

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117432
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358140
Inspection dates	17–18 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Elsom
Headteacher	Susan Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspection team visited 22 lessons and observed seven teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff - including teaching assistants, a parent, and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a selection of documentation, including planning, evidence of monitoring such as lesson observations, analyses of pupils' work and other assessment information. The inspection team scrutinised inspection questionnaires returned by 116 parents and carers, and by 21 staff and 95 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- In view of recent changes, how well activities planned for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promote their learning.
- The impact of support and guidance on the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The effectiveness of new management information systems in developing the role of subject leaders.

Information about the school

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England primary school is a smaller-than-average sized school. Most pupils are from White British heritages. Hardly any speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals is well-below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school has the Activemark award and National Healthy Schools status.

A new deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2009. A new classroom was built in November 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England primary school is a good school. Pupils achieve well because of good quality teaching in most classes, with particular strength in Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 6, standards of attainment are above average in English and mathematics. An interesting and relevant curriculum engages pupils well. Parents and carers are supportive of the school's work. Speaking for many, one parent wrote, 'This school is a very caring, positive environment where each child knows that they are expected to work hard and be kind and caring to each other.'

Most pupils achieve well in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, from starting points in line with age related expectations, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress. This is because they do not have sufficient opportunity to practise their developing early writing and number skills daily, and activities do not always have a clear learning purpose. Staff record children's achievements through taking photographs and writing brief notes, but assessment is not rigorous enough to plan precisely the next steps in their learning. Elsewhere in the school, good marking clearly shows pupils how to improve, and they have time to respond to their teachers' comments. Pupils know their individual targets, which are communicated in child-friendly language.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and parents and carers strongly agree. Pupils have a good understanding of dealing with hazards. They generally behave well, and the older pupils look after the younger ones considerately. There is a high participation rate in the many sports clubs available to pupils, who organise games as young sports leaders. The school cares for pupils well, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Adults provide good role-models for pupils, treating them with respect, and displaying the Christian values that underpin the work of this church school. There are weaknesses in the provision for the small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, whose progress overall is not as rapid as that of their peers. The targets on pupils' individual education plans are not specific enough or able to be measured easily, and one or two members of staff have not had the particular training required to boost the progress of certain individuals or groups of pupils. While intervention programmes take place, these do not always meet pupils' particular needs.

Good leadership from the headteacher has seen teaching improve rapidly, with much that is consistently good or outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and challenge them through high quality questioning, conducting lessons at a brisk pace. Monitoring is effective, giving staff clear guidance on how to improve. The recent introduction of a central electronic information management system, or portal, enables subject leaders to access data and upload evidence to show progress against the school's key priorities for improvement. The governing body is involved well in the life of the school, visiting regularly to monitor developments and holding senior leaders to account.

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There has been good progress since the last inspection, with attainment consistently above average, and improving teaching and learning; consequently the school's capacity for further sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - providing daily opportunities for children to practise their early writing and number skills
 - ensuring each activity, whether led by adults or chosen by the children themselves, has a clear learning purpose
 - making assessment procedures more rigorous and systematic to identify precise next steps in children's learning.
- Improve provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and thereby improve their progress by:
 - ensuring targets on individual education plans are specific and measurable and reviewed termly
 - tailoring intervention programmes to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils
 - ensuring specific staff, who are given particular responsibilities, are appropriately trained.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy learning and achieve well. They are enthusiastic in lessons and very keen to participate. For example, Year 2 pupils had made models of lighthouses and were engrossed in forming electric circuits to light them up. Year 6 pupils engaged in high level discussion around calculating large square numbers and identifying patterns. In Year 1, pupils enjoyed role-play in their police station as part of a topic on 'people who help us', viewed grimly by a (pictorial) prisoner behind bars. A focus on improving writing has seen pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress, with many opportunities to write for a purpose and to practise their writing skills across a range of subjects.

While most pupils achieve well, including the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language, the progress of the small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is more variable. This is because teachers have not pinpointed sufficiently clearly the particular steps necessary to help these pupils accelerate their learning, or recorded them accurately on individual education plans. The plans are not reviewed often enough to measure the impact they are having on pupils' progress. Consequently, the support provided is not always tailored closely enough to pupils' specific needs. Nonetheless, the dedicated team of teaching assistants do make a valuable contribution in classrooms supporting other groups of pupils, and there is some very effective pastoral support for pupils with challenging behaviour.

Pupils' make a good contribution to the school and wider community. A welcome service for Reception children and their families celebrates them joining the school community and they are taken in hand by older pupils. As one Year 6 pupil remarked, 'You can make

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friends with the little ones as well.' Pupils take responsibility as peer mediators and members of the school council, although its meetings are too infrequent to have a sustained impact. Pupils enhanced their local area by designing a sculpture trail from Great Amwell to Hertford, creating small bronze statues at key locations along the way. The choir performs at local venues, including to elderly residents. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by close links with the parish church, and links with schools in The Gambia and India. Pupils develop their team-building skills on residential visits and are prepared well for secondary school, having well-developed basic skills.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is consistently good or better in most classes, although there remain pockets of satisfactory teaching. Lessons are often planned to interest and engage pupils, with well-organised resources and a high level of challenge. For example, Year 1 pupils used their good knowledge of how the emergency services were first set up to write factual text, supported by the teacher's excellent questioning and use of the interactive whiteboard. On the rare occasions when teaching is satisfactory rather than good, explanations lack clarity, pupils sit for too long waiting to begin their independent work and expectations are not high enough. Assessment is good, with clear guidance given to pupils to show them how to improve, and opportunities taken to correct any misunderstanding.

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The curriculum is creative and interests pupils, built around the skills they need. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, as when Year 6 pupils produced high quality topic books on life for children during the Second World War. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is not so well developed. The curriculum is enriched well with a good range of clubs, visits and visitors. Pupils make good use of the local environment, growing their own vegetables and studying the historic buildings in the village. Transition arrangements at every point of transfer are strong, with plenty of support for pupils as they move on in their education. The school is very welcoming and caring, something that parents and carers appreciate. One said, 'The ethos of the school is especially caring between younger and older children and also staff members - we are pleased to be part of this school.' The school promotes attendance well, ensuring that it remains above average.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has been successful at supporting a number of newly qualified teachers in becoming consistently good practitioners through careful coaching and regular monitoring. The headteacher's drive and ambition is shared by all staff, who work together well in moving the school forward. The new deputy has made a considerable impact in developing the school's distinctive ethos and strengthening links with the church and community. Self-evaluation is accurate, supported by the new information management system, where evidence of subject leaders' activity to raise standards is stored and easily accessible. Subject leaders are relatively new to their posts, but have already had a positive impact through their good knowledge and regular monitoring of the school's work. The effectiveness of the governing body is good. Governors are well-informed and contribute to the school's strategic direction. They are particularly effective at ensuring that safeguarding procedures meet all requirements, and in ensuring the safety of the school site. All staff are trained in child protection and good systems are in place to record and follow-up any concerns staff may have. A daily message book enables parents and carers to keep staff apprised of important information affecting their children.

The school gives pupils equal access to all activities and tackles discrimination well. However, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make the same good progress as their peers. The school is actively implementing measures to remedy these inconsistencies. There are good links with parents and carers, who are positive about the school and engage well with staff. Parents and carers raise considerable funds each year to benefit the pupils. The good sports partnership has enabled pupils to take part in a wide variety of activities, and

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the extended schools' consortium has provided additional benefits for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. An excellent partnership with a parent resulted in pupils' creating a renowned local amenity, a sculpture trail. The school promotes community cohesion well, having an outstanding understanding of its local area and developing good links with schools abroad in The Gambia and India. Pupils have exchanged letters and sent out donations. There are evolving links with a multi-cultural urban school in the United Kingdom.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's skills and knowledge on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is generally in line with age related expectations. They settle well, because of the good level of care and support they receive. Class routines are well-established, resulting in an orderly and harmonious environment. Progress is satisfactory, because there is not enough emphasis on what children are learning, whether engaged in activities chosen by themselves, or led by adults. Opportunities are missed to discuss aspects of learning with the children at the beginning and end of sessions, and the extent to which they can practise their early writing and number skills varies. This means their acquisition of writing and calculation skills is not as rapid as it could be. The Early Years Foundation Stage is resourced well, with a spacious outside area that is used well. Topics are planned to interest children, such as 'dinosaurs', and they enjoy working and playing together. However, their learning is not directed sufficiently closely to ensure they make good progress. By the end of the Reception year standards are broadly average, but below in writing and calculation.

Staff keep attractive records of children's achievement in 'learning journeys', which parents and children enjoy viewing. These mainly contain photographs and brief notes about what children are doing. Observations of children's learning are not sufficiently

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detailed or systematic to build up a comprehensive picture of their progress, or to enable staff to plan precisely the next steps in their learning. There is satisfactory leadership and management of a committed staff team, who are very willing to take on new ideas and improve their practice.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned by parents and carers was greater than average. Parents and carers are generally supportive of the school, with most believing their children enjoy school, are kept safe, are taught well and that the school is led and managed well. A small number of parents and carers were concerned about safety issues caused by car parking at the start and end of the school day, and some said they would like more information about how their children were learning. The school accepts that road traffic is a problem, and is considering ways of reducing it. The school also recognises parents' desire for more information, and is in the process of implementing a mid-year report to supplement the annual one.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 116 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 183 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	69	59	45	39	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	71	61	40	34	3	3	2	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	53	46	56	48	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	50	54	47	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	64	56	47	41	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	57	50	47	41	9	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	52	54	47	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	43	37	57	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	52	45	57	50	4	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	43	52	45	7	6	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	45	39	58	50	2	2	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	64	56	42	37	6	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	67	58	44	38	1	1	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



21 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Ware, SG12 9SE

Thank you for making us welcome when we inspected your school and sharing your views with us, both when you met us and through completing questionnaires. You told us that your school is good, and we agree with you. You said that the staff are friendly and make learning interesting, and that you would turn to an adult if you had a problem.

Here are some other things the school does well.

Standards of attainment in English and mathematics are above average.

Most of you make good progress in your learning.

The teaching is good and teachers ask you challenging questions.

You know how to stay safe and keep healthy.

You behave well and the older pupils look after the younger ones.

There are plenty of clubs and visits for you to enjoy.

The school cares for you well, especially if you have any worries.

Mrs Robinson and her team lead the school well.

Not all of the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do as well as the rest of you, so we have asked your teachers to make sure that they set targets for them that will help them to improve. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle quickly into school, but we believe they could make faster progress. We have asked staff to focus on what they are learning and to spend more time observing them to find out what they can do and need to do next.

You all can help by working hard and telling your teachers what you enjoy about learning.

With best wishes for the future,

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt

Lead Inspector

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