

Mells Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123767
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	340421
Inspection dates	24–25 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lisa Williams
Headteacher	D J Clayton
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors spent almost half the time observing teaching and learning in nine lessons, seeing each class and all three teachers three times. The team analysed questionnaires returned by 48 parents, 26 pupils and seven staff members. The inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and pupils, both formally and informally. Additionally, they scrutinised a range of documentation including data showing how well each pupil makes progress as well as policies and documents about safeguarding the pupils.

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

- boys' achievement in, and attitudes to, writing throughout the school
- pupils' knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom
- whether subject leaders know how well pupils are doing in those subjects that are not formally tested.

Information about the school

This is a small rural school where pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes, the headteacher teaches for 40% of the week and there is no senior leadership team. There is an independent nursery neighbouring the school, but this is not managed by school governors and did not form part of this inspection. Although their backgrounds vary, most pupils come from White British backgrounds and there are no pupils at an early stage of learning English. Although the percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average, in some years the proportion is significant. Currently there are no pupils with a statement of educational needs.

The school gained the Artsmark silver award in 2008 and is currently working towards gaining Healthy School accreditation during this academic year.

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. One parent's views summarised the views of most, 'I am very happy with Mells and the positive effect it has on my child.' Some elements of its work are outstanding. The school's excellent commitment to equal opportunities contributes to the exceptional progress made by some individual pupils, whether they find learning difficult or relatively easy.

Outstanding care helps pupils to thrive in a nurturing environment. Safeguarding arrangements are good. These strengths contribute to pupils' good behaviour, positive attitudes and help pupils feel safe and secure. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and there are examples of individual pupils demonstrating considerable thoughtfulness. Interesting arts and technology projects add interest and enjoyment for pupils. That said, plans for pupils to learn through topics and to learn about different cultures and communities within the United Kingdom are at an early stage of development.

Good teaching pays close attention to challenging all pupils at their own levels. This combines with a good curriculum to place a strong emphasis on developing key skills and promoting good progress for all. Most pupils join the school with the level of skills, knowledge and understanding expected for their age. Some have strengths in recognising numbers and letters, but relative weaknesses in early writing and some social skills. Good teaching and suitable activities help pupils to make good progress during the Reception Year. This good progress continues as they move through the school and most pupils leave Year 4 having attained above expected levels in English and mathematics. There are examples of some pupils leaving with well above expected levels, most consistently in reading and mathematics. Fewer pupils reach higher standards in writing than in reading and mathematics because opportunities for pupils to write fully in different subjects are constrained by too many worksheets.

The school works effectively with other local schools to keep teachers up to date and involved in school improvement. Nevertheless, within the school, opportunities to share the best practice are limited. The school has improved on several fronts since the previous inspection. Most noteworthy is the success in improving boys' attitudes to writing and, with this, their achievement. Mathematical activities are more practical and stimulating than previously, which contribute to examples of outstanding achievement for individual pupils of different abilities. The curriculum has been further enriched for all pupils, including children in the Reception Year, with the development of outside learning areas. Site security now makes good use of technology. Improvements such as these arise from good leadership, management, and governance. The headteacher, very ably supported by the Chair of the Governing Body, has a clear and accurate view of the

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school's strengths and development priorities. These are debated, understood and addressed effectively with other governors and staff. These strengths, including all the recent improvements, mean the school is well placed for further development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in writing for all groups of pupils, but especially the most able, by giving them more opportunities to write in other subjects.
- Develop pupils' understanding of diversity in the United Kingdom by implementing plans to link with schools in contrasting areas and by selecting topics that provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about cultural differences.
- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning by sharing best practice more consistently.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

The inspection focused on boys' attitudes to, and achievement in, writing because the school had identified this as a recent area of concern and focus. Lesson observations and discussions with pupils demonstrated that boys are now as keen to write as girls and make equally good progress. For example, boys in Year 2 selected captions for a Bible story and for science diagrams as the work they were most proud of. Boys in Years 3 and 4 played an equal part in scribing notes in small group work, and were enthused by writing gruesome myths.

In most lessons attainment is above average and learning is accelerated because of strengths in planning to adjust levels of challenge to meet pupils' differing needs. For example, pupils in Year 2 who find mathematics quite difficult rapidly gained accuracy in subtracting two digit numbers, whilst others applied subtraction to money and higher attaining pupils were stretched by creating their own calculations with numbers ending in eight. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 made exceptional progress in mathematics, learning about the characteristics of three-dimensional shapes, because of inspired teaching strategies that included pupils embarking on practical construction. In literacy these pupils reached above expected levels in note taking and character analysis because of extremely stimulating teaching strategies that were also fun. The strongest teaching motivates pupils to challenge themselves.

When pupils are highly enthused, behaviour is impeccable. Generally pupils cooperate well together in partners or small groups, although they can be a little insensitive about each other's contributions. Most pupils attend well and the school is working diligently with those few families whose children do not attend so regularly. Pupils have a good understanding of day-to-day safety issues and healthy choices. They develop a good understanding of moral issues because adults provide opportunities for this in assemblies and in lessons. Spiritual development, as seen in valuing attributes such as 'effort' and 'kindness', is good. These strengths combine with a sense of responsibility to enable pupils to make a good contribution to the school and local community. Although an appreciation of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom is less well

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developed, pupils are becoming kind and thoughtful citizens. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Good teaching arises from high expectations, modified tasks to meet differing needs within the class and good subject knowledge. On occasion, while satisfactory, the level of challenge and pace drops for part of the lesson. When teaching is good rather than outstanding it is often because opportunities to modify questions for different ability levels are missed at the beginning of the session. Outstanding teaching is characterised by extremely well-organised and stimulating activities that generate a huge level of challenge, interest and motivation throughout the lesson. Strengths in lessons are underpinned by the good quality support provided by teaching assistants, often for pupils with identified learning needs.

Particular strengths in the curriculum lie in the contribution that information and communication technology and personal and social education make to learning in other subjects. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 use computers to combine graphics and

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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text to produce imaginative adventure stories. They also make films based on traditional tales to raise issues about keeping safe. Work to support thematic learning is underway, but topics are currently used more as an organisational tool for adults rather than being chosen to reflect the interests of the pupils. A key strength is the flexible response to organising activities for individual pupils, whether it is extra access to a Forest School’s programme to meet emotional needs or working alongside middle school pupils to meet advanced academic needs. Targeted support enables all pupils, including the most vulnerable, to thrive. There are several examples of pupils at different ability levels making remarkable progress in one area or another.

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?

Staff work together effectively, sharing responsibilities for continuing school development. Since the previous inspection, work in teams to address priorities on the school development plan has been formalised. This ensures a cohesive approach and works well. It contributes to staff successfully using national guidance to monitor pupils’ skills in those subjects that are not formally tested. While this helps them to plan for each pupil’s progression, the information is not collated to give a formalised overview of standards in these subjects. Staff share an outstanding commitment to setting realistic, but challenging, targets for each pupil, whatever their background or circumstances.

All the parents and pupils who completed questionnaires felt that the headteacher and staff do a good job. Established systems check each pupil’s progress and governors make a good contribution to monitoring the work of the school. These strengths have contributed to successful school development. Staff and governors share an accurate view of the school’s strengths and areas for further improvement. Staff and governors are fully aware that effective links with the local community are contributing to pupils’ personal development, for example by exploring local environmental issues such as quarrying. They have begun to forge meaningful international links through contact with a school in the Maldives where pupils have pen pals. The school recognises that links with a contrasting community in the United Kingdom is the next step and has begun to address this.

Safeguarding documentation is comprehensive and detailed; procedures are effective. Awareness of child protection issues is particularly strong. Safety issues are woven into the curriculum and contribute effectively to pupils’ personal development.

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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
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a good start in their Reception Year. The coordinator shares her good understanding of how children at this age learn best, resulting in effective teamwork. Staff are unfailingly calm and supportive, and communicate consistent expectations for children. These strengths help children to settle quickly and happily. They learn purposefully and cooperatively with adults and each other, in all areas of learning, whatever their individual needs. Staff rapidly gain a clear view of children's abilities and needs at the beginning of the year, and use this knowledge to support their learning effectively. Ongoing assessment is detailed and thorough so expectations are well pitched to extend existing strengths and promote learning in areas of difficulty. While planning reflects children's interests to an extent, for example by providing a requested 'pirates ship' for imaginative play, adults miss opportunities to use such interests as a central basis for planning. There is a variety of suitable activities for children to choose from, but not all are equally stimulating and valuable.

Staff have invested much time and energy in improving the resources for the outside area. It is used well and staff provide good quality support for children who have initiated ideas. For example, two boys applied their emerging writing skills, while developing their understanding of the world around them by becoming 'mountaineers' planning routes and making notes. Adults avoided falling into the trap of over directing the learning in this situation.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

A high proportion of parents returned questionnaires, and the overwhelming majority are happy with their child's experience of school. Concerns are few and mostly individual rather than shared. The concern expressed by a very small minority about their child's progress was not supported by inspection findings which took account of progress seen in lessons and records of pupils' progress over time. Parents were unanimous in their appreciation of the school's leadership, children being kept safe, being well-prepared for the future, and helped to be healthy. All parents felt that their views were heard and valued.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mells Church of England First 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 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 84 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	73	11	23	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	67	16	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	52	21	44	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	58	16	33	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	69	14	29	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	56	20	42	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	65	17	35	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)	33	69	15	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	56	20	42	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	58	17	35	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	56	19	40	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	69	14	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	67	14	29	1	2	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"> ■ 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.



26 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mells Church of England First School, Mells, BA11 3QE

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we inspected your school recently. I should like to say an extra 'thank you' to the children who met with me in the staffroom. I really enjoyed hearing your ideas about school and seeing your work.

We agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school. There are so many good things I cannot mention everything. We were particularly pleased to see how well everyone learns in lessons. This means that when you leave at the end of Year 4 you are doing better in English and mathematics than most children of your age. You do best in reading and mathematics, so we have asked the teachers to give you more chances to write in different subjects, so you become even better writers. You can help by remembering your literacy targets when you are writing in subjects like history or science.

You told me how much you enjoy school, how safe you feel, even though some children sometimes 'break the rules?', and how much your teachers help you. We agree with you that most children behave well most of the time. Although people get on well together in school and with pupils from nearby schools, you do not have much chance to learn about other people in the United Kingdom who come from different backgrounds. We have asked the headteacher and teachers to press on with their interesting plans to make contact with schools in Bristol, as well as choosing topics that will help.

Sometimes you make extraordinary progress in a lesson because it is so exciting, for example when the older children were making three-dimensional shapes. We have asked the teachers to share their best ideas so this happens even more often. We know that you and your parents realise the staff care about you a great deal. They know you very well and take care to help each of you individually. This is fantastic and helps some of you to make outstanding progress.

Yours sincerely

Jill Bavin

Lead inspector

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