

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School, Frome

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123843
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	359528
Inspection dates	30 November 2010–1 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Christine Huard

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon McPhee-Clarke
Headteacher	Alan Burgess
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2008
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Introduction

Introduction This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 21 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and some pupils from Years 2 and 4. They observed the school's work, and looked at samples of pupils' work in literacy and mathematics, curricular planning, assessment and tracking information for each year group and the school's procedures for ensuring pupils' safety. Inspectors also considered 87 questionnaires that were received from parents and carers as well as those returned by staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at four key issues.

- The progress made by pupils in Years 3 and 4.
- The progress made by boys in literacy and by girls in mathematics.
- How effectively assessment and marking are used to ensure that pupils understand what they have to do to improve.
- How well information from assessments is used to ensure that tasks are matched to the needs of all pupils.

Information about the school

St John's First School is of broadly average size compared to schools of the same type. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. The main areas of need are social and behavioural and difficulties with speech and communication. The school has several awards including Healthy Schools, Activemark and Artsmark. The children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are accommodated within two Reception classes.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St John's First School provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. Since the last inspection there has been significant improvement and standards are rising across the school. This is due to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning which means that levels of attainment have risen and previous underachievement has been almost completely eradicated. Although overall progress from their starting points currently remains satisfactory, some pupils, particularly those in Years 2 and 4, are making good progress and are now achieving well. Attainment is broadly average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 2 and in line with that expected at the end of Year 4. Actions taken to improve literacy and mathematics across the school are proving to be highly effective. As a result there is little difference now in the progress made between boys and girls, with boys improving well in literacy and girls in mathematics.

A particular strength of the school is the outstanding care, guidance and support provided for pupils, especially in the way it responds to the needs of more vulnerable pupils and those requiring particular help and support. The curriculum has recently been reviewed and is exciting and stimulating and pupils sparkle with enthusiasm as they describe the themes and topics they have the chance to follow. Pupils are enthusiastic about their education and this is helping them to learn more effectively.

The great majority of parents and carers wholeheartedly support the school. Many of the parents who added comments to the questionnaires they returned were high in their praise of 'this caring and vibrant' school. Staff work well together as a team and the governors are fully involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. As a result, there is a good unity of purpose as well as a determination to continue to improve in order to provide the best possible education for the pupils.

Teaching is satisfactory but much has good elements. Nevertheless there are some inconsistencies which mean that progress made by pupils is a little uneven. Some teachers do not match tasks sufficiently well to the needs of all pupils. Consequently a few, often the more-able pupils, do not receive sufficient challenge in the tasks set and their progress slows. Most teachers use assessment effectively to judge how well pupils are learning in lessons. However, not all teachers are following the school's policy closely enough which means their assessment is less effective. Procedures for assessing pupils' learning on a longer-term basis have become much more robust. Pupils know and understand their targets and know what they need to do to reach the next one.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and have a good understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, reflected in the awards the school has won. They are polite and considerate and behaviour is good. The play spaces are happy and harmonious. Pupils make a good contribution to the school, local and international communities through

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participation in a range of events and through their good awareness of those less fortunate than themselves.

The robust monitoring system ensures that the quality of teaching and learning is evaluated well by senior leaders. Subject leaders are not sufficiently involved in this at present which means their overview of their areas is not complete. Senior leaders and governors are astute and their self-evaluation is extremely accurate. Staff demonstrated very clearly, by their uniformly positive responses to the questionnaires, that they share the renewed drive for improvement. This, combined with much improved teaching and academic outcomes for pupils, and the very strong endorsement expressed by parents, demonstrates that the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Match tasks closely to the needs of all pupils, but particularly those of the more able, in order to ensure consistently good learning and progress across the school.
- Improve the quality of marking and day-to-day assessment by ensuring that strategies are used systematically and in line with school policy to ensure all pupils and teachers know exactly what pupils need to do to improve further.
- Develop the role of all subject leaders by ensuring they have sufficient opportunities to monitor their areas of responsibility in order to have a complete overview. ♦

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy their learning and this is reflected in their good attendance. They bubble with enthusiasm as they describe their learning. Pupils listen well in lessons and eagerly answer questions. They work well together in pairs and small groups. This was particularly evident in a Year 4 mathematics lesson when pupils were undertaking a challenge involving accurate calculation and measurement of the perimeter of a number of shapes. Pupils are thoughtful and reflective. They proudly tell how they raised money to help those affected by the floods in Pakistan. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and look after each other well. They successfully participate in enterprise weeks and plan and put into place schemes for raising money, evaluating the results at the end.

Pupils' writing throughout the school has greatly improved over the last year, particularly that of boys. This is because they are encouraged to discuss and plan much more rigorously and are very interested in tasks given to them. In literacy, pupils in Years 3 and 4 have been writing fantasy tales as a build up to them attending a performance of Peter Pan. They have planned their writing carefully through discussion and drama and the results were imaginative and exciting, showing a good deal of flair.

Progress in mathematics, too, shows marked improvement, and pupils are gaining confidence in applying the knowledge and skills they have gained because teachers provide them with appropriate investigations to carry out and problems to solve. Pupils make good progress when tasks are well matched to their needs. However, this is not always the case. For example, in one lesson, pupils, mainly more-able ones, who completed their mathematics were enjoined to read a book on the carpet instead of being provided with a more challenging task or extension activity.

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Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from individual and small group support; their progress, too, has improved over the last year and is in line with that of their peers. Pupils are highly competent at using information and communication technology (ICT). This, together with their rapidly improving academic progress, good personal development and developing enterprise skills, ensures they are prepared well for their future lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
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?

Teachers ensure that pupils know what they are going to learn and use resources, such as interactive whiteboards, skilfully. In most classes pupils have opportunities to discuss and compare their thinking with partners, and tasks are carefully devised to excite and inspire and meet the learning needs of all. Occasionally, the progress of more-able pupils slows. This is because some teachers do not challenge pupils sufficiently when questioning, or do not use assessment information precisely enough when planning so that tasks do not stretch them enough. In other classes, marking is good and target setting is highly individualised so that most pupils know and understand what they have to do to improve.

The school has developed an exciting and creative curriculum. It is regularly reviewed and pupils are consulted to ensure that it matches their needs and interests. The themed approach means that effective links are made across a range of subjects. This has a particularly good impact on the progress of most pupils because they have many

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opportunities to practise their skills. The school celebrates pupils' achievements well and the quality of art and display in the school demonstrates the validity of the Artsmark it has received. The use of ICT is fully integrated into all topics and the good use of the internet means that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to further extend their learning. A good range of visits and visitors as well as many exciting out-of-school activities, particularly in sport, provide pupils with lots of opportunities to enhance their learning.

The school works very closely with parents and carers and a wide range of outside agencies to enable them to make the best possible provision for more vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The nurture base provides exceptional support for pupils, particularly those who have problems managing their own behaviour. Transition arrangements into and out of the school are highly effective. Pupils receive very good support for their personal development and are very well cared for.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school swiftly reversed a downturn in standards following the previous inspection by tackling weaknesses resolutely. As the headteacher said, 'Our children deserved better, the very best; that means some of us had to change.' Staff at all levels share the vision and ambition to further improve attainment and accelerate pupils' progress. Nevertheless, because of a lack of consistency in some teaching and in the use of assessment, particularly on a day-to-day basis, there is still room for improvement in the attainment of some pupils. Monitoring is robust, but has mainly been carried out by senior leaders during this period of change. Consequently subject leaders have not had sufficient opportunities to fully play their part in this and gain a wider overview of their subject areas.

Governors regularly visit the school. They are instrumental in driving the school forward and play a full part in self-evaluation and in prioritising future development. Equality of opportunity for all pupils is promoted effectively as shown by the narrowing of gaps between the achievements of different groups. The school ensures that pupils, whatever their ethnic or cultural background or their ability, are valued and free from discrimination. Links with parents and carers are strong and parents appreciate the extent to which they are involved in their children's learning. Governors and leaders promote community cohesion well. The school has a wide range of links within the local community which promote pupils' learning and understanding highly effectively. The school is developing an exciting link with a school in a very different area. At the time of the inspection, governors had ensured that all safeguarding procedures are robust and fully meet requirements.

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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	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The attainment of children joining Reception varies greatly from year to year but is generally a little below the levels expected. Assessments show that children's progress has improved steadily since the last inspection. The proportion of children reaching the expected levels for their age across all areas of learning has increased significantly and is securely in line with national averages.

Children are keen to learn because teaching is vibrant and lively. There is good consistency in the practice across both classes and a good balance between those activities led by the teacher and those that children choose for themselves. During the inspection, children were eagerly involved in making Christmas cakes and enjoyed measuring out ingredients, discussing what they were and enthusiastically helped to beat the cake mix. They learn to share and take turns as well as to develop independence and the ability to make choices. Children relish the opportunity to share ideas in exciting role play areas, such as the post office. Interesting themes and the good utilisation of the outside area make the curriculum and learning relevant and exciting. However, the provision in the secure outdoor play space does not yet match the inspiring indoor environment and the school recognises that this can be further developed.

The care and attention given to children's welfare are outstanding. Their individual needs are known and acted upon and every effort is made to ensure children are safe and secure at all times. Leadership and management are good. Staff demonstrate considerable understanding of the needs of young children. Ongoing monitoring of the progress children are making ensures that activities are carefully matched to their needs. 'Learning journeys' and 'memory books' are of a high quality and contain a comprehensive record of children's achievement in which parents are fully involved.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very confident that their children enjoy school; as one wrote, 'My children love the whole school experience, motivated by the wonderful headteacher's mandate of ensuring that first and foremost the children at St John's should enjoy coming to school.' They feel their children are safe and well cared for. They also express confidence in the leadership and management of the school. The overwhelming majority are happy overall with the experiences their children are receiving. The many positive comments also show they particularly appreciate the feeling of community and the caring school ethos. One comment summed up the views of many: 'The school has a very welcoming, loving environment and the children feel happy, secure and nurtured.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's CE (VA) First 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 295 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	69	26	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	53	61	34	39	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	39	45	47	54	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	47	43	49	2	2	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	45	52	36	41	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	49	41	47	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	46	46	53	0	0	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)	42	48	38	44	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	44	45	52	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	34	51	59	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	40	49	56	0	0	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	42	48	39	45	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	63	30	34	1	1	1	1

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



2 December 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's CE (VA) First School, Frome BA11 1QG

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. You were really polite and friendly and helped us to learn a lot about what you do and what you enjoy. Your school gives you a satisfactory education and is rapidly improving.

What we found about your school.

- It is a friendly and happy place in which to work and play.
- You all receive excellent care, support and guidance from the adults in the school.
- You enjoy coming to school and behave well.
- You make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science.
- You show a good understanding of how to live healthily and how to stay safe. Your teachers usually plan interesting lessons and most mark your work well so that you know what you have to do to improve.
- You benefit from a good range of after-school clubs as well as some interesting visits and visitors.
- Your headteacher and teachers are working very hard to help you do better.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- We have asked the teachers to make sure that all of you, especially those of you who find learning easier, are given tasks that really challenge you so that you make better progress.
- We have asked all teachers to make sure they follow the school's assessment procedures carefully when assessing your work so that you all know what you need to do to improve.
- We would like the subject leaders to take more part in monitoring what is happening in their own subjects.

We are sure that you will do all you can to help all adults who work with you to make your school even better.

Yours sincerely

Christine Huard

Lead inspector

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