

# St Mary's Church of England First School, Charminster

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113784
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	325884
<b>Inspection date</b>	4 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Deborah Zachary

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	192
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Alec Pegram
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ian Donnelly
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 May 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Charminster Dorchester DT2 9RD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01305 263880
<b>Fax number</b>	01305 263880

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- whether provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils' personal development and well-being are good or outstanding
- how well pupils are now making progress in mathematics
- how well the school promotes community cohesion.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with staff, pupils and governors, analysis of the school's data on progress, examination of pupils' work, study of documentation, observations of lessons, observation of playtime, and study of questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own self-evaluation assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

The school draws its pupils from the village and the surrounding rural area. Almost all of the pupils are of White British backgrounds. There are an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is smaller than is typical nationally and every class but one contains pupils from two different year groups. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two classes; one contains Reception stage children only, and the other contains a mixture of Reception stage children and Year 1 pupils.

Two other providers share the school site, but they run independently and are inspected separately. They are the Sunny Days Play Club @ St Mary (after-school and holiday care) and the Little Acorns Pre-school.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Mary's is an outstanding school. Pupils' achievement and personal development are excellent. Exemplary leadership has led to excellent improvement since the last inspection. Most parents were extremely positive in the comments they made on the inspection questionnaires. One parent summed the school up simply as '10/10'. Another reported: 'I wouldn't want my child to be in any other school.'

Standards were above average in Year 4 last year, and the current Year 4 pupils are on target to reach even higher standards this year. Pupils' standards when they start at the school do vary from year to year, but one of the reasons why overall standards in Year 4 are higher this year is that progress in mathematics has improved. The school had already successfully carried out a lot of work to improve reading and writing. Progress in these areas remains outstanding. Progress in mathematics was satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2. This was identified by school leaders as a weaker area and the reasons for it analysed. Strategies to improve teaching, including the introduction of a more detailed assessment system to help target work closely to pupils' abilities and offer greater challenge, have been very effective. As a result, progress in mathematics is now good and is still rapidly improving. The teaching of mathematics, like the teaching overall, is outstanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from excellent support and teaching, often from teaching assistants, and make outstanding progress just like their peers. Good links with outside agencies, such as speech and language or behaviour support, ensure that expertise is provided from beyond the school when necessary.

Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and know their capabilities extremely well. Since the last inspection, the school has done a lot of work to make sure that pupils take some control of their learning by giving them individual targets. As well as this, marking often comments on how well work is done and then goes on to give a 'wish' – something the pupil should do next to improve. Teachers also make sure pupils have a clear understanding of what they are going to learn in each lesson. This greatly helps their engagement in learning, as does the use of 'talking partners', where teachers ask pupils to very quickly discuss a point with a friend and come up with an idea or an answer. The excellent curriculum is continually reviewed to ensure pupils systematically progress in their studies, no matter which mixed-age class they are in. Themed weeks and days, specialist sports coaching and a very good range of extra-curricular activities greatly enhance the provision. Music is a particular strength of the school. Across the subjects, the work that pupils do is highly interesting and they thoroughly enjoy it. During the inspection, many of the classes were focusing, at different levels, on travel and how people in other countries live, what is important to them and the similarities to and differences from our lives. This has led to very good awareness of the world and its peoples, and the pupils' knowledge of global issues is excellent for their age. Pupils have a good knowledge of their own culture and rural traditions. However, their understanding of Britain as a multicultural society, whilst satisfactory, is mostly limited to what they have learnt in lessons about other religions. The school has made a start on improving this, for example through additions to the library and some study in Years 3 and 4 of Benjamin Zephaniah's poetry about Britain.

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is excellent, and their cultural development good. They demonstrate their sensitivity, and exceptional singing skills, in singing songs from a variety of countries with excellent expression and control of volume. The outstanding pastoral care they receive is mirrored in the way they care for each other. All Year 4 pupils, for example,

act as buddies to Reception age children. They seek each other out in whole-school activities such as the singing. Year 4 pupils also act as 'playground pals', and they apply for these posts in writing; this is just one example of the excellent ways in which the school prepares them for later life. The 'playground pals' not only ensure others are happy at lunch and break times, but also take other responsibilities such as ensuring that the fruit bin is used as part of recycling waste. The school council is flourishing, and gives pupils the opportunity to develop enterprise and financial skills as well as working in teams. Pupils of all ages contribute to their class charter, which defines their rights and responsibilities. Their excellent knowledge in this area, as applied both to themselves and to children worldwide, has been recognised by the school gaining the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award. The pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and safe, and statutory safeguarding requirements are rigorously applied by the school. Attendance is above average and rising. Behaviour is outstanding.

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding. He has empowered leaders at all levels and they carry out their delegated responsibilities, for example for learning difficulties and/or disabilities or for the Early Years Foundation Stage, very effectively. Excellent links have been developed with other schools and providers. The governing body is extremely well organised and informed, and challenges the school to do the best it can. The school is highly aware of its own strengths and weaknesses and identifies areas it wants to improve extremely accurately. It has carried out a very clear analysis of the context in which it works and the backgrounds of its pupils, and identified strategies to meet any needs arising. It ensures, for example, that pupils are not prevented from activities for financial reasons. It also takes excellent steps to draw in parents, running specific courses to meet their needs. A breakfast club flourishes. The school community is highly cohesive and has excellent connections with the village and local area.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding in all respects, ensuring that all children are given an excellent start to their education and have a secure basis for their future learning. Staff plan a wide range of activities that are interesting, exciting and cater for the needs of all; they engage the children and very successfully encourage them to become eager, independent learners. This term, for example, one of the topics has been related to 'Space' to fire the particular interest of the high proportion of boys. The excellent quality of teaching features especially positive relationships, very productive and focused use of teaching assistants, stimulating resources and excellent use of space, both indoors and outdoors. It ensures that children make outstanding progress. Last year, children in Reception joined the school with standards below those expected nationally, especially in communication, language and literacy, where they were very low in terms of preliminary writing skills. By the end of the year, standards in mathematics were well above average and standards in writing close to average. In the current year, the children have already made exceptional progress in reading. The children are very happy, confident and proud of their responsibilities, such as being 'special helpers', and are pleased with the way they can register themselves by circling their names on the interactive whiteboard. High quality care, guidance and support, including the strong involvement of parents, which starts with a very effective visit to each home before children start school, ensures that children settle into routines and greatly enjoy school. Outstanding leadership and management ensure that the progress of each child is closely tracked and their needs are catered for in an extremely caring and effective way.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve pupils' understanding of the range of cultures that are represented in modern Britain.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

### Achievement and standards

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

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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
The extent to which 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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

**Annex B**

**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

5 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England First School, Charminster DT2 9RD

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited your school recently. Thank you, too, for telling us all about it. We were very, very impressed. We have judged that your school is outstanding!

The children in the Reception Year get off to an excellent start. Throughout the school, you are making extremely quick progress and reaching high standards. You have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. You told us all about the many things you do to help improve the school, such as being buddies or playground friends or making your own class charters. We think the adults in the school take great care of you as well. We saw how much you enjoy lessons and we are not surprised, because the teaching is outstanding. You also get a very wide range of interesting things to do.

Your headteacher and the staff who help him are leading the school exceptionally well. However, they are not content and want it to get even better. You can help with this too by continuing to work hard and trying your very best. We were really impressed by how much you all know about other countries and people around the world. We have asked the staff to make sure you know as much about this country and the many different backgrounds of people who live here.

With best wishes for the future

Deborah Zachary

Lead inspector