

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Church of England Middle School, Puddletown

Coombe Road, Puddletown, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8SA

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 January 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Dr Tim Ennion. This school is part of Wessex 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, Michael Foley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Baker.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from positive relationships at this community focused school. However, the overall quality of education has weakened since the previous inspection. The school is aware that, until recently, expectations of what pupils could achieve were too low. Although there are some recent improvements, pupils' learning is variable because expectations of them and the teaching of the curriculum remain inconsistent. The needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not met consistently. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils behave and attend well. The school is typically calm and purposeful. Staff establish positive and trusted relationships. Pupils take on responsibilities with commitment and care. Bullying is exceptionally rare. However, pupils' attitudes to learning could be better. Expectations of what pupils should do for themselves can be low and their interest in learning is not captured consistently.

Pupils are happy. They contribute to a strong community ethos by looking out for each other. Older pupils act as positive role models. Pupils are well cared for. They make an

active contribution to their school and wider communities. For example, older pupils raise money for charities by leading creative events.

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

Since its previous inspection, standards at St Mary's dropped significantly. During this time, there has been considerable change in leadership, including joining a new trust. This means that, until recently, there had been a limited response to this decline. Since the arrival of current leaders, including from the new trust, things are beginning to turn around. However, improvements are recent and not yet leading to a consistent impact on pupils' learning overall. Furthermore, the amount of change means that some members of the school community are unclear about the reasons for the much-needed improvements that are taking place and their role in supporting this. As a result, they are reluctant to embrace the changes that are needed.

The school is now using every opportunity to improve provision. For example, the school has worked with similar settings to ensure that curriculum goals are ambitious and that the identified content across subjects is better sequenced. Nevertheless, the implementation of the curriculum remains variable. For example, the school has introduced new structures to make lessons predictable, ensure assessment is used effectively and to help pupils remember more of what they are taught. However, these structures are not used consistently. Similarly, the expectations of what pupils should do and how they should improve their work are often too low. This all contributes to variability in the work in pupils' books, the security of their learning and the achievement of pupils over time.

The provision for pupils with SEND is not secure, including in the resourced provision, known as 'The Bridge'. There are improvements in how SEND provision is led. Systems have been introduced to tighten how need is assessed. However, staff lack knowledge about how best to help pupils with SEND learn the curriculum effectively. Often, not enough is demanded of these pupils. Staff do not use the systems for meeting pupils' needs consistently in class. Consequently, some pupils with SEND are not retaining key knowledge independently and so do not achieve as well as their peers.

Reading is prioritised. The school has improved how it supports those who are still in the early stages of learning to read. This is beginning to make a difference. Typically, pupils read books that are well matched to their reading abilities. As a result, pupils' reading skills are improving, although there are still opportunities to raise expectations further.

The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, social and emotional development very well. There are plentiful opportunities for pupils to explore their interests and abilities in clubs and other school events. The school has significantly improved pupils' access to impartial careers advice. It has identified age-appropriate content carefully, so that pupils are taught about relationships, consent and fundamental British values.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum is too variable in quality and not enough is expected of pupils. This means that pupils do not learn the curriculum as well as they should. The trust should raise expectations further and secure greater consistency in the implementation of the curriculum so that pupils achieve more.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is not secure. Staff lack the knowledge they need to understand the best ways to teach pupils with differing needs. Similarly, the systems for ensuring staff support pupils with SEND are not used consistently. As a result, pupils with SEND have variable experiences and do not learn as well as they could. The trust should ensure staff understand how to make appropriate adaptations when teaching pupils with SEND and apply these consistently.
- The school has not successfully secured the confidence of some members of its community. Some staff do not understand why changes are needed in the school and so the implementation of the school's actions to improve remain variable. The school should improve how it engages and communicates with all members of the community so there is greater clarity about the changes being implemented and why.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2019.

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	138189
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10344631
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Baker
CEO of the trust	Michael Foley
Headteacher	Dr Tim Ennion
Website	www.stmaryscemiddleschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	18 and 19 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- In September 2022, the trust that the school was a part of amalgamated with Wessex Multi-Academy Trust. Since that time, the school has appointed a new headteacher, deputy headteacher, two new assistant headteachers, one of whom is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), and a new pastoral leader, who is also the designated safeguarding lead (DSL).
- The school does not use any alternative provisions.
- The school runs a specially resourced provision for pupils with communication and interaction needs. There are 10 pupils in the provision.
- The school is designated as having a religious character. Its last inspection under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) was in June 2023 when it was judged good overall. The next SIAMS inspection will take place by the end of 2028.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, who is also the SENCO, and the pastoral leader, who is the DSL.
- The inspectors spoke to the chief executive officer from the trust. They also met with two trustees and three members of the local governing committee, including the chair.
- The inspectors looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning, visited the specially resourced provision and looked at a sample 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.
- The inspector took account of the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. He also considered the responses to the Ofsted staff survey.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including documents relating to governance, leaders' plans for school improvement, information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour and documents relating to the school's curriculum.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stuart Ingram

Ofsted Inspector

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