

St John Catholic Primary School

Berry Lane, Mill End, Rickmansworth, WD3 7HG

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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

- Standards in writing are not good enough because pupils' understanding of key skills does not grow evenly year-on-year and their errors and misunderstandings are not always corrected.
- The rate of pupils' progress through the school is not good over time because the quality of teaching varies.
- More-able pupils are not making the progress they should because some teachers give them tasks that do not build on what they already know. Some tasks they are given do not make them think sufficiently. Sometimes teachers do not realise quickly enough that they understand, and are ready for something harder.
- Teachers' guidance for pupils is not always timely. Sometimes they intervene too quickly so pupils do not have the chance to think things through for themselves and sometimes pupils can be left without the help they need for too long.
- Pupils are not always encouraged to contribute to discussions.
- While they have begun to improve the quality of teaching, school leaders and governors have not yet made sure that teaching is consistently good so that standards rise.

The school has the following strengths

- Inspectors agree with parents that St John has improved since the previous inspection. One typical parent commented, 'I've noticed a massive improvement since the last inspection.'
- The rate of progress has improved over the past two years.
- Pupils say the new way of teaching subjects is fun and interesting.
- Attendance is well above average and pupils say, 'School is a fun place to be.'
- The vast majority of pupils behave well. All say they feel safe in school, and parents confirm this.
- School leaders and governors have a good grasp of what is wrong with the school and have begun to make improvements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons. Many were joint observations with the headteacher.
- The inspectors made other visits to classes, looked at pupils' workbooks and listened to pupils reading.
- The inspectors held discussions with pupils, the headteacher, other staff, governors, parents, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 73 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View and spoke to approximately 20 parents. The responses to 14 staff questionnaires were also considered.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including: the school's own information on pupils' progress; planning and monitoring documentation; the school's view of its own performance; records of how the school uses its funding, especially how the money from pupil premium is spent; records relating to behaviour and attendance; and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Robert Greatrex, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Vreta Bagilhole

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a slightly smaller-than-average sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (the extra government funding for pupils looked after by the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and some other groups) is low.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is low.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are taught in seven classes, each with one age group.
- An independent pre-school is housed in the school and did not form part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to good by making sure that:
 - guidance is timely so pupils are neither given too little time to try to work things out for themselves, nor are left too long so they struggle
 - in discussions particularly, make sure pupils are able contribute their thoughts and ideas.
- Raise the standards of more-able pupils by:
 - planning lessons that build on what pupils already know and get them to work at a sufficient pace
 - regularly including opportunities that enable pupils to challenge and make them think for themselves
 - recognising when pupils understand, and immediately moving them to more difficult work.
- Raise standards in writing by:
 - increasing the knowledge and understanding of teachers so that they all know how to correct pupils' misunderstandings and errors
 - ensuring learning over time builds and develops pupils' understanding of key skills, so they make better progress.
- Improve leadership and management by making sure that leaders, managers and governors increase the pace of change to improve pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- The rate of pupils' progress is improving but it is still insufficient, particularly for the more-able pupils, and standards in writing are still lagging behind so achievement requires improvement.
- Children enter Reception with skills and experiences that are a little above those expected at this age. They settle quickly because of good links with the pre-school, from which many come. They make expected levels of progress.
- Over the past two years, pupils have made less than expected progress in Years 1 and 2 so they have fallen behind by the time they take national assessments at the end of Year 2. Good teaching in Year 2 is now accelerating progress for that class.
- During the same period of time, year-on-year progress has improved in Years 3 to 6. In 2011, progress was at a slower rate than expected. In 2012, it had caught up. In 2013, it was a little above. This does not tell the full story, however. Progress still varies from year-to-year because of inconsistencies in teaching.
- In 2013, Year 6 pupils reached levels that were broadly as expected by this age. However, this same group of pupils, at the end of Year 2, had been well above average. In relative terms, their progress had been slower during the four years so they had slipped behind pupils elsewhere.
- Reading standards are improving. Below average results in the Year 1 screening of phonics (how letters link to sounds) led to a new method being introduced, with pupils being taught in ability rather than age groups. As a result, pupils are making quicker progress.
- Standards in writing lag behind those in other basic subjects because some teachers do not have the knowledge themselves to be able to correct pupils' misunderstandings, leaving pupils with misunderstandings.
- There are not enough pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding to comment on their attainment without identifying them. Last year, those eligible pupils who did not have special educational needs made progress similar to, or greater than, their peers in English and mathematics.
- Recent quicker progress partly stems from the much more effective use of information about pupils' progress. Any pupils falling behind receive good extra help, which is checked and changed if it is not working. As a result, less-able pupils and those disabled or with special educational needs make relatively good progress.

The quality of teaching **requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. However, it is inconsistent and not enough is good to promote good achievement, particularly in writing and for the more-able pupils.
- Pupils' speaking and listening skills are generally good so that they can explain their ideas clearly in discussions. Some teachers, even when they have planned an interesting discussion point, do not ask enough pupils to join in, so some contribute little to the activity.

- In a few classes, routines are not yet established, nor are expectations clear to pupils. As a result, some pupils waste time or fidget.
- In some classes, more-able pupils do not learn sufficiently at a pace matched to the task or their abilities. Some tasks are too easy, so they learn little. On other occasions, some teachers do not recognise when pupils have understood and go over again what they know already. Occasionally, when the tasks have been mastered, teachers do not give them new, tasks to tackle that really makes them think.
- Sometimes, teachers are not sufficiently aware of when pupils are struggling and need a little extra help. On other occasions, teachers do not give pupils sufficient thinking time between asking them a question and giving them the answer.
- Teachers often use pupils' work to illustrate what they want pupils to learn. For example in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, the teacher selected a good piece of work to demonstrate what she was looking for.
- Most teachers provide clear explanations of what pupils are to learn and how they will know they have achieved it. As a result, pupils know where to focus their efforts.
- Marking is much more effective than at the previous inspection because teachers use one system consistently, so pupils know what to look for in all of their lessons. Teachers also check that pupils follow up on the advice provided.
- Generally, positive relationships between pupils and staff mean that lessons flow smoothly and pupils want to please.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of pupils behave well. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are very positive. They take pride in their work and how it is presented, and want to do their best. Even when the teaching fails to capture their interest, most pupils work hard and do the best they can.
- Pupils and their parents feel the level of care is good. For example, the club for young carers gives them an opportunity to talk about how they feel, and share concerns and possible solutions. Pupils are confident staff will resolve any misbehaviour, including rare instances of bullying, quickly.
- Pupils have a good understanding of safety, including how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The 'Chaplaincy Group' for example develops pupils' spirituality very effectively.
- Attendance is high and pupils are punctual to school. They and their parents say they enjoy school and look forward to coming.
- Pupils are very considerate of those less fortunate than themselves and regularly raise funds to help them. They have a good sense of 'community'. The eldest act as mentors for the new arrivals, others regularly visit senior citizens.

- Behaviour and safety are not yet outstanding because at times some pupils lose interest when teaching does not sufficiently engage them.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- While there have been improvements since the previous inspection, they are not sufficiently secure to make enough impact. The school struggles to recruit new teachers. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, writing levels are still too low, and progress is not quick enough, particularly for the more able.
- The headteacher is clear and accurate in her judgment of teaching, and where it needs to improve. Some underperforming teachers have targets and time scales to reach them. She and the governors have implemented useful training, and this is making a difference to some teachers who understand where and how they need to improve. However, the impact is not universal and inconsistencies remain.
- Since the previous inspection, subject leaders look more closely at teaching and learning so modifications are in the right areas. While writing has improved, more needs to be done and more quickly. The national funding for sport is spent effectively on experts with the knowledge to help pupils 'fine tune' their physical skills. These are developing well and pupils are reaching a good level of performance. Pupils enjoy these sustained energetic activities which supports their health. At the same time, staff observe sessions to build their teaching expertise further.
- The curriculum is much improved since the previous inspection. Subjects are linked well and increasing use is made of opportunities to practise writing skills. Pupils are very enthused. 'You learn in a fun way' and 'It crosses every subject' were two typical comments. Visits and a good range of before and after-school activities enrich learning further.
- The partnership with parents is strong and parents are generally very supportive. Recruitment was the only concern voiced to inspectors.
- Good links with local and church schools are beneficial. Pupils work together, for example at the time leading up to transfer to high school. Improvements in marking began with staff links to these schools.
- The local authority has given the school good support since the previous inspection and helped begin the improvement process.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very well organised because the Chair is a determined leader who clearly understands that the quality of teaching is key to better achievement for pupils. The relatively high number of newly appointed governors has been very carefully chosen to bring new skills, and are forming an effective team, but have had too little time to make an impact. Since the previous inspection, governance has improved. More training means governors can use information, including that about pupils' progress, to better direct the school. Regular visits give useful firsthand knowledge with which to ask questions of school leaders. Spending is monitored closely, including the impact of pupil premium funding. Safeguarding and other legal requirements are seen as paramount. However, maintaining a full complement of governors is a challenge they struggle to achieve.

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	117475
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425262

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	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Beaton
Headteacher	Paula Smith
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2012
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