

Rode Methodist VC First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123823
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	327998
Inspection date	2 December 2008
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 controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	69
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	Kate Robinson
Headteacher	Carolyn Tommey
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Rode Frome BA11 6NZ
Telephone number	01373 830523
Fax number	01373 830523

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

Whether the provision for the most able and the gifted and talented pupils ensures they make the best possible progress.

Whether the school's self-evaluation is accurate.

Whether all major elements of the school's work are at least good and if any areas are exemplary.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, documentation, interviews with the headteacher, governors including the chair, and discussions with pupils and staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the school's own self-assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This small rural school serves its local village although a significant minority of pupils come from further afield. All children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) start school together in September. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are of White British background although there is an increasing proportion of bilingual pupils, mostly speaking European languages. The school has recently been awarded Artsmark gold for the third time. It is part of the Frome Community Learning Partnership which combines expertise from 17 local schools.

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. From a strong position at the time of the last inspection, it has continued to improve significantly. This has come about through a highly creative curriculum and excellent and confident teaching. Consequently, pupils achieve exceptionally well, reaching very high academic standards and are extremely well prepared for their future lives. One parent summed up the thoughts of many when she noted, 'This is a forward thinking school, not afraid to be different. Learning comes alive!'

These delightful pupils are highly enthusiastic learners. They relish the many opportunities they are given to initiate projects and to take part in school events, all of which make an outstanding contribution to the local community. Their views and ideas are an integral part of the school's development. For example, they are about to start interviewing possible contributors and specialists to help them with their next production at a local theatre. This is a follow-on from a highly successful multi-media project entitled, 'Is it playtime yet?' In lessons, all pupils settle quickly to independent tasks and often are working so hard on their own or in groups that the teacher has difficulty in stopping them. In one discussion, a pupil mentioned that he could do with more time at school so that he could finish everything. A consequence of this is that behaviour and attitudes towards school are exemplary and attendance very high. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The next step, as the school correctly identifies, is to enhance pupils' understanding of this country's cultural diversity and so raise even further their already excellent understanding of community cohesion and global citizenship.

Although there are small numbers in each year group, children generally start in the EYFS with skills that are slightly above those levels expected for their age. Thorough assessment ensures that pupils' achievement is measured regularly. This shows that significant proportions of pupils make better than expected levels of progress. For example, standards in the national tests taken in Year 2 in 2008 were significantly better than average and have been consistently so for three of the last four years. In 2008, over twice the proportion of pupils in Year 4, where there are no national figures for comparison, were working at levels that were much higher than expected, even though these pupils started school with average standards. Their performance in these basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are only part of the story. Achievement in information and communication technology (ICT), art, music and physical education is equally high. Pupils, especially the more able, also have a good understanding of the world around them, developed through their studies in geography, science and history. The school uses a range of master classes to help those identified with a particular gift to make the most of their talents. Data about these pupils show they also make excellent progress.

The outstanding curriculum is based on giving pupils a wealth of different experiences and ensuring they see a real purpose to what they are learning. Lesson planning is extremely thorough. Lessons move at a fast pace and are well balanced between input from the teacher and participation by the pupils. The school has made excellent use of its own internal expertise as well as from outside specialists and its partnership with a local media and arts college to develop a highly advanced curriculum. In association with two other small schools, a French language assistant has helped improve the teaching of modern foreign languages. In addition, dance, music and arts specialists have been involved in a very wide variety of practical work. Local community gardeners and cooks have helped pupils develop fully their excellent understanding about healthy living. Activities include using an allotment, growing, cooking

and eating vegetables, as well as selling some at the school fair. At lunchtime, one pupil remarked about his balanced packed lunch explaining how he needed calcium to help grow healthy bones.

Classrooms are a vibrant and interactive environment for learning, where wall displays both celebrate good work and provide thoughtful ideas connected to whatever is being learnt. For instance, before starting the school's topic on fire, pupils were asked to suggest things they wanted to know: these included, 'Why do some flames have blue sparks?' and 'Perhaps we could go to the forest to see how wood burns.' By the end of the topic, the teacher makes sure these questions have been answered, although admitted that finding out 'how dragons breathe fire' could prove difficult.

The pastoral care, guidance and support pupils receive are excellent. Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and virtually no accidents have been recorded this term. All this leads to pupils' excellent understanding of safe practices. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and to take risks within a safe environment. For instance, the sensory path around the perimeter has been designed with different surfaces so that pupils can walk, run or cycle and so gain confidence in their own physical ability.

The academic guidance pupils receive is good, although not quite as strong as their pastoral guidance. The school undertakes regular and comprehensive analysis of each pupil's progress to ensure that support can be given quickly and so overcome any potential underachievement. Much of this support is identified in the planning of lessons and often there are different groups working on a similar theme. For example, in Year 1, pupils were trying out Samuel Pepys quills to see how well they could write, while those in the same class in Year 2 were writing up diaries about the Fire of London. Pupils, particularly the older ones, have group targets which they know and work on. However, targets for individual pupils are not so evident and they are not discussed with them. As a result, pupils do not always know how they can move from one level to the next or about how well they are doing. The school is rightly working on developing better systems, and recognises that these pupils have well developed skills in thinking for themselves.

The headteacher's extremely strong leadership has been at the forefront of improvement. She has empowered the whole school community to share ideas for improvements and developments. Currently, pupils are being consulted about how to use the new field area that is being developed, with ideas such as 'go-kart' tracks. Together with the highly effective governing body and whole staff, she has been instrumental in making considerable improvements across all areas of the school's provision, which have had a significant impact on pupils' achievements. This drive for continuous improvement means that in its evaluation of its effectiveness in some areas, the school underestimates how well it is doing. Nevertheless, all evidence points towards a school with an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The highly effective provision in the EYFS means that the youngest children make an extremely secure start to their education. Through the very comprehensive transition arrangements, they settle into school life quickly and recent assessments indicate they are making extremely good progress. The excellent teaching promotes children's inquisitiveness and encourages them to find out more. For example, after being prompted by the teacher to 'have a go', they dispersed gradually to both the indoor and outdoor areas to search out their answers. Teaching assistants are deployed very well to assist and question rather than to direct learning. For instance, children hunted for numbers under leaves, worked on the whiteboard or with each other in role-play

activities while the adults supported them with suggestions. Standards by the start of Year 1 for children in the Reception class last year were well above average in all six areas of learning. The EYFS leader, who normally teaches Years 1 and 2, teaches the Reception class once a week. This allows good oversight and monitoring so that any potential issues and areas for development are rapidly dealt with and provision continues to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use individual targets more effectively to enhance pupils' understanding of what they have learnt and what they need to do next.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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	1
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?	2

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**

3 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rode Methodist VC First School, Rode, BA11 6NZ

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. We very much enjoyed talking to so many of you, having lunch with you and seeing what you were up to. I really enjoyed watching the DVD of your production. It will be no surprise to you that we have said your school is excellent. As I promised some of you, I have enclosed the main points of our report below.

- You told us how much you liked school and we can see why. There are just so many interesting things that you do. These all help to ensure you make excellent progress and reach high standards.
- You also said that you thought behaviour was excellent – we agree! In lessons you behave extremely well and on some occasions when you were working on your own, we could hear a pin drop!
- Your teachers really do know how to make you think hard. As you said, the work you do is interesting and provides you with lots of challenges.
- We think that one of the best things about your school is the very many exciting activities you do in art, dance, drama, PE and music – the list is endless!
- You are cared for extremely well. All the staff make sure you are kept safe but also that you can try out things which will teach you how to stay safe when you get older.
- Your headteacher has lots of exciting things planned for the future and knows how to make things even better.

We have asked your teachers to give you individual targets to help you understand more clearly what you need to do next. We are sure you will be able to talk with your teachers about these targets.

Finally, please carry on working hard so that your school continues to be one of the best – and of course, good luck for the future!

Yours faithfully

David Collard Lead inspector