

Inspection of Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy

Chard Street, Thorncombe, Chard, Somerset TA20 4NE

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Jessica Evans. This school is part of Acorn Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Andrea Rice, who is also the executive headteacher of this school, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Brian Impey.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's strong community ethos allows pupils to feel happy and safe. Pupils respond well to the daily routines and expectations set for them. They take pride in their work to support local and international charities. This broadens their horizons of the wider world. Older pupils hold positions of responsibility, such as being a librarian or a play leader. This helps them understand the values of leadership in a supportive way.

Since the trust took over the running of the school, the school is more aspirational in its work. The much higher expectations for pupils are paying off. The school is improving strongly after challenging times. The curriculum pupils receive ensures that they understand and can apply important subject knowledge effectively in some subjects. For example, pupils learn well in mathematics and phonics. However, the development of the curriculum remains a priority in the school. Pupils are not yet building their knowledge well enough across the full curriculum.

Pupils understand what good behaviour is. Most of the time, pupils behave with respect for each other. They move around the school in a calm and courteous manner.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Astute trust leaders have brought stability and rigour. This is providing a firm platform for speedy and necessary change. There have already been many demonstrable improvements. For example, staff subject knowledge is deepening markedly. As a result, pupils are remembering much more, especially the younger children in phonics and mathematics. Staff check what pupils know accurately in reading and mathematics. Pupils' conduct has improved. Children learn across the early years very well.

Staff know every pupil individually. This is particularly valuable for the many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Support for staff ensures that they have the knowledge they need to meet these pupils' needs. As a result, most pupils with SEND are learning more and behaving well.

The school's curriculum is improving. Many subject curriculums are designed well. Nonetheless, in some subjects, such as art and history, the most important concepts that pupils need to know have not been clearly identified. As a result, pupils do not remember important parts of their learning effectively. They are not able to build on prior knowledge and learn and remember more.

Children in the pre-school establish routines quickly and learn new vocabulary through appropriate and interesting activities. The school's subject curriculums start from the early years. Consequently, Reception children study a suitable range of subject content that helps them to build on their learning in Year 1 and beyond.

Staff help children to develop curiosity and they communicate eagerly about their learning as soon as possible.

As a result of effective phonics teaching from Reception onwards, pupils become fluent readers in key stage 1. Reading continues to be central within the English curriculum. Pupils read texts together that broaden their understanding of the world. Teachers read stimulating stories to younger pupils to help with pronunciation and expression. Pupils read for pleasure, with appropriate choices, in key stage 2.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the school identified weaknesses in pupils' ability to write longer responses with neat handwriting. Now, most older pupils can write fuller responses. However, for some, their presentation and handwriting remain weak. At times, the school's expectation of pupils' writing is not high enough. This means that some pupils in key stage 2 continue to make basic errors in spelling and punctuation.

Where expectations of pupils' behaviour are high, pupils respond well. They work hard and focus on their learning. Some pupils with complex needs require more support in managing their behaviour. Staff are skilful in recognising triggers and responding quickly so that outbursts are minimal. The school's work to monitor pupils' attendance and behaviour is making a positive difference. Most pupils attend well. However, there are still a minority of pupils who miss valuable learning time because they do not attend regularly enough.

The school motto of 'Living, Learning and Growing Together' sits at the heart of all that happens. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum provides pupils with a comprehensive knowledge of how to keep themselves and the environment healthy. In addition, they learn about their local community with visits to a goat farm and the nearby church. Leaders are sensitive to the changing nature of communication and keen to ensure pupils understand the importance of e-safety. Pupils are developing as responsible citizens of the future.

Staff feel supported. They value working with colleagues from across the trust.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A few subject curriculums, such as history and art, need further revision. As a result, pupils are not learning the key concepts nor building effectively on prior learning in these subjects. The trust must ensure that each subject curriculum builds pupils' knowledge well over time so that pupils learn more and remember more.

- A minority of pupils do not attend school regularly. As a result, they miss valuable learning. The trust must maintain its efforts to improve attendance so that more pupils attend and progress well through the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148404
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10298101
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Brian Impey
Headteacher	Jessica Evans
Website	www.stmarys.acornacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy converted to become an academy in February 2021. When its predecessor school, Thorncombe, St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school is part of the Acorn Multi Academy Trust.
- The school is a voluntary controlled Church of England school in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The previous section 48 inspection took place in November 2019.
- There is a higher number of pupils with SEND than seen in other schools nationally. Many of these pupils arrive in-year.
- There have been many changes to staffing since the previous inspection.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
- The leader of the pre-school was appointed in September 2023.
- The school's pre-school takes children from two years of age.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- ☒ Inspectors met with the chair of directors of the trust, the chief executive officer, the school improvement lead for the trust, the special educational needs lead for the trust, the chair of governors, a parent governor, the headteacher, staff and pupils.
- ☒ Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, art and history.
- ☒ For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- ☒ To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- ☒ Inspectors took account of the Ofsted survey, Parent View, and the results of the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Kathy Maddocks, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Stewart Gale Ofsted Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
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