

Combe St Nicholas Church

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123828
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	340437
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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

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

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	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Freeston
Headteacher	Lesley Watson
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2006
School address	Combe St Nicholas Chard Somerset TA20 3NG
Telephone number	01460 63116
Fax number	01460 66963
Email address	sch.110@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
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**Number of children on roll in the registered
childcare provision****Date of last inspection of registered
childcare provision**

Not previously inspected

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documents, including the school's records of pupils' progress and its monitoring activities, school policies and notes of procedures, teachers' plans and 47 parental questionnaires.

inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following aspects.

- Attainment on entry and progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Evidence of any variations in progress between different groups across the school and standards of pupils' work.
- The quality of teaching and assessment and how teachers meet the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes.
- Examples of specific improvements in the curriculum and other provision since the last inspection.
- The rigour of checks carried out by the school on its own performance.

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than average. Pupils are taught in four classes in the mornings and three in the afternoons. The four-year-old children in the Early Years Foundation Stage share a class with a few pupils from Year 1 in the mornings and with pupils from Years 1 and 2 in the afternoons. Older pupils are taught in two classes, each containing two year groups. All pupils are White British. There are relatively few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The headteacher and assistant headteacher have taken up their posts within the last two years and there have been substantial building additions and alterations in the same period. The school has gained Healthy Schools and Activemark awards. The inspection did not include the work of the Tadpoles pre-school provision on site.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. The new leaders have set a clear sense of direction. As a result, the school is improving purposefully, following a challenging period of uncertainty during which there were major changes of staff and governors, a reduction in the number of classes and considerable building works. The school has several good features. The most significant of these relates to the pupils' good personal development. Pupils clearly feel safe and secure in school. They enjoy the many school activities provided within the good curriculum. They arrive eagerly at the start of the day and their attendance is above average. They behave well and are very thoughtful in their responses and attitudes towards one another. While pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good, they have a limited awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity of modern Britain beyond their immediate community. The staff provide good care, guidance and support for all pupils. The pupils and their parents were unanimous in their replies about this in the inspectors' surveys. Although pupils enjoy their lessons and make good progress in some, over time their progress is satisfactory. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start in their new accommodation, and make good progress. Attainment fluctuates significantly from year to year because of the small numbers in each year group. In some years, standards are above average but overall they are average. Both boys and girls make satisfactory progress, but it is stronger for the girls.

Despite many examples of good teaching, with stimulating activities that motivate pupils, the quality of teaching is satisfactory rather than good. This is because there are variations in quality and some recently agreed school practices are not being implemented consistently. The school is developing a range of new ways to assess pupils' learning, and is encouraging pupils to think more about their own learning. However, teachers do not always have accurate assessments in important subject areas or make the best use of their assessments. This means that they do not consistently match activities sufficiently to the wide range of abilities in their mixed-age class, or always plan to make the best use of time during a lesson. This results in some pupils, frequently the more able, not being fully challenged or extended. Marking is variable, often with insufficient guidance given to pupils about how to improve their work. The use of short-term learning targets is at an early stage of development.

On appointment, the headteacher quickly and perceptively identified the main priorities for improvement. She has raised expectations of pupils and staff and brought about substantial improvements to the way the school operates. A programme of checks is being systematically introduced and other staff and governors are becoming more involved in these processes. An effective system for tracking pupils' progress has been

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established and is being used well to identify pupils in need of extra help and how best to deploy the support staff. However, some of the checks, for example on the quality of teaching, are not sufficiently frequent or robust and a few judgements about the school's performance remain a little generous. Nevertheless, the school has improved significantly in the last year and is securely placed to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good teaching in all classes to accelerate pupils' progress, especially that of the boys, by:
 - challenging pupils of all abilities, including those who are more able through matching work closely to their individual needs
 - establishing effective ways of assessing pupils' learning during lessons and across the curriculum, and enabling pupils to be fully involved in this process
 - providing pupils with clear feedback and guidance when marking work about the next steps in learning and how to improve it.
- By the end of this school year, extend the roles of staff and governors in conducting checks on the school's performance, by:
 - providing appropriate training for those new to these roles
 - ensuring a clear focus on the outcomes for pupils when checking the school's performance
 - ensuring judgements are clear and information from the checks is shared and used to improve the work of the school.
- Implement a planned programme to broaden pupils' horizons beyond their immediate area in order to extend their awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity of modern Britain.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The attainment of children on entry to the school is typical of children of their age. Standards are consistently at least average at the end of Years 2 and 6 and in some years are above average. A proportion of older pupils make good progress, especially among the girls. In a few lessons, pupils' progress slows because work is not matched closely to pupils' needs or because shortcomings in organisation result in one group waiting while the teacher deals with another group. Levels of understanding and standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' books are broadly as expected for their age. The school has set high targets for pupils currently in Year 6. However, in some instances, these appear unrealistic as they are much higher than the standards shown in their current work. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to the extensive support programmes, and individuals make good progress, although in some cases from exceptionally low starting points. Pupils' collaborative skills are good as are their positive attitudes to learning and, for most, their confidence in using computers. These features combine to equip them well for the next stage of education

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and adult life.

Achievement is satisfactory and pupils clearly enjoy school. There are lots of smiles, even on a wet day, and they are proud to contribute to the running of the school and to help one another, which they do conscientiously. An excellent example of this is the tender way pupils in Year 5 escort individual children from the Early Years Foundation Stage to acts of collective worship and sit with them during the service. On such occasions, pupils respond well, reflecting sensitively on spiritual and moral issues. However, in other discussions they struggle to talk about differences in culture, customs and values across Britain's diverse society. Pupils have a good understanding about healthy eating and taking exercise. Enthusiasm for and participation rates in after-school clubs, such as football, are exceptionally high for both boys and girls.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum is well structured to ensure breadth and progression. Innovative materials are used to promote pupils' personal development. The use of broad themes across the school, such as 'Ourselves and our local area' is helping to make activities

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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relevant to the pupils. These include, for example, setting up 'Combe Cottage' in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and older pupils doing a village study, writing autobiographies or producing French identity cards as part of their work in a foreign language. This approach means that skills are frequently practised in what feels to pupils like meaningful situations. Pupils are very positive about the extensive programme of residential visits, with 'I wish we could stay longer' being the only complaint.

Teaching is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and there are examples of good teaching across the school. Teachers establish good relationships with pupils and manage behaviour well. Pupils collaborate well. As a result, teachers plan opportunities for pupils to work together in small groups, for example as seen in science when carrying out an experiment designed to demonstrate that smoking is harmful. While teachers usually plan and provide activities intended to reflect the different needs in the mixed-age classes, there are times when the pace of learning slows. This occurs particularly during lengthy introductions when the whole class is kept together even though some pupils are capable of undertaking more advanced work independently. Teachers are beginning to adopt new ways of assessing pupils and moderating work. They mark work, but too frequently provide insufficient guidance on the next steps in learning. There are inconsistencies in the way short-term targets are set. They do not always reflect pupils' abilities and have insufficient variation or follow-up in books during the term.

Pupils are well cared for. The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good, with well-organised provision involving a range of additional staff and external professionals. Good links with parents enable effective working partnerships to support their children. Those few pupils who are particularly vulnerable are very well supported. One parent of such a child wrote, 'I cannot praise the school enough for their efforts and support.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has effectively established a climate for improvement, raising the level of professional debate and expectation within the staff and governing body. She is well supported by the small leadership team. The new chair of governors has moved swiftly to ensure governors fulfil their statutory roles. Major changes to the buildings,

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staffing structure and ways of working have been put in place. A clear development plan includes agreed priorities and a new motto has been launched to underpin the school's revised aims. These developments help reflect the school's sound capacity to improve further, but it is too soon for most of these actions to have made a significant impact on standards and pupils' progress. An annual cycle for monitoring and assessment activities is being introduced. However, the roles of staff as class teachers or as subject leaders have not been clarified or substantial training confirmed to help them in their increased roles in the monitoring process. Similarly, steps to increase the role of governors and provide training to help them hold the school to account have begun but remain underdeveloped.

The school's commitment to promoting equal opportunities is tangible. It works strenuously to ensure all pupils are equally valued. There is a commitment to inclusion, seen for example in the meticulous planning to enable the most vulnerable pupils to participate in residential visits. All the required governors' policies designed to safeguard pupils are fully in place and day-to-day practices and staff training are implemented rigorously. The school successfully promotes cohesion within the local community. It has reflected on the community's needs, for example by surveying the demand for a breakfast club, and welcomed the Tadpoles pre-school provision onto the site. While the school has global links, it has recognised the need to promote cohesion and links across Britain and this is a priority within the development plan.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Provision has improved and is now good. The school's assessment information shows children made satisfactory progress in recent years. However, this year children are making good progress. They are already working at a level above national expectations for their age and a high proportion are on course to attain the expected learning goals by the end of the year. Children are benefiting from the good teaching, the changes in the class structure this year and the recently acquired new building, including the outdoor canopy and its safe surface. However, the school is aware further minor adaptations are needed to the building to make it totally fit for these young children. The teacher and her assistants work well together to provide a good range of experiences for children inside and out of doors. They observe children's responses carefully and adjust activities accordingly with high expectations. There are good induction procedures, including links with the pre-school provision, to ensure the children's welfare. Children's personal development is good. They move confidently around the areas, tidy up responsibly and follow routines. Leadership is good and is shared between the headteacher who provides a strategic lead, for example by establishing the Early Years Foundation Stage department, and the class teacher who leads the planning and manages the team of adults well on a day-to-day basis.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A significant proportion of parents responded to the inspection questionnaire. Almost all parents were fully supportive of most aspects of the school, with unanimous support for four aspects including their children's safety, promotion of healthy lifestyles, teaching and preparation for the next stage of education. The area that attracted the most disagreement, albeit by a very small minority, related to the way the school supports parents to help their children with their work. However, inspectors consider that the school has recently improved parents' access and contacts with the school and that the ways for them to be informed about how they can help their children are effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Combe St Nicholas Church of England Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 47 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 84 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	68	14	30	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	55	21	45	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	43	25	53	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	45	22	47	4	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	49	24	51	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	40	23	49	5	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	55	21	45	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	24	51	22	47	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	38	25	53	4	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	40	26	55	1	2	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	34	27	57	3	6	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	20	43	24	51	2	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	53	21	44	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Combe St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Chard, TA20 3NG

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing some of your work. You were very helpful in answering our questions. We are pleased that you like your school. It is a satisfactory school. It is improving and many things are good, although some things could be better. Here are some of the highlights we found.

- You make satisfactory progress in your learning and reach average standards by the time you leave.
- You behave well and are very thoughtful towards one another.
- Many of you take on jobs to help around the school. We were particularly impressed by the way those of you in Year 5 collect and care for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage during collective worship.
- You know a lot about the importance of eating healthily and taking exercise. We were pleased to see how many of the boys and girls were keen to take part in the football club. Good luck with your next important cup match.
- You clearly enjoy school. Your teachers plan interesting things for you to do and many special events or visits, such as the residential trip to Greatwood.
- Your headteacher has many ideas of how to improve the school further and has already made some important changes.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on three things to make the school even better.

- Help you make even faster progress in your work by challenging you to do that bit better and helping you to know more clearly what you need to do to improve it.
- Agree the best ways to check how well everything is going in school and what they each need to do to improve.
- Help you learn more about people's different beliefs, values and customs across Britain.

We are sure you will have your own ideas about how to improve the school and will want to talk about these with your school councillors.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly

Lead inspector

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