

Inspection of Thorner's Church of England School, Litton Cheney

Litton Cheney, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 9AU

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 September 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone is proud to belong to this small, rural school. Relationships are warm and positive, which means pupils feel nurtured and safe. There are growing numbers of pupils at the school and yet parents and carers, pupils and staff continue to value the close-knit, family feel.

The values of the school underpin daily life. Pupils have a strong moral code. They help to create their class charters at the start of each year. This develops younger pupils' understanding of right and wrong. For older pupils, they begin to understand the concepts of rights and responsibilities. The charters help with a shared understanding of expectations. However, adults do not always have high enough expectations for pupils in some younger classes. Sometimes, low-level disruption affects learning, which is not addressed robustly enough.

Pupils have plenty of planned experiences to learn about life beyond their rural context. They enjoy a range of enrichment trips and visitors, which bring the curriculum to life. The school is very much part of the village community. Pupils enjoy taking part in local events. They are hugely proud of their contribution to the solar panel projects in the school and village. Their involvement has given them a sense of achievement and collaboration.

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

The school has a clear vision of success for all pupils. It has focused on implementing a sequenced curriculum. The curriculum is designed from Year 1 and ensures that, year on year, pupils build on what they know. However, the curriculum is not yet designed to be seamless from the early years. The school has not considered how learning in the pre-school and Reception Year prepares children for later learning. This means that children in the early years are not learning all the knowledge they need for a successful transition to Year 1.

In phonics and mathematics, the curriculum is designed into small steps of learning. Pre-school children become familiar with songs and rhymes. This prepares them for segmenting words and blending sounds in the Reception Year and key stage 1. Training for staff means that they are accurate and confident in implementing the programme. As a result, most pupils learn to read with accuracy and fluency. Older pupils are enthusiastic about the books they choose to read.

The precision in the phonics and mathematics curriculums enable adults to make accurate checks on pupils' knowledge. Staff then use this information to close any gaps that pupils might have. In some curriculum areas, this is less effective. The curriculum is not broken into small enough steps of knowledge. This hinders staff's ability to make accurate checks on what pupils have learned. This includes for some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Consequently, some of the next steps for pupils are not specific enough.

Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning across the curriculum. They enjoy coming to school and attendance is high. Pupils of all ages enjoy talking about their learning. They can recall knowledge and skills they have learned. For example, older pupils can identify key facts about World Wars I and II, describing the impact the wars had on Litton Cheney. The visit to the village memorial was significant in pupils' understanding of the concept of sacrifice and the importance of national events such as Remembrance Day.

The early years curriculum is not ambitious enough for children. Early years staff do not have a secure understanding of the new statutory framework. As a result, children do not build the cumulative knowledge they need for key stage 1. Children enjoy selecting resources for their own activities. They do this independently in the indoor and outdoor areas. Adults encourage and build children's confidence through a range of activities. However, the areas do not promote curiosity, interest or critical thinking as well as they should.

Everyone says that bullying is rare. This is because pupils have a secure understanding of respect and difference. Older pupils know what discrimination is. The curriculum ensures that pupils learn about the concepts of equality and tolerance. Pupils show empathy and are inclusive of everyone in their school community. Children in the early years share resources well and play harmoniously together.

Governors are accurate in their evaluation of the school. They have positive relationships with staff. They regularly visit to understand the school's work. They also use helpful information from leaders to understand strengths and weaknesses. Governors have successfully managed a range of resourcing issues in recent years. This places the school in a much stronger position to continue to develop capacity and effectiveness.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the knowledge that the school wants pupils to learn is not identified precisely or fluently enough across the age range of the school. Consequently, learning is not always focused on the specific knowledge that pupils need to secure, which affects the usefulness of assessment. The school needs to identify, and sequence, the specific knowledge it wants pupils to learn from pre-school to Year 6, in these subjects.
- The curriculum and provision in the early years is not ambitious enough. As a result, children experience a series of activities and experiences without a focus on the knowledge children need to build. The school must ensure that all early years staff are supported to understand the knowledge children need to learn and how to provide this. This is so children build the cumulative knowledge they need for key stage 1.

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	113804
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10344495
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Nicole Forbes-Marshall
Headteacher	Michael Sitch
Website	www.thorners.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average Church of England Voluntary Aided primary school in the Diocese of Salisbury.
- The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in November 2019.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds on site.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English including early reading, mathematics and geography. 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders, teaching and support staff and members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector also had telephone calls with the local authority and the diocese.
- 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.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. In addition, they met with pupils informally and formally to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. Inspectors also took into consideration responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation provided by the school.

Inspection team

Angela Folland, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Claire Fortey

Ofsted Inspector

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