



School Inspection Report 1963

Ministry of Education

Report by HM Inspectors on Chilmark Church of England Primary School, Wiltshire

Inspected on 15th July 1963. Issued 24th Sep 1963

This school which has not been reported on since 1939, was given aided status in 1953 and reorganised as a primary school for children of 5 to 11 in September 1961 when the new secondary school was opened in Tisbury. Numbers have risen during the last two years from 29 in 1961 to 47 at the time of this visit and the present level seems likely to be maintained. Only 5 children, drawn from two families, are at present attending from the neighbouring RAF depot but there appears to be a good deal of movement into and out of the school of the children of Service personnel and of agricultural workers.

The solid stone building provides three classrooms. Two of them, of 430 and 290 feet respectively, have been formed by the erection of a light partition in what was originally the large main schoolroom; the third also of 430 square feet, is much darkened by the trees and shrubs of a neighbouring garden, which block the main window at the west end, and it tends to be cold as well as gloomy. The largest of the three original cloakrooms has been taken over as a scullery and a second is mainly used to house bulky apparatus for Physical Education. Some alternative means of storing this equipment needs to be devised since present numbers are beginning to overflow the capacity of the third remaining cloakroom. The old offices at the back of the building were converted to water-borne sanitation some time ago and one fixed basin with cold running water was installed in each block. The offices are inconvenient of access, dark and lacking in privacy; the boys' block need redecoration and the provision of more hygienic modern fittings in the urinal. Washing facilities are minimal and until the school can be remodelled additional washbasins and a sink for classroom use might well be provided in the quite spacious scullery. The hard playground on three sides of the school is small and awkward shape. A delightful garden plot has been created in one corner of it and it is understood that the Authority has just acquired about one third of an acre of land adjoining the school, formerly a garden, which has for some time past been waste ground. This, when put in order, will make an invaluable extension to the playground and garden and should also afford some grassed playing space.

The school is organised in two classes. The Infant's class of 23 children is very much larger than it has ever been since the large room was partitioned and the Infants began to use the light and cheerful, but very small room at the end of it. This space, under 300 square feet in area, is quite inadequate for present numbers and it is clear that for so long as this remains a two-class school the right policy is to put one class in the empty classroom at the west end (at present used only for dining and for craft work) and to let the other occupy the big main classroom, which

might even be large enough to allow some space for indoor physical activity on wet days if the partition were thrown back and stackable furniture provided. The Headmaster is well aware of the necessity for this change and intends to bring it into force next term.

All three classrooms are marred by the traditional high windows and the dark west classroom in particular would be transformed if it were found possible to lower some of the windows and extend the clerestory lighting.

There have been several changes in the direction of the school in recent years. The last Headmaster, a comparatively young man appointed in 1958, died suddenly in office, and his successor, who has had considerable experience as an assistant in another village school in the County, took charge in September 1961 after an interregnum of a term. The Infants mistress on the other hand has served here ever since she left College in 1951 and her experience under a succession of Heads in this small all-age school, with its cramped and hitherto poorly equipped premises has clearly not inspired her to keep abreast of modern developments in the education of young children or even to put into practice the principles and ideals which will have been set before her training.

For it must be frankly said that the Infants' class has been for some years past a very disappointing place. The children make slow progress in reading and in command of written English; they do not acquire skill in handwriting - largely because their teacher sets them no example - and they go through the motions of doing 'sums' with little or no comprehension of what they are about. Although the present Headmaster has made various efforts to broaden and enliven the range of their activities outside formal instruction, the occupations and play of the younger children remain trivial and of little educational value. Apart from some pleasant plants and a few good books, which are not being very constructively used, there is hardly anything in the room to provoke conversation, stimulate the imagination or awaken the desire to learn. Swollen numbers in this small room make it difficult at present to give the children those opportunities for free movement, exploration and choice of occupation which are so important for active learning at this age. When the class moves into more spacious quarters a far more interesting environment will have to be created such as, properly used, can give reality and purpose to training in the 3Rs and in other skills, and a very much higher quality of achievement will then be looked for.

For the 24 boys and girls of Junior age in the Headmaster's class by contrast and exceptionally wide range of stimulating interest and activities has been provided. Carefully planned visits are made to local farms and to the village church; local geography is studied and topics of elementary general science are discussed. For each activity lively individual records are kept, both pictorially and in writing, by means of which steady progress is made in power of written expression and skill in handwriting is developed incidentally. Practical activities too provide material for written work; gardening, which includes the care of indoor plants and the taking of cuttings; and handwork, where a variety of 'real' crafts is pursued, notably the spinning and dyeing of wool, the weaving of small attractive articles, basket making and rope making with local materials, and the whittling and carving of wood. A school magazine has been started which records the day to day happening in the life of the school and of its individual members, including expeditions to sports and festivals and other journeys, as well as original stories and poems. There is a well chosen and well displayed library of books, supplemented by the invaluable local collection from the County library. The Headmaster reads frequently to the class and encourages them to borrow and read to themselves. Backward readers are given regular practice.

Religious instruction according to the teaching of the Church of England has an important place in the curriculum and singing lessons, besides introducing the children to a good range of secular songs which are clearly much enjoyed, are also well related to the daily service of Church observances.

The Headmaster's thoughtful and interesting schemes set out very clearly the principles on which this full and well integrated course of Junior education is based and it is good to find such sound theory so well justified by successful practice particularly in the field of written English.

Two ways in which the present good work might be taken still further were adumbrated during the inspection. More use might be made of storybooks and collection of legends in the library as a starting point for 'centres of interest' of a literary and historical kind, and its books of information might complement more than they seem to do at present the firsthand experiences gained in environmental and practical studies. And secondly the work in arithmetic will improve, particularly with the less able children, in proportion as the element of oral discussion increases and as pupils can be induced to think about the reality of the calculations they are asked to perform and to solve difficulties for themselves by continual reference to concrete situations.

If the works of the Infants' class could support, as it is far from doing at present, the enterprising teaching in the Junior class this school might achieve outstanding results and provide its pupils throughout the course with a really good all-round primary education.

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