

St Mary's Church of England First School, Charminster

West Hill, Charminster, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9RD

Inspection dates

25–26 June 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors are ambitious for the school and provide determined and effective leadership. This has led to significant improvements since the previous inspection. As a result, teaching is good and pupils achieve well.
- Governors have a good knowledge about how well the school is doing because they check regularly for themselves. This enables them to support and challenge leaders effectively.
- Senior leaders' checks on teaching provide teachers with clear guidance about how to improve their work. They follow their checks with appropriate support and training. This ensures that teaching continues to improve.
- Teachers know their pupils well and plan to make learning interesting and challenging. Current groups of pupils make good progress and attainment is rising across the school. However, sometimes weak letter formation holds back fluency in writing for some of the younger children.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. Attendance is consistently about the national average. Few pupils are persistently absent.
- The most able pupils are challenged well in their learning so they reach high standards.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress in line with other pupils. Their provision is carefully planned to ensure that their needs are met effectively.
- Pupils behave well and feel safe in school because staff look after them well.
- Parents praise the work of the school, especially the great dedication shown by staff in caring for pupils.
- The curriculum is designed to be exciting and engaging. It promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Leaders of subjects outside the core curriculum work alongside colleagues to improve learning. As yet, they do not make a full contribution to monitoring and developing teaching in their areas of responsibility.
- Children in the early years settle quickly, grow in confidence and make good progress. However, teaching does not enable some children to achieve as they could in writing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the skills of subject leaders so they make a fuller contribution to monitoring and the development of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.
- Strengthen teaching to increase pupils' progress in writing by ensuring that letter formation is secure, especially in the early years.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have taken positive steps to secure effective leadership and speed up the pace of improvement. The headteacher and her leadership team set a clear direction for the school and instil a sense of high ambition. Leaders have dealt with the areas for improvement from the previous inspection successfully.
- Improvement plans are sharply focused with clear targets and timescales to ensure they have the required impact. Together with governors, leaders monitor plans regularly and adjust actions to increase the effectiveness of their work. This gives them an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- A key improvement is the precise way senior leaders give teachers feedback on the strengths of their teaching and where they need to improve. This is followed up by timely support and training. As a consequence, staff morale is high and all are committed to driving forward improvements.
- Systems for holding staff to account are rigorous, as shown in the improvement in pupils' progress and attainment across the school. Leaders track pupils' achievement closely, ensuring that if progress falters, any extra help or changes to provision are made without delay.
- Leaders draw on effective support from the local authority and the diocese to help sharpen leaders' evaluation of the school's work and implement new strategies to improve teaching, especially in English and mathematics.
- Leaders of subjects apart from the core subjects, work alongside colleagues to ensure that learning in their subjects is interesting and engaging. However, they are not yet fully involved in monitoring teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement, limiting their ability to make further improvements.
- The broad and balanced curriculum is designed to spark pupils' interests and ideas. For example, during the inspection, pupils were highly motivated by the 'alien spacecraft' that had landed in the playground over the weekend. This 'event' stimulated pupils' ideas for writing and for art and science work extremely well. Music is a strong aspect of the school's provision. The wide range of opportunities to perform in front of an audience has a positive impact on raising pupils' aspirations and broadening their horizons.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils' understanding of British values develops through opportunities such as learning about democracy when electing school ambassadors.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well and deals with any kind of discrimination effectively. Leaders use the pupil premium effectively and disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as others, both in their academic progress as well as their personal development.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is well planned to ensure that pupils receive a tailored programme of support, and they make good progress. Specialist provision to

help pupils with social and emotional difficulties has good impact, enabling these pupils to be fully included in school life.

- Parents are pleased with the work of the school. They value the warm welcome that their children receive each day and the approachability of staff. They praise the way the school goes 'that extra mile' to help pupils if any problems arise.

Governance of the school

- Governors are a tightly focused group and organise their work well to provide strong support and challenge to leaders. They have taken advantage of training and advice from the local authority to increase their effectiveness. They are knowledgeable about the school's performance because of the high-quality information they receive from leaders. They are well informed about key areas for improvement because they monitor the impact of new strategies alongside senior leaders. As a result, they have a clear overview of the quality of teaching and how well pupils are doing compared to national figures.
- Governors monitor the school's budget closely to ensure that funds support improvements to teaching and learning. They understand how additional funds are spent to help disadvantaged pupils and to develop school sport.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has a high priority and there is a strong culture of vigilance to ensure pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders follow the statutory guidance stringently for appointing staff. Staff receive regular training in the latest requirements for safeguarding, including how to keep pupils safe from extremism and radicalisation. All risks are thoroughly assessed by leaders and updated regularly, for example with relation to the outdoor sports events and educational visits.
- Staff know the families of children who attend the school well, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. This enables leaders and staff to keep a close eye on pupils' well-being. The appointment of the parent support adviser has been a positive step in strengthening relationships between home and school to promote regular attendance. Leaders work tirelessly with other agencies to make sure pupils receive the care and support they need. Parents appreciate the inclusive environment where their children are able to flourish and feel part of a 'big family'.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good, resulting in effective learning, positive behaviour and good progress across the school. Improvements since the previous inspection ensure that teachers have good subject knowledge, especially in mathematics, and set purposeful work that builds pupil's knowledge, understanding and skills well.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and assess their progress regularly. They question and explain skilfully to develop learning further. They monitor

pupils' learning as they work and adjust the amount of challenge and support to increase progress.

- The work for the most able pupils is well planned to deepen their understanding. For example, in a mathematics 'grapple' task, Year 4 pupils had to use reasoning and deduction to work out the 'vest' number for each 'athlete' and then write their explanations using the correct mathematical terminology. This stretched their thinking to the full.
- Disadvantaged pupils benefit from well-targeted teaching that enables them to keep up with others to achieve well. Teachers ensure that the most able pupils in this group have the right level of challenge to enable them to achieve as well as others of high ability.
- Teaching assistants are well trained and make a valuable contribution to learning. They work in close partnership with teachers to provide carefully tailored support for pupils with SEND. They help pupils to manage their feelings and build their self-esteem well.
- Teaching of phonics is thorough, enabling pupils to become fluent readers who enjoy reading. Teachers encourage pupils to think about their reading and question them effectively to develop their understanding well. They promote reading across a range of high-quality texts to ensure that older pupils are suitably challenged.
- High-quality training, together with ongoing support and challenge from leaders, ensures that teaching in mathematics is strong. There is a clear focus on developing pupils' fluency in number as well as their knowledge of other aspects of mathematics. Increasingly, teachers challenge pupils' thinking by setting work that requires them to reason and solve problems.
- The teaching of writing is generally effective and teachers inspire pupils to write across subjects to high standards. For instance, key stage 2 pupils produced high-quality writing about environmental issues in the Brazilian rainforest. However, sometimes teachers do not ensure that all pupils, particularly in the early years, have mastered the basics of letter formation, which limits their fluency.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, benefit from breakfast and after-school clubs that help to improve attendance and attitudes to school. Sessions with the emotional literacy support assistant, help pupils with emotional difficulties to overcome problems with anxiety and lack of confidence.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are effective and contribute greatly to pupils' enjoyment and success in school. Pupils are clear that they are safe and happy in school. Parents feel that their children are well nurtured and encouraged to try their best.

- Pupils show a good understanding of what constitutes bullying, such as racist name-calling. They report that bullying seldom happens but they have confidence in staff to sort out any problems promptly and effectively.
- E-safety has a high priority. Teachers show pupils how to stay safe online. Pupils spoke knowledgeably to inspectors about how to stay safe on the internet and how to report any concerns.
- Pupils undertake their responsibilities such as school councillors, eco warriors and librarians very reliably. They judge this to be a 'fair' school where everyone is valued and treated equally well. They have a good respect for and a developing awareness of other faiths and cultures that prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Typically, pupils are polite and friendly and considerate of others. They move around the school sensibly, cooperate well in class and settle to work without any fuss. They are good advocates for their school and show great enthusiasm when talking to visitors about their learning and achievements.
- Pupils take increasing pride in their work, and good standards of presentation have improved since the previous inspection. Teachers insist on neat setting out of work to promote accuracy and fluency in mathematical calculation as well as work in other subjects.
- Most pupils apply themselves diligently in lessons and strive to achieve as well as they can. The school's records show that there are few incidents of poor behaviour. The very small number of pupils who have poor behaviour are managed well.
- Occasionally, a few pupils lose concentration and are inattentive in lessons, limiting their progress. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in their regular attendance and punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the previous inspection, pupils have made better progress, especially in mathematics, and attainment is rising across the school. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2018 was above that in other schools nationally in reading and mathematics and in line in writing.
- Current groups are achieving well, as indicated by the evidence of the school's assessment information, the learning in lessons and the work in pupils' books. Pupils in all key stages achieve well. This prepares them effectively for the next stage in their education.
- Effective use of the pupil premium funding enables disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as others from similar starting points. Extra help that promotes their confidence as learners is successful in increasing the progress they make.

- Pupils with SEND make good progress and their support is well matched to their specific needs. Because of this, their attainment shows improvement this year, especially in mathematics.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make strong progress because their work requires them to apply their knowledge and skills well. Increased challenge over the past two years ensures that more pupils are working at greater depth in each subject.
- In the previous two years, the large majority of Year 1 pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Pupils are able to apply this knowledge successfully to read unknown words, enabling them to quickly become accurate readers. When they meet new words, pupils often reread to check they have a clear understanding. Older pupils enjoy reading across a range of high-quality literature and demonstrate good levels of understanding.
- Pupils demonstrate fluency and accuracy in calculation. Increasingly, they are able to reason and explain their ideas using the correct mathematical terms. They undertake investigations and solve problems successfully across all aspects of the mathematics curriculum.
- Pupils become accomplished writers as they move across the school, building their vocabulary and their skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling well. They write in lively and engaging ways across subjects and in a range of styles. However, in the youngest classes, some children do not form letters correctly and this limits their fluency when writing.

Early years provision

Good

- Parents appreciate the effective arrangements for starting school that ensure children transfer smoothly and settle quickly into their new routines. They speak highly of the approachability of staff and feel well involved in their children's learning.
- From their starting points, children make good progress across all areas of learning. As they leave Reception, the number of children who achieve a good level of development is broadly in line with national figures. Most children start Year 1 as confident learners. Because the most able children are well catered for, currently a greater number of children are on course to exceed the early learning goals than previously.
- The early years provision is well led and managed. Staff work together as a cohesive team with regular opportunities to develop their skills and receive training and advice from external consultants. Leaders have an accurate view of children's achievement and the effectiveness of the provision. Improvement plans are focused on improving teaching, particularly in writing.
- Good attention is paid to safeguarding to ensure that children are kept safe both indoors and in the outdoor area. Staff are attentive to children's welfare, so they feel happy and secure. As one parent commented, 'My son is so happy here he wants to come even when he's too ill!'

- Children are enthusiastic learners and very keen to join in the learning activities. They behave well and are considerate of others, sharing toys appropriately and taking turns.
- Teaching is generally good. Teachers assess and monitor children's progress carefully so that teaching activities are usually well matched to children's needs. As a result, disadvantaged children achieve as well as others from similar starting points. Children with SEND are supported sensitively, enabling them to settle well and become successful learners. Additional support for their speech and language development helps improve children's communication skills effectively.
- Mathematics development is strong and most children achieve well due to good levels of challenge. For instance, during the inspection, children were observed working out how many more counters they would need in their 'counter pots' to make 20. Once they had mastered this, the teacher probed their thinking even further by increasing the challenge to larger numbers. This extended their understanding well.
- Staff build on children's interests and develop their language skills as they play. Phonics teaching underpins the development of early reading and writing skills well. However, while children recognise letters and the sounds they make, some are not proficient in forming letters correctly, which slows their progress in becoming fluent writers.

School details

Unique reference number	113784
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10088295

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lyn Paine
Headteacher	Suzanne Garner
Telephone number	01305 263880
Website	http://www.charminster.dorset.sch.uk
Email address	office@charminster.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 March 2017

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized school. It admits pupils up to the end of Year 4. Pupils are organised in 7 classes; all are mixed age, with the exception of one Reception class.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is slightly above average while the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below.
- The school manages breakfast and after-school clubs each day.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans. They examined information on current pupils' progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, safeguarding procedures and the plans for the use of the sport premium.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked to them in classrooms and around the school. They evaluated a wide range of their work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' learning across the school. Most observations were carried out with the headteacher. In addition, they made visits to classrooms, the dining hall and the playground.
- Meetings were held with pupils, governors and school leaders. The lead inspector also met with an external adviser who provides advisory support to the school and spoke with an adviser from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day and during the inspection. They took account of the 58 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as their written responses. They also took account of the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Sandra Woodman, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Marcia Northeast	Ofsted Inspector

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