



St Mary the Virgin CE VA Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134020
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 282422
Inspection dates 3 May 2006 to 3 May 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Burghart AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Pheasant Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Gillingham
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Dorset SP8 4LP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01747 824446
Number on roll	113	Fax number	01747 825095
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr A Robins
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs A C Christopher

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is part of a rapidly developing area of new housing. It opened in September 2004 and continues to increase in size with pupils regularly joining each age group. In the last year the school has more than doubled in size and is set to do so again in the future. Almost all pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is well above average. The attainment of pupils whenever they enter the school represents a wide range but overall is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

It's an exciting time for St Mary's! The school, created from scratch less than two years ago, is already a good one. As a result of the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, well supported by a good team of staff and governors, the school gives good value for money. Staff cope exceptionally well with a continual influx of new pupils joining all age groups. Many of these pupils have learning difficulties associated with a lack of success in their previous schools.

Good provision in teaching, the curriculum, and how pupils are cared for, helps the majority of pupils to make good progress. Children are achieving well in Reception where provision is good, and in Years 1 and 2. Standards for seven year olds are consistent with what is expected nationally and are rising. Standards are broadly average in Year 6. Most pupils achieve well, but the more capable pupils have not reached the levels they are capable of principally because of gaps in previous learning. There are strengths throughout in reading and mathematics where progress is good.

Writing and pupils' awareness of multicultural issues are key areas for improvement across the school. That these issues have already been identified is a good example of the effectiveness of the school's outstanding self-evaluation. Senior managers have an accurate view of strengths and relative weaknesses. Their evaluation closely matches inspectors' findings and confirms that the school's capacity to improve further is strong. Parents' very obvious confidence in the school is fully justified. Comments like, 'My children have blossomed since coming here!' are extremely common.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to be even better the school should:

- raise standards in writing giving pupils more opportunity to extend their vocabulary and improve sentence construction
- ensure that potentially higher attaining pupils achieve as well as they should
- develop further opportunities to raise pupils' awareness and understanding of life in Britain as a multicultural society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

For most pupils achievement is good, particularly for those with learning difficulties. Currently, standards are broadly average at the end of Year 6 with strengths in reading and mathematics. However, there is evidence that potential higher attainers are not reaching the levels they are capable of because of gaps in their previous learning. This situation is fast improving as pupils become more settled and benefit from the school's determined efforts to help them catch up.

Standards in Years 1 and 2 are consistent with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics and for a minority of pupils are likely to be above average by the end of Year 2. These standards demonstrate that pupils are achieving well and building on good progress in Reception. The school can prove that it adds value to pupils'

performance no matter when they join the school. The greatest effect to date is on those in Reception and Years 1 and 2. The school has identified writing as a priority area for improvement. Inspectors find that this is an appropriate target for all pupils as this is an area in which they do relatively less well. The signs for the future are positive, with raising standards as the school's highest priority.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good because all staff give high priority to integrating all pupils regardless of age or ability. Initiatives in Reception to promote children's personal qualities, such as consideration for others, are very effective and are successfully built on higher up the school. Pupils respond well by showing positive attitudes to learning, co-operating well, and demonstrating that they enjoy school. Attendance is monitored effectively and matches the national average.

The school is committed to considering the 'whole child' and, as a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' moral and social development are strengths. Pupils know right from wrong and understand how to work and play together. Whilst the school still seeks to promote pupils' spiritual development further in line with its Christian ideals, this aspect is already good. Cultural development is good in terms of pupils' knowledge of artistic and local culture but pupils are not sufficiently aware of the multicultural nature of life in British society.

Behaviour is good notwithstanding those who could present problems. Pupils think the school is a friendly place and they clearly feel safe. They say, 'We have our own opinions'. Through the school council, circle time discussions, and notes on "Worry Bubbles" displayed in classes, pupils show they are keen to take responsibility and play a part in school and community life. They know how to stay healthy through balanced diets and regular exercise. Pupils are prepared appropriately for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are achieving well and their learning is effective because teaching is good. Teachers cope very well with the constant increase in numbers in all classes and manage mixed age and ability groups effectively. There is clear evidence that standards are being improved as pupils become more settled and benefit from the good teaching and support on offer. Teaching assistants are a full part of the teaching team and their successful approach in supporting all pupils' learning is strongly influenced by teachers' good planning, perceptive questioning, and good organisation skills.

Good literacy teaching helps pupils communicate and make good progress in reading. However, there are too few opportunities to encourage pupils to extend their vocabulary

and sentence construction when writing. Improvements are already featured in teachers' plans.

Relationships at all levels are good and there is an atmosphere of trust with staff prepared to listen to pupils before guiding them to make improvements in lessons. Assessment of pupils' performance is well established and is being used effectively to show pupils how they can improve their work. Teachers are continually reviewing the success of their methods to ensure that work fits pupils' ability and experience. Teaching in Reception is good, helping children to learn through experience. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress in all years because good teaching focuses on their individual needs. The school has not yet had the same success in pushing potential higher attainers as far as they are capable. This is due more to gaps in pupils' previous learning than to current practice. However, the pace and challenge of a minority of lessons do not do enough to extend these pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum on offer is being systematically improved but is already good. It is being carefully adapted to meet pupils' differing needs and is very well managed to cope with the increasing number of new arrivals. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported effectively. However, support for higher attaining pupils has not yet taken full effect.

Appropriate and manageable short and long term plans are creating a rich and relevant curriculum. Learning activities are supported well by spacious high quality accommodation but the school is aware that outdoor provision is not yet good enough, especially with regard to facilities for the youngest children, although improvements are planned.

Although there are too few opportunities that would enhance pupils' multicultural development, there is an appropriate range of clubs, which extend the curriculum. These are well supported by staff and pupils. Provision, which includes an introduction to French for older pupils, is much appreciated by pupils and parents alike who say, 'There is a lot of fun in learning'. Good links are being built between subjects, for example laptops were used successfully in literacy to search the internet to explore how to make compost and then write persuasively to encourage more people to make it.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school is committed to promoting academic support as well as the personal care of pupils. There are very good links with parents that contribute to the quality of care, and staff work hard at getting to know pupils, many of whom have just arrived.

The school has developed effective strategies for assessing pupils' skills and progress and uses the information gathered to set appropriate targets for pupils, especially

those with learning difficulties. Success is carefully tracked and work is well marked in order to give pupils clear guidance showing how they can make improvements. Although still being developed, these strategies are proving successful in supporting the big increase of pupils with wide-ranging needs.

Pupils' behaviour is managed very effectively but the school has identified the need to provide more counselling for pupils with emotional needs. Pupils say, 'This is a calm friendly place to learn and we like the way people look after us'. This is a school that successfully includes all pupils, where staff work well with parents, outside agencies and other responsible adults to promote pupils' learning. All required child protection and health and safety procedures are fully met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. To get to the point where pupils are achieving well in the short time most have been in the school is a significant success. This has been effectively managed whilst dealing with the teething problems of a new building and inducting a constant flow of new pupils and staff. Particular examples of good management are in Reception, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties, and literacy. The headteacher's contribution is outstanding. She has very successfully drawn all staff, governors, parents and pupils together as a very good team. Contributions from all concerned are valued and feed the school's development planning. Self-evaluation is of high quality. The good senior management team and governors have an accurate view of strengths and areas for development. For example, they understand that improvements are needed to the management of provision for more able pupils, outdoor facilities and multicultural opportunities. Such awareness continues to drive the school forward.

In less than six terms the school has already established a very positive ethos firmly based on Christian ideals, a successful track record, and a strong capacity for further development. There are excellent models for managing change, for example in terms of staff development and subject leadership. Governance is good with particularly strong contributions from key governors over finance, accommodation and staffing issues.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

We really enjoyed visiting your school. We can see that you enjoy it as well and can understand why your parents are so pleased with St Mary the Virgin. It is not just because of the lovely building, although this certainly helps. It is the teamwork of the friendly, caring staff who provide you with good teaching and support so you can make the most of what adults call 'your education'. The school is good at helping you, no matter how long you have been there, to make good progress in your work and towards growing up as sensible, considerate people.

Your school is well run. Your headteacher, the staff and governors make a very good team. The school will be even better when standards are higher (especially in writing), when more able pupils always do as well as they can, and when the improvements to the playground and grounds are finished. We have asked teachers to plan more ways of helping you explore and understand the many different lifestyles of people in our country.

I am very pleased to tell you that we have judged your school to be a good one. In such a short time since it was opened this is something to be really proud of. We know you will make the most of it.

Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart Lead inspector