



Totnes St John's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 113406
Local Authority Devon
Inspection number 289612
Inspection dates 7–8 December 2006
Reporting inspector Kevin Jane HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Pathfields
School category	Voluntary controlled		Totnes
Age range of pupils	4–11		TQ9 5TZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01803 864695
Number on roll (school)	193	Fax number	01803 868067
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Richard Endean
		Headteacher	Janet Parker
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St John's is a slightly smaller than average primary school, serving the Pathfields area of Totnes in Devon. Nearly all of the pupils are White British, with a higher than average proportion of pupils having learning difficulties or disabilities than is found in most schools. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also higher than average. Attainment on entry to the school is well below average although there is a wide ability range overall. The school has had stable staffing over the last few years. It has developed good partnership arrangements with other schools and agencies. It has very good relationships with the parental community and has their full confidence.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Totnes St John's is a good and improving primary school. Over the last few years, the headteacher has provided good strategic leadership and, together with governors, staff and the wider community, she has promoted the continuous development of a very positive ethos where, as the school states in its aims, every child really does matter. Typical of many such responses, one parent wrote to inspectors, 'All the staff at St John's are so approachable and helpful and my husband and I feel we could not have chosen a better school for our children and wish we could have gone there when we were their age'.

The pupils are right to be enthusiastic about many aspects of school life. The youngest children in the Reception class get off to a good start because of good teaching and a well planned curriculum which meets their needs in developing independence, confidence and attention to the basic skills. Older pupils have access to an interesting curriculum which is enriched with educational visits and extra-curricular experiences which contribute very well to their personal development. Added to this, the school pays close attention to ensuring the health, safety and general well-being of pupils and is committed to involving them in decision-making where the school council has contributed well to developments such as improving playtime. As one pupil said, 'I like coming to school to learn, the teachers make sure we have fun and are not left out'.

There are examples of good and outstanding teaching in the school because, for example, teachers plan lessons well, based on good assessment arrangements, and this ensures that pupils of all abilities make good progress, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is only satisfactory because in a few lessons, the pace is too slow and teachers need to have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour so that valuable teaching time is not wasted.

The school has rightly identified the need to raise standards of attainment for all pupils. The standards in English, mathematics and science are stubbornly below national averages, especially in mathematics. However, considering their low attainment on entry to the school, pupils' progress is close to the nationally expected rate by the age of 11. The school monitors pupil progress rigorously and is now setting more ambitious targets. However, the strategies for achieving these targets need to be sharper as they have not, as yet, produced significant improvement. Despite this, the school knows itself well because of good self-evaluation, the outcomes of which closely resemble the findings of this inspection. As a consequence, the capacity for further improvement is highly promising.

What the school should do to improve further

- increase the pace and level of challenge in teaching in order to raise standards in English, science and especially in mathematics
- ensure that lessons get off to a prompt start and efficient use is made of available teaching time

- ensure that the school improvement plan contains curriculum targets and that it more clearly identifies priorities for improvement which are specific and measurable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 are below national averages in all core subjects and particularly low in mathematics by the age of 11. Over the last few years, there has been a fluctuating picture regarding standards, mainly caused by a range of factors, including the mobility of pupils and the well below average standards of attainment on entry to school. By the age of 11, there are no significant differences in the standards of boys and girls or other groups of pupils, including the considerable numbers of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The school has rigorous systems to monitor the progress of pupils and rightly recognises the need to raise standards further for all. As a consequence, this features as a key priority in the school's improvement plan but strategies currently employed, for example in mathematics at Key Stage 2, have yet to show significant improvement. Targets in English and mathematics for the next two years are far more challenging than has been the case in the last few years and predictions of attainment and progress, based on robust assessment and tracking of progress, are highly promising. Currently, however, insufficient challenge and pace in teaching, overall, are barriers to higher standards.

In the Reception class, children make good progress, especially in their confidence and independence. Although attainment on entry is low across all areas of learning, a well planned curriculum and good teaching ensures that children make good progress in basic skills and reach standards broadly in line with those expected for their age.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils are good ambassadors for their school and are enthusiastic about many aspects of school life. They particularly enjoy the extra-curricular activities, trips and visits that make a valuable contribution to their personal and social development. The school council takes very seriously its responsibility to improve the life of the school. For example, it has worked to make playtime an enjoyable and safe experience for everybody.

Behaviour is good around the school. However, although they enjoy lessons, pupils sometimes find difficulty in settling down to work promptly in class and therefore valuable learning time is wasted. Pupils try to follow the rules that are displayed in every classroom. They feel very safe in school and believe that the rare incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are dealt with fairly and promptly. They choose sensibly from a range of healthy foods and drinks and participate in a good range of physical activities, reflecting the successful drive to achieve a Healthy School Award. Attendance rates are average, but improving, because most pupils really want to come to school.

Although standards in literacy and numeracy are variable, other basic skills are secure. By Year 6, pupils take on real responsibilities, can work independently and feel well prepared for secondary school.

Contributions to the local and wider community are good, particularly in pupils' support for a wide range of charities. Spiritual and cultural development is particularly good and pupils show awareness about the environment and about issues facing people in Africa. Music is a particular strength of the school. Taken together, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. Work in the classroom is monitored carefully, with a clear focus on improving the quality of learning. Nevertheless, in a few lessons the pace of learning is too slow and teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour, particularly at the beginning of a new activity, when pupils are allowed to chatter and waste time. Some good and outstanding lessons were observed and teaching is consistently strong in the Foundation Stage and at the end of Key Stage 2. For example, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the deployment of learning support assistants are having a real impact on improving basic skills. Teachers generally plan lessons well and use a variety of approaches and resources to ensure that pupils enjoy their lessons. Support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is generally good. Learning is most effective when pupils are given the opportunity to work independently. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 respond particularly well to this approach which accounts for the good progress they make. Assessment procedures are good in the classroom and teachers adjust their approach when they find that individuals need more time or support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and there is a very clear focus on raising attainment in literacy, numeracy and ICT. New approaches to teaching history, geography and science are being developed to promote learning but these have not yet resulted in raised standards. There are well-planned visits, including outdoor pursuits and theatre trips, to complement class-based work and older pupils have the opportunity to experience residential activities which contribute well to their personal development.

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is well planned. There is a well-balanced approach to the six areas for learning through a thematic approach that gives priority to the development of personal, social and basic skills.

There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in music and sport. Friday afternoon enrichment activities include football and French, and good use is

made of expertise from outside the school. Curriculum planning ensures that the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with specific gifts and talents, are met.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care is good and pupils are learning in a safe and healthy environment because the school council works with the staff to focus on issues such as good behaviour and healthy eating. Pupils are given lots of opportunities to find out about healthy lifestyles and Year 6 are very knowledgeable about keeping safe when involved in sports. Reception children are also well cared for, for example when they use circle time to explore what is meant by friendship.

Procedures for ensuring health and safety and child protection are fully in place. Classroom activities, trips and visits are planned to ensure both safety and a good quality learning experience. Monitoring of behaviour and attendance is good and assessment procedures are effective. Marking is usually thorough and includes guidance on how pupils can improve. A more rigorous approach to tracking and target-setting is contributing well to pupils' progress.

Parents say that their children settle into school happily, although a small minority are concerned about behaviour in some classes. They are kept suitably informed through newsletters, the school's own website, reports and parents' meetings.

The quality of care for individual pupils is good because of the contribution of support staff and the effective monitoring systems. Break and lunchtime supervision is very good. Pupils with identified needs and learning difficulties are cared for well, and links with partner schools and outside agencies are used to contribute effectively to the well-being of pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good strategic leadership based on a commitment to continuous improvement and raising standards for all pupils. She has successfully diagnosed strengths and weaknesses through the rigorous approach to monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. This, together with an effective partnership between staff and governors, who hold the school to account well, has created the conditions to bring about the necessary improvements. Governors are well informed about the school and play an active part in supporting developments.

The school improvement plan has identified the appropriate priorities for improvement, and resources are aligned well to priorities. However, this is not yet fully effective because actions lack precise criteria to measure their effectiveness.

Those with leadership and management responsibilities for subjects and other aspects understand their roles well and arrangements for monitoring the curriculum are secure.

The shared approach to self-evaluation accounts for the close correlation between how well the school knows itself and to the findings of this inspection. As a consequence, the school offers good value for money and has the necessary capacity for further improvement.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

We very much enjoyed meeting you and coming to see your lessons when we visited your school recently. Thank you for making us so welcome, telling us about your school and letting us see your work.

We believe that St John's is a good and improving school. This is what we liked most:

- you are interested in your lessons and try to do your best
- your teachers and other adults look after you well. They take care to make sure you are safe and encourage you to be healthy
- you have lots of exciting clubs and activities to attend that help you to develop as young people
- you are making a good contribution to improving your school through your school council
- your headteacher is a good leader and is doing a good job with teachers, other adults and governors in helping your school to be even better
- the youngest children make a good start in school and you all make good progress by the time you leave at age 11.

This is what we have asked your headteacher to do to make your school even better:

- we would like your teachers to expect more of you in lessons in English, mathematics and science so that you are helped to do as well as you possibly can
- you can help by making sure you listen carefully and getting down to your work quickly, making sure that no time in lessons is wasted
- we would like your headteacher to make more detailed plans to help you do very well in your work and to improve the school.

We hope that you will play your full part in helping teachers and other adults in your school to make it even better.