



St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115236
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 285545
Inspection dates 29 June 2006 to 30 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Denis Pittman AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Tower Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		CM16 5EN
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 573028
Number on roll	777	Fax number	01992 576928
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Mike Rigelsford
Date of previous inspection	29 June 2004	Headteacher	Mr. Keith Sharp

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 29 June 2006 - 30 June 2006	Inspection number 285545
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John's is a smaller than average mixed comprehensive school. The school is proving more popular resulting in an increase of numbers. Almost all students are of White British background. The school draws students from an area which is neither economically advantaged nor socially deprived. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The school was granted specialist engineering status in January 2006. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards which are below average for their age.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Overall effectiveness is good rather than satisfactory as indicated by the schools' assessment. This inspection judgement is based on the good progress made by students in both key stages, the improvements in teaching and learning, an innovative curriculum and the high quality of leadership within the school. The results in the GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are approaching the national average. This represents good achievement given the relatively low attainment level of students on entry. However, there is still too much variation between the standards attained at GCSE in different subjects. Achieving a consistency of performance for all subjects is now the school's objective. The same pattern of improving achievement is shown in the good progress of younger students. Students' personal development is good. They enjoy school and contribute well through their year councils. Behaviour in the school is generally good. Students' attitudes and learning in lessons are predominately good. Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers have a clear focus on what the students are to learn. Through its effective programme of monitoring, the school has identified where good and better teaching lies in the school. However, it does not always find ways of spreading this good practice. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT) by students in lessons. The curriculum and the care, guidance and support for students are good. A substantial range of opportunities in the curriculum enables good individual choice. The school is well led and effectively managed. Day-to-day arrangements work well. Department heads have good quality systems for improving teaching and learning in their subjects. Partnership with other local schools and colleges is good and is highly valued. Governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors support the school well but their links with subjects, to help raise standards, are not clearly defined. Financial management is satisfactory. Parents are encouraged to give their views about the school through regular surveys; they are mostly very satisfied with the provision for their children. The effective leadership, higher standards, dedication of the teachers and increasing responsiveness of the students demonstrate that the school has a good capacity to further improve its performance. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Achieve consistently good performance in all subjects through the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. - Increase the students' use of computers in all subjects to give more opportunities to apply ICT skills and access a wider range of resources. - Increase governors' support for school improvement through better links with departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make good progress in this school. Standards are now broadly average because of year on year improvements. Interim results for Year 9 and 11 students are considerably higher than this time last year, making the school's challenging targets for both key stages eminently attainable. Since students' standards on entry are below average, current attainment in Years 9 and 11 shows the school ensures that students make good progress in the long term. This matches the good progress seen in lessons. The GCSE results for 2005 and the school's current targets show a sustained rise over recent years, but there remains too much variation in standards between subjects. National test results in Year 9 for English, mathematics and science were below average last year but current targets in all three subjects are higher. The 2006 Year 9 mathematics results match national levels for 2005 and are the highest reached by the school. They confirm the reliability of the school's tracking and prediction procedures. In English and science students showed similar standards. The school has raised standards by improving teaching and learning, broadening the curriculum and constantly increasing expectations of staff, students and parents. It has also focused on boosting performance by boys. They benefit from a literacy reinforcement programme in Key Stage 3, revision classes on Saturdays, after school and in the holidays. In Key Stage 4 there has also been extensive mentoring of underperforming students, again largely middle and lower ability boys. Their standards have risen strongly as a result.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students is good. Attitudes and behaviour have improved substantially over the past few years. Students comment that they enjoy their education because there is a good atmosphere for learning in the school. Attendance rates have greatly improved and are now broadly in line with the national average. The behaviour of the majority of students is good in lessons and around school, although a small minority of students can be difficult. Bullying is rare and where it does occur it is dealt with effectively. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The opportunities for reflection in assemblies are taken seriously. Students get on well with each other and with their teachers. They work collaboratively, sharing ideas in lessons. Students are knowledgeable about the ways of life of other cultures and countries. Students are well aware of issues linked to drugs and sex education and appreciate the need for following health and safety rules. They are increasingly choosing to eat sensibly. Physical education is popular and many students take part in extra-curricular sport to extend their physical exercise. Students' contribution to the school community is good. Many older students readily take on responsibilities within the school, some acting as 'listeners' for students with concerns. Acquisition of workplace skills is developing and is satisfactory but students have insufficient opportunities to use ICT in other subjects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The quality has been improving for some time and observations during the inspection confirm that gains are still being made. Teaching now enables most students to make good progress. Those students who were previously underperforming are being taught more effectively in class as well as benefiting from extra support outside lessons. The needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities are met well. Students are learning well because teachers structure lessons clearly and use assessment information well to pitch the lessons at a challenging level. Staff maintain good relationships throughout the great majority of lessons. In many lessons teachers display real skill in posing questions which draw students into discussion. Students see that their ideas are valued and developed by staff. These lessons also benefit from first-rate management of students' behaviour. A minority of teaching limits students' progress through over-dominance by the teacher or because activities only permit low level responses. Occasionally, inattention is allowed to persist and learning is hampered, as a result. The majority of lessons give close attention to promoting boys' learning, formerly a weakness in the school. Emphasis on reinforcing literacy skills is one effective strategy and teachers also use short tasks, practical work and visual resources well. As a result of this, and through additional support outside lessons, boys are now learning well overall.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has been developed to cater well for the wide spectrum of students' aptitudes and interests. The school offers traditional GCSEs, a variety of applied GCSEs and vocational options. Students study other courses, including construction, motor vehicle maintenance and engineering, at local colleges. A wide range of design and technology options is being offered in line with the school's newly acquired specialist engineering status. Currently, students have insufficient opportunity to use their ICT skills across subjects. There is sound, flexible alternative education. This is regularly reviewed and improved and available for some students who require a different approach to learning. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced and meets all requirements, including that for religious education. Arrangements with local primary schools ensure that Year 7 students settle in quickly and promote curriculum continuity. A variety of extra-curricular activities, including a gifted and talented summer school, is offered to enrich the experiences of students. The provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) is being further developed. Outside agencies provide good support for certain PSHE topics such as sexual health and drug education. Giving form tutors responsibility for teaching citizenship and PSHE has strengthened the school's pastoral care programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, support and guidance for students are good. Parents are very pleased with the care provided at the school. Students know there is someone to turn to if they have concerns. A full-time learning mentor and a part-time counsellor support students who have concerns. First aid and medical procedures are clear. Child protection arrangements are secure and the school carries out all necessary checks on all staff. Good procedures are in place to monitor and improve behaviour. A full time-attendance officer, liaising with the school-based educational welfare officer, initiates strenuous and successful efforts to raise attendance. Students are supported well with their learning. Additional classes are arranged to boost attainment or to help revision at appropriate times. Within departments there is a good system for setting targets and tracking students' achievement. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are given good support by experienced teaching assistants to achieve as well as their peers. In addition, the learning support unit provides the opportunity for students who are unsettled or have behavioural problems within the classroom setting to progress. Students who are gifted or talented are identified and given opportunities to develop their interests especially in sport.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. This judgement matches the school's own evaluation. The school has made significant progress from its position of failing to provide an adequate quality of education a few years ago. It has a good capacity to improve still further. The school is very well led by the headteacher who gives a clear and purposeful direction to the school. This is shown in his drive to achieve specialist status in engineering. A strong emphasis is placed upon raising students' aspirations. There is a positive and supportive ethos in the leadership group with a firm commitment to improvement. Procedures to monitor and evaluate the work of the school are effective. These have been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching which has led to higher standards. The school is positively regarded by parents; they value the quality of teaching and the progress their children make. The opinions of parents and students are actively sought through surveys and questionnaires so these views can inform future planning. The school's resources are managed well. However, the age of the buildings and the disparate nature of the site present problems in relation to maintenance costs and the management of students. The school copes well in both of these circumstances. Equality of opportunity is promoted well through the schools' work-related curriculum. The governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are supportive of the school and have contributed to workforce reforms and changes to work practices. Governors receive reports reviewing the work of departments but the monitoring links with subject areas are not sufficiently developed. The school's self-evaluation provides a detailed and largely accurate analysis of its provision. Financial management is satisfactory and the school provides good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of that inspection. I would like to thank you on behalf of the inspection team for your help and courtesy. We enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you and to listen to your views about the school. Some of your parents and carers responded to a confidential survey and this was very helpful. We were pleased to see that the standards you achieve in tests at the end of Year 9 and in examinations in Year 11 are improving. Most of you make good progress while you are at school. We could see that more of you now enjoy coming to school, as your attendance rates have got better. We know your teachers work hard to help you get good examination results. Many parts of the school's work are good: in particular the wide range of choices you have in Years 10 and 11 including courses at colleges for some of you. You also said you appreciated the care and support you receive when you most need it. The school is well run and gives you plenty of opportunities to learn and develop. It is a friendly place and we can see that you mostly get on well with each other and the adults at the school. You told us that you enjoy taking part in sporting activities and other trips or visits. The main things we have asked the school to do to improve further are:

- To improve GCSE results in some subjects to make them as good as the best.
- To give you more opportunities to use computers in a range of subjects.
- To encourage the governors to visit the school more often to see how well you are doing and for them to work with departments to help raise standards.

Once again, thank you for your involvement with this visit. Continue to enjoy your good school which you are helping to create.