



Thorner's Church of England School, Litton Cheney

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113804
Local Authority Dorset
Inspection number 289727
Inspection date 17 January 2007
Reporting inspector Geoff Burgess

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Litton Cheney
School category	Voluntary aided		Dorchester
Age range of pupils	4-11		DT2 9AU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01308 482410
Number on roll (school)	70	Fax number	01308 482520
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ross Jones
		Headteacher	Pat Cunningham
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school which serves the Bride Valley area of West Dorset. Many pupils travel some way to get to school. The number on roll has fallen by a third since the last inspection owing to a lack of affordable housing for young families in the area. The amount of movement of pupils in and out of the school other than at the usual time of joining or leaving has increased, as has the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Both are now above average. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. With small numbers starting school each year, the attainment of children on entry to the Reception group varies from year to year. In most years, it is broadly at the level expected.

At the time of the inspection, an acting headteacher had recently taken over the running of the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which continues to provide a very caring environment and a good quality education for its pupils. Parents are very pleased with the way it helps their children to learn and develop. One observed that, 'there is a lovely happy atmosphere at the school, a real family feeling'. Pupils say they 'can't wait to get to school'.

The well-established staff team works closely together to accurately evaluate the work of the school and create a clear agenda for improvement. As a result, the school has maintained standards despite a falling roll and an increasing number of pupils with learning difficulties. Ambitious plans to develop the school further show that the school is in a good position to continue to improve. The school's solid track record and consistently good outcomes show that leadership and management are good.

In this small school, each child is seen as an individual, with their needs and talents known and understood by all the adults. Pupils are very confident when talking to adults and feel safe discussing their fears or worries. Care, guidance and support are good not only in the attention to pupils' personal welfare but also in procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. However, information about pupils' progress and marking are not used well enough to enhance pupils' understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve.

Parents are delighted that their children are so happy in school. Pupils' love of their time in school is reflected in the low levels of absence and in the real enthusiasm they show for learning. The school is highly successful in encouraging pupils to be active, eat sensibly and stay safe. Behaviour is excellent and pupils respond enthusiastically in class, by joining in animatedly with all the activities offered. Pupils make a very positive contribution in class and around the school. Community involvement is strong, with one parent commenting that the school 'is an asset to the local community'. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Building on this very positive ethos, good teaching in all classes helps to ensure that achievement is good and that pupils make good progress. Standards are above average at the end of Year 6. Most children in the Reception Year achieve nationally expected standards.

The curriculum is good. From the Reception Year onwards, interesting activities are well matched to pupils' needs and keep pupils actively engaged and motivated. Good use is made of the local area but opportunities for pupils to learn about and celebrate the richness and diversity of other cultures are limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment information and marking to ensure pupils understand how well they are doing and how they can improve
- Provide pupils with more opportunities to learn about other cultures so that are better prepared to live in a multicultural society

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, standards are above average but vary with the balance of abilities in each small year group. Recent Year 6 results in national tests have been well above average, with some variations in individual subjects. For instance, science, weaker in 2005, was well above average in 2006 when mathematics was relatively weaker. In recent years, standards in Year 2 have been above average. They were average in 2006 mainly because of lower results in writing, a weakness that the school is continuing to work on. Its success is evident in the already much-improved standards of writing this year. The school's records show, and inspection evidence confirms, that current standards are above average.

Achievement is good throughout the school. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. Class records and observations during the inspection show that children get off to a good start in the Reception Year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils respond enthusiastically to the positive ethos of the school. Everyone tries to look after each other and relationships are excellent. Children really enjoy their time in school and one boy said, 'I wouldn't change anything, it's just about perfect'. During lessons pupils work very hard. As a result of the school's emphasis on healthy lifestyles, pupils make healthy choices in their lunch boxes. They are very aware of the need for exercise, and understand the effects of this on their own well-being. Nearly all pupils take part in sports outside lessons, as well as in the daily exercise activities.

School council members relish their responsibilities, and feel that their views have an impact. Because membership changes termly, many pupils benefit from the valuable experience of serving on the council. Pupils contribute to the school and community in numerous other ways, for example, through fund raising, looking after play equipment and helping at church. This results in responsible pupils who are very confident socially. They are articulate and sensitive in expressing their own feelings, and very aware of the feelings of others. Pupils' personal attributes, together with their academic progress, prepare them well for their future lives.

Although there are many excellent features to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, their cultural development is relatively weaker. Pupils have adequate awareness and understanding of other cultures, but not in quite enough depth to fully prepare them for living in a multicultural society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The best indicators of the good quality of teaching are the good progress made by pupils in each class and pupils' enthusiasm for learning. All teaching is characterised by very high quality class management and by the care taken to choose activities and ways of working that engage and interest pupils. Skilled teaching assistants add further expertise, especially in the Reception Year and in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Very good use is made of a range of resources and of the skills and interests of all the staff. An outstanding example of all these strengths was evident in a dance lesson. Inspired by the enthusiasm and expertise of the class teacher, they showed real maturity; older pupils were totally engrossed in refining their own and their classmates' already virtuoso performances.

All teachers understand the needs of their pupils, and assessment procedures are used well to ensure work is matched to these needs. Marking helps teachers to evaluate pupils' performance but is not used enough to tell pupils what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well, with sufficient emphasis on developing basic skills and establishing links between subjects. Effective use is made of the good facilities for younger children, so that they benefit from structured play. The curriculum is very well enriched by the wide range of trips and activities. Volunteers organise a variety of clubs, school productions and concerts. Good links with other schools result in frequent opportunities for pupils to participate in sport, and to be involved in regular creative arts projects. A parent commented that 'children get so many opportunities to shine'. However, pupils' multi cultural understanding is only satisfactory because not enough is on offer in this area across the subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's emphasis on the uniqueness of each child means that in this school every child really does matter. Parents have very positive views of the school, and feel very well consulted and involved. A parent said, 'The teachers seem to know the individual requirements of the child and get the best out of them'. The school makes very good use of various organisations and agencies to support children and parents, such as the regular 'drop in' visits of the school nurse. Appropriate health and safety procedures are in place to safeguard pupils. The school tracks pupils' progress carefully, but does not share the information on progress enough with pupils. This prevents pupils from having a full understanding of how well they are doing or how to improve their performance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are effective and efficient. With an acting head having recently taken over, the school continues to operate like clockwork. Information is readily accessible. The self-confidence and shared sense of purpose of the staff team is clear in all that they do. This is fitting testament to the robust leadership and management of the permanent headteacher.

The outcomes of strong leadership are evident in the consistently good academic standards and the outstanding personal development of pupils. This shows why the school is held in high regard by pupils, parents and the local community. It also illustrates the way that all members of the school community are involved in the management and development of the school.

The governing body performs well the important dual role of challenging and supporting the staff. A real strength is the high level of consultation which goes on between the school, governors and parents. Termly focused questionnaires for parents are a good example. This helps to make all levels of communications excellent, a fact much appreciated by parents.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

We would like to say how much we enjoyed our day with you at Thorners. What a lovely place to have a school! We are really pleased to see how much space you have to work and play in. It is easy to see you really enjoy your time in school. Like you, we think that Thorners is a good school.

These are the good things we found:

- You behave very well, enjoy learning, work hard and always do your best.
- Because of this you make good progress.
- We know you agree with us that your teachers are good at making sure you learn really well.
- You enjoy having lots of opportunities to do extra and different things outside lessons.
- You and all the grown-ups make everyone welcome at the school and include them in all there is going on.
- You know you are safe and that there is always someone to turn to.
- We know you appreciate all that the grown-ups do to make sure your time in school is as happy and positive as possible.
- Your headteacher is good at making it possible for everyone to do their best.

To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do now:

- Make sure you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve so you can do even better.
- Give you more opportunities to enjoy learning about the traditions and ways of life of people from different cultures.