

Milton-on-Stour Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113801
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325888
Inspection date	19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Burghart

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

The registered childcare, 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 on roll	
School (total)	115
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Melvin Stroud
Headteacher	James Stanford
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Milton on Stour Gillingham SP8 5QD
Telephone number	01747 822588
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- Pupils' progress and the apparent underachievement of higher attaining pupils, evaluating possible links to the quality of teaching
- The impact of the school's strategy for community cohesion
- The success of the introduction of 'assessment for learning' and the accuracy of the school's judgements of care, guidance and support.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, assessment information, pupils' work, school documentation, questionnaires returned by parents and discussions with staff, pupils and governor representatives, including the chair of the governing body. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own views, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average size primary school in a rural setting. It draws pupils from an area much wider than the local village. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Of the current Year 6 pupils, nearly two thirds have such needs. Children start school in a class which also includes some Year 1 pupils. Each of the three other classes contains pupils from more than one age group. There are disproportionately more boys on the school roll than girls.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Academic progress is good and pupils achieve well. Pastoral and physical care is outstanding. Pupils respond with extremely positive attitudes and excellent behaviour. This builds on particularly good progress in personal, social and emotional development, established as a result of the good Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Relationships are of high quality and successfully underpin pupils' all-round good personal development. Staff are particularly effective in encouraging pupils to work and play together in harmony. Social and moral development is outstanding and there is a very clear spiritual dimension to the school that reflects its Christian ideals and includes pupils' appreciation of nature, art and music. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They are especially pleased that their children are very happy and that they are growing in confidence and independence. One parent summed up the views of many: 'The staff and the whole ethos of respect and care have allowed our child to "come out of himself" and, at the same time, be happy. We are delighted!' Parents are keen to attribute the school's success to the quality of leadership and management.

Standards vary year on year dependent on the profile of learning difficulties in relatively small year groups, but are above average overall. Last year more able pupils underachieved in mathematics at the end of Year 2 and in science at the end of Year 6. Staff and governors analysed the reasons for this, identifying deficiencies in the way such pupils were challenged. Revised planning, the support of the local authority and programmes of in-service work for teachers have rectified the situation and eradicated underachievement. Pupils are now well prepared for future study and for life in general, with particular strengths in basic skills and the ability to work effectively with others as well as independently. Standards, taking a four-year period into account to even out the effect of variable proportions of pupils with learning difficulties, are above average overall, with strengths, for example, in reading and science. Despite progress being good, the school continues to focus extra attention on writing because of children's lower than expected starting points in this aspect, and on mathematics where investigation and problem-solving skills are weaker than other aspects.

Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported in class and in small groups. Consequently, they are fully included in all activities and make the same good progress as others in their age groups. Teaching assistants work very effectively under the good leadership of the special needs coordinator. All classes are well taught: a view supported by the monitoring of the headteacher, governors and officers of the local authority. A good, well-planned curriculum makes it possible to teach pupils in mixed-age classes effectively, avoiding undue repetition. It also gives excellent support to pupils' personal, social and health education. Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and their awareness of healthy lifestyles are outstanding. The school's status as a Flagship Food for Life Partner, providing hot meals to five other local schools as well as subsidising lunches for its own pupils, is rightfully valued by staff, pupils and parents.

Teachers make learning objectives clear, draw pupils into discussions with skilful questioning techniques, and are prepared to listen. A Years 5 and 6 lesson, exploring the desirable qualities and characteristics of potential members of the European Parliament, was a good example of open-ended questioning used to prompt pupils to reason. Occasionally, in their efforts to reinforce learning, teachers allow activities to go on too long, but make good use of 'brain gym' and physical exercise to redress the balance. Growing use of assessment to determine what pupils can do and what to do next is one of the reasons why progress is good. Targets are set

for the whole school, class and some ability groups, for pupils to aspire to. This approach has helped improve standards in English and mathematics. However, the lack of specific targets for individual pupils in some classes restricts progress. The recently introduced system known at the school as 'assessment for learning' is having positive effects, but currently stops short of giving pupils full opportunity to be involved in gauging their own progress. This is the reason why the overall judgement for care, guidance and support is good, rather than, as the school self-evaluation suggests, outstanding. Although teachers' marking of pupils' work is reassuring, opportunities are missed for staff to refer to pupils' personal targets and indicate how best to make improvements. Nevertheless, there is a good dialogue between teachers and pupils in lessons. Pupils obviously trust staff and are not afraid to make mistakes and learn from them.

The success of the school is orchestrated by the headteacher, who skilfully leads a strong team of staff and governors. The school's contribution to the local community is excellent, with pupils and local residents benefiting from a very strong partnership in the use of facilities and the sharing of experiences and expertise. Pupils' awareness of different lifestyles, customs and beliefs is satisfactory. New initiatives to establish links with schools in other areas of Britain and study life in other countries have yet to have a full impact. The school recognises that opportunities designed to develop multicultural understanding as an element of community cohesion in its wider sense are underdeveloped.

Governors are well informed and are able to hold the school to account. Their good governance is at the heart of effective deployment of staff and resources. One example is the way improvements to the building and school site have produced an excellent learning environment. Self-evaluation is good. It accurately identifies strengths and prioritises areas for further development. Consequently, the school has clear educational direction and there is a collective ambition to set challenging targets to take the school forward. It is well placed for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good quality provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is strongest in its pastoral care, which is outstanding. The quality of education and the progress children make are good in all areas of learning from what is typically a little below expectations when children start school. The well-established routines and good relationships with staff help children settle in quickly, be very happy and feel secure. There is a strong and successful emphasis on developing children's social, communication skills and independence in addition to basic skills. Children are emerging as young readers and, to a lesser extent, writers, as well as learning to count and solve simple problems. This is achieved through a well-planned balance of teacher-led and self-directed activities and the commitment of staff to encourage learning through play. There is an excited buzz of activity when children rush into class, eagerly anticipating what will be ready for them. Sharing, turn taking, being considerate and excellent behaviour are all well established. Learning is obviously fun! By the end of the Reception Year most children reach what is expected of them in all areas of learning and exceed learning goals in personal development and those featuring knowledge and understanding of letters and sounds. The learning environment is stimulating, well organised and, except for large construction equipment, well resourced. Children have the opportunity of free flow between inside and a secure outdoor area. Provision is well led and managed. Good records are kept of children's involvement and the progress children make, but making use of this information to plan the next steps of learning for individuals is still in its early stages.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunity to be involved in evaluating their own progress, and ensure that teachers give them more specific learning targets and more guidance to show how to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' awareness and understanding of the wide diversity of lifestyles, faiths and customs in Britain and around the world.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Milton-on-Stour Church of England Primary School, Gillingham SP8 5QD

Many thanks for your warm welcome during the inspection. We were very impressed by the way you were so eager to tell us about your school. A special thanks to the school council and those who talked to me at lunchtime. Milton-on-Stour is a good school where you make good progress and are being helped to grow up as caring, sensible young people. We were able to see for ourselves just how happy you are!

Here are some of the highlights:

- Children get off to a good start in Class 1, especially in learning to get on with other children and adults.
- Behaviour and attitudes across the school are outstanding.
- When pupils leave Year 6, standards are usually better than average.
- Staff take excellent care of everyone and make sure that all of you are safe.
- Teaching is good in all classes.
- The school is well run by the headteacher, with the help of staff and governors.
- Links with parents are excellent, and the school plays an important part in village life.
- In order for the school to be even better we have asked staff and governors to make two main improvements:
 - Get you even more involved in looking at your own learning to see how you are doing, by giving you individual targets as well as your group ones, and by showing you how you can improve your work.
 - Help you to find out more about lifestyles, faiths and customs in different parts of our country and around the world.

You can help by keeping up the good work.

Yours faithfully

Mike Burghart

Lead inspector