

St John's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117460
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358142
Inspection dates	5–6 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Suckling
Headteacher	Robert Price
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2008
School address	Hertford Road Digswell, Welwyn AL6 0BX
Telephone number	01438 714283
Fax number	01438 712991
Email address	admin@digswell.herts.sch.uk

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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 15 lessons, observing eight teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and the Chair of the Governing Body. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed 68 parental questionnaires, 110 responses to the pupil survey and 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.

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

- Is the gender difference in 2010 assessments a pattern and if so what action is the school taking to close the gaps?
- How successful has been the focus on raising achievement in mathematics?
- How effectively does teaching meet the needs of all pupils?

Information about the school

Pupil numbers have risen in this average-sized school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, although there has been an increase in recent years in the proportion of pupils from a range of minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Few pupils are identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Nursery and a Reception class. The school has recently received the Intermediate International award and achieved Healthy Schools status.

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

3

Main findings

St John's is a harmonious school in which pupils of all backgrounds mix happily. This is a result of the sharp focus from the headteacher, supported by his staff team, on promoting the pupils' personal development and securing their well-being. Within these areas the school has developed some good and outstanding features.

The school provides excellent levels of care, guidance and support for its pupils. The headteacher and his team use their very clear understanding of the circumstances of each pupil to carefully target action in support of their specific needs, particularly where they are potentially more vulnerable.

Pupils not only feel very safe in school, a view echoed by their parents and carers, but they also have an acute awareness of how to identify and deal with risks they might face, such as when using new technology. This is because the promotion of 'e-safety' is at the heart of the school's work.

Pupils are proud of their school and their wide-ranging contribution to its development. Their extensive voice in school life and contribution to the local community are greatly valued. Links with a school in Zambia help them to gain an insight into the lives of children elsewhere and to see how action such as their 'Pencil Case' collections can have a positive influence on others learning.

Pupils show great consideration for each other and through their 'Peace Pals' help to resolve constructively any conflicts that might arise. They develop an extensive view of the wider world through events such as 'Global Awareness Week'. These factors contribute significantly to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The pupils' keen participation in a wide range of sporting activities and their recognition of the importance of a balanced diet demonstrate their very clear understanding of how to stay fit and healthy, and are reflected in the achievement of Healthy Schools status.

This commitment to the promotion of the pupils' well-being has not been matched by a sufficiently sharp focus on their academic achievement. The children's good progress in the Nursery and Reception, from skills and experiences broadly as expected for their age, is not built on consistently across the rest of the school where pupils make satisfactory progress and attainment is average.

Teaching is satisfactory, with some examples of good practice when lessons are interesting and meeting individual needs. However, teachers do not always use assessment information to focus their teaching on moving the learning of all pupils forward rapidly, particularly in mathematics, where their achievement is lower than in reading and writing.

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There is a gender gap in attainment, with boys reaching lower levels than girls, particularly in writing. Opportunities for regular extended writing and clearer targets for their work have improved the quality of written work. However, the contexts chosen often do not stimulate the boys' interest and imaginations, and boys are not always as engaged in their learning as girls.

The school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. While leaders and members of the governing body have a broad understanding of the school's qualities, self-evaluation including the analysis of assessment data is not refined enough to lead to sharply-focused plans to raise pupils' achievement. Priorities for action are appropriate but not always sufficiently targeted on securing rapid improvements, such as in mathematics.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate learning, particularly in mathematics by:
 - making more effective use of assessment information when planning lessons and providing feedback to pupils on how to meet their targets
 - extending the teachers' skills in questioning and teaching key concepts.
- Take more effective action to close the gap between the achievement of boys and girls, particularly in writing, by:
 - analysing more rigorously progress and attainment by gender in all subjects to identify when and where boys are falling behind
 - adapting teaching methods to engage boys more fully in their learning
 - providing more interesting contexts to stimulate boys' writing.
- Focus leadership and management at all levels on raising achievement by:
 - implementing an effective cycle of self-evaluation involving staff, governors, parents and carers, and pupils
 - focusing priorities for improvement on meeting more challenging targets
 - introduce a continuous programme of professional development aimed at bringing the quality of teaching up to that of the best.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When learning is most effective, particularly in English lessons, pupils work with interest and a determination to do well. They enjoy practical activities and collaborate well when working in groups. Most concentrate well in lessons and readily share ideas in discussion with others, although opportunities are missed to work with their 'talk partners' more often. Pupils are keen to answer questions because their contributions are clearly valued by their teachers. These personal qualities and the effectiveness with which they utilise their basic skills such as in information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning in other subjects, give them a firm platform for future success. On a few occasions, learning is less productive and the pupils lose interest when teachers talk too much and do not encourage them to take an active role in their learning.

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Year 6 test results in mathematics rose in 2010 although they only represented satisfactory progress given the pupils' starting points. By contrast, results fell in English although they were higher than in mathematics. Inspection evidence shows that more pupils than in 2010 are currently on track to at least meet national expectations by the end of Year 6, although this still represents only satisfactory progress. Pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to others, although for some progress is good because of the impact of specific programmes focused on meeting individual targets.

Pupils are very aware of what to do in any unsafe situations and take great care over the safety of others. Older pupils undertake their role as trained peer mediators with pride and are keen to act as 'buddies' for Reception children. Pupils display a keen interest in topical issues and take an active role through their Eco Council in caring for the environment, including the promotion of recycling. Pupils have raised money for their link school in Zambia to buy chickens whose eggs have then been sold to raise money for school toilets. The strength of activities such as these has been recognised by the International Schools award. Pupils greatly enjoy taking part in cultural and sporting activities. They appreciate and understand the customs of other cultures and religions and display a willingness to reflect on experiences and the consequences of their actions.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	1

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

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How effective is the provision?

Within a pattern of satisfactory teaching there are strong features that move the pupils' learning forward well. In the most effective lessons, tasks undertaken are pitched at varying levels to move pupils' learning on, and skilled use is made of interactive whiteboards and other technology to engage the pupils' interest and stimulate their imaginations. However, whole-class teaching tends to be pitched at the middle ability and questioning is not used effectively to challenge the pupils' thinking, particularly in mathematics. Furthermore, teaching assistants are not always usefully deployed to support learning during these sessions.

Marking is not consistent in its guidance on how to improve a piece of work and only the oldest pupils are securely aware of their working levels and what they should be aiming for as they prepare for national tests. The valuable opportunities provided for pupils' self-assessment of their writing to clear criteria, particularly in Years 5 and 6, are not replicated consistently elsewhere or in mathematics.

Teachers make the development of basic skills a high priority and provide pupils with many opportunities to develop their writing and ICT skills in a wide range subjects. The curriculum's strength lies in its support for the pupils' personal development and in enriching their experiences through themed events, educational visits including a residential for Year 6 pupils, and the wide range of well attended clubs. The latter are largely provided by school staff, but also benefit from the expertise of others in sporting and musical activities.

The school provides an exceptionally welcoming environment for all pupils. The very close relationship with home means that there is an excellent understanding of the circumstances of pupils and their families, with the result that they have high levels of confidence when seeking the school's advice. The school's work with families and outside agencies to support potentially vulnerable pupils is excellent. Transition arrangements are well thought through and help the older pupils, particularly those who might find change difficult, move smoothly onto secondary school.

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?

While the direction provided by the headteacher in supporting the pupils' personal development is clear, it is not always successful in driving improvements in achievement forward rapidly. The performance of teachers is checked frequently and action identified to improve their practice. However, this has not always focused sufficiently on the quality

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of the delivery. Equality of opportunity is central to the headteacher's vision for the school and no discrimination is tolerated. Assessment information is used well to identify and take action over any underachievement, but it is not always analysed effectively to spot emerging patterns. Consequently, the differing performance of boys and girls has not been tackled with sufficient vigour.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors take an active role in support of the school, but they do not challenge the school's leadership sufficiently when setting targets for improvement. Governors have established robust systems to protect pupils and ensure the safety of all within the school. Procedures include carefully vetting all those who work in the school, and ensuring that policies to safeguard the welfare of the pupils are properly implemented and backed-up by regular staff training.

Staff and governors use their clear understanding of the school's context to plan activities to support greater community cohesion. This includes developing links with schools locally, nationally and abroad. The school is strongly committed to partnership working by bringing in expertise, not otherwise available, to extend the opportunities provided for the pupils and to support their welfare. There is also a drive to forge an ever stronger partnership with home. The school engages closely with families, such as by directing parents and carers towards local support services.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
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 children's smooth start to school life is based on a close relationship between school and home and having a 'buddy' in Year 6 to look out for them. Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, particularly in their personal development. This is because their learning is promoted well and they are encouraged to take responsibility for developing aspects of their work. For example, Nursery children have the

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opportunity to plan their own activities before carrying them out, usually in cooperation with a friend.

Children enjoy a broad range of interesting activities, such as when Reception children surveyed others to find their favourite vegetable before recording their responses graphically. The children's considerate behaviour is based on strong and constructive relationships with adults in the two classes and clear expectations that they should respect everyone. Adults take care to ensure that the children are safe at all times and also that they learn how to work safely, particularly when outdoors.

Activities are carefully planned, although at times the more able could be challenged more in whole class sessions. Assessment is thorough and 'learning journals' provide a valuable record to demonstrate each child's progress and to keep parents and carers up to date about how well their children are getting on. Parents and carers greatly value this information as well as being welcomed into class at the beginning and end of each session. All adults work together as a team, although opportunities are missed for the Nursery and Reception to work as one unit. Under new leadership, the staff team has identified as a priority enabling children in the two classes to work together more closely, and share resources and learning areas more effectively.

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

A slightly smaller proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire than is usual, although the level of satisfaction is average or above in response to most questions. Inspection evidence supports their positive views particularly that their children are helped to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. Inspectors investigated the concerns of a small number of parents and carers about how well the school manages behaviour through discussions with staff and pupils, but concluded that behaviour is good. This reflects the views of the majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire. Inspectors also judge that the school is increasingly seeking to take account of their views as is the opinion of the large majority.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's CofE 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 68 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 232 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	69	20	29	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	65	22	32	2	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	34	36	53	7	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	38	35	51	7	10	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	32	47	31	46	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	38	38	56	2	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	50	34	50	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)	30	44	31	46	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	41	30	44	9	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	26	29	43	11	16	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	29	28	41	12	18	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	31	46	26	38	8	12	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	51	29	43	2	3	0	0

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



9 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's CofE Primary School, Welwyn AL6 0BX

Thank you all very much for your friendliness and help when we visited your school recently. We judge that St John's Church of England Primary is a satisfactory school. You clearly enjoy school and your teachers take excellent care of you and keep you safe. Your behaviour is good and we were impressed by the way you try so hard to stay fit and healthy. You have an excellent understanding of how to keep yourselves safe and we were impressed by the way older pupils act as buddies for Reception children and help to sort out any problems when acting as 'Peace Pals'. Your support for the school in Zambia reflects your thoughtful care for others.

The youngest children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception. The rest of you make satisfactory progress during your time in school, learning the skills you need for the future. Those of you who find learning more difficult also make satisfactory progress because of the support you receive.

The three things in particular we have asked the teachers and other adults to do in order to make the school better are to:

- find ways of helping you to learn better particularly in mathematics
- make sure boys do as well as girls, especially in writing
- make sure everyone focuses on improving your progress and helping teachers to develop their teaching skills.

You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard. Well done for showing such pride in your school and in your achievements.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector

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