

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOHN'S CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL

Bebington, Wirral

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105080

Headteacher: Mr P Sharp

Reporting inspector: Mrs Christine Huard
27290

Dates of inspection: 5th - 6th November 2001

Inspection number: 195105

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	7 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Old Chester Road Bebington Wirral Merseyside
Postcode:	CH63 7LH
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr P Hughes
Date of previous inspection:	June 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St John's Catholic Junior is a small school situated in Bebington on the Wirral Peninsula. There are 218 girls and boys, aged between 7 and 11. There are slightly more boys than girls attending the school. Pupils are from a wide range of backgrounds and some travel a considerable distance to attend this school. The school serves the parishes of St John's, New Ferry and St Luke's, Spital. Only a tiny minority of pupils, well below the national average, are from ethnic minority backgrounds and nearly all pupils speak English as their first language. There are 28 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs. At 13 per cent this is below the national average. A very few of these pupils receive specialist help for moderate learning difficulties and social and communication skills. One pupil has a statement of special educational need. This is below the national average. Thirty-one per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is above the national average. The attainment of pupils entering the school in Year 3 is broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St John's is a good school with many very good features. Over the last four years, standards have improved in English, mathematics and science in line with national trends but at a higher rate. Relative weaknesses, such as extended writing, have been identified for action in the school development plan and action taken is beginning to help improve pupils' learning and achievement. Teaching is good throughout the school and often very good in Years 5 and 6. Care is taken to make appropriate provision for pupils of all abilities. The additional support provided in class enables pupils who have learning difficulties, and those who find concentration a problem, to make good progress. Appropriate support is provided for the very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future, which is shared by staff, governors and parents alike. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school is led and managed very well by the headteacher, senior management team and governors.
- Standards achieved by pupils in mathematics and science are high and in English they are above average, when compared with pupils from similar schools.
- The school's development of information and communication technology (ICT) is very good and pupils learn effectively.
- The quality of teaching and learning are good.
- The personal development of pupils is very good.
- The quality and breadth of the curriculum are good.

What could be improved

- Standards of extended writing in Years 3 and 4 are too low.
- Homework set is not closely matched to on-going classwork or the needs of the pupils.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in June 1997. At that time, the school was lacking in resources for both gymnastics and science. These issues have both been tackled effectively and the school is now able to fully meet the requirements of the curriculum. The teachers have gained greater expertise in the teaching of games, which enables pupils to develop their skills more effectively. In addition, the school has improved in many other areas and is well placed to improve further. Standards have risen year on year in line with the national trend. There have been significant improvements in the provision for ICT. A suite of computers has been installed and staff have developed their expertise through relevant training. The structure of the school timetable has been altered to allow for the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies as well as ensuring that a rich and varied curriculum is taught. The school has improved the quality and use of the accommodation although the open plan area for Years 3 and 4 is cramped, and noise carries easily between working areas which can disturb pupils' concentration.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at St John's School at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
English	B	B	C	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
Mathematics	B	C	C	A	
Science	B	D	B	A	

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Pupils' achievements are good overall and consistent between classes because of good teaching which is appropriately matched to provide for the differing abilities of pupils. Results attained in national tests for pupils in Year 6 are average in English and mathematics and above average in science. The school's results have improved year on year since the last inspection, except for a dip in 2000 when the education of Year 6 pupils was severely disrupted because of prolonged staff absence. The improvement made has been broadly in line with the national trend, although at a higher level. In 2001, results improved significantly in all three core subjects. Targets set for 2002 are appropriately based on pupils' achievement to date and the results of nationally recognised and standardised tests. The targets are similar for English to those for 2000, but have been raised appropriately for mathematics. They are suitably challenging and pupils should be able to achieve them.

Inspection evidence shows attainment in the current Year 6 to be above average in science and mathematics. In English, attainment in speaking and listening and in reading is good and better than in writing, which is satisfactory overall, although better in Years 5 and 6 than in other years. Pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are good. However, in English, pupils in Years 3 and 4 have too few opportunities to develop the skills learned, through appropriate extended writing activities. Both literacy and numeracy skills are used and developed effectively through work provided in other subjects, such as history and science. In ICT, pupils' achievements are good and pupils benefit from discrete subject teaching in the well-equipped suite. Good efforts are being made to fully integrate ICT into all subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The pupils really enjoy being in school. They generally concentrate very well in lessons, especially when these are lively and interesting. They try hard, settle well to the tasks set and take pride in the presentation of their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good around the school and in lessons. The code of conduct is simple, realistic and understood by all pupils. There is an expectation of very good behaviour. Very good support is provided for the few pupils with behavioural problems which enables them to learn effectively. The very good behaviour supports the learning of all pupils.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils in all classes are encouraged to take responsibility for a number of tasks in the classroom and around the school. They fulfil these efficiently and maturely. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good. Pupils work and play very well together.

Attendance	This is good and above the national average. There are few unauthorised absences. Pupils are punctual and lessons start on time.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	N/A	N/A	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The overall quality of teaching is good. In some lessons, particularly in Years 5 and 6, it is very good. Teachers are confident, have good subject knowledge and present this in a way that stimulates and excites the pupils. They challenge their pupils by providing interesting and original tasks at an appropriate level to match the abilities of all the pupils. They encourage their pupils to research independently in order to increase their knowledge and from the start show respect for their opinions and ideas and listen carefully to what they have to say and encourage their peers to do the same. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson, pupils intelligently discussed the best way to organise an investigation and then carried it out maturely. Pupils learn effectively because they are interested, are trusted to work sensibly, collaborate efficiently and listen to each other. They take a pride in what they are doing at whatever level they are working and their teachers celebrate their achievements with them. Pupils are valued for themselves, which raises self-esteem and provides on-going encouragement. English and mathematics are generally taught well and the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are consolidated effectively across the whole curriculum. However, although the basic skills required for the development of pupils' writing are taught effectively in Years 3 and 4, pupils have too few opportunities to use them appropriately. They therefore make insufficient progress with their independent writing at this level. Teaching is well matched to the needs of pupils of all abilities and lessons are planned which are exciting and challenging to all pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. This is broad, balanced and well organised to ensure that all areas of the curriculum are covered comprehensively. ICT has been particularly well developed. Art continues to be a significant strength of the school.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils' needs are identified carefully, work targets are set and work is well matched to pupils' needs. Good support from teaching assistants and other adults benefits many pupils, particularly those with behavioural difficulties.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Although rarely required, the school has appropriate procedures in place for providing support when necessary and receives the help of suitably qualified staff.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for pupils' personal development is very well supported by the strong ethos of the school, the good role models provided by the staff and very good relationships between pupils and adults. The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral and social awareness highly effectively and particular improvements have been made in pupils' cultural awareness.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is effective in promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of its pupils. The positive friendly atmosphere makes a strong contribution to providing a caring, learning community. This is underpinned by a range of effective policies and procedures.

The school provides a wide range of activities outside of school, which are very well supported by pupils.

Parents think highly of the school, are supportive and appreciative of the care the school accords its pupils.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is very good and provides clear direction for the school. The support provided by the deputy headteacher and team leader, who is temporarily absent, is very good. They share the head's vision for the school and all are committed to achieving it.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors have a very good understanding of their role. They are actively involved in the school, bring considerable expertise to their work and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They question sensibly what it does and are aware of its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses its results, teaching and curriculum effectively and takes action to improve. It consults widely on its further development. The written development plans outline current priorities well and effectively communicate the long-term vision.
The strategic use of resources	Good overall. Funds are directed to priority areas and their use is controlled and monitored well.

The management of the school is effective in seeking to ensure best value in its spending decisions by questioning what it does and ensuring that funds are spent wisely.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like coming to school. • The school treats the children as individuals and is very caring. Staff listen to, and act on, any concerns raised. • The teaching is good and the children make good progress. • The behaviour is good and any bullying is immediately and effectively dealt with. • The school has very high expectation of the children in terms of behaviour and work. • The children are encouraged to be responsible and become more mature. • The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress and receive good quality information from the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of parents returning the questionnaire felt that there was not a wide enough range of out of school activities. • A significant minority of parents was concerned that pupils did not have enough homework.

The inspectors agreed with the parents' positive views. The inspectors found that the range of out of school activities was good. There is a good range of out of school clubs, most of which are held on one evening. This does mean that pupils have to make choices, but they also have the chance to experience a range of activities during the year. A range of visits and visitors also enhances the curriculum, which successfully augments pupils' learning opportunities and personal development. The inspectors agree with parents' concerns about homework. Apart from in Year 6 where it is good, there is generally too little, it is often unrelated to work in class and it is not sufficiently well planned and organised.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school is led and managed very well by the headteacher, senior management team and governors.

1. The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher has been in post for 10 years and provides strong leadership and clear educational direction for the school. The main focus is to maintain and improve the already good standards, but the school actively plans to develop fully the personality of the pupils so they are well prepared to enter society as well rounded individuals. In this, the school has been particularly successful with the unstinting help and support of the staff and governors. Together they have devised a full, exciting and diverse curriculum, which fully embraces the ethos of the Catholic faith together with national requirements, to fully achieve the school's aims
2. The role of the subject co-ordinator has been well defined and developed. Each subject has an identified manager and all are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and conscientious. Some teachers are responsible for more than one subject. Strategies for monitoring achievement are on going. This is particularly evident in the core subjects where analysis of past work, test papers and results are part of an on-going annual review system in order to ensure the subjects are taught most effectively. All co-ordinators monitor planning and scrutinise pupils' written work. Literacy and numeracy have been effectively monitored through classroom observation.
3. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well managed. There is a comprehensive policy, covering all the statutory requirements. The governor for special educational needs is involved and supportive. The co-ordinator assists with the writing of individual education plans and ensures that targets are referred to in planning for class work. She monitors to ensure plans are implemented and provides extra support, particularly for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Where necessary, appropriate diagnostic tests are administered and outside agencies involved. The co-ordinator liaises closely with both the infant school from which the pupils come and the secondary schools to which they transfer.
4. The governors are knowledgeable, involved and supportive. They have termly meetings for which the headteacher provides detailed reports. They have established committees, each with agreed terms of reference, and each reports to full governing body meetings. The governing body as a whole has established a very good working relationship with the headteacher and undertakes the role of 'critical friend'¹ very successfully. They review test results and are actively involved in target setting with the staff. Governors fulfil their responsibilities successfully and their involvement in the strategic direction of the school is very effective.
5. The school development plan clearly identifies relevant priorities. It shows developments in areas including the curriculum, organisation and management, finance, the local community and premises. There is a well laid out action plan for each area, with the budget implications clearly identified. The main curriculum priorities currently, are raising standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, particularly extended writing and ICT. The plan provides a very good focus for continuing development.
6. The school aims are appropriate and are closely matched to the school's Catholic philosophy and ethos. They are published in the prospectus for parents to share, and the mission statement heads up all school documentation. The aims address a range of relevant issues, including personal, social, moral and spiritual development, the curriculum and home and community links. The underlying values of celebrating achievement and promoting the individual development of every pupil are very clearly evident in the day-to-day life of the school, not least through an assembly which occurs weekly and celebrates the achievements of pupils, not only academically but also in their social interactions. Practice fully reflects

¹ Critical friend - one who monitors constructively the activities and achievements of the school, identifying the areas that are strong and those that are weaker and require improvement.

policies and the school provides a welcoming, friendly environment. The staff work industriously as a united team and provide very effective role models for the pupils. The ethos is very positive and reflects the school's strong commitment to on-going improvement and good relationships.

7. The school manages its financial resources very well overall. Financial planning is effective and fully supports the improvement of teaching and learning. Expenditure is carefully considered and planned to ensure cost effectiveness. Governors appreciate the need to ensure best value and have planned appropriate training to enable them to develop expertise in this area. In the meantime, they have adopted a policy of buying in services from the local authority as a means of ensuring quality and value for money. Staff are very well deployed and very good use is made of support staff. The use of extra teaching staff so that pupils can be set according to ability for numeracy is a useful and effective use of funding. This has had a positive impact on the levels of pupils' attainment. The good deployment of staff expertise promotes the development of the curriculum and the improvement of teaching and learning.

Standards achieved by pupils in mathematics and science are high and in English they are above average, when compared with pupils from similar schools.

8. The pupils' achievements in National Curriculum tests have improved steadily year on year and last summer were well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English when compared with the results achieved by pupils in schools of a similar kind.
9. The school has adapted the literacy strategy and is using the framework in a way that meets the needs of the pupils in the school. Writing has been identified as an area for improvement and the school has made provision for this and ensures that it is a major integral part of its own literacy strategy. Through careful planning the school now has a programme for English that is varied and matches the needs of the pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6. It provides a stimulating curriculum, which challenges and excites the pupils and enables them to tackle more complex texts with confidence and enthusiasm.
10. In Year 6, pupils have studied extracts from 'The Taming of the Shrew'. They have used this as the basis for a good deal of extended writing, in particular in 'thought tracking' the main characters. Pupils experiment with language, for example one pupil, wrote about Petruchio's thoughts on Kate's character, saying 'now there's a feisty one'. They are developing an awareness of the effectiveness of writing strategies such as the use of short, sharp sentences and appropriate punctuation to gain greater effect. In another Year 6 lesson, pupils were writing a narrative from the point of view of a particular character with an emphasis on using powerful verbs. Pupils compared the effect of 'Mr Tom walked to church' with 'Mr Tom strode purposefully to church'. The teacher developed a group model of a powerful narrative. Through skilful questioning, she persisted in the quest to make pupils think and develop their own ideas. They moved purposefully to individual work, settled quickly and completed the task set efficiently. The levels of concentration were very high in this lesson and pupils displayed an ability to recall previous learning and put it to good use in class discussion.
11. There is good provision for all pupils, and a small group working with a support teacher in Year 5, tackled a similar task to the rest of the class but at an appropriate level, with additional resources. The plenary session where pupils shared their own work showed how effective pupils' learning had been as they compared well developed paragraphs illustrating that the lesson objectives had been well met.
12. The variety within the English curriculum stimulates the imagination of pupils. As part of their work on 'The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe', Year 5 was provided with the challenge of writing letters from Lucy to her friends describing her adventures. They showed a very good recall of the story and pupils were able to describe the events in an interesting manner. In character studies, pupils analysed Edward's thoughts and demonstrated their understanding of how these influenced his actions. The writing developed maturely and showed a very good understanding of the text and maturity in the presentation of their writing.
13. Throughout the school, the numeracy strategy has been embraced with enthusiasm. Pupils in Year 3 relish the challenge of mental arithmetic quick fire questions to start a lesson and show a good ability to recall tables and make simple calculations. Teachers have high expectations and the pupils respond extremely well. Positive relationships and interesting tasks enable pupils to sustain their concentration

and ensure their active participation in lessons. Pupils answer questions confidently from an early age, and share ideas and strategies for solving mathematical problems, which build on previous work and methods.

14. By the time pupils reach Year 6, they are set according to ability for mathematics, which considerably assists the progress of all pupils. All groups of pupils study the same topic at an appropriate level which ensures that they are all challenged and can achieve high standards for their own ability level. For example, at the start of term, higher ability pupils were tackling long multiplication confidently, whilst others were developing and improving short multiplication skills. High standards are achieved because pupils are constantly on-task; they listen attentively and respond promptly to questions. All work builds on what has gone before. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, were confident in working to hundredths when tackling problems involving decimal fractions. Lower attaining pupils were provided with additional resources such as place value mats and games to reinforce the work they were carrying out to establish their understanding of decimal notation of tenths and hundredths. They help and support each other aided by the teachers. Self-esteem is raised by teachers encouraging pupils to share their work and by the methods employed in solving problems with the rest of the class.
15. Pupils of all ages achieve well in science. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils attain standards which are above average. In recent years, performance in the national tests and teacher assessments for pupils in Year 6 has been good. Pupils show a good level of factual knowledge and a well-developed understanding of practical skills. A major factor in the school's success is the good provision for the experimental and investigative aspects of science, which promotes high standards and ensures that pupils understand their work. This forms the basis for the entire science curriculum and pupils' knowledge from Year 3 to Year 6 is enhanced through practical investigation and experimentation which encourages and supports the development of their questioning attitudes.
16. Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding develop systematically as they move through the school. Pupils in Year 3 are encouraged to predict what will happen in their experiments and to use the appropriate technical vocabulary for their work. They start to define what makes a test fair and to consider hypotheses such as 'What would happen to the substance if it were put into cold water instead of hot?' Pupils are encouraged to write up investigations from an early stage and as they move through the school they draw on the wide range of experiences they have had in the past. They broaden the range of recording methods they use. For example, older pupils use a computer to record and analyse data and use it to draw a graph of their results. Pupils in Year 6 were observed organising an investigation to determine what factors needed to be taken into consideration when making a parachute. This was all part of their work on forces but also took into account their prior knowledge of materials. In this lesson, there were strengths in pupils' attitudes and maturity in their personal development. They organised themselves very competently within small groups and allocated tasks fairly. Within the group, they co-operated and collaborated well, completing the task efficiently and reporting back to the class confidently.

The school's development of ICT is very good and pupils learn effectively.

17. Pupils are achieving standards in ICT which are above those expected because of the good and sometimes very good teaching that they receive to enable them to use effectively the very good quality equipment the school has installed.
18. The school has introduced a scheme of work, which is based on nationally recognised guidelines, and this ensures that the teaching of ICT skills is tackled progressively. Parallel classes work on similar projects throughout the year.
19. Pupils are timetabled for whole-class ICT lessons in the computer suite. Lessons are taught mainly by class teachers who have received appropriate training, are confident and have considerable expertise. Skills are taught in a systematic manner. The atmosphere in classes is calm and purposeful. The teacher gives very clear instructions and all pupils develop an understanding of basic skills from an early stage. For example, all pupils in Year 3 can log on and log off independently. The lessons proceed at a good pace and time is well used.

20. Tasks for the pupils are challenging and interesting and often relate to work being carried out in other subjects. For example, Year 3 pupils were given a task to design and present a poster to advertise their forthcoming visit to Chester to reinforce their work on the Romans. The learning objectives of the session were shared so that the pupils knew exactly what was expected of them. The teacher was enthusiastic and had a good rapport with the pupils, which relaxed them, gave them confidence to ask questions and added significantly to their self-esteem. The pupils worked hard to complete the task to a good standard and were very enthusiastic. Their levels of concentration were high. Pupils were encouraged to work at a level that reflected their own prior levels of competence. The higher attaining pupils experimented with a variety of backgrounds and borders, could cut, paste and insert appropriate illustrations as well as select the size, colour and style of font to produce the effects they required. All pupils could select a plain background and cut and paste text on to it by the end of the lesson. Throughout, the teacher made skilful use of questions and effectively assessed what the pupils were understanding and learning.
21. Lessons become more challenging as pupils move through the school and their knowledge and understanding increase. In the upper half of Key Stage 2, pupils are confident and competent. A Year 6 lesson was planned to extend pupils' knowledge and skills in using a spreadsheet. The teacher shared the objectives with the pupils and gave them relevant information. She had high expectations of pupils' ability to learn effectively and, once given the instruction, pupils were left to solve problems independently. Within a fixed budget, they had to decide how much and what variety of food was required for the class Christmas Party based on the results of a previously completed questionnaire. They had a very good understanding of the task and could develop their own formulae to calculate the amounts required and costs. They helped each other and there was a buzz of enthusiasm as they discussed the work they were doing. The teacher made very good use of the big screen to reinforce and demonstrate the next stages in learning and to help small groups who were having difficulties. These strategies helped the lesson flow successfully and at the end of the session all pupils understood how to make the appropriate calculations even if they had not fully completed the task set. The teacher had planned good extension activities to challenge the higher attaining pupils who completed the tasks more quickly and these pupils were able to adapt their choices according to changes in personnel and budget.
22. The school has installed a suite of networked computers. They are supplemented by a number of laptops and stand alone computers in some classrooms. A large screen and projector has been set up in the suite, which is of considerable assistance for whole class teaching. The co-ordinator is knowledgeable and enthusiastic. She has ensured that staff have received the training they need in order to be able to teach the curriculum confidently, thus enabling the pupils to achieve standards above those expected. A very high quality action plan has been drawn up which covers the development and use of ICT across the school in its administrative as well as the academic role. This ensures that administrative staff also receive the training they require. The scheme of work is planned to be comprehensive and covers all areas of the ICT curriculum. Very good efforts are being made to ensure the integration of ICT across the curriculum. Although this is not yet fully complete, the links made to date are realistic and meaningful, for example, the integration of a design and technology programme to design and make a picture frame using computer aided design and producing the frame using a CAD/CAM machine. A good assessment system has been put in place which tracks pupils' progress in each topic and evaluates progress made. This has a positive impact on standards because areas which need reinforcing can be instantly identified.

The quality of teaching and learning are good.

23. The quality of teaching is good overall and is a strength of the school. In all the lessons observed, the teaching was sound or better. The teaching and the opportunities it provides for pupils to improve their learning skills is the major contributory factor to the high standards the school is constantly striving for and achieving.
24. Teachers' planning is thorough and detailed. Teachers plan across parallel classes to ensure consistency in what is taught and this helps maintain the good standards achieved throughout the school. Lessons are carefully sequenced to ensure full coverage of a topic or programme of study. Plans outline clear learning objectives for each lesson and teachers tell the pupils exactly what they are going to learn. Grouping is considered carefully and teachers ensure that activities are planned which match the attainment level of all pupils. A brief recap at the start of each lesson prompts pupils' memories and allows some useful

assessment to take place. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson, pupils could remember appropriate technical vocabulary associated with forces and fair testing before dividing into groups to develop a fair test of their own. The pace set is lively throughout and lessons are well structured and relevant to sustain pupils' interest. Written tasks are fully explained to pupils before they carry them out and pupils record work in a variety of appropriate ways.

25. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are high, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The literacy and numeracy strategies have been well implemented and all pupils are fully occupied with suitably challenging tasks during the times when the class teacher is concentrating on one group of pupils. Pupils are able to work unaided because the work is carefully matched to the pupils in each group and teachers give clear instructions as to the work to be tackled and ensure that the pupils understand what they are to do before they start.
26. The expertise and enjoyment that teachers bring to their lessons is evident. In a science lesson in Year 5, the teacher had organised a range of practical activities to illustrate how the particles in a gas, liquid and solid are arranged. Her use of drama was apt and original, appealed to the pupils and helped develop their understanding in an instantly unforgettable way. She had high expectations of the pupils' abilities to understand and supported learning effectively throughout the lesson. She used the correct terminology when talking about the different elements and expected the pupils to do the same. The highly effective session at the end of the lesson drew all the learning together and confirmed that the learning objectives had been successfully achieved.
27. Whole class teaching is used effectively to promote the learning of pupils with special needs and is very good overall. Careful questioning by the teachers ensures that the pupils can take a full part in all lessons. Praise and encouragement are used effectively. When pupils are involved in small group work, work is carefully matched to pupils' abilities. For example, in the Year 5 literacy lesson, lower attaining pupils were able to write their own narrative paragraph with the aid of a carefully worded prompt sheet and additional help from a very well briefed support teacher who led them by asking appropriate questions. Individual education plans are readily available and the targets for each pupil are realistic and highly individual to each pupil and designed to build on learning step by step.

The quality of pupils' personal development is very good,

28. Pupils are very enthusiastic about school. They are keen to learn and many bring very positive attitudes about the value of learning from home which are built on and extended by their experiences in school. There is an equally positive atmosphere for learning created by the headteacher and the staff. The combined approach of pupils, parents and teachers in partnership results in effective learning and in pupils who show high levels of personal development.
29. Pupils appear comfortable and relaxed in school. They grow in confidence and maturity as they move through the school and respond well to the many opportunities to take initiative in their learning. The school's ethos and approach are built on the joint principles of teamwork and independence in learning and are successfully communicated to the pupils. A notable feature, especially among the oldest pupils, is the extent to which they sustain concentration in their work and show the capacity to work both independently and as part of a small or large group. Pupils from the earliest time in school are enabled by staff to organise their own work where this is appropriate, for example by choosing their resources or setting up equipment for their group. Often, when working in groups, for example in science, they show that they are working as a team, allocating roles and duties accordingly.
30. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good. Adults and children show respect for each other and are polite in their conversations. Examples were seen of high quality discussions and negotiations between teachers and pupils about planned activities. Pupils also relate well to each other. They appreciate and cultivate their friendships and care well for others on a daily basis. Older and more able pupils in each team support and encourage those who need help.
31. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall. Pupils are encouraged to be reflective during lessons as well as assemblies and collective acts of worship. Every classroom has a

small but attractive and well cared for altar, which is a useful focus for class assemblies and encourages reverence and reflection. Acts of worship are appropriately themed and are well prepared so that they are relevant to the pupils' interests and experiences. For example, the annual Poppy Appeal was explained carefully and to support this the school had its own book of remembrance in which staff and families could record friends and family they wished to remember. Pupils in Year 3 are prepared in school for First Forgiveness, which has a positive impact on their ability to consider the impact of their own actions on others. In addition, pupils in Year 5 have the opportunity to go on retreat, which develops their spiritual awareness and reflective capacity. Staff are excellent role models for pupils, who clearly know the difference between right and wrong and are developing a clear moral sense. Pupils show a respect for adults and also for each other. The school code of conduct is brief, positively reinforced and well adhered to. Pupils' very good behaviour contributes to the positive ethos in the school. Pupils' social development is encouraged through a wide range of tasks around the school. There are high levels of co-operation and awareness of the needs of others. Pupils are developing a sense of social responsibility through their support for a range of charities embracing the local and Catholic communities as well as national and international causes. Pupils have had greater opportunities to develop their cultural awareness. A range of visits and visitors to the school positively enhance the curriculum and residential visits enable pupils to enlarge their experiences as well as giving them the chance to develop independence and co-operation. Pupils have the opportunity to study a range of multi-ethnic cultures through the curriculum in geography and history as well as through literature. Art still has a high profile in the school as it did at the previous inspection and that from other cultures is widely explored.

The quality and breadth of the curriculum is good.

32. The school has positively and thoroughly reviewed its planning systems in the light of Curriculum 2000 and made significant improvements in the curriculum offered to the pupils as a result. The school uses a combination of nationally approved schemes of work together with those provided by the local authority, effectively adapting and modifying these to fit the school's requirements. The school provides a wide and interesting range of learning opportunities and the links established between subjects are particularly effective. The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met. It is evident, from the examination of pupils' work, that, although the school reacted positively to the recent national emphasis on literacy and numeracy, it at all times sought to ensure that its pupils continued to be provided with a broad range of activities in all subjects. This has resulted in overall standards across the whole curriculum being at least satisfactory.
33. The National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy have been effectively implemented. The literacy strategy has been effectively adapted to meet the needs of the school and writing allocated additional time as a priority for further development. This focuses more clearly on the skills required for extended writing and has been particularly effective in raising standards in Years 5 and 6. The numeracy strategy has resulted in good quality focused mental oral starters being incorporated into each lesson. These are brief, pacy, linked to on-going mathematics topics and time is effectively used before moving on to the taught topic for the day.
34. Not all subjects were seen being taught during the inspection but lively and interesting displays of work in all subjects throughout the school and evidence from pupils' work indicate that the school is successful in providing links across several subjects in order to ensure very good learning opportunities. For example, work on forces in science in Year 6 incorporates the use of ICT as sensors are used to measure distances accurately during an investigation into friction. An interesting and carefully executed design and technology topic was linked to the study of 'Romeo and Juliet' in Year 4, where exquisite masks were designed, beautifully made, and evaluated. Overall, the very good planning ensures a rich and dynamic curriculum which, coupled with good teaching, results in all pupils making very good progress. Parents at the parents' meeting appreciated the broad curriculum and were impressed by the way in which the school taught all subjects.
35. There are good policies to underpin provision and a clear overall statement of the school's curricular aims. Consistency and depth in teachers' long-term planning are ensured by agreed procedures and a shared approach to the work by teachers in similar year group classes.

36. The school has positive links with the local high school, which serve to enrich and widen the curriculum for pupils. A number of projects are undertaken which involve the pupils receiving specialist help from high school teachers. For example, pupils in Year 6 have recently undertaken a project to design and make photograph frames using highly specialised CAD CAM equipment. This has led to increased confidence and understanding when seeing a project through from start to finish. A good range of extra-curricular activities takes place. These enable pupils to re-inforce and extend their personal interests and also enhances the positive relationships in place between the pupils and adults in the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards of extended writing in English in Years 3 and 4 are too low.

37. Although the results achieved by the school's 11 year olds in national tests in recent years in English have consistently been average or above, results in writing have dropped slightly. The school has identified for itself the need to develop writing across the school. However, the greatest need is in Years 3 and 4 where standards of extended writing, at the current time, are not high enough.
38. The amount of time allocated to English and extended writing is quite sufficient. However, there is a lack of understanding as to what constitutes extended writing. A variety of work is covered in the form of technical exercises, comprehension, punctuation and spelling exercises. Pupils write poems, and also prose for a variety of purposes. The use of materials and skills covered in the technical work is wide and there is an emphasis on building a wide-ranging vocabulary ostensibly to support other written work. The standard of teaching for developing these particular skills is at least good. There is clear progress in both the standard of presentation and handwriting - although some pupils are still not joining this. The spelling in exercises is also improving. Work shows a developing understanding of the use of punctuation.
39. However, it is evident that pupils have too few opportunities to use the skills they are learning, and the wide vocabulary they are building up, in their written work. Reports on school activities, news, story summaries and story writing all supposedly constitute part of the curriculum. However, much of the 'extended writing' consists of short and often incomplete pieces of work. The work shows comparatively little progress when compared to other areas and only four pieces of work had been completed in the seven weeks prior to the inspection. The topics upon which pupils are expected to write are often uninspiring - such as 'The Playground' and 'A Trip' and the writing of news from week to week is mundane and contains little of educational value. Teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve in their writing is too low and there is too little rigour in its marking which suggests a certain lack of knowledge as to what constitutes extended writing. This is particularly evident in Year 4 where work sheets have been distributed under the guise of extended writing which are no more than comprehension exercises. There are few examples of work in which there is a use of more complex sentence structures and the extension of ideas with a growing vocabulary. This shows that preliminary discussions and preparation for writing do not link the technical skills learned previously, and that clear expectations and learning objectives have not been set. The quality of work varies considerably and is sometimes less than satisfactory. It is unclear as to how sentence or word level work being taught in literacy sessions is being transferred to extended writing and applied in this different context.
40. The literacy co-ordinator is well aware of the need for improvement and shows a good understanding of how the subject needs to be developed in the lower end of the school. A good literacy action plan has been produced which contributes to the school development plan. This includes monitoring extended writing lessons and children's work each half term. Although it is too soon to tell the impact this monitoring is having, the co-ordinator has very good knowledge of what the lower school, in particular, needs to do to improve standards.

Insufficient homework is set to meet the needs of the school and the pupils.

41. Homework was raised in the parents' meeting in the first instance. As is often experienced, there is a diversity of opinion amongst parents as to whether pupils should be set homework at primary school level. The consensus of opinion is that it should be, particularly in Year 6 in order to prepare pupils for regular homework when they achieve secondary school status. There is an expectation in the OFSTED framework that homework will be set and that it will meet specific criteria.
42. At St John's, homework is set on a weekly basis. There is little set in Years 3 and 4, usually spellings and some handwriting. It is expected that pupils will read at home each night. The links to classwork are generally vague. The criterion used to judge whether or not the work has been completed is through a spelling test. Parents felt that for a majority of pupils there was little challenge to the work set and, although learning spellings must be of some use, there are other more original and stimulating ways of presenting this kind of task.

43. In Year 5, homework is set. Here the work is more specific and more regularly set. It includes reading each night, 10 spellings and 5 topic words each night. The latter do at least have a link with work currently being carried out in class. However, little challenge is provided for the pupils. In Year 6 the homework set is better thought out, more challenging and stimulating. The system used here could well be a model for the rest of the school. In English for example, work is set every week, often a comprehension exercise. The work is marked in class with the pupils, when appropriate, which means that all can learn and areas for improvement can be identified and the class teacher can ensure that the pupils' understanding is clear. The work is clearly differentiated and challenging.
44. One of the main weaknesses is that although homework is set, there is little that enables pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. No examples were seen of pupils having to carry out research and thus begin to learn independently. The tasks set are generally mundane and repetitive and do little to stimulate a pupil's imagination and instil a genuine enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning on one's own. There is little opportunity for children and parents to co-operate and the random tasks bear little relation to work being covered in class. Teachers' planning makes no reference to homework and a valuable opportunity for extending classwork to the benefit of all pupils is being missed.
45. At the present time, homework does not have a sufficiently high profile in the school. There is a homework policy. This, however, is old, vague and requires revision and updating. The policy does state that work should be linked to work being carried out in class, particularly topic work. Although some of that seen in Year 6 undoubtedly was, this was not the case in other classes. The staff handbook, which is a comprehensive guide and a very useful document for all teachers, gives no detail as to what and how much homework should be set. Similarly, guidelines for supply staff and student teachers contain no reference to the setting of homework. Opportunities are being missed by the school to raise standards further by encouraging pupils to learn and research independently and also to increase co-operation between home and school by including parents in their children's learning experiences.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

46. St John's is a good school. However in order to raise standards still further the governors, headteacher and staff should take steps to:
- (1) Improve standards in writing in Years 3 and 4 by:
- ensuring staff fully understand the requirements for extended writing;
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use the skills they have learned.
- (see paragraphs 37 - 40)
- (2) Improve the quality of homework set by:
- revising the homework policy by making it more relevant to the current needs of the school and its curriculum;
 - setting homework on a regular basis;
 - matching homework more closely to classwork.
- (see paragraphs 41 - 45)

N.B. Writing has already been identified by the school as an area requiring improvement within the school development plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	8

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	6	9	2	0	0	0
Percentage	0	35	53	12	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than five percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y3– Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	218
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	68

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	28

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	4.2
National comparative data	5.2

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2001	29	33	62

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	21	22	26
	Girls	28	28	30
	Total	49	50	56
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	79 (80)	81 (65)	90 (78)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	19	21	26
	Girls	27	27	31
	Total	46	48	57
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	74 (78)	77 (80)	92 (82)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	0
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9.625
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23
Average class size	27.6

Education support staff: Y3 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	70.41

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
	£
Total income	416726
Total expenditure	395723
Expenditure per pupil	1728
Balance brought forward from previous year	10739
Balance carried forward to the next year	31742

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	220
Number of questionnaires returned	121

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	64	31	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	45	2	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	55	38	4	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	45	16	0	1
The teaching is good.	56	38	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	54	4	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	73	21	4	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	30	0	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	50	38	8	0	4
The school is well led and managed.	60	32	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	40	2	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	42	18	3	5

Other issues raised by parents

Parents are very pleased with the ethos of the school and the caring and positive atmosphere, which is heavily influenced by its very strong links with the Catholic church. Non-Catholic pupils are made to feel very much part of the school and all its celebrations.