

St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113897
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	338264
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Tom Winkskill HMI

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 of pupils on the school roll	481
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Benny Hazlehurst
Headteacher	Mr Carl Winch
Date of previous school inspection	5 April 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 22 lessons taught by 16 teachers and met with groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work including scrutinising pupils' books, and looked at school monitoring records, improvement plans, policies and schemes of work and 158 questionnaires from parents and carers. Inspectors spent about one third of their time during the school days directly observing learning.

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

- how well the school provides for pupils identified as gifted and talented and those with different levels of attainment
- the quality of teaching and learning in different subjects and in different key stages
- the features of the curriculum which make the most effective contribution to pupils' learning and well-being
- aspects of care, guidance and support that enable potentially vulnerable pupils to thrive.

Information about the school

The school is part of the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership and serves a large rural area to the east of Dorchester, receiving pupils from six first schools. It has been a specialist science and mathematics school since April 2007. The school's facilities, including those for music and information and communication technology (ICT), have been improved since the last inspection. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average. In 2009, the school gained the UNICEF 'Rights Respecting Schools' Award and was redesignated as a National Healthy School.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school which is taking the right steps to become outstanding. It rightly commands the confidence of parents and carers. The school's distinctive ethos is reflected in the outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. This in turn manifests itself in their outstanding behaviour and highly positive attitudes to all aspects of school life. The pupils benefit from outstanding care, guidance and support including provision which enables a range of pupils, who might otherwise find school very difficult, to participate in school life and learn well. Skilful, purposeful teaching enables the pupils to make good progress throughout the school so that by the time they leave their attainment in the core subjects is exceptional. However, some teaching does not take into account fully the needs of all pupils with different abilities and aptitudes and so opportunities are missed to bring about outstanding learning and progress consistently. Pupils are not always clear about how well they are doing and what, precisely, they need to do to improve the quality of their work. The curriculum provides a wide range of challenging opportunities and it is to the school's credit that pupils achieve so well in a two-year Key Stage 3. Pupils are able to apply their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT in different subjects. However, these are not sufficiently coherently planned to enable pupils' preparation for the next phase of their education to be outstanding. In addition, provision for careers education in Key Stage 3 is limited. The school's specialist status, which was achieved through effective liaison with other schools in the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership, contributes well to the school's work. Attainment in science and mathematics is exceptionally high and in 2009 a group of Year 8 pupils won a prestigious national science competition. A recent family learning day for science was well supported.

The school's strong capacity for improvement is well established. The highly effective governing body, along with the headteacher and senior staff, is instrumental in setting a clear vision of continuous improvement for the school. School leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. For at least the last three years, pupils have left the school having achieved well. Care, guidance and support and aspects of the pupils' personal development and well-being have improved since the last inspection as a result of planned actions taken by school leaders. However, there are too few opportunities to make use of the different expertise found in different subjects and to share good and outstanding practice. Consequently not all staff are enabled to make a full contribution to whole-school improvement initiatives. As a result of the outstanding outcomes for pupils, the school provides excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- In order to improve pupils' learning and progress from good to outstanding, improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to support learning in each subject by:
 - providing different tasks and activities in lessons so that pupils with different prior attainment, and including those identified as gifted and/or talented in that particular subject, can make more rapid progress
 - systematically ensuring pupils know how well they are doing
 - explaining to individual pupils precisely what they have to do in each piece of assessed work in order to meet or exceed their target grades or levels for that subject
 - providing opportunities for staff from different subject areas to share and implement good practice
- In order to improve the extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being, improve the curriculum by planning and implementing:
 - whole school, cross-curricular approaches to the application of literacy, numeracy and ICT, building on the expertise and current good practice in different subjects
 - a careers education programme in Key Stage 3.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons, tutorial periods, assemblies and around the school at breaktime and lunchtime. Fixed-term exclusions are low and permanent exclusions are very rare. Pupils are courteous and polite and get on very well with adults and their peers alike. They respond well to their teachers and are keen to succeed, which most do in the calm, positive, friendly working atmosphere. In lessons the vast majority of pupils are compliant and extremely focused. For example, pupils in a food technology lesson concentrated avidly as the teacher demonstrated safe knife-handling skills. They then worked independently of the teacher carefully following set procedures, in pairs, preparing food by applying effectively the skills they had learned. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their work.

Achievement is outstanding because of the good progress pupils make throughout the school and their continued high levels of attainment in tests in English, mathematics and science. For example, in each of these subjects in 2009, well over 80% of the pupils gained Level 5 or better after only two years of study in Key Stage 3. This is a commendable achievement as most schools do not reach this high percentage after three years of study. The few pupils with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties make good progress because the school takes effective steps, including the good deployment of well-trained learning support assistants in lessons, to enable them to meet or exceed their targets. In addition, the school ensures pupils with a range of social and emotional difficulties participate fully in school life. This results from a

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detailed and accurate assessment of pupils' needs and highly effective concerted action including the involvement of families and outside agencies.

Pupils feel safe in school, although well-behaved but boisterous play on the cramped hard play areas means that a small minority of pupils do not feel as secure as they would like. The pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is encapsulated in one boy's highly perceptive comments in a discussion with an inspector after thinking deeply about his studies of the other religions. He was able to reflect maturely and sensitively on what life might be like in modern Britain for people whose religion, lifestyle and culture were very different to his own. Pupils appreciate the success of others. They also take the opportunities through reflection time and prayer provided in assembly and in their 'reflection diaries' to consider a range of issues, including the plight of those suffering elsewhere in the world.

Pupils are well prepared for their move from middle to high school and enjoy opportunities to work in teams and to take on wider responsibilities. For example, some high attaining older pupils support younger pupils who are preparing for national tests in Year 6. Some pupils are also part of the anti-bullying campaign and act as a first port of call for other pupils who feel they may be being bullied. These activities also exemplify the pupils' effective contribution to a highly cohesive school community. Pupils are proud to represent the school and its values as they take part in drama and music and take on leadership roles as prefects and mentors for other pupils. However, they have fewer opportunities to influence how they learn and how they are taught.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

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

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2 2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is good in both Key Stages 2 and 3. Much of the teaching seen was good and occasionally outstanding, with no inadequate teaching observed. This is in line with the school's own evaluation. Outstanding teaching and learning were observed in English, mathematics, science and physical education. In an outstanding English lesson in Year 5, pupils of different abilities used materials planned to meet their varied needs. Pupils were clear about what they were learning and were encouraged successfully to think deeply by highly effective questioning which was targeted to provide well-focused challenges to pupils of different abilities. As a result, pupils made excellent progress, stimulated by the interesting and inspiring resources. Teaching is characterised by teachers' good subject knowledge applied in well-organised lessons which interest and enthuse the pupils. This results in good learning and progress and contributes to pupils' excellent behaviour. The craft of teaching is very much to the fore. There are well-established procedures so that pupils settle quickly and change from one activity to another in lessons smoothly with little fuss and no time wasted. Resources are well organised and lessons are well structured. Teachers give clear instructions and good questioning challenges the pupils to think and develop their answers. Although learning activities are based generally on teachers' understanding of pupils' prior attainment and learning, planning to meet the needs of pupils with different levels of prior attainment was not always sharp enough to enable pupils to make outstanding progress. In addition, marking and other feedback to pupils do not always set out clearly the standards individual pupils' work has reached. Pupils feel that teachers help them improve their work. However, the advice is often too general and not sufficiently specific to help pupils in a particular piece of assessed work.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most pupils including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In each subject the activities build on pupils' prior experience. There is a wide range of popular enrichment activities. For example, the school makes good use of partner schools for some activities such as Year 5 poetry seminars at another middle school and visits to the upper school for science and mathematics. Specific provision outside the classroom for those pupils identified as gifted and talented includes the Mathematics Challenge competition and opportunities to contribute to the school website. The provision for gifted and talented pupils in lessons is more limited.

The school makes every effort to get to know individual pupils in order to provide closely tailored support and guidance. For example, the school has set up a flexible provision known as the nurture group. This provides very high-quality support for pupils with

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different needs. In the last two years the number of pupils who had poor attendance has halved as a result of working with pupils and families through the group. Another very successful nurture group activity, the breakfast club, helps pupils to prepare for the school day, supports them in catching up missing work as well as providing specialist support for pupils with specific needs. Transition arrangements for pupils joining from first schools are excellent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

School leaders at all levels gather a range of information including that from lesson observations, the views of pupils and parents and from tracking pupil performance. The headteacher, ably supported by senior staff and the large majority of subject leaders, is firm in his resolve to bring about further improvements in the learning and well-being of the pupils. The headteacher and senior staff provide strong leadership. Subject leadership is good and the school is taking steps to tackle the different issues which lead to current weaknesses in the leadership of a very small minority of subjects.

The governing body is exemplary in its level of commitment to, and involvement with, the life of the school. The school is taking the right steps to promote equality and endeavours to live up to its stated aim of enabling every child to reach his or her potential and develop as confident and self-assured individuals. The school's membership of the Dorchester Area School's Partnership helps to improve its self-evaluation and the quality of teaching. Early work with partner first schools to improve the quality and use of pupil performance data across the whole of Key Stage 2 in both first and middle schools has yet to have an impact.

Safeguarding procedures are well established and there is a culture of safety without stifling the exuberance and enthusiasm of pupils for a range of activities. The school has a well judged understanding of its local community and is taking steps to develop exciting links with two schools to promote community cohesion in the wider community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire provided a resoundingly positive endorsement of the work of the school in their responses. Ninety eight percent of the respondents indicated that they were happy with their child's experience at St Mary's. The results show high levels of confidence amongst these respondents with all aspects of the school's work. There is particularly strong support amongst respondents for the way the school is led and managed and the steps taken by the school to ensure pupils' safety.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Church of England School, Puddletown 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 158 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 481 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	41	91	58	2	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	53	73	46	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	66	42	82	52	8	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	64	41	88	54	4	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	74	47	81	51	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	33	100	63	5	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	36	93	58	4	3	1	1
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)	74	47	77	48	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	62	39	88	55	6	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	60	38	89	56	7	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	36	82	52	5	3	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	85	53	68	43	5	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	86	54	69	43	3	2	0	1

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"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



22 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown
DT2 8SA

We inspected your school recently and I am writing to inform you of our findings. Thank you for making us welcome, particularly those of you who helped us with the inspection.

St Mary's is a good school and could become outstanding. The standard of attainment reached by pupils at the end of Year 8 as shown by test results and assessments in English, mathematics and science in recent years has been very high. It has often been better than the attainment of Year 9 pupils in many other schools across the country. Inspectors were also very impressed with your outstanding behaviour. The care, guidance and support provided by the school are excellent so that you feel safe and benefit from outstanding personal development.

You make good progress and learn well because the quality of teaching is good. Your teachers provide interesting, well-taught lessons which you enjoy. The headteacher and senior staff, supported by the excellent governing body, run the school well so that it is capable of becoming even better.

In order to become an outstanding school, we have set out below what needs to be done.

- Teachers in every subject should make sure you know how well you are doing and provide you with detailed information about how to improve your work.
- Teachers should make sure that every pupil is working on activities which will enable them to make the maximum amount of progress in lessons.
- The school should help you to use your skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT more effectively in different subjects.
- The school should provide more information about the world of work.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Tom Winskill

Her Majesty's Inspector

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