



St John's School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109738
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288480
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Austin Canons
School category	Foundation		Bedford Road, Bedford Road
Age range of pupils	2–19		Bedfordshire MK42 8AA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 345565
Number on roll (school)	137	Fax number	01234 327734
Number on roll (6th form)	26		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Kirsten Rimmer
		Headteacher	Mr Ron Babbage
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002		

Age group 2–19	Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007	Inspection number 288480
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties, some of whom have autistic spectrum disorders, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils come from socially and culturally mixed backgrounds. Most students who are over 16 are educated in the St John's base at Biddenham Upper School. There has been a recent increase in the number on roll because the school has absorbed several pupils from another local special school, making this a very large special school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that provides exceptionally good value for money. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is very ably supported by a team of experienced senior managers. He combines high expectations with clear vision and is particularly skilled in empowering the staff to give of their best. The stability of the school's leadership and the coherent way in which the school is managed have enabled it to resolve fully issues identified at the last inspection and sustain high quality provision despite a number of challenges in recent years. These have included the headteacher dividing his time between this and another local special school experiencing difficulties and the seamless integration of a number of pupils from there into St John's, with ten more expected in September 2007.

Senior managers use the resources at their disposal very effectively. Although inadequate for the increased, and increasing numbers of pupils, the accommodation has been skilfully adapted to ensure that no groups of pupils are disadvantaged. The skills of the best teachers are put to exceptionally good use in coaching less experienced staff. This, combined with outstanding opportunities for staff to undertake training, has enabled the school to develop the skills of a number of newly qualified teachers and to support others through the graduate teacher programme. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is good and improving: some teaching is exemplary and less experienced teachers have been supported very effectively, so that their teaching is now good overall.

Although standards are well below average as a result of pupils' learning difficulties, achievement is good and it is outstanding in some areas. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and those with multi-sensory impairment receive very high quality provision. The school has exceptionally well-established links with other schools and pupils of all ages benefit from the opportunities to attend mainstream school for part of their time. The very positive impact of these links is particularly evident for students at post-16 who attend the St John's base at Biddenham Upper School, and whose achievement is outstanding. Throughout the school, strong emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills, fostering their independence and on citizenship, personal, social and health education reflects their needs and abilities extremely well. By providing outstanding care, support and guidance to its pupils, the school gives them confidence to participate enthusiastically in school activities and to meet their targets. In addition, work-related learning, work experience and college placements ensure that students gain key skills to prepare them for the future.

School self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Managers collect a vast amount of information from which to judge the school's effectiveness and use this thoroughly to plan future development. Consequently, the school has identified the need to refine the way it tracks the progress of individual pupils, which is not yet precise enough, and the wealth of monitoring information gathered is not summarised and shared amongst staff as much as it could be. In all other respects, the school is already doing everything it possibly can to improve and it is extremely well placed to build on its existing success.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students who are 16 and over make outstanding progress, particularly as a result of the placement of many in the base at Biddenham. This provides outstanding opportunities for students to work alongside their mainstream peers. Liaison between St John's staff and those in the upper school is of very high quality, ensuring that students receive excellent facilitation and support. Opportunities to take part in work experience and to attend the local college also support their achievement. As a result of these experiences, students grow in confidence and self-esteem and become increasingly independent. Those students at post-16 who are based at the St John's site make good progress as a result of effective teaching. Care, guidance and personal development are outstanding on both sites, and the post-16 department is led and managed very well. It provides exceptionally good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- In order to ensure all pupils achieve as much as they can and to improve further the quality of teaching, refine the way the findings of monitoring are summarised and analyse data more closely in tracking the progress of individual pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' achievement is good and improving. Throughout the school, pupils make good progress in working towards their communication targets and exceptionally good progress in personal, social and health education and in gaining independence skills. Pupils make steady progress in gaining basic skills in literacy and numeracy: the school is working effectively to improve their achievement in these areas. Opportunities provided for pupils of all ages to integrate into mainstream school promote the achievement of higher attaining pupils exceptionally well. Students at post-16 who are educated at the Biddenham base make outstanding progress, for instance, gaining GCSE in physical education and taking part in the sports leadership course. Pupils at Key Stage 4 make good progress in the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Transition Challenge. Students go on at post-16 to make outstanding progress in the Towards Independence course and the OCR (Oxford and Cambridge Schools and the Royal Society of Arts) National Skills Profile.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils gain great enjoyment from being in school. They are happy, relaxed and enthusiastic participants in all activities. This is reflected in their excellent attendance.

As one pupil put it, 'This school is fantastic'. Behaviour is exceptionally good, and relationships between pupils and teachers are outstanding. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and benefit a great deal from the citizenship, personal, social and health education programme. As a result, they are well aware of how to keep themselves safe and the need for healthy eating and for exercise. They take part in a variety of physical activities at lunch time and in after-school clubs such as gymnastics, dancing and soccer. The school council spearheads pupils' involvement in the school and in the wider community, and pupils have made decisions that have helped to improve playground facilities and school meals. They help others through fundraising and sponsorship events. They develop skills as team members; learn to take responsibility and gain a great deal especially from residential visits. Work-related learning at Key Stage 4 and at post-16 helps students to develop life skills and to grow in maturity so that they are very well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good and improving. Where teaching is outstanding, tasks are closely matched to the learning needs of different pupils and creative activities are provided that give pupils a real 'buzz'. In the school as a whole, lessons are well planned and pupils learn in an environment that is at once calm, orderly and stimulating. Teachers use resources well to support pupils in grasping new concepts. They promote pupils' communication skills effectively through use of a range of aids, such as symbols, objects of reference, switches and good use of signing. When working with pupils with profound and multi-sensory impairment, staff show a high level of sensitivity, taking the lead from pupils' response. Teachers generally make good use of their teaching assistants, who contribute significantly to pupils' learning. But, where teaching is good rather than outstanding, teaching assistants are not always used as well as they could be and activities provide pupils with less enjoyment in learning than they do in the best lessons. The school has good systems in place for assessing pupils' attainment, teachers keep detailed records of pupils' progress and targets in individual education plans are suitably specific. Overall achievement is checked thoroughly but the ongoing progress of individual pupils is not tracked as closely as it could be. This has been identified by the school as an area for development and it is currently considering the best way of doing this.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is an outstanding range of activities to interest and motivate pupils of all ages and abilities. Many opportunities are created for higher attaining pupils to integrate with mainstream pupils and there are excellent reciprocal arrangements with local schools. The resources and planning for pupils with multi-sensory needs are also a particular strength. Subjects are well planned and regularly reviewed to give the greatest impact upon pupils' learning. An extensive range of clubs, educational visits, residential trips, sporting activities, competitions, dramatic performances and visitors to the school enriches learning and adds a great deal to pupils' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Excellent teamwork and liaison between teachers, teaching assistants and therapists provide pupils with a very high level of care and support. Teaching assistants play a key role in the management of care and behaviour. There are strong systems and procedures, which meet fully legal requirements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety. Parents and carers are involved very well and kept informed about their children's progress. The school provides outstanding support and guidance to pupils when they join the school, transfer from one key stage to the next and when they leave. The exceptionally good promotion of pupils' healthy eating, fitness and safety has been recognised by the Healthy Schools Award.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher and his senior staff team provide outstanding leadership and management. Senior leaders are committed to including all pupils as well as possible, readily embrace new initiatives and take great care to tailor learning experiences to the needs of different groups of pupils. The vast majority of parents express a very high level of satisfaction with the school's work and it is held in high esteem locally.

Management responsibilities are carefully delegated and senior managers gather a wealth of information so that they have a very thorough knowledge of the school's work. This thorough approach underpins the school's extremely strong capacity to cope with future change and to bring about further improvements.

The monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and detailed. The findings of this have been used very effectively by senior staff to improve the quality of teaching, although information from monitoring is not yet summarised and shared regularly with

all the staff as effectively as it could be. Nevertheless, staff morale is high and the atmosphere amongst staff and pupils alike is at once relaxed, focused and purposeful.

Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection. Governors make a good contribution to the school's work and are clear about its strengths and what could be refined to improve it further. They ask probing questions and regularly visit the school to gather information. This approach puts governors in a good position to oversee the work of the school and to hold the school to account for what it achieves.

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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?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 January 2007

Dear Pupils

St John's School, Austin Canons, Bedford Road, Kempston, Bedfordshire, MK42 8AA

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit very much. Now, I am writing to let you know what we found out about the school.

This is an outstanding school. The staff care for you extremely well and the school has a happy and relaxed atmosphere so that you enjoy learning. This gives you a lot of confidence and helps you to make really good progress in your personal development and good progress with your work. St John's School has extremely good links with other schools and those of you who attend the St John's base at Biddenham Upper School make outstanding progress.

The headteacher and senior managers lead and manage the school exceptionally well. They already provide outstanding support for new teachers and training for all the staff so that they can help you as much as possible. There is not much more they could do to improve the school but I have asked them to use a bit more information when they check how effective it is. You can help them to make sure the school goes on being outstanding by trying really hard in your lessons and continuing to be really kind to one another.

Yours sincerely

M J Goodchild

Lead Inspector