

# Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113767
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	338236
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Deborah Zachary

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	61
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Gerald Bray
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Tanya Robinson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 November 2006
<b>School address</b>	Chard Street Thorncombe Chard TA20 4NE
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who visited six lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, and a range of groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation showing support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the school's data about pupils' progress, the school action plan, the school's records of monitoring of teaching and learning, and a range of other documentation. Questionnaires returned by pupils and staff and 36 questionnaires returned by parents were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- progress in writing, to see how effectively the school identifies areas to improve
- improvements made to teaching and progress, in order to assess the impact of actions taken to raise their quality
- how well the needs of Early Years Foundation Stage children are met in the mixed-age class
- the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- pupils' behaviour, their views about it and the impact of the school's actions to promote good behaviour.

The last two aspects became focus areas during the course of the inspection.

## Information about the school

Thorncombe is a very small school. Some pupils come from the village, but about two thirds come from further afield. All are White British, but they are from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. There is a comparatively high turnover of pupils; higher proportions leave or join between Reception and Year 6 than is typical nationally. A broadly average proportion of pupils, 18%, have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the majority of these have specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). However, none of them has a statement of special educational needs. There are three classes: two for Key Stage 2 and one catering for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception) alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2.

The school has been accredited with the following awards:

- Healthy School 2007
- Activemark 2008
- Investors in People 2008
- Eco Schools Green Flag 2009.

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

### Main findings

This is a satisfactory school whose strengths lie in pupils' personal development and in the provision made for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The pupils are exceptionally knowledgeable about how to stay healthy, and are able to explain not just about how they have improved their health but how they have been able to affect the eating and exercise habits of their families too. Behaviour is good and the pupils feel safe. They can reflect about their own and others' lives, and the very large majority show a care for and sensitivity to each other's feelings. They much enjoy school, and the curriculum is interesting and wide-ranging.

Each year group is small, so standards by Year 6 vary from year to year. They are broadly average. Standards and progress rose after the last inspection, but about a year ago the school identified that there was significant unsatisfactory progress in the early part of Key Stage 2. Though the actions taken have had some effect and teaching and progress are satisfactory, there is ground to make up for some pupils, particularly those who are less able or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching quality still varies greatly between classes. A significant amount is good or better but sometimes the pace is too slow and sometimes those who are less able find it difficult to get into a task because of the way it is presented. There is not always a clear and simple objective for them to aim for in lessons. The most able pupils, however, have made good progress because work set in lessons is usually pitched at the right level for this group.

The school has the feeling of a strong community and has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Staff work as a good team and both teachers and teaching assistants are highly committed to their pupils and raising pupils' achievement. Plans for improvement are clear and address the right things, identified through the school's sound self-evaluation. What has been done has had a positive effect. However, though the school has identified weaknesses and taken appropriate action, monitoring systems are not sufficiently fine-tuned to have the maximum impact. For example, the monitoring of teaching is perceptive, but its impact is lessened because points for improvement are not always rigorously or quickly pursued. Information about progress is interrogated, but not in fine detail. Targets on the individual plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are sometimes too complex, and resulting strategies that have not had the desired impact have not always been changed quickly enough. However, the one-to-one or small group teaching sessions provided for these pupils, led by teaching assistants, do result in effective learning.

The governors are involved and effective. They have deployed resources well to support the school's drive to improve teaching. The school works closely with many partners,

including the secondary school to which most pupils go, and the local pre-school, enhancing provision for pupils and children. Parents are supportive and attendance is above average, but a significant number of parents have some concerns, and particularly misapprehensions about the state of behaviour in the school and how well it is handled.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning where teaching is weaker by:
  - quickening the pace demanded of pupils in lessons and ensuring they complete enough work
  - making sure that the tasks set for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are presented in a way that encourages them to make better progress
  - tightening the system for improving teaching to ensure support is quickly given to overcome significant weaknesses and further checks are made within a tight timeframe.
- Improve tracking and target setting by:
  - identifying simple and clear targets for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, both in lessons and in their termly individual plans
  - regularly reviewing pupils' progress towards each target in the individual plans and adjusting the provision or strategies where progress is too slow
  - analysing data about all pupils' attainment in finer detail, to identify where rapid intervention is needed for specific groups of pupils.
- Work with parents to deepen understanding of how the school's behaviour strategies can support their children.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**3**

Achievement is satisfactory overall, but lesson observations confirmed that progress varies too much across different parts of the school. Progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is good. Pupils have a well-used rewards chart in Key Stage 1 and are delighted when they can add a sticker. They are happy and contribute well to class discussion, often after talking to a partner to clarify their ideas, an effective activity also seen during observations in the Year 5/6 class. Pupils also respond well in Key Stage 2 when they are involved in their own learning through clear lesson objectives or through some extremely helpful suggestions in marking. However, lesson objectives for the lower attaining pupils are sometimes too open and success criteria too numerous for them to be sure they have reached what was required. In contrast, examples of focused objectives that did help included 'use connectives in my writing' and the connectives displayed on the wall helped the pupils to check. Sometimes, the pace of work drops because teachers spend too long on an activity, or they do not insist on writing being completed or because they fail to set time limits. This again slows the

progress of the lower attainers. Behaviour can be very good, but if the pace drops, pupils lose concentration and some chat.

Pupils have a good knowledge of the wider cultures of the world as well as those present in their own country. They are also very committed to helping the school and the local community through charity work, through recycling and through local projects such as supporting the viability of the village shop. They are alert to safety issues, and some warned an inspector of the danger of walking up a steep bank. Though play can be boisterous at breaktimes, all involved assured inspectors they were enjoying it and felt secure. There is a quiet area for children in Reception and Years 1 and 2 to play in if they wish.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers apply good strategies for discipline, ensuring that pupils are quiet and listening when they speak. They choose groups effectively, for example in Years 1 and 2 where spelling questions are carefully targeted to pupils' needs. Resources are used well to stimulate ideas, particularly in Years 5 and 6, where learning is often lively with

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

resources and stimuli for ideas all around. Though the level of work is broadly targeted to pupils' needs, this is much more successful for the more able than for the less able. Some lower attaining pupils' books show that they do not write enough, or get through enough work in a lesson. Some tasks have the subject content at the right level but the way it is presented means the pupils struggle to engage with the subject matter. For example, they might understand but have difficulty recording in the way the class has been asked, or they might struggle with choosing the order they are asked to do some things rather than the things themselves. In Year 1/2, however, during a lesson in which pupils read out what they thought the feelings of 'Mr Wolf' were, lower attainers were sensitively enabled to take part.

The curriculum as a whole is very imaginative and highly enriched. Innovative ideas for visits include a residential trip to London and visits to a London school. Such features greatly extend pupils' experience. It meets the needs of the majority of pupils very well. Pastoral care is good, as is pastoral support for vulnerable pupils. Guidance about secondary education is effective. Arrangements for small group teaching and an associated curriculum that meet the requirements of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have recently been changed. They are satisfactory, although plans for support for some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities sometimes lack clarity, and monitoring of the long-term effectiveness of support has been limited.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

Staff are ambitious for the pupils, and the school's leaders are taking appropriate steps to drive improvement. With only a small number of teachers, each carries several management responsibilities. For this reason, development planning must prioritise the very most important areas for improvement, and the school has rightly focused on improving teaching and improving writing. Both these areas have improved to an adequate extent. The headteacher has appropriately been released from class teaching for two terms to enable improvement to accelerate. She is aware that the monitoring of teaching has not been fully systematic because points for improvement are not specifically picked up from one observation to the next, and observations have not taken place regularly enough.

The school's leaders and managers have been effective in establishing an atmosphere in

which pupils feel cared for, and safeguarding procedures and requirements are met well. The school promotes community cohesion well, both within school and locally but also nationally and internationally through partnerships with other schools. Individual pupils are all valued, and the requirements of equalities legislation are also met. However, despite satisfactory improvements, there are still differences in the progress of pupils of different abilities.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

The school assesses the capability of children on entry and again at the end of their time in Reception. These assessments show that last year the children made very good progress. This year, there are fewer children in the year group but they are benefiting from skilled teaching, with adults well aware of the need to ensure that they have plenty of opportunities for talk. Teaching assistants take every chance to join in play, weaving learning and questioning into what the children themselves are doing. In one impressive more formal lesson, the children used pipes to guide the flow of water from a water butt in the grounds, while the adult questioned very effectively, drawing their attention to ideas they might have missed such as which way the water flows. Long-term planning is good, covering all the recommended areas of learning, and progress is tracked well and analysed effectively. Though the outside area is used for learning activities, the covered play area immediately outside the classroom is much less enticing than the area used for free play indoors. As a result, children tend to stay indoors. Lesson planning does target aspects of learning that will be drawn out by adults during play, but opportunities are still sometimes missed to link free play to formal learning aspects such as phonics.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

**Views of parents and carers**

The majority of parents are highly satisfied with the school. A quarter of the responses to the inspection questionnaire had additional comments that were very positive, such as 'an excellent school' and 'I am really pleased.' Many commented on the supportive atmosphere and sense of community, which inspectors also noticed. They also commented on the way that their children love school, which the pupils confirmed to the inspectors.

Parents' biggest concerns were about behaviour and some bullying. Inspectors saw no unacceptable behaviour, either in lessons or in the playground, though play can be boisterous as pupils let off steam. Inspectors interviewed many groups of pupils about their views of behaviour, both formally and informally in the playground. Only a very few pupils, in Years 3 and 4, had concerns, which were about the way two or three Year 6 pupils sometimes behave towards them. All pupils said they felt very safe and could always go to teachers if they were worried about anything. The school is aware of the issues and has appropriate behaviour strategies. A very small number of parents had concerns about safety on trips. The school's safeguarding procedures are good, including risk assessments for trips.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 61 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	64	9	25	4	11	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	53	13	36	3	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	44	15	42	3	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	53	12	33	3	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	58	13	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	50	14	39	3	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	75	9	25	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	53	12	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	53	14	39	1	3	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	33	14	39	1	3	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	31	21	58	3	8	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	23	64	7	19	3	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	64	10	28	2	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



15 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Chard TA20 4NE

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited your school. Thanks especially to the many pupils who talked to me, both in groups and in the playground. We found that you are getting a satisfactory education, but at the same time found some good things about the school. The youngest pupils, for example, get off to a good start at the school. I was really impressed with the way you understand how to stay healthy, for example through your running and sports. You told me you feel very safe and you really enjoy the wide range of things the school offers you. You make a good contribution to the school and the village, helping whenever you can. You behave well, though a very few of the older ones need to sometimes be a bit more careful of some younger ones' feelings.

I have asked the school to work on some things so it can get even better.

- Make more teaching as good as the best. You can help by trying to work as fast as you can and making sure you know what you are trying to learn each lesson. If the work is confusing, ask for help.
- Tighten up the checks that are made on your progress and how good teaching is.
- Make sure that the school identifies clear things to aim for each term for those who find learning difficult.
- Work with your parents to make sure everyone is happy with behaviour in the school.

All the best for the future

Yours faithfully

Deborah Zachary

Lead inspector

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