

Combe St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Combe St Nicholas, Chard, Somerset, TA20 3NG

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Almost all pupils make good progress from their starting points, especially in reading and writing. Attainment fluctuates year on year because of very small cohorts with differing numbers of pupils with special educational needs.
- Since the last inspection the percentage of more able Year 6 pupils reaching the higher level in both English and mathematics has improved significantly.
- This is because the quality of teaching has improved and is now consistently good with some outstanding features. Teachers have worked hard to introduce new methods of teaching basic skills through lively whole-school themes. Relationships are exceptionally good, establishing a positive climate for learning and encouraging pupils to want to do their best.
- Pupils enjoy being at school. As a result their attendance is excellent. They behave well in lessons, around the school and towards each other. Pupils know they are very safe in school and well looked after. Mutual respect between pupils and adults ensures that pupils' views are valued and acted upon through the school council.
- Since the last inspection the headteacher has worked hard to establish a small but strong whole-school team committed to improvement. By accepting help from a Local Leader in Education, strengthening the monitoring role of governors and taking advantage of opportunities for professional development, especially within the local cluster of small schools, the school has successfully addressed all previous issues.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use or strengthen their mathematical skills across all subject areas.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited nine lessons and observed three teachers.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including pupils' work, systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress, safeguarding procedures, and the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.
- Meetings were held with the governing body, staff and groups of pupils.
- The inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority and the Local Leader for Education who had previously given support to the school in areas identified as in need of improvement.
- The inspector took account of the views of 26 responses from Parent View, meetings with parents and carers and the school's most recent questionnaire to parents and carers.
- Questionnaires from five members of staff were analysed.

Inspection team

Anna Sketchley, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average sized primary school.
- All pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is significantly higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is significantly below the national average.
- The school is part of a local collaboration of five small primary schools.
- The pre-school on site is under the management of the governing body.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics by:
 - embedding the strategies that have already begun to improve pupils' performance in mental mathematics
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise problem solving in a range of contexts
 - providing continuing professional development for teachers by sharing good practice and expertise more widely
 - providing professional development for teaching assistants to ensure that they support pupils' learning in mathematics as well as they do in English
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children join the Reception class with the levels of knowledge and skills that are broadly expected for their age. The good progress they make is maintained throughout Key Stage 1.
- Small year groups and varying numbers of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs mean that attainment at the end of Year 6 fluctuates from year to year.
- Attainment in the current Year 6 is not as high as last year because almost half of the pupils have been identified as in need of school action and some require school action plus.
- In reading and writing almost all pupils are making expected progress from their starting points and many are exceeding it. Progress in writing has accelerated significantly since the last inspection. Teachers ensure that pupils are very aware of the features required in their writing at different levels and reflect on their work to make improvements. For example, Year 6 pupils used features for Level 4 writing to improve a piece of Level 3 writing based on ideas from 'The Witches' during an exciting 'Roald Dahl Day'.
- The teaching of phonics is particularly well organised. It is taught in mixed-age groups and so meets the needs of all pupils. This helps younger pupils, and those with special educational needs, use their knowledge to successfully to tackle unfamiliar words such as 'suspiciously'.
- Attainment in mathematics is not as strong as in English and although most pupils make expected progress, fewer exceed this. Nevertheless, attainment at the higher Level 5 has improved since the last inspection.
- As a result of its own analysis, which showed a dip in mental arithmetic, dedicated time for mental arithmetic and more emphasis on pupils' listening skills have been put into place and are already showing an improving trend.
- Pupils do not always choose the correct number process when solving mathematical problems and they have insufficient opportunities to practise this skill across other subjects.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium, those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs are very well supported by skilled teaching assistants. Initiatives funded by the pupil premium especially support work on sentence construction and on basic number work. These have been successful in closing the gap in the attainment of the lowest 20% and the rest over time.
- The local secondary school helps support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. This helps both groups to make at least good progress and aids continuity on transfer.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- Excellent relationships establish a very positive climate for learning. Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes are evident in their independent work, enabling them in lessons to complete

their tasks even when working independently.

- The teaching of English is sometimes outstanding. Some teachers are not as confident when teaching mathematics as their subject knowledge is not as secure. Thus there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Teachers demonstrate very secure subject knowledge in literacy lessons enabling them to interpret the curriculum in imaginative ways that stimulate pupils' curiosity and interest. This has led to a dramatic improvement in writing since the last inspection.
- Using 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' as a stimulus, Years 2, 3 and 4 pupils learned to write instructions by first making sweets with melted chocolate and chocolate ice cream. Their writing was given a clear purpose when they were encouraged to take the instructions home for their parents to try the recipe.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is ably used by teachers and pupils during lessons. This captures pupils' attention well. In Year 1 pupils used their ICT skills confidently as they manipulated a program about where people live.
- The curriculum fully supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development especially through the use of Sunday School Wood for Forest School experiences. A small group of Reception children and Year 1 pupils enjoyed a truly spiritual experience together in the wood making 'dream catchers', telling each other of their dreams while extending their fine physical skills and language development.
- Lessons are well organised, maximising the small size of the school and the use of highly skilled teaching assistants to form teaching groups across the age range, particularly for reading and phonics work.
- Teachers plan all lessons carefully, ensuring that tasks meet and challenge the different ages and abilities of pupils in each class. This has led to a rise in the number of more able pupils achieving the levels of which they are capable.
- Pupils are very clear about what they are to learn because teachers share the learning intention with them at the beginning of every lesson. Pupils use their target cards well to remind them about their personal targets and, alongside teachers' marking, guide them to take responsibility for their own improvement. This is an important development since the last inspection.
- Teachers are particularly skilled at questioning pupils to check their understanding, especially at the end of the lesson. Questions are modified according to the needs and understanding of particular pupils, encouraging them to show what they know.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Excellent relationships and mutual respect exist between all pupils and adults.
 - The views of pupils and parents and carers support inspection evidence and school records show that bullying is rare and behaviour over time is good.
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- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and parents and carers fully support this view.
- Participation in anti-bullying week and the school's effective personal, social and emotional curriculum ensure that pupils understand about different types of bullying. Internet safety is understood and well established.
- Behaviour in lessons during the inspection was very good because pupils are interested and staff are skilled at behaviour management.
- Pupils are very polite, both to adults and to one another. They are very caring. Evidence of this is seen in the way in which Year 5 'Buddies' look after Reception children.
- Involvement in decision making through the school council, and roles such as Year 6 mediators and the Children's Parliament encourage a good attitude to learning and help pupils feel valued and make good progress.

The leadership and management

are good

- The school is successfully emerging from a period of significant disruption, including budgetary constraints and redundancies, because self-evaluation is accurate and the headteacher, with the help and advice of a Local Leader in Education, has built a small but strong team of teachers and assistants dedicated to improvement.
 - Accurate identification of weaknesses in teaching and the implementation of effective initiatives have brought about an improvement in writing and demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement. The current focus on improving attainment and progress in mathematics is also beginning to make a difference, especially in pupils' mental skills, but there is still more to do.
 - The management of teachers' performance is rigorous and closely aligned to the national Teaching Standards. It clearly identifies individual professional development needs and how these will be fulfilled.
 - Almost all pupils are making better progress than previously because of more rigorous tracking and regular meetings to discuss individual pupils' progress and how best to meet their needs.
 - The curriculum gives pupils many memorable experiences. It is carefully planned to take account of mixed-age classes. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities are excellent for such a small school and are of considerable benefit to pupils' personal, social and health education.
 - The very good collaborative partnership and reciprocal arrangements with four other local small schools and the local secondary school allow teachers to contribute to and take advantage of professional development.
 - Equality of opportunity for different groups of pupils is promoted well and the school does not tolerate any discrimination. The governing body and school staff ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed rigorously and regular training and monitoring ensure that a high quality is maintained.
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■ **The governance of the school:**

- governors have a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses, effectively monitoring its work and challenging it to do better
 - governors have particular expertise in managing the school’s finances and track funding well, including the use of the pupil premium
 - the headteacher’s performance management objectives are rigorously monitored and pertinent to areas for school improvement
 - the governing body ensures that all statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupil's needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupil's needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123828
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	402203

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Freeston
Headteacher	Lesley Katner
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 November 2009
Telephone number	01460 63116
Fax number	01460 66963
Email address	Sch.110@educ.somerset.gov.uk

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