

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115236
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379043
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2012
Lead inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	791
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Rigelsford
Headteacher	George Yerosimou
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham	Additional inspector
Sa'ad Khaldi Al	Additional inspector
Jackie Cousins	Additional inspector
Justina Ilochi	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Forty lessons were observed, featuring 39 different teachers or tutors. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, students, the headteacher, senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at students' work. In addition, questionnaire responses from 67 parents and carers, 25 staff and 32 students were analysed and their views taken into account.

Information about the school

St John's is a smaller-than-average voluntary controlled Church of England secondary school. All students living within the school's catchment are welcomed, irrespective of their faith. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds. There are almost no students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students identified as having disabilities and with special educational needs is average, although slightly more than average have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average but rising. Student mobility is high; nearly 25% of students completing Year 11 in 2011 were not at the school in Year 7. The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. Alternative provision is made for a small number of Key Stage 4 students. They attend, for part of their time, an organisation called 'The Box', which is located close to the school.

A new school is being built and is due to open in September 2013. St John's is a specialist engineering college and it holds many other awards including National Healthy Schools status.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- St John's is a good school. It is well led by a strong headteacher, supported by his effective senior leadership team and middle leaders. Governance is good. The governing body shares the headteacher's vision about how the school will improve further.
- Students achieve well. GCSE results are improving and are close to the national average.
- Students' good achievement has been enhanced by improvements to the curriculum. The provision of vocational options, reflecting the school's engineering status, has significantly boosted attainment. The offer of three separate sciences, for example, has enabled higher-attaining students to make better than expected progress.
- Most teaching is good. A significant minority of lessons are outstanding. Good teaching is helping to boost achievement.
- In a minority of lessons, especially in Key Stage 3, teaching is satisfactory because work is not always well presented, marking does not consistently identify how improvements can be made and opportunities for students to read, especially aloud, are not always seized.
- Though a significant minority of parents and carers and students expressed reservations about behaviour, inspectors found the school to be happy. Behaviour was usually good and, in some lessons, outstanding, making a significant contribution to learning.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Senior staff know where improvements are needed. Strengths identified at the previous inspection have been built on, and the school has improved well.
- Preparations for the new school are well advanced. Older students have been consulted about the changes. Younger students do not share such a feeling of ownership.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Students have many opportunities to exercise responsibility. Charitable events, good quality assemblies and work with a school in India are all examples of how St. John's is successfully preparing its students for life beyond school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate and improve further the quality of learning so that by the end of 2012, teaching in all lessons is at least good through ensuring:
 - greater consistency in the presentation of students' written work in all subjects, especially in Key Stage 3
 - that the marking and assessment of students' work in Key Stage 3 consistently provides information about how well they are doing and what needs to be done to improve
 - that across all subjects of the curriculum staff seize every opportunity to encourage students to read for themselves, including reading aloud.
- Ensure that Key Stage 3 students' aspirations for the new school and the general care of the school environment, and their role in maintaining it, are regularly sought, considered and where appropriate enacted.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average. By the time they leave at the end of Year 11, attainment is broadly average. The achievement of most students, including those with special educational needs, and the small number with physical disabilities, is good. A significant minority of students join the school after the start of Year 7. Through the extensive support offered, these students' achievement is also good. The extensive monitoring and tracking information provided by the school shows little variation in the performance of boys and girls. An improved curriculum, especially in terms of vocational educational, has led to an improvement in results. The improved curriculum has enabled more students to meet with examination success and it has helped progression at the end of Year 11. The success of these developments is reflected in the fact that only one per cent of students who left in 2011 are not in education, employment or training. This is well below the national figure. Much care has been taken to ensure that disaffected students, who are often lower attainers, are provided for well. Developments, involving alternative curriculum provision, such as 'The Box', an external provider offering a range of support especially for literacy and mathematical skills, have also led to students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable achieving well.

During the inspection, students made good progress in many lessons. In a significant minority of lessons, in subjects as varied as mathematics, physical education and religious education, students' achievement was outstanding. For example, in an outstanding religious education lesson, Year 8 students considered the arguments for and against the rights to wear religious attire. The lesson had pace and challenge and expectations were high. Students had to express balanced views in writing and then make oral presentations, which were peer assessed. Progress was rapid. Equally impressive was the sensitivity and objectivity shown by the students. An outstanding business studies lesson featured rapid progress in the way students developed and successfully applied subject specific vocabulary. High quality oral work was matched by excellent written work analysing business ethics. This was an excellent application

of moral development. Most students are making good progress and achieve at least well. This view is strongly supported by parents and carers. Over 90% replying to the inspection questionnaire believe that their children are making at least good progress.

Quality of teaching

Most teaching is good and lessons are planned well. Lessons succeed in challenging, engaging and interesting the students. In the best lessons, students' learning is at least good so that they make at least good progress. Independent and collaborative work is promoted well. This was amply illustrated in a Year 7 drama lesson on mime. Students had to develop their own routines, perform and self- and peer-assess their work. The careful planning, high expectations and challenge all contributed to outstanding learning. In a minority of lessons, especially in Key Stage 3, where learning is satisfactory rather than good, there is a lack of consistency across subjects about the way work is presented. Books can be quite untidy, showing a lack of pride which is not challenged. Inconsistencies in marking and assessment are also discernible. Books might be marked, but work is not consistently levelled and students are not systematically offered advice on what is good and what needs to be improved and how.

Successful lessons, allied to the well-planned curriculum, promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Team work and responsibility are fostered well in many subjects and work in subjects such as French, business studies and religious education successfully develops moral and cultural issues. Many lessons have a good spiritual dimension, especially in terms of taking responsibility and helping one another.

Parents and carers, and students themselves, are happy with the quality of teaching provided. They are confident the school is helping their children to develop skills in communication, reading, writing and numeracy. As one parent commented: 'St John's continues to exceed our expectations. Our children are challenged academically and supported in their personal development. Teaching is very good and is helping our children to improve.' Evidence from lessons confirmed the view that teaching is good. In most lessons, reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills are improving well but, in a minority of lessons, students are not consistently given opportunities to read, including reading aloud. Nevertheless, most students are making good progress, with a significant minority doing even better than this because the relevance of the curriculum has improved and students are rising to the challenges set.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are provided with working environments that are safe, secure and well cared for. Students know how to keep safe and in their inspection questionnaires students, parents and carers all indicated that this is a safe school. Though a number of parents, carers and students expressed disquiet about behaviour, what was observed during the inspection was consistently good and often outstanding. Indeed, in many of the lessons observed, learning benefited because the students behaved well and supported one another in their work. Other indicators suggested good and

improving behaviour. Incidents of bullying and harassment, including those based on race or gender, are rare. When they arise, they are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Exclusions are low and falling and attendance has improved to around the national average for secondary schools. In part, these positive outcomes reflect the changes made in the school's curriculum. A more personalised and varied curriculum is successfully engaging more students and helping them to gain better results.

Another aspect of the good and improving behaviour is the responsibility placed on the students themselves. Students in all year groups in the school are given scope to seek positions of responsibility and act as leaders. Part of this initiative has successfully involved students in anti-bullying programmes. Opportunities are given to students to air their views and opinions through 'student voice'. These openings are welcomed by the students, though some younger ones reported that they do not feel fully consulted about the new buildings and how the school's general environment can be improved. They feel valued. The vertical tutor group system has also helped, as it has created a more harmonious student community. As one Year 11 student commented: 'The school is now like one big happy family. It is far better than when I joined.'

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides good leadership. He has skilfully built on the strengths identified in the previous inspection. He is well supported by a good senior team, an effective governing body and a keen and committed staff. Morale in the school is high. There is a strong focus on improving students' achievement. Equality of opportunity is promoted vigorously, especially through a richer and broader curriculum. Since the last inspection, the monitoring and tracking of students' work has improved significantly. The performance of different groups is closely monitored. This is to ensure that any gaps in performance are tackled and closed, ensuring that any discrimination is tackled decisively. Safeguarding procedures are robust. The school site is safe and appropriate provision, including detailed risk assessments, is made for off-site education.

Accurate self-evaluation has led to improvements in teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Improved target setting has resulted in better academic, personal and social outcomes, although some inconsistencies remain in the small number of less effective lessons. A keen focus on professional development has also contributed to the improved outcomes by enhancing staff expertise in meeting students' learning needs. Provision for all students is good and there are no significant variations in the rates of progress of the different groups. The governing body has a keen understanding of the challenges facing the school. Its members give senior leaders strong support and they are fully involved in monitoring progress and holding the school to account.

Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has continued to evolve well. More vocational options are available. In part, this reflects the school's status as an engineering college. These developments have been successful and a broad and varied curriculum is offered and this has led to better achievement because students can follow programmes of study that meet their own needs. The improved

curriculum, allied to good extra-curricular provision through assemblies, music, sport, drama and a variety of clubs, amply supports students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Students are encouraged to seek responsibility and help others. Fundraising for a school in India illustrates this commitment. St John's is a good and improving school. It has developed well since its previous inspection and has the capacity to improve further. The success of the school is reflected in the very high number of parents and carers who expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school's work.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled School, Epping, CM16 5EN

My colleagues and I thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed talking to you and learning about your views. You told us that the school is good and improving and that you are happy with the education you receive. The inspection confirms that your school offers a good education.

We liked many things. You are taught well and your teachers are keen for you to succeed. In most lessons, the work set is challenging and engages you. However, where learning is slower, lessons are less effective. In order to improve teaching further, we have asked your headteacher to:

- ensure that by the end of 2012, all lessons are taught well by ensuring:
 - greater consistency in the presentation of your written work in all subjects, especially in Key Stage 3
 - that the marking and assessment of your work in Key Stage 3 consistently provides information about how well you are doing and what you need to be to improve
 - that in all subjects staff seize every opportunity to encourage you to read for yourselves, including reading aloud.

We liked the extent to which you contribute to school life but we have concluded that Key Stage 3 students could be consulted even more. We have asked your headteacher to ensure that your views about the new buildings and the general school environment are sought and implemented wherever possible. We were impressed by your keenness in lessons. Your attendance is broadly average and your behaviour is good. By maintaining and building on these standards, you can help the staff secure the improvements we have requested.

Thank you for making our visit enjoyable.

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham
Lead inspector

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