

Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School

Birch Avenue, Blandford St Mary, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 9QD

Inspection dates

30–31 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Over time, governors have not taken timely and effective action to hold leaders to account. As a result, the school has declined and pupils' standards are low.
- The school's capacity to improve is weak because there is insufficient depth and quality across the full range of senior and middle leadership, including leadership for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Subject leadership is ineffective and underdeveloped. Consequently, too few individuals can be relied on to make necessary improvements.
- Teachers' weak subject knowledge limits the development of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills.
- Teachers do not tailor work effectively to meet pupils' different needs, including those of disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers do not have high expectations of pupils, including the most able. As a result, pupils fail to meet the standards they are capable of in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers do not insist on high-quality work, for example in handwriting and presentation. Consequently, pupils' attitudes and learning outcomes deteriorate.
- Teachers do not effectively check pupils' understanding or build on pupils' prior skills and knowledge. As a result, pupils' writing development and their problem solving and reasoning in mathematics are weak.
- The curriculum has not been developed to ensure that pupils are encouraged to apply their key skills well across a range of subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is effective and knows what needs to be done to secure improvements in teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching in Years 2 and 6 is starting to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics in these year groups.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to raise pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, including for the most able
 - teachers check pupils' learning and take effective action to build on pupils' previous skills, knowledge and understanding
 - teachers' subject knowledge is used effectively in supporting pupils' progress in spelling, punctuation and grammar in writing
 - teachers effectively develop pupils' problem solving and reasoning skills in mathematics
 - teachers use accurate assessment information to ensure that work is well suited to the different needs and abilities of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils
 - teaching assistants make consistently positive contributions to support pupils' learning
 - teaching motivates pupils and holds their interest to improve pupils' learning attitudes and behaviour in lessons
 - teachers insist on high-quality work, including in pupils' handwriting and presentation.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders' evaluations of the school's work are checked rigorously and are accurate enough for leaders to be held to account
 - governors provide effective support and challenge to school leaders
 - governors probe deeply and ask the right questions to bring about sustained improvement
 - governors implement an effective strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the school, including the most able
 - governors establish an effective team of middle and senior leaders to build capacity for sustained improvement

- those with responsibility for improving outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well trained and can deliver and check this aspect of the school's work effectively
 - subject leaders know and understand their roles and responsibilities well enough to contribute effectively to school improvement
 - the curriculum is used to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that pupils regularly apply these skills through a wide variety of subjects and across the school day.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.
 - An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Since converting to an academy in 2014, leaders have not taken effective and decisive action quickly enough to prevent a serious decline in the school. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' standards have suffered.
- Leaders' evaluations of the school's work and outcomes are too generous. As a result, leaders do not make required changes or take action quickly enough to secure better outcomes for pupils.
- School leaders, including governors, have an overgenerous impression of the effectiveness of the school and, in particular, its capacity to improve. As a consequence, leaders and managers are not challenged effectively to improve their leadership and drive improvements in the quality of teaching and learning quickly enough.
- Though the headteacher, who was appointed in late 2016, is making progress, senior and middle leadership remains ineffective.
- Subject leadership is ineffective because it is underdeveloped. Although subject leaders have been allocated to subjects, they do not yet have the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil these roles effectively. As a result, actions to improve teachers' professional knowledge and address weaknesses are too slow.
- Those responsible for improving outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have had limited impact. Strategic plans and actions for pupils are not checked or matched closely enough to pupils' needs. As a result, teaching is not focusing on the areas to help the pupils achieve well, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school delivers the full range of subjects through a broad curriculum. However, opportunities to deepen pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not utilised effectively in other subjects. As a result, pupils do not apply these skills equally well across the curriculum. This slows their progress and enjoyment.
- Since September 2016, the newly appointed headteacher has been effective in quickly understanding what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning. He has introduced essential measures of professional accountability and training for staff. This is starting to have positive impact, for example in improving the quality of teaching in some year groups. However, this is altogether too recent to have had enough impact on teaching and learning across the school or to remedy the significant weaknesses that are now adversely affecting the school.
- The headteacher is working hard to promote equal opportunities. Pupils and parents recognise the work of the new headteacher in establishing a more positive and improving environment for the pupils. One parent, whose view was typical, said, 'The school is now heading in the right direction'.

- The school delivers a range of extra-curricular clubs such as netball, gymnastics and choir, which the pupils enjoy attending. There is also a breakfast club which provides a calm and settled start for a number of pupils before school.
- Leaders promote British values through a range of activities. As a result, pupils are confident in speaking about issues relating to them and understand, for example, the principles of democracy. Pupils elect peers for the School Council Board and have a choice in the charities they support. Furthermore, pupils have been involved in drafting the 'good behaviour' charter which is being adopted and approved by the governing body. School values, such as truthfulness, are visited at least every half term. Pupils recognise the impact of the work of the new headteacher in this improving aspect of the school's work.
- Support provided through the trust has not been effective in preventing the decline of the school. However, there are now some useful links being forged with other schools in the trust and local cluster to bolster aspects of teaching and learning.

Governance of the school

- Since the conversion to academy status in July 2014, those responsible for running the school have had to respond to significant changes in personnel, in terms of both staffing and recruitment to the governing body. However, these have not been well-managed and have led to a significant decline in teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. Governors have not planned strategically for change and have failed to hold leaders to account with sufficient rigour and urgency. Poor performance has not been challenged effectively. This has led to a weakness in the ability of middle and senior leaders to drive wider improvement. However, the recent appointment of the new headteacher is now bringing some needed strengths to recover some of the ground that has been lost.
- Governors' evaluations of the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes are too generous. The visits and checks they make do not deliver the depth of challenge needed to secure the rapid improvement needed. As a result, they have failed to act speedily enough to prevent the decline in pupils' outcomes.
- Governors are now undertaking visits to the school and minutes of meetings show that they ask questions about the pupils' achievement and the school's priorities. However, questions still lack impact because these are not probing enough, or because governors do not follow up with the rigour needed to secure the necessary improvements.
- Governors recently commissioned an external review of the spending of the grant for disadvantaged pupils. This identified some key weaknesses, for example in how well the most able pupils are being taught. However, governors still do not have a rigorous strategy for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- The allocation and spending of the sports grant is appropriately used to improve the quality of physical education and games, and for increasing pupils' participation in sport.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Since the arrival of the new headteacher there has been a renewed emphasis on safeguarding. Staff are fully trained and processes are compliant with statutory regulations, including pre-employment checks and vetting arrangements for staff.
- Child protection training is up to date for all staff and governors. Most importantly, staff are vigilant and escalate concerns quickly to the safeguarding leads who act quickly to review all referrals. Case studies show how effectively staff referrals are treated. This tenacious approach, including by the parent support worker, has led to effective multi-agency working, which has initiated direct interventions to keep children safe.
- School leaders and staff take effective action to ensure that pupils are kept safe. They ensure that there is a strong culture for safeguarding children. This also includes ensuring that the local authority is challenged and informed in the event of children being reported as 'missing in education'.
- Care work for pupils and parents is particularly effective and often driven or instigated by school staff, including the parent support worker. School staff have been proactive in instances where bullying has arisen. They have, for example, organised work through the police and other school-based mediation services.
- Pupils feel safe and know how to stay safe in a variety of contexts and situations. They know how to stay safe online and are aware of the risks of cyber bullying and other online forms of abuse.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teachers do not check pupils' learning or consider their progress deeply enough. They often fail to take effective action or to respond appropriately to pupils' needs, including those of the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, work can be either too hard or too easy for pupils.
- Teachers do not have the skills to build on pupils' previous knowledge and starting points. They tend to rely on delivering curriculum plans rather than responding to the needs of the pupils themselves. As a result, teaching is not well matched to pupils' needs.
- Teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of pupils. As a result, pupils do not produce the standards and work they are capable of in reading, writing and mathematics or in other subjects across the curriculum.
- Teachers accept poorly presented work and handwriting too readily. All too often, they do not intervene to raise pupils' own expectations of what they can achieve. Consequently, pupils' progress stalls markedly or, in the worst cases, shows regression over time.
- Teachers lack the subject knowledge required to build effectively on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding in writing, especially to support pupils' development with

spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, opportunities are limited for pupils to write for a range of purposes and to develop their writing skills accordingly.

- Teachers lack the subject knowledge to be confident in teaching mathematics, especially for problem solving and reasoning. As a result, pupils are not gaining the skills or confidence to work through a variety of mathematical problems and situations.
- Teachers lack confidence in assessment information, which is too often inaccurate. As a result, they do not plan opportunities that are well suited to the needs and abilities of different pupils.
- Interventions have variable impact; for example, they do not adequately support pupils who need to catch up in their phonics by the end of key stage 1. However, effective deployment was observed during the inspection at other times, for example in supporting a group of Year 3 pupils to develop their reading.
- When time in lessons is not used effectively, pupils become demotivated and lack interest. As a result, pupils become bored and cause minor distractions. Consequently, the standard of their work and quality of learning suffers.
- Overall, classes are typically orderly and pupils know where they can go if they need help or support. The class environments are organised well to support pupils in this way, for example in Year 2, where pupils can help themselves to mathematical resources and equipment as they need it.
- Teaching in Years 2 and 6 is increasingly strong because the teachers understand the requirements for the end of each key stage. The teaching in these year groups is enabling pupils to begin to catch up quickly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils do not always take pride in their work because of a lack of expectation by staff. The quality of handwriting and presentation of work across the curriculum deteriorates and is poor where pupils are not being held to account.
- Pupils feel safe and trust adults. They agree that bullying and anti-social behaviour have greatly reduced, especially since September 2016. They also agree that staff act promptly to respond to any concerns if these arise, including bullying. Behaviour logs and school records also show that staff act quickly in support of children and families when the need arises.
- Pupils particularly trust the work of the emotional literacy support adviser and the parent support worker. These staff are particularly effective in working with pupils and their families in providing additional support and care for pupils when they need it.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe. As a result, they are knowledgeable about maintaining their personal safety and reducing potential risk or harm. For example, pupils are confident and know how to stay safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils feel 'very pleased with the new headteacher' and recognise the improvements in general conduct and behaviour since his arrival. In particular, pupils are pleased to contribute to the school's new values (love, hope, respect, perseverance, responsibility) and feel they have a stronger voice.
- There are still a few occasions when poor behaviour surfaces and interrupts children's play or learning in lessons. Consequently, at these times, behaviour can be a barrier to learning or pupils' social and emotional well-being.
- Generally, pupils conduct themselves well and are taking increasing responsibility for their own behaviour. The new 'good behaviour' policy has been drafted following a full consultation with pupils which is having a positive impact on pupils' understanding of behaviour and tolerance.
- The overall attendance of pupils is improving, although it remains slightly lower than the national average. However, pupils eligible for free school meals still have a much lower attendance rate compared to their counterparts. School leaders check pupils' attendance and are proactive in working with parents and professional organisations to ensure that this continues to improve.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- In 2016, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 that reached expected levels across all of the national tests in reading, writing and mathematics was well below the government floor standard of 65% of pupils. The rates of progress for pupils placed them in the bottom 5% of schools nationally for mathematics and writing.
- Pupils' attainment in the 2016 national tests at the end of key stage 1 was below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Currently, too few of the most able pupils are being challenged and supported to attain higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. In some subjects, there are no pupils currently working at higher standards, for example in writing at the end of key stage 1.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, still lag too far behind their national (non-disadvantaged) counterparts in all subjects. Current disadvantaged pupils are still not catching up quickly enough and too many continue to make slow progress from their previous starting points.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics across the school are low. Workbooks confirm that pupils are not yet proficient in their number work and there is not enough development of pupils' wider skills in mathematics, for example in statistics, geometric reasoning and measurement. However, pupils' low standards in problem solving and reasoning skills are of particular concern. Although such limitations have been seen in all groups of pupils, they apply especially to girls in certain year groups.

- Pupils' writing skills are underdeveloped, especially in spelling, punctuation, organisation and handwriting. Across the school, lower- and middle-attaining pupils, particularly boys, are finding it difficult to master skills in writing across the curriculum. This is especially evident for disadvantaged boys needing to catch up in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans, are not well supported. Workbooks show pupils make slow progress over time, especially in basic writing and mathematics skills.
- Workbooks in other subjects show that pupils do not transfer and develop their skills effectively across the curriculum. Limited opportunities are available for pupils to deepen their skills and understanding in the full range of subjects, for example through analysing, comparing and recording in science or history. As a result, pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their learning or by the time they leave the school at the end of key stage 2.
- The number of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check declined in 2016. Currently, those pupils who did not meet the standard, particularly boys, are not being well supported to catch up quickly enough.
- Pupils in Years 2 and 6 are now starting to catch up in writing and mathematics. Analysis of workbooks and assessment information shows that pupils are making progress to catch up.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Although most children leave the early years foundation stage with a good level of development, there are insufficient opportunities to stretch middle- and higher-attaining children. As a result, these children are not writing to a greater depth and quality that they are capable of by the time they leave the Reception Year.
- Teachers are not identifying needs of the most able children or intervening swiftly enough to ensure that children go on to exceed the early learning goals. Currently there are no children excelling in writing.
- Assessment information is not being used effectively enough to enable children to learn quickly across the areas of learning, in particular mathematical development. As a result, teaching and learning are not developed sufficiently to ensure that children can make good progress across a wide range of areas of learning.
- Phonics is well taught and children are making strong progress in their use of letters and sounds. During the inspection, pupils were reading words and identifying sounds containing the 'oi-oy' phoneme. As a result, the children are developing secure reading skills in readiness for Year 1.
- Lower-ability boys are well targeted to improve their early communication, physical development and writing skills. As a result, they are making rapid progress. Evidence shows how these children are progressing quickly from initially making marks to being able to make plausible attempts at writing words.

- Transition arrangements into early years have been improved and school staff make effective use of familiarisation days and other activities to support new children and their families. Consequently, children settle quickly and are well prepared to begin learning in the Reception Year.
- Parents appreciate the work of the early years staff in providing a nurturing and caring environment for the children. In addition, the pupil premium grant is used to provide additional intervention from the parent support worker to develop children's early reading skills.
- The children play and integrate happily. Staff ensure that the environment is inviting and generally supports the children well.
- The children are well looked after and safeguarding is effective.

School details

Unique reference number	141046
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10033172

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	Blandford Education Trust
Chair	Trevor Keep
Headteacher	Daniel Lasbury-Carter
Telephone number	01258 453331
Website	www.blandfordstmary.dorset.sch.uk/
Email address	office@blandfordstmary.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- This is the first inspection following the school's conversion to become an academy in July 2014.
- The school works with partner schools in the Blandford Education Trust and with other schools as part of the Blandford Schools' Network.
- The number on the roll makes this school slightly smaller than the average-sized primary.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the additional grant for disadvantaged pupils is less than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion of those who have an education, health and care plan is also above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classes, often accompanied by the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher as well as subject leader for mathematics and the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives of the school's governing body and the chief executive officer, and had a telephone conversation with the diocesan education adviser.
- An inspector also spoke with the early years foundation stage leader.
- The inspectors scrutinised a number of documents including the governing body's minutes and visits, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, anonymised performance management records and evidence relating to safer recruitment and child protection.
- Most visits to classrooms were conducted through accompanied learning walks. The inspector also conducted a physical education lesson observation in Year 1.
- The inspectors undertook a scrutiny of pupils' books to evaluate the quality of work and check the accuracy of assessment information held by the school in writing and mathematics. An additional workbook scrutiny and learning walk was conducted as part of an evaluation of the breadth of the curriculum. This included an analysis of science and topic books.
- Children spoke to the lead inspector during various activities throughout the inspection. In addition, the inspectors met with pupils in Years 2 and 6 and heard them read.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at playtime and lunch.
- Inspectors also met with parents at the start of the second day. The 29 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were taken into account. The lead inspector also considered responses from 12 pupils and staff in separate online surveys.

Inspection team

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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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