

St John's VA Church of England Primary School

Thornham Lane, Slattocks, Middleton, Manchester, M24 2SB

Inspection dates 17–18 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- There is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of teaching and learning which has led to variations in the quality of teaching between classes.
- The management of too many subject areas, including science, history and geography, is weak with standards and teaching in these areas inconsistent and sometimes poor.
- Classroom assistants are not being used to their best effect, especially in lessons.
- Pupils are not making the progress they should in some years and are having to catch up in others.
- The school's development planning lacks sufficient rigour to identify the really important issues and put any necessary improvements in place quickly enough.
- Governors have not challenged the headteacher sufficiently or held her to account. As a result improvement has been patchy.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards in English and mathematics are generally above the national average. English is usually better than mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs, as well as those who receive additional government funding through the pupil premium, generally make at least expected and often good progress because of the good individual support and care they receive.
- Good teaching and learning are most frequently found in the Reception class and in the Year 5/6 class.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel very safe and secure.
- Parents are very positive about the welcoming atmosphere of the school in which every child and individual are valued.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed all five teachers in the school. In total six lessons were observed, as well as parts of four other lessons including three sessions that focused on the sounds that letters make. All observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher who was also observed reporting back to teachers on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The inspector spoke to members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority, as well as to staff and pupils. He heard some pupils read and talked to them about their reading habits. He also held informal discussions with a number of pupils. The inspector observed the work pupils were doing in all classes. He also looked at a range of documents relating to performance management and safeguarding, minutes of governing body meetings, the school's improvement plan, monitoring and evaluation records and information on the progress made by pupils, including those receiving extra funding.
- The inspector analysed the 18 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as three written responses from parents.

Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St John's is a small, voluntary aided Church of England primary school, situated on the outskirts of Rochdale, serving a mixed area of semi-rural and urban housing.
- The number of pupils eligible for extra funding through the pupil premium is well below the national average.
- There are few pupils from minority ethnic heritages and none is at an early stage of learning English.
- The percentage of pupils who need extra help is broadly average.
- The school has strong links with the local church community.
- St John's has achieved the Healthy School and Eco School status. It is also a Forest School.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - producing a clear school development plan which is shared with all staff and governors and identifies the priorities for action and strategies to tackle weaknesses
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching and learning is regular and rigorous and that weak teaching is eliminated, improving the awareness of members of the governing body of what goes on in the school and what needs improving so that they can challenge and hold the headteacher and staff fully to account
 - restructuring staff responsibilities to ensure that there are named teachers responsible for the good delivery of each subject
 - ensuring that these subject leaders are held accountable for improving the quality of planning and teaching in their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring that staff and governors have high expectations and that plans are designed to bring about rapid improvement.
- Focus on improving teaching and learning in order to ensure there is less variation across classes by:
 - improving teachers' knowledge and expertise across all subjects
 - ensuring that activities in lessons challenge pupils
 - ensuring teachers' planning for all subjects identifies what the pupils are expected to learn and how this is to be achieved
 - using questioning more effectively to challenge and engage pupils and encourage them to extend their thinking
 - providing clear instructions to enable pupils to be more closely involved in tasks.
- Make sure that classroom assistants work closely with teachers to plan their role in lessons and enable them to:
 - give more individual explanations to the pupils they work with than is possible for the teacher to give to the whole class
 - work alongside the teacher to make the lesson more lively or to generate more challenging discussion
 - ensure that individual children keep concentrating by helping them to answer questions and take an active part in the lesson.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement is inconsistent across the school with pupils making good progress in some classes and weaker progress in others. Pupils make good progress in those lessons where teaching is more consistently good, notably in Reception and in the Year 5/6 class. At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English and mathematics are generally above the national average with English often being the better. This reflects the greater time allocated to improving literacy skills and the better organisation and management of the subject.
- In the past, children entered the school with skills that were broadly average. Now more are entering with below average skills. They get off to a good start in the Reception class with the majority making good progress in developing their speaking, listening and communication skills. The welcoming and safe environment in which they play and learn nurtures their personal and physical development well.
- Progress is inconsistent and better in Years 5 and 6 than at earlier stages. Test results in 2012 show that most pupils made better than expected progress in both English and mathematics. This is because teachers are now tracking pupils' progress more closely and are able to target support more effectively.
- Boys generally achieve less well than girls, but there can be considerable variations from year to year depending on the size and composition of the groups. Girls' writing is more precise, neat and accurate with fewer punctuation and spelling mistakes. Boys more frequently excel at developing their creative and imaginative thinking skills.
- Reading is taught well and pupils are encouraged to read regularly. Younger pupils are developing their reading skills to break down text and read unfamiliar words. But again, there is some inconsistency across the school linked to weaker teaching, especially the sounds that letters make. However, the greater majority of pupils leave school reasonably fluent in their reading.
- The intimate family nature of this small school means that every child is well known and the culture of care ensures that the majority of those pupils with disabilities or special educational needs and those who receive additional funding support through the pupil premium make good progress. However, the more-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged.
- Standards in a range of subjects, including science, history and geography, are variable and often poor. Insufficient time is allocated to enable pupils to study these subjects in sufficient depth. On some days, pupils are involved in literacy and literacy-related activities for almost the whole day. The quality of written work outside literacy lessons is very variable and pupils are not encouraged to transfer what they have learned to writing in other subjects.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although good teaching was observed, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between classes and across subjects. As a result, there are significant gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subjects, with the exception of English and mathematics.
- In the good lessons, pupils were keen to take part and offer their opinions and share ideas. In weak lessons, pupils were subdued and lacking in interest with able pupils, in particular, not being challenged by the activities set. Planning was often good in English and literacy-based lessons because the teachers were confident in what they were delivering and pupils were familiar with classroom routines. Planning in other subjects was variable and often focused on the task rather than what the response of pupils might be.
- An exception was a particularly good lesson on Ancient Greece. Here the clarity of the instructions ensured that pupils were clear about the roles they were to play in researching and then designing Greek costumes. The teacher ensured that all pupils understood the task by checking to see if they could repeat the instructions. The teacher's questioning encouraged pupils to explain in detail what they were expected to do and as a result the lesson ran

smoothly.

- In the weaker lessons questions were shallow, the answers were obvious and the teachers talked too much. Space was not well used so that pupils could not see the resources or what was being demonstrated. As a result, they lost concentration. In the weaker phonics lessons, pupils made little progress because they were given too little time to practise what they were being taught.
- Literacy work was marked consistently and accurately across the school. Pupils' attention was drawn to spelling and punctuation mistakes as well as grammatical errors. Targets were clearly identified and pupils knew these well.
- However, there was too much variation in the quality of feedback to pupils. Some was effective and demonstrated good practice, for example when pupils were required to signal a clear opening and closing statement in their writing. Marking in mathematics and some other subjects was less precise, often consisting of a tick with over-use of praise, rather than any clear guidance for improvement.
- Tracking of pupils' progress is precise and accurate in literacy and mathematics, allowing teachers to identify which pupils need support. This has helped to ensure that pupils of all abilities are able to make at least expected progress. Teachers have little accurate information about how well pupils are doing in other subjects.
- In too many lessons, classroom assistants are currently not being employed effectively. Too much of their time is taken up trying to get pupils to pay attention to the teacher. Teachers rarely involve them when planning their lessons apart from in the Reception class where they have a more clearly defined role. Classroom assistants provide better support for pupils when working with small groups or through one-to-one tuition.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The pupils are inquisitive, well mannered and welcoming and every one of them is valued. In the words of one parent, 'All the school staff, including lunchtime supervisors and the school administrator, are friendly and display a very caring nature with the children'.
- Pupils feel very safe and enjoy coming to school. Attendance is broadly average but, because of the small numbers in the school, one child's absence can have a disproportionate impact on attendance figures. Parents have few concerns about behaviour and bullying of any kind and pupils are adamant that bullying does not occur. They have confidence in the adults in the school that this would be dealt with swiftly and fairly if it occurred.
- The school is expanding, with a particular increase lower down in the number of children with learning difficulties. One of the reasons for this is that parents are impressed by the warmth and welcome of the school. The school supports these pupils well and there is good contact with a range of agencies, which provide support when this is required. Parents value the support the school provides and communication between home and school is very good.
- Behaviour in lessons is generally good although pupils did comment that, on occasions, there is some minor disruption from specific individuals because they lose interest and get bored or frustrated. On the whole, pupils with any behavioural difficulties are managed well in class.
- The communal atmosphere that pervades the school is clearly in evidence at lunchtime when the whole school sits down to the mid-day meal. The emphasis is on eating together and getting to know each other. There is a gentle buzz as pupils share stories, plan activities and develop good table manners. They all get a chance to eat at the 'Captains table' with its spotted table cloth, shiny cutlery and the opportunity to eat with the headteacher as she gets them to talk and feel special.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership requires improvement because there is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of the teaching and learning. This has led to variations in the quality of teaching across classes. As a result, pupils are not making the progress they should in some years and are having to catch up in others.

- The headteacher has been very supportive in the care and nurture of her staff, the majority of whom are relatively inexperienced. She has taken good advantage of the local authority's training programme for newly qualified teachers and has encouraged her younger staff to further their expertise in areas such as special educational needs and early years.
- The local authority has provided good-quality advice to support teachers and governors and understands the need to provide additional support for small schools with a high proportion of relatively inexperienced staff.
- Teachers have taken advantage of professional development opportunities, which are supporting improvements in the monitoring and support provided for disabled pupils and those who need extra help, especially in the class containing Years 3 and 4 pupils. Interventions are more quickly initiated and there is clear evidence that these pupils are making expected and sometimes good progress. Equally in the Reception class, children's experiences have improved especially in the better use of outdoor play and the more extensive access to a wide range of stimulating toys and resources. This is enriched by weekly Forest School experiences in the nearby school grounds, fields and woodland where pupils learn practical skills. This was an area for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, the outdoor play area remains drab and needs a splash of colour.
- Less attention has been paid to ensuring that the management of all subjects is good. The teaching of literacy is well organised and effective but the teaching of mathematics is less well supported and relies too much on individual teachers' knowledge and expertise. Equally, nobody is accountable for, or leading on, the improvement and development of a number of subjects, including history, geography, design and technology, and science. As a result, standards and quality of work in these areas are inconsistent and sometimes poor.
- Setting clear targets for teachers' performance has recently been improved and these are now linked more closely to specific expectations regarding improvements in standards and responsibility. These have not been in place long enough to be able to judge their impact.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of out-of-classroom experiences and learn from visitors to their school. Residential visits and opportunities to meet visitors, such as Josie Cichockyj, a Paralympic champion, are beneficial and exciting events, which support pupils' social development well and raise awareness of the world beyond the school. However, insufficient consideration is given about using these rich experiences to support better learning in the classroom because the planning and management of some subjects is weak.
- Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated in this school. As one pupil remarked, 'We are all one big happy family'.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements. The school provides pupils with a good range of opportunities to stay safe, including when using the internet.
- Effective use has been made of the extra pupil-premium funding to provide specific children with additional help in the classroom and to enable them to experience a range of educational visits and enrichment activities. As a result, they are making faster progress than previously.
- Weaknesses in the management and organisation of the school and subjects have not been accurately identified in the school development plan. The lack of accountability for some aspects of the school's work and the lack of precise detail required to bring about improvements has prevented this school from becoming a good school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have not held the school sufficiently to account in recent years. As a result, the school has been a comfortable rather than a dynamic place in which to work and improvements have been patchy. Although supportive, governors have lacked the knowledge and skills required to analyse the school's work and to challenge and support the headteacher. They have not been given a sufficiently clear picture of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the school. However, the situation is changing. Under the leadership of their new chair, governors are getting to grips with the work of the school and issues which have hindered improvement. These have included a closer involvement in drawing up performance management targets for the headteacher and staff as well as working on the school's new self-evaluation.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105806
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	402989

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	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marian Catterall
Headteacher	Beryl Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2008
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