

Full report

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Hillside Lane, Great Amwell, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9SE

Inspection dates

11–12 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have acted quickly to introduce improvements following the previous inspection. They are fully aware of the quality of education across the school and they have clear plans to build on recent successes.
- The curriculum supports pupils' personal and academic development effectively. It prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and life in modern Britain.
- Leaders use additional funding for pupil premium, special educational needs, physical education (PE) and sport efficiently. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well as a result. All pupils benefit from access to a wide range of sporting activities.
- Leaders have made good use of advice they have commissioned from external agencies. As a result, teaching in the early years, phonics provision and governance have all improved.
- Members of the governing body know the school well. They provide appropriate levels of support and challenge to leaders to achieve whole-school priorities for improvement.
- The early years provides a good start to children's education. Children make good progress in their learning and personal, social and emotional development.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Attendance, however, is below the national average, mainly due to term-time holidays. Inconsistencies in the way some teachers use assessment information to plan learning means that some activities are not challenging enough, particularly for the most able pupils in mathematics.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, and current pupils make good progress across most subjects. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is typically well above average. The depth and quality of pupils' work in history and geography is not as strong as in other subjects.
- A small minority of parents are dissatisfied with the work of the school, feeling that communication with senior leaders could be improved.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment information to plan activities that challenge the most able pupils so they make stronger progress in mathematics
 - strengthening the depth and quality of the curriculum in history and geography so pupils develop a more systematic understanding of these subjects
 - developing strategies to raise attendance to the national average and to reduce the number of term-time holidays
 - working with governors to address the concerns of the small minority of parents who are dissatisfied with the work of the school and communication with leaders.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have maintained the good quality of education during a period of staff turnover. Leaders acted quickly to address recommendations from the previous inspection. They have successfully made improvements to the early years, phonics teaching, governance and the mathematics curriculum.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have clear expectations of staff and pupils. They have established a nurturing culture in the school with a clear set of values promoting a positive ethos for learning and personal development. As a result, pupils are happy and most make good progress in a range of subjects. As one parent commented, 'This is a friendly school and my child gets lots of help and support to help him learn.'
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and of where there is scope for further improvement. They have set clear targets for pupils' academic achievement and have identified priorities for improving further the quality of education so that pupils' good progress is sustained.
- Subject leaders are becoming increasingly involved in checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They share senior leaders' vision and ambition for the school. They have benefited from support from external advisers and partnership work with other schools to develop their subject skills and expertise.
- Leaders provide appropriate professional development opportunities for all staff. Staff feel valued and are fully supportive of school leaders.
- The headteacher is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and in this role she ensures that pupils' needs are accurately identified and met. As a result, pupils with SEND typically make good progress.
- Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils are provided for well. Staff identify pupils' barriers to learning and use of additional funding supports their learning effectively. Disadvantaged pupils have access to the full range of activities offered by the school. They make strong progress and attain at least as well as other pupils nationally.
- The primary PE and sport premium is used well. The leader responsible for PE has a clear understanding of how extra funding benefits pupils. Pupils have access to a range of sporting activities including clubs and competitions, and the funding provides development opportunities for teaching staff. Pupils appreciate the opportunities that they have to be physically active, and they have had the opportunity to participate in competitive sport. During the inspection, pupils were seen developing their cricket skills in a well-organised lunchtime activity led by a specialist coach.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum provides opportunities to experience learning in a broad range of subjects. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about learning in science, art, computing and PE. Leaders have not ensured that history or geography are planned with sufficient precision to allow pupils to develop a systematic understanding of these subjects.

- Leaders have ensured that a comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, assemblies, extra-curricular trips and visits contribute strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders ensure that the curriculum prepares pupils well for life in modern British society.
- Through their regular checks on teaching, learning and assessment, leaders have identified that not all teachers make the best use of assessment information to plan mathematics activities with enough challenge, especially for the most able. A new approach to the planning and teaching of mathematics activities has been implemented and this is evident in pupils' books and in most teaching. Nevertheless, this way of working is still very new and not all teachers are sufficiently skilled in implementing it.
- Strategies implemented to improve pupils' attendance, including applications for fixed-penalty fines to reduce term-time family holidays, have not resulted in overall attendance rates reaching the national average for the past two years.
- A small but significant minority of parents who responded to Ofsted's Parent View survey and provided comments via free-text expressed dissatisfaction with some aspects of the school's work. In particular, these views included a desire for improved communication with senior leaders.

Governance of the school

- Governors have responded quickly to findings in the previous inspection report about improving their ability to hold the school to account for the achievement of all groups of pupils. Over the course of the last 12 months, governors have made good use of professional support to help them make better use of performance information. They have sharpened their understanding of the school's priorities for further improvement and they are asking a greater range of probing questions to test out information given to them by senior leaders.
- Following a skills audit undertaken by the governing body, plans are in place to change the structure of governing body meetings. These plans are designed so that more governors, especially those with the strongest backgrounds in teaching and learning, can be more fully involved in decisions about learning and the curriculum.
- Governors make regular visits to the school to gain an independent view of its work. Under the leadership of the new chair of the governing body, governors are strengthening how they contribute to self-evaluation and improvement planning and how they check on progress towards achieving priorities. Governors now have a more accurate view of the quality of education provided and ensure that they have the training needed to fulfil their roles effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors have established a culture where safeguarding is at the forefront of the school's work. Procedures to check that adults are suitable to work in school are thorough. The records of the checks carried out are accurately maintained and regularly checked by senior leaders. The child protection policy reflects the latest

published guidance and is updated at least annually. Governors ensure that other policies related to safeguarding are kept up to date to reflect changes in published guidance or legal requirements.

- Leaders provide staff with annual training and regular updates so that they can recognise signs and risks of harm and keep children safe. This includes training so that staff are aware of the signs of extremism and radicalisation. Adults working in the school are confident about when and how they should refer any concerns.
- Leaders maintain accurate and appropriately detailed records of concerns, which include details of actions taken. They monitor the impact of actions and support for pupils' welfare and well-being. Leaders ensure that pupils and families receive the help that they need. When necessary, they know how to make referrals to other agencies promptly and follow up concerns promptly.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe. They appreciate the support from Year 6 pupils who act as playground carers, ensuring that everyone is safe and happy at breaktimes. Staff and the majority of parents agree that pupils are safe in school. Pupils learn how to stay safe in a variety of situations in ways that are appropriate for their age. For example, pupils confidently told inspectors about how they know how to stay safe when working online or using social media.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The vast majority of teaching across the school is effective and supports most pupils to make good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their pupils well. Teachers know individual pupils' barriers to learning and they adapt activities and provide help to overcome them. Learning support assistants typically provide effective support for the pupils they work with. This helps disadvantaged pupils with SEND to achieve well.
- Teachers have established positive relationships in their classrooms. Pupils grow into confident learners. They work with others collaboratively when asked to do so but also develop skills independently. As a result, most pupils are willing to contribute ideas, and they usually respond well to teachers' directions.
- Teachers usually use questioning effectively to check and probe pupils' understanding. Teachers in most classes typically identify and address pupils' misconceptions quickly.
- The majority of parents who submitted responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, indicated that their children are taught well. Nevertheless, a significant minority of those who responded disagreed. Some parents also said they would like to receive more information about their children's progress.
- The teaching of writing is effective. Pupils learn to write for different audiences and purposes and learn the technical aspects of grammar and punctuation. However, most teachers do not do enough to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to practise and apply their writing skills sufficiently in history and geography. In these subjects, pupils do not confidently demonstrate similar standards in their written work to those seen in their English books.

- Reading is promoted well throughout the school. Recent, new approaches to the teaching of reading in groups with an adult are being implemented effectively and these are improving the level of challenge in the texts pupils study. Pupils learn and apply their knowledge of phonics to help them when they come across unfamiliar words. Pupils who read to inspectors did so with fluency and understanding appropriate to their current levels of attainment.
- Teachers ensure that in mathematics pupils have the opportunity to develop and practise calculation skills and develop their understanding of shape, space and measure. Pupils confidently apply their mathematics skills in science by carrying out calculations and presenting results of experiments in graphs and tables. Teachers are currently increasing opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their reasoning skills. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes, nor is the impact on pupils' achievement, especially for the most able pupils.
- Subject leaders help ensure that the content of most lessons is at the right depth for pupils' ages to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Assessment systems in some subjects are not fully developed. This is particularly evident in geography and history, where the overall quality of work is weaker. In these subjects, teachers do not consistently identify what pupils need to do in order to deepen their understanding or develop skills further.
- Most teachers routinely use their knowledge of pupils and assessment information to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' capabilities and interests. Occasionally, teachers set activities that are too easy for some pupils. On these occasions, some pupils lose interest and talk to other pupils, which disturbs the flow of learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' well-being and personal development are high priorities for teachers.
- The school supports pupils well, including pupils who join from other schools and they generally settle in quickly. Pupils show a good understanding of why they should learn about and respect different cultures and beliefs. They show a good understanding of tolerance and equality. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about and discuss issues such as racism and gender stereotypes in ways appropriate for their age. Pupils told inspectors they know that, 'It's OK to be different.' Instances of racist or derogatory language are extremely rare.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They ensure that individuals get help tailored to their needs in times of difficulty. Several parents gave specific examples of how the school has supported families and pupils who were facing problems. Leaders ensure that the school can offer programmes of support for pupils' social and emotional well-being, including from external agencies when necessary.
- Pupils have opportunities to show responsibility, for example through being members

of the school council, sports ambassadors who help run clubs, or by raising funds for charities. Pupils' learning about democracy, especially in PSHE, is reinforced through elections for members of the school council.

- Trips and residential visits, the variety of clubs and activities provided and the range of physical and sporting activities, including the annual 'sports week', also contribute to pupils' health and social development. Pupils value and understand the importance of education. Looking after the school's hens, hatching chicks in an incubator and learning outdoors in the woodland area all contribute to pupils' wider appreciation of the breadth of learning inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils show a very good understanding of bullying in all of its forms and of the harm it can cause. Pupils say that bullying is rare, and they are confident that teachers deal with it well when it does occur. Staff and the majority of parents agree that this is the case.
- The majority of responses to Parent View and almost all of the parents who spoke directly to inspectors were positive about the support and care provided by school. Pupils say that there is always an adult or a Year 6 carer that they can go to if they are sad or are worried. They are confident that teachers and other adults will help them. Nevertheless, a significant minority of parents feel that leaders do not always address parents' concerns about pupils' development needs quickly enough.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is typically good. Pupils usually settle quickly and respond well to teachers' directions. Movement in lessons and around the school is calm and orderly. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils play and socialise sensibly. They are polite, helpful, sociable and respectful to one another and to adults and visitors.
- There are very few incidents of a serious nature. There have been no exclusions. This shows that pupils learn to make the right choices about their behaviour.
- Adults have high expectations of behaviour and model these well, including to the youngest children in the early years. Adults usually apply the school's rewards and behaviour systems well to reward good and improved behaviour and to reinforce adults' expectations.
- Attendance rates have been below the national average for the last two years, although the percentage of pupils who are persistent non-attenders is well below the national average. On the occasions where teachers have planned activities that are not appropriately challenging, some pupils lose focus on their learning and need to be directed back to learning by the teacher.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils currently in the school, including the most able pupils and those with low prior attainment, are making good progress across different subjects and year groups. This is because the majority of teaching is effective, and most activities are well

matched to pupils' capabilities. Nevertheless, the progress made by the most able pupils in mathematics is not as strong as in reading or writing.

- Published data must be treated with caution due to the relatively small numbers in each cohort. However, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 has been broadly in line the national average with since 2016. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has improved greatly since 2015 and in the last three years it has been either in line with or above the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. At the end of key stage 1, their attainment in reading, writing, mathematics and science is in line with that of other pupils nationally and, as seen in the work in their books, they continue to make good progress across key stage 2.
- Pupils with SEND typically make good progress. Teachers and learning support assistants work well to identify what help they need, and they help them to develop independence in their learning. Leaders evaluate carefully the impact of the support provided on the progress of individual pupils.
- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is well above the national average. Although pupils make similar progress to other pupils' nationally, some have not made strong enough progress to attain the higher standard in mathematics by the end of Year 6. Teaching is not developing their skills in reasoning and problem-solving well enough. Pupils use and apply their writing and mathematical skills confidently in most other subjects, although this is not sufficiently well developed in history and geography, where practice is inconsistent. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is evident, and they are encouraged to read for pleasure. They develop the skills needed in the key subjects to prepare them for the next stage in their education.
- Pupils demonstrate good understanding in a range of subjects. For example, pupils show that they have developed the ability to carry out scientific investigations and draw correct conclusions in science. Attainment in French is particularly strong. Pupils' understanding in history and geography is less secure.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have addressed areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, and have implemented actions to improve provision for early reading and writing.
- Children are confident learners who are able to involve themselves deeply in imaginative play. They play alongside and with each other, typically showing kindness and collaboration. Children's personal, social and emotional development is supported well. A carefully considered induction programme helps children to settle quickly into the Reception class. Parents recognise the care shown by adults and appreciate the opportunities to visit the setting more frequently if their children feel nervous about starting school.
- Adults model behaviour well and encourage children to be polite and cooperative. This develops children's communication skills and contributes effectively to their personal,

social and emotional development.

- Most children start school with skills and abilities broadly typical for their age. They have made increasingly strong progress in recent years, so that the proportion attaining a good level of development at the end of the early years has increased and is now securely in line with the national average. Children currently in Reception are making good progress in all areas of learning.
- The early years curriculum provides children with activities that cover all areas of learning. The outside area is used well to support children's learning. There are a variety of activities that support their understanding of number and shape and their early writing skills. Children are confident enough in their writing to produce sentences including, 'I have long legs and bright blue wings. I am a crane fly.' The focus on reading and teaching phonics contributes well to this. Children enjoy books and reading. The curriculum and teaching prepare children well for key stage 1.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All expected requirements are met. Children say that they feel safe in school and know who to talk to if someone is unkind to them.
- Adults use their observations and assessments to check children's progress systematically, especially children with SEND and disadvantaged children. Leaders ensure that any extra help provided is supporting these children to make good progress.
- Leadership is strong and effective, with vision and ambition for continuous improvement in teaching and the curriculum. For example, leaders have plans to add to the outdoor area by creating a music area with pans and tin cans, introducing larger construction equipment and developing opportunities for gardening.

School details

Unique reference number	117432
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10067132

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bernard Murphy
Headteacher	Lydia Hunt
Telephone number	01920 870135
Website	www.sjbaptist.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@sjbaptist.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 June 2018

Information about this school

- St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School is a smaller-than-average primary school, with one class in each year group from Reception to Year 6.
- St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School has formal designation as a Church of England school. A separate section 48 inspection of the school's ethos, the content of collective worship and the quality of religious education was conducted in March 2016. The report is available on the school's website.
- The school works collaboratively and informally with other local schools.
- The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care plan is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is lower

than that in most primary schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across all year groups. Some of these observations were carried out with the headteacher. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects, listened to some pupils read and reviewed the school's assessment information.
- The inspection team reviewed a range of school documents and policies, including behaviour and attendance information, information about governance arrangements, minutes of the local governing body meetings, governors' visit reports and documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, met with groups of pupils and spoke to pupils when observing them at informal times, such as playtime and lunchtime, to gather their views on the school.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body and senior leaders and spoke to representative from the local authority. Members of the inspection team held meetings with subject leaders and a newly qualified teacher.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke with parents before school and also reviewed the 46 responses and the free-text responses submitted to Parent View.

Inspection team

Nick Rudman, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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