

Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Chard Street, Thorncombe, Chard, Somerset TA20 4NE

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders do not effectively evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, the rate of improvement is slow.
- Outcomes for pupils require improvement because pupils' progress from their starting points in writing and mathematics is slow, and so the standards they reach are not high enough.
- Teachers do not plan activities that sufficiently challenge pupils' thinking in mathematics. Teaching focuses too heavily on calculation, and so pupils lack breadth in their mathematical knowledge.
- Pupils do not always concentrate fully, especially when their work lacks challenge.
- Governors do not hold school leaders to account with enough rigour. They do not always have sufficient information available to challenge senior leaders effectively.
- Governors have not ensured that pupil premium funding has sufficient impact. As a result, disadvantaged pupils do not make enough progress.
- The most effective teaching is not shared across the school. Consequently, pupils' progress, particularly the most able pupils' progress, is not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The wider curriculum, beyond English and mathematics, is well designed and engages pupils in their learning.
- Children in the early years settle quickly into school life and make good progress because they are taught well.
- Pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in their high attendance.
- Pupils use their reading skills effectively to enjoy a wide range of books. Younger pupils use their phonic skills well to work out unfamiliar words.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - establishing an effective process for senior leaders to check the quality of teaching and learning, and use this information to identify where further improvements in teaching are needed
 - providing appropriate training for governors
 - ensuring that governors rigorously hold senior leaders to account by using accurate information in all areas of the school's work
 - establishing clear outcomes and expectations for the use of pupil premium funding
 - sharing more widely the best teaching across the school
 - sharing the effective practice of successful middle leaders to raise standards in English and mathematics and improve pupils' outcomes overall.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers' expectations of all pupils, including the most able, are consistently high, so that all pupils make the progress they are capable of
 - pupils use their reasoning skills in mathematics and solve problems in order to increase rates of progress
 - teachers are provided with opportunities to share what works best in teaching writing so that the quality of pupils' writing improves.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders, including governors, do not make the best use of the school's or external progress information to track pupils' achievements over time. They have not provided sufficient support for those pupils who are underperforming.
- Governors do not routinely hold leaders to account for pupils' academic progress as they move through the school. This is impeding the school's improvement.
- Leaders do not systematically monitor the performance of staff, the effectiveness of teaching or pupils' progress in order to make improvements. This means that teachers are not given the support they need to develop their practice.
- The use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is not focused sharply enough. This means that leaders have not been able to determine the impact of this funding on these pupils' attainment and progress.
- The design of the mathematics curriculum is unbalanced with an over emphasis on number and calculation. There are insufficient opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to apply their knowledge and solve problems. As a result, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable in mathematics.
- The wider curriculum is generally well designed and is a strong feature of the school. Pupils enthuse about opportunities they experience. For example, samba lessons in music and experimenting with parachute design in science develop their creative and investigative skills well.
- Leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is good. This is because the starting points of pupils have been accurately identified, and work is planned to meet their individual learning needs. Leaders work effectively with teachers to ensure that manageable, individualised targets are set for each pupil. As a result, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress.
- Leaders emphasise the importance of the school's values. These values are evident in all aspects of school life. This ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Leaders act quickly in the event of any derogatory or stereotypical language, and pupils and parents and carers reported that this is rare. Leaders have made sure that all staff received the appropriate training to prevent radicalisation and extremism. As a result, staff are confident in this area.
- Leaders have successfully extended the age range of the school to include a group of two to four year olds. These children are given a good range of activities both inside and outside the classroom. Leaders have made sure that staff working with this age group are appropriately trained. As a consequence, children in this setting make a positive start to life in the school. Parents are appreciative of the work of the early years team and the positive relationships in the setting.
- Leaders have made use of the physical education (PE) and sport premium funding for a wide variety of appropriate areas, such as providing training for staff in skills to deliver

gymnastics and training a play leader to help promote healthy, active lunchtimes. However, school leaders and the governing body cannot accurately account for the impact of this funding in terms of whether pupils' progress is better and standards are rising.

Governance of the school

- Governors do not sufficiently challenge senior leaders to account for pupils' achievement. The reasons for the underperformance of groups of pupils in the past and currently are not being identified. This has contributed to the current weaknesses in leadership and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Governors recognise that they need to be more assiduous in monitoring the use of funding for disadvantaged pupils to ensure that it has a positive impact on their progress.
- Governors are passionate advocates for the school. They try to involve themselves as much as possible in day-to-day school events. As a result, they are aware of ongoing school initiatives, such as the purchase of new books for the school library to promote boys' reading. However, their strategic role in leading the school is not strong.
- Governors are diligent in their safeguarding duties. For example, the systems and procedures for pre-employment checks and appointing staff are fit for purpose. A safeguarding governor systematically checks school records to confirm that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Positive relationships and well-organised systems promote a safe culture in the school. Pupils said that they feel safe. For example, pupils are confident that there is an adult they can talk to if they have a concern.
- Policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are fully in place. Safeguarding records are kept up to date, and school records show that appropriate actions are taken when required. Staff training is up to date, and staff have a clear understanding of a wide range of safeguarding matters. Staff know what to do if they have any concern about pupils' welfare.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Teaching does not yet ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- The teaching of mathematics lacks challenge. Work is not always matched well to pupils' learning needs. They spend too much time tackling work which does not require

them to extend their thinking, and this slows their progress. The vast majority of work completed so far this school year is in the area of number and calculation and has presented the pupils with little or no challenge. Pupils also revisit work which they have already demonstrated they understand. Pupils do not use their mathematical skills in a variety of different contexts. As a result, pupils, in particular the most able pupils, do not make enough progress and do not achieve high standards. Pupils recognise that their work could be harder.

- Teachers do not always help pupils to move forward in their learning quickly enough. This is because pupils' work often lacks sufficient challenge. For example, the most able writers do not have enough opportunities to extend their writing at length, which impedes their progress.
- Teaching does not develop and deepen pupils' understanding sufficiently or help them to tackle misconceptions or mistakes. As a result, pupils do not consistently make the progress they could.
- Teachers give feedback in line with the school's assessment policy, and pupils understand how this helps them. However, these strategies are not used accurately enough, and there is little evidence in pupils' books that assessment is contributing positively to pupils' progress.
- The teaching of phonics is good because it is well planned to meet pupils' learning needs. This enables pupils to make good use of their increasing phonic skills to accurately read challenging words.
- Teachers plan imaginative activities for the wider curriculum. Pupils talk enthusiastically about exciting lessons and topics. For example, in science, work is purposeful and motivating. Teachers ensure that writing skills are developed alongside the science tasks. Parents also comment positively on the quality of the wider curriculum.
- Experienced staff in the early years support children well. For example, they introduce and explore appropriate vocabulary, question children to clarify understanding and challenge children to move their learning forward. Thorough planning enables them to provide tasks which interest and engage the children. There is an appropriate balance of structured activities and opportunities for children to explore for themselves.
- Pupils agree that homework supports their learning. They appreciate the regular opportunities to practise skills at home. They also enjoy longer-term homework projects, which enable them to work at a greater depth, for example researching evolution.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- Pupils' personal development and welfare are good and are promoted effectively throughout the school.
- The school's leader for personal, social and health education has a clear understanding of how this subject has a positive influence on all aspects of school life. Staff share this

vision.

- Collective worship is an important part of the school day. It is skilfully planned to include pupils of all ages and, consequently, every pupil can fully participate. Pupils have appropriate opportunities for their views to be heard and make full use of time for reflection.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe. They talked with confidence about staying safe online.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The breakfast club is well attended, and pupils enjoy the sociable, relaxing start to the day. After-school clubs are varied with many options for pupils to choose from, including sports, arts and crafts clubs. These are popular and some are attended by up to half the school.
- Pupils understand the importance of British values in the life of the school. For example, pupils confidently explained how the school council democratically made decisions about how playground behaviour might be improved.
- Parents appreciate the pastoral care that the school provides. They emphasise the consistently caring approach of the staff, expressing how happy their children are at school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. In some lessons, pupils become restless and uninterested. This is as a result of being asked to complete work they already understand or because teachers spend too long explaining work that pupils have already understood. Consequently, pupils often do not make the progress or attain the standards of which they are capable.
- A significant proportion of parents expressed concern about how the school deals with bullying issues and highlighted some incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils also reported that, recently, behaviour had dipped.
- Attendance is high for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils highlighted the 'fun and practical' opportunities they have to learn in subjects such as science, music and design technology.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good. Children experience a wide variety of interesting activities both inside and outside the classroom, led by adults or by the children's own interests. Parents appreciate how quickly and well pupils settle to life in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- By the time that pupils move onto their next stage of education at the end of Year 6, too few have made the progress of which they are capable. For example, in 2017, Year 6 boys, and those who were disadvantaged, did not make the progress that might have

been expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics.

- During the past two years, pupils' outcomes in writing at the end of Year 6 have not been good enough. For example, pupils' progress in writing has been well below average for the last two years. Leaders have not thoroughly investigated the reasons for this underachievement or ways in which they can ensure improved progress.
- The most able pupils' progress, particularly that of older pupils, is not good enough, and so many of these pupils do not reach high standards of attainment.
- In mathematics, many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, do not make enough progress at a sufficiently speedy rate. This is because too much focus is given to teaching calculation methods and repeating work that is already understood.
- Pupils' outcomes in reading are a strength of the school. Pupils make good progress in their reading skills because they are given access to books that are well matched to their abilities and interests. Pupils described how their enthusiasm for reading is further developed through work that is linked to other curriculum areas, such as art and drama.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress because they are supported well. Their individualised targets, and next steps for learning, are based on accurate assessments and are reviewed regularly.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 in the 2017 national tests was average in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils' work in their books indicates that this is still the case.
- Pupils are making good progress in phonics. In 2017, a high proportion met the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check, a significant improvement on the previous year. Teaching ensures that most current pupils are on track to meet the national expectations in phonics.
- Outcomes for pupils in the early years are broadly average. In 2017, most pupils met the national expectations for their age. Children currently in Reception are achieving well.

School details

Unique reference number	113767
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10037843

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	65
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Melanie Pierce-Butler
Headteacher	Tanya Robinson
Telephone number	01460 30535
Website	www.stmarysthorncombe.dorset.sch.uk
Email address	office@stmarysthorncombe.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	September 2012

Information about this school

- Due to the size of the school and the small numbers in each year group, there is no separate early years section or judgement.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The majority of pupils are of White British backgrounds.
- The school is much smaller than average.
- Governors are responsible for the operation and management of a breakfast and after-school club.
- Pupils are currently grouped into three mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is average.

- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in each class, often jointly with the headteacher. He also observed a whole-school assembly. The inspector visited the school breakfast club.
- The inspector carried out a scrutiny of books jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector held a meeting with six governors from the school. Meetings were also held with senior leaders. The inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority by telephone.
- The inspector spoke to pupils in class and in the playground to seek their views on the school. A formal discussion was held with pupils in Years 4 to 6.
- The inspector heard pupils in key stages 1 and 2 read.
- The inspector spoke to nine parents in the playground and took into account 44 responses to the Parent View survey. The online questionnaire responses of eight staff members were taken into account. The inspector scrutinised a number of documents, including safeguarding records, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. Documents relating to the use of the pupil premium funding and the primary school PE and sports funding were also considered.

Inspection team

Matthew Shirley, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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M1 2WD

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