

Axbridge Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123806
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314724
Inspection date	9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Barron

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Brown
Headteacher	Gillian F Briggs
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	Moorland Street Axbridge BS26 2BA
Telephone number	01934 732391
Fax number	01934 733360

Age group	3-9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: • The effectiveness of the school's initiatives to improve standards in writing throughout the school, especially those of boys and more able pupils • How well pupils in Year 4 achieve in relation to their starting points and whether this is reflected in their attainment • The quality of pastoral and academic care, guidance and support for pupils • The quality of pupils' personal development, especially regarding their appreciation of the multicultural nature of modern British society. The inspector gathered evidence from discussions with pupils, staff and representatives from the governing body, observations of teaching and of pupils at work and at play, scrutiny of school documentation and self-evaluation, samples of pupils' work and an analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a slightly smaller than average school in which most pupils are taught in mixed-age group classes. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is comparable to the national average. The school has received the Artsmark Gold award, the Financial Management Standards in School award and has recently achieved revalidation for Healthy School status and also the Activemark award in recognition of the school's commitment and consistent efforts to keep pupils active. The school has also appeared twice in Ofsted's 'Really Successful School' list, an achievement noted by the then chief inspector of schools, David Bell.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It provides an excellent education for pupils and prepares them very well for the next stage of their education.

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding at all levels and this is typified by the dedication and excellent leadership of the headteacher, who is held in very high regard by pupils, parents, governors, staff and the local community. There is a pleasant family atmosphere about the school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about what they consider to be a very successful school, and value the high level of care and support provided for their children. 'A first class school that cares about pupils as individuals' is typical of the many positive comments in parents' questionnaires.

This is a school that knows itself very well and always puts the needs of pupils first. Children enter the school at the age of three with skills which broadly meet expectations for their age, although their language and communication skills are often less well developed. By the time they leave the school in Year 4, they attain well above average standards, not only in English and mathematics, but also in subjects such as art, science and also history, which was judged as outstanding by an Ofsted single-subject inspection in 2007. Standards in English are well above average overall and there has been some improvement in writing by boys and the more able. However, standards in writing are not as high as standards in reading throughout the school. Even so, the school's present success confirms its outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The quality of pupils' work on display is of a high standard and provides very clear evidence that the school's success is not just restricted to the results of national tests and assessments. The curriculum is outstanding and links different subjects together very well in order to ensure learning is relevant, purposeful and enjoyable for pupils. During discussions with pupils it was evident that many of them enjoyed being able to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subject areas.

The school provides an excellent level of care, guidance and support for pupils and this is the basis for their outstanding personal development and well-being. Very good induction and transfer arrangements help pupils settle quickly into new routines. Health and well-being are very securely safeguarded and child protection procedures fully meet current government requirements. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together to ensure that pupils requiring extra help, especially those pupils with learning difficulties, are very effectively supported and make the same outstanding progress as all others.

The school has developed very effective methods to assess how well individual pupils are progressing in all subjects since the last inspection, and uses these very well to ensure that work is very effectively matched to pupils' individual needs. This is a key factor in ensuring pupils' achievement is outstanding in all year groups. Another key factor is the consistently high quality of teaching. Classrooms are colourful and stimulating places. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and use a variety of approaches to make lessons interesting to ensure pupils are always involved in learning. This enthusiasm and dedication rubs off onto pupils, who are keen to do well and work very hard. Pupils say that their teachers are very nice and that they always try to make learning interesting and enjoyable. They say they look forward to lessons, especially if they involve practical work or when teachers

use interactive whiteboards. As one pupil put it, 'When teachers use the big computer screens, they even make literacy lessons fun!'

Pupils' enjoyment of school is outstanding, and is reflected in their above average rates of attendance. Some pupils say that they try to come to school when they are clearly feeling ill and several older pupils admit they are not looking forward to leaving the school at the end of the summer term. Pupils play a very full and active role in both the school and the local community. They are very aware of the importance of their involvement in fundraising for local and overseas charities. Pupils talk excitedly about the school's participation in many community events, such as the Axbridge 'Summer Fun Day' and the carols they perform for the town's elderly residents at Christmas. Pupils take the responsibilities they are given very seriously. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about how they help to look after younger children at playtimes. Pupils know there is always someone to help them should the need arise. The quality of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and this is reflected in their exemplary behaviour and excellent attitudes towards others. Pupils fully understand the need to make sensible and healthy choices and have a very good understanding of the importance of keeping fit and staying safe. They are keen to talk about the activities they take part in, especially the wide range of very popular extra-curricular clubs that the school provides for pupils of all ages and also the school's successes in sporting activities. A wide variety of visitors to the school and visits to interesting places, including residential trips to outdoor learning centres such as Goblin Combe, help to build up pupils' knowledge of the world around them.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have a very clear vision for the school and have been very thorough in regularly analysing the school's performance. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is excellent. This has enabled the school to set very challenging targets and to sustain and improve existing very good practice. They have been well supported in this by the governing body, which offers a very convincing level of challenge and support to the school and fulfils its statutory duties very well. Individual governors play an important role in school affairs. They bring a high level of expertise to the school and take their responsibilities very seriously. The school has built up very good relationships with parents, who are very supportive and appreciate that their views are regularly sought and acted upon. Resources are very good and are used effectively in all classrooms to enhance learning. Links with other schools and with external agencies are also very good and support learning very effectively, particularly that of pupils with learning difficulties.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The words of one parent summed up the outstanding quality of provision in the school's Foundation Stage: 'This school offers pupils a lovely, safe environment in the reception and nursery classes in which both my children have thrived.'

Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage and make rapid progress in both their Nursery and Reception years because teaching caters exceptionally well for the needs of all children, regardless of their abilities. This provides the basis for their outstanding progress throughout the rest of the school. Classrooms provide stimulating learning environments for children. Teachers and effective teaching assistants work very well together to ensure that lessons effectively blend opportunities for children to learn both independently and with adult direction. Lessons often make excellent use of children's imaginations and real life situations in order to capture their interest and add to their enjoyment of learning. Progress in children's personal, social and emotional development is very good. Children are happy to share and to

take turns whilst joining in lesson activities with enthusiasm. Staff work very effectively to ensure there is always a very strong emphasis on language development in all lessons as children often enter the school with less well developed communication skills. This ensures they make rapid progress in improving their language skills. Regular visits to interesting places within the local community are used very well to build up children's understanding of the world in which they live. A further range of interesting activities, both indoors and outdoors, ensure that standards are already above average by the time they enter Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Develop and implement strategies to improve attainment in writing throughout the school.

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Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Axbridge Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Axbridge, BS26 2BA

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. Everyone was so friendly and helpful and I soon realised why you like your school so much. I enjoyed talking to you about what you like the most about school and seeing you all working so well in lessons. Your parents believe that this is an outstanding school and I agree with them. Here are some of the things I particularly like about your school.

- Your school gives you an excellent good start to your education.
- Your teachers always try to make lessons interesting and this helps you to make really good progress and reach well above average standards.
- You really enjoy everything about your school.
- Your personal development is excellent; you all behave very well indeed and you are very friendly, caring and polite.
- Your headteacher, teachers and governors are all working very hard to make sure that the school gets even better in the future.

I believe your headteacher and teachers can make your school even better. I have asked them to help you to reach the same high standards in writing as you do in other subjects.

You can help your school by continuing to work hard.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Barron Lead inspector