment of a new headteacher has brought fresh impetus to the work of the school. She has guided the staff in making accurate evaluations of the school's performance and taken decisive action to improve pupils' achievements. However, while the headteacher and her deputy have a keen oversight of the quality of education across the school, other staff are at the early stages of learning how to develop the skills of subject leadership.

Over the past couple of years, good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 has led to pupils achieving levels that exceed those expected of five- and seven-year-olds. The same is true this year, with a good proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics. In Key Stage 2, the picture has been more mixed. Standards, though slightly above the national average, have not been high enough, and pupils' achievements in English and mathematics only satisfactory at best. This year there has been a sharper focus, led by the headteacher, on tracking individual pupils' progress and ensuring that those who need extra help receive it. The school's data show that current Year 6 pupils have made good progress since Year 2 in English, mathematics and science.

The school's commitment to the whole child is reflected in pupils' enthusiastic responses and palpable enjoyment of what is on offer each day. Relationships are cordial, and pupils are swift to point to this as a prime reason for why they feel safe and well cared for. Many pupils express a keen sense of the importance of learning and the good teaching they receive. As one pupil put it, 'They (the teachers) really help you, so that eventually you are able to do what you thought you couldn't do.'

Throughout the school, the well-considered deployment of teaching assistants supports the learning of individual pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching in Reception and Key Stage 1 is consistently good. The teachers get to know their pupils' needs very well and communicate successfully their high expectations for work and purposeful play. These teachers match tasks accurately to pupils' abilities and, as a result, the pace of learning is brisk. In Years 3 to 6, although teaching is good overall, the pace of learning is not always so brisk. The inspector's analysis of pupils' work shows that teachers' expectations are less consistent. Pupils are occasionally allowed to produce work that does not reflect the quality evident elsewhere in their books. While most work is marked with encouraging comment, there are few examples of incisive feedback that tell the pupils how to improve or to achieve a specific target.

The school faces some considerable challenges over the summer, including changes to the staff team and the creation of a large class for Years 3 and 4. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, but these changes are causing concern for a few. The inspector's conversations with the headteacher and governors indicate that plans are well advanced to ensure the school continues to maintain the many strengths of its existing provision.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Reception class make a good start to their education and achieve well. Effective induction arrangements ensure that children are well prepared for school. This term there are regular visits to school, and meetings to share information with parents and carers. Children

from the neighbouring pre-school make frequent informal visits to the Reception class, and as a result are already making many friends within the school and becoming familiar with routines.

The teacher's assessments of children at the start of the year show that most arrive with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that are at least in line with those expected for four-year-olds. This is particularly the case in respect of their personal social and emotional development, as well as communication, language and literacy.

The teacher provides a well-judged blend of activities covering each of the areas of learning in both indoor and outdoor classrooms. There is a good balance of activities that children choose for themselves and those that adults lead. Learning is frequently enlivened by effective links between the areas. For instance, led by the teacher, children practised counting using model jam tarts. Their learning was successfully extended as the teacher introduced the concept of sharing fairly between individuals and identifying matching numerals. The next day children were helped to bake their own jam tarts and, with great excitement, they shared these around the school. Approaches to developing a love of language are similarly creative. Children are already starting to write for a variety of purposes. They are proud of their writing and eager to read it to visitors. Thorough approaches to teaching children about letters and sounds are building their confidence and their early reading skills.

Arrangements for assessment are thorough. Staff record daily observations of what children know and can do, as well as photographs and samples of notable pieces of work. This builds into a helpful picture of each child's progress that is effectively supported by a sheet showing progress against the national scales.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed. There is a sharp focus on children's all-round development and the successful transition to the types of work demanded by the National Curriculum. Positive relationships and effective teaching support the development of extremely positive attitudes to learning, so that by the end of the Reception Year almost every child has attained a good level of overall achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that marking in Key Stage 2 is more consistent and offers incisive feedback to pupils about how they can improve their work.
- Review individual responsibilities, so that staff at all levels increase further their effectiveness as leaders and managers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The results attained by Year 6 pupils in 2008 were in line with the national average in English and science, and above average in mathematics. The small cohort contained a predominance of boys and, while their performance in mathematics was strong, it was weaker in English. The current Year 6 cohort contains a wide spread of abilities, and the school's tracking data provide strong evidence that they have all made good progress from their starting points in Year 2, regardless of gender. This is particularly the case for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties. Sharp assessment and well-considered support help these pupils to make good progress towards their targets.

The 2008 assessments of Year 2 pupils continued the positive trend of previous years, with standards in reading, writing and mathematics comfortably above the national average. The

current Year 2 shows further improvement, with an even greater proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

'I like this school. It's small, friendly and I'm getting really good at maths.' This type of comment is typical of many heard by the inspector, and he agrees with the positive sentiment. The overwhelming majority of pupils express similarly positive views. Their attendance is well above average, and behaviour and attitudes to learning almost always good.

Pupils have a good understanding of what it means to stay safe and keep fit and healthy. This is reflected in the school's Activemark award. The weather during the inspection was hot and humid, and those taking vigorous exercise during breaks were regularly observed drinking water. Others speak persuasively about the importance of diet and exercise.

Pupils have a keen sense of their local community and the part they can play within it. Many spoke of their commitment to the drive to achieve Eco-schools status. This included their work in support of Hurst Water Meadow, involvement in the recycling of materials, and the potential benefits of solar power. Work in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education has prepared them well for the cultural diversity of 21st Century Britain. By Year 6 pupils have a good understanding of major religions such as Islam, and have visited a local mosque. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. The pupils' friendly and confident approach to adults and their good skills in literacy and numeracy mean that they are well prepared for the next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Throughout the school, the positive relationships that exist between pupils and adults provide an excellent foundation for successful teaching and learning. Teachers plan thoroughly, and generally ensure that pupils of different abilities are given work that is well matched to their abilities. This is particularly the case for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who have been identified as underachieving. The deployment of well-trained teaching assistants to support these pupils is very effective because they make the daily progressive teaching of core skills fun and enjoyable. Pupils have a palpable sense of success and progress. Recent work to challenge more-able pupils in mathematics has also led to increased progress in Key Stage 2.

Teachers frequently make effective use of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning. In Year 2, pupils were swift to respond to increasingly challenging questions about telling the time. Their desire to succeed was enhanced by the knowledge that they could check their answers using the interactive screen.

Teachers offer plenty of encouragement and helpful feedback to pupils during lessons. While pupils' written work is mostly marked promptly and accurately, pupils in Key Stage 2 do not always receive feedback to tell them how to improve. There is little evidence of pupils correcting or revisiting past work, or of teachers encouraging the development of this key discipline.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which is responsive to the needs and interests of pupils and contributes strongly to their overall achievement and enjoyment. Helpful cross-curricular links are being developed that enable pupils to transfer skills and knowledge between subjects. For instance, the analysis of pupils' work reveals regular opportunities to practise a variety of writing styles in science, history and PSHE. Mathematical skills also feature in many of the pupils' accounts of the investigative work in science, along with the use of information and communication technology.

Learning is enhanced by the wide range of visits and visitors. There are many opportunities for pupils to deepen and extend their learning through their local involvement with Dorchester Abbey and the Hurst Water Meadow project. The school also has a firm focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with visits such as those to the Oxford mosque and synagogue. As a result pupils are building a secure appreciation of the diversity of British society. The extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for personal success, and contributes strongly to pupils' personal and social development. Governors have well-considered plans to extend the scope of these arrangements. Pupils who find learning more difficult are skilfully supported, and the school has made a secure start to identifying the types of enrichment activities that benefit the more-able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides excellent levels of pastoral care and support for pupils. There are effective child protection and safeguarding arrangements, and risk assessments are regularly undertaken for all aspects of school life. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for, and new pupils are welcomed into the school and settle quickly. Procedures to support pupils who have learning difficulties are good. An effective range of intervention strategies helps to accelerate their progress.

Recent improvement in tracking pupils' progress and the introduction of personal targets are beginning to improve the quality of academic support. The headteacher has established clear expectations and processes for collecting and collating data about progress. These underpin the school's increasingly ambitious targets for each year group. However, the use of individual targets for pupils is inconsistent and has yet to have a major impact on helping pupils to be always clear about the next steps of their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new headteacher has made rapid and accurate assessments of the school. She is clear about its many strengths, but has correctly identified that there is not enough rigour in ensuring that pupils achieve their utmost. The monitoring of teaching and learning has successfully identified important areas for improvement, especially in relation to ensuring more consistent challenge in Key Stage 2. Similarly the introduction of regular discussions about pupils' progress is helping teachers to 'raise their game' and set more accurate targets. As a result, achievement is improving. September will see some major changes to the staff team but, as yet, most teachers remain at the early stages of developing their roles as leaders and managers.

The governors have a good oversight of the work of the school. They recognise its importance as a focal point for the local community and encourage the pupils' involvement in it through recycling and environmental projects, gardening, and making the most of the history and geography of the immediate area. They successfully ensure that the school's teaching and curriculum help pupils to value and understand communities beyond their own. They share the headteacher's concern to 'raise the bar' for pupils. In addition to providing constructive challenge, many offer practical help and support, for instance by helping in class and leading poetry lessons for more-able Year 6 pupils. The school is well placed for the future.

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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	2
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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
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**

07 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dorchester St Birinus Church of England School, Wallingford, OX10 7HR

Thank you very much for your warm and friendly welcome during the recent inspection of your school. It was a pleasure to meet you all. The many conversations I had with you were extremely useful in helping me to discover all about St Birinus.

St Birinus is a good school. From the moment I arrived I was impressed by your good behaviour. You are polite and courteous and work hard in lessons. Many of you know a lot about your local community, and I particularly like the way you take care of each other throughout the day.

One of the main reasons you all achieve well is that your teachers do their best to make learning fun. I could see that Years 3 and 4 learned a lot about designing pop-up books because they had the chance to test out different techniques themselves. Class 2 clearly enjoyed their tongue-twisters, and by the end of the lesson many of you had learnt them by heart. Oh yes, and the jam tarts made in Class 1 were delicious!

Most of the time Classes 3 and 4 take care to do their work neatly, but this isn't always the case. I have asked teachers to make sure that you always write neatly and take pride in your work. I was delighted to find that most of you know your targets and can explain them to visitors. However, in order to help you make even faster progress, we'd like the teachers to make sure that when they mark your work they tell you whether you are getting closer to your targets, and how you can improve still further. You can help by reading their suggestions and using them in your next piece of work. I've also suggested that teachers get to know a bit more about what is happening outside their own classrooms so that they can help each other to make St Birinus even better.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Hugh Protherough

Lead Inspector