

Inspection of a good school: St John's RC School (Essex)

Turpins Lane, Woodford Bridge, Essex IG8 8AX

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 December 2021

Outcome

St John's RC School (Essex) continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St John's, including those in the sixth form, are happy, safe and well cared for. Leaders know pupils well and have high expectations of what they are able to achieve. Staff plan fun activities that interest pupils and help them to learn. Pupils told us that they love going on the bikes, singing, playing football, going shopping and having friends.

Pupils get a lot of support from the teachers and therapists. This helps them to behave and communicate well. Staff help pupils to explain how they are feeling. Pupils learn to do this by using objects, pictures, sign language or words. This helps pupils to let staff know what they like and want to do. Staff are very alert to pupils' feelings and emotions. They know exactly when to step in to provide extra care and attention so that learning can continue without interruption. Bullying is very rare. When it does happen, staff deal with it effectively.

Leaders ensure that pupils leave the school ready for the next stage in their lives, be it education, work or training. Pupils gain the skills and knowledge they need to become more independent and confident. This is the main goal for all pupils. It is shared by staff, governors, parents and carers.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils have complex learning, communication, physical and social emotional needs. Many of the pupils do not use spoken language. The school's own therapy team has worked closely with leaders to devise three different academic curriculum pathways to meet pupils' needs effectively. As a result, pupils are supported well to do their very best. They experience success and are prepared for the next stage in their learning. Together, therapists and teachers set or amend the targets in pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plans) so that they are relevant and meaningful. This collaborative working is a strength of the school.

Since the last inspection, leaders have brought in a new assessment system. All staff have been trained to use this approach to assess and monitor pupils' progress towards meeting their EHC plan targets. Staff are now confident in capturing pupils' very small steps of progress. They identify pupils' next steps across all areas of the curriculum. Staff share this information, including visual images of pupils' learning, with parents. However, at present, leaders do not capture what students can do at home and in the wider community as well as they would like. They have clear plans in place to work more effectively with parents to achieve this.

Leaders ensure that staff are trained to teach and promote reading well. This is because they know that developing pupils' love of books is important. Many of the pupils do not use spoken language. Teachers use signs, symbols and photographs to help develop these pupils' reading skills. Teachers check pupils' understanding carefully. The small number of pupils who read well do so with confidence because teachers have ensured that they have learned the phonic skills they need to decode unfamiliar words. Staff read to pupils regularly. They use stories where pupils are encouraged to touch, taste, smell and feel items relating to the story to capture their interest. Staff also create or use stories based on pupils' own interests. This motivates and engages pupils in reading. All pupils can access reading successfully.

The school delivers a broad curriculum, which is well organised. It allows pupils to build on what they already know and can do. Form teachers deliver most of the curriculum subjects. Subject specialists teach physical education, food technology and music. Leaders have good knowledge of the subjects they are responsible for. They are given time to monitor how well the subject is taught across the school.

Promoting pupils' personal and social development is a key aspect of every curriculum subject. Pupils are encouraged to build confidence and prepare for adulthood. School council members spoken to by inspectors were very proud of their role in helping to improve the facilities in the school. They told inspectors that they were taught about their rights and responsibilities and how everyone should respect each other, whatever their differences may be.

Leaders have developed an age-appropriate relationships and sex education programme. This is part of a wider programme that includes healthy eating, independence and life skills, online safety and safety in the community. As a result, pupils develop many essential skills around self-help, independence and keeping themselves safe.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, many of the wider enrichment activities have stopped. Pupils have only recently been able to continue with travel training and visits to the local shops.

Pupils' behaviour is highly positive. They learn the school's routines and expectations very well. This was evident during the inspection in the way in which the whole school evacuated quickly and with a minimum of fuss when the fire alarm sounded. Leaders have created a caring, warm and welcoming school. Classrooms have a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Pupils are motivated in their tasks. This helps pupils to learn well.

The school is led and managed well. Governors are knowledgeable and understand their role in school. They challenge and support leaders appropriately. Leaders have built positive relationships with staff. They are well aware of the workload pressures that exist. Staff appreciate the efforts leaders are making to reduce unnecessary workload.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that further developing systems for checking pupils' progress to include information from parents about how students apply skills taught in school within the home, and in a range of contexts, may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding. All staff and governors understand and carry out their safeguarding responsibilities well. Leaders have recently introduced a more effective reporting system. They have found that this has made it easier for staff to record any concerns about pupils' well-being. Senior leaders follow up on these concerns immediately. Pupils' absence is followed up swiftly to make sure they are safe.

All staff have completed safeguarding training. They have a clear understanding of the ways in which pupils are vulnerable. Parents are confident that their children are safe in school. Staff give great support to families. They work closely with other agencies and services to provide pupils with effective support.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' systems for checking the progress pupils make do not always include information from parents that demonstrates how pupils are able to apply their different skills in a range of contexts. This does not give leaders the deepest understanding of how well pupils achieve across subjects and within the wider community. Leaders should continue to work on developing systems that enable leaders and parents to share and exchange information routinely.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	115466
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10211040
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dianne Tranmer
Headteacher	Wendy Killilea
Website	www.stjohnsrcschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St John's is a non-maintained special school. The school provides education for pupils aged five to 19 years with moderate and severe learning difficulties. The needs of pupils on roll have become increasingly complex in recent years.
- The school has a Catholic ethos and is in the Diocese of Brentwood.
- Pupils from 11 different local authorities attend the school.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- The inspectors met with the executive principal, the headteacher, two assistant headteachers, a speech and language therapist, the occupational therapist and a group of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders and other staff, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans, saw a range of clubs and activities and spoke to leaders about some other subjects. Inspectors spoke to members of the school council and listened to pupils in each key stage read. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day, and spoke to staff about pupils' wider development.
- Inspectors held discussions with the designated leader for safeguarding, scrutinised the school's single central record of employment and vetting checks and spoke with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 70 parents who responded to the school's own questionnaire and 4 parents who made comments on Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also reviewed the comments made by 50 staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey and reviewed 30 pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Cindy Impey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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