

St John's RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115466
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	301325
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	106
6th form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Bob Hamill
Headteacher	Mr Brian Sainsbury
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2001
School address	Turpins Lane Woodford Bridge Essex IG8 8AX
Telephone number	02085041818
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Age group	5–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

When the pupils enter St John's, because of their disabilities, their skills, knowledge and understanding are generally very low compared with children of a similar age. Pupils have a wide variety of, and sometimes multiple, needs. The main groups are those with moderate or severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and a small number of those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). The school offers training to mainstream schools and works in partnership with neighbouring local authorities to help excluded or disaffected pupils back into school. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is typical of this type of school. All pupils have a statement of special educational need; four are looked after by the local authority. Almost half of the pupils are from backgrounds other than white British heritage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which gives good value for money. It has some outstanding features as well as a few areas for improvement. The headteacher, governors and the whole school staff have a clear vision for pupils' improved independence and achievement, preparation for life, sense of responsibility and respect for themselves and others. They work unstintingly to secure this and are successful in achieving these goals. The school is well placed to improve further.

Families and pupils praise the school's work highly. Families say 'St John's is always there for the families as well as the children if they have a problem,' and 'I had a lovely little monster and now I have a lovely little son'. The school is particularly successful in developing pupils' practical and social and communication skills through the strong partnership working with parents, speech and language therapists, learning mentors and teaching staff. Personal development is good. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep safe and lead healthy lifestyles. Some aspects are outstanding such as pupils' behaviour and their enjoyment of school.

Care support and guidance is good. An ethos of respect, care and concern for the individual underpins everything that this school does. The personal care and medical management of pupils is particularly good because teaching staff, assistants, therapists and nurses work so closely together. Pupils' wider understanding of their own needs and those of others is fostered well through a strong personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Not all pupils know their own learning targets, however, and more could be done to involve them in agreeing and evaluating these.

Pupils of all ages and from all backgrounds achieve well, because the teaching is effective. Staff have a good knowledge of the pupils' needs and plan effectively to meet these. The school keeps a careful track of pupils' progress in all subjects but does not always use the information it has to set whole school targets for improvement precisely enough.

The curriculum provides a good range of experiences which contribute well to pupils' learning. There is a very good and appropriate emphasis on life skills, alternative learning and vocational opportunities in the secondary department and sixth form. The dividing of classes into smaller groups and the opportunities students have to be included at other schools mean that they are also very well supported in more academic courses. They are prepared effectively for the next stage of their education and life. The positive contribution they make to the school and local community, clubs and residential experiences support pupils' social and cultural development very well.

The school is well led and managed. This is a school that reflects on what it does and challenges itself to do better. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The pace of development has really increased in urgency and momentum over the last two years, through work with an external consultant and the re-organisation of the senior management team. Senior staff have a satisfactory knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. A good start has been made on analysing data and setting targets for individuals and for groups, but this is not yet exploited fully. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive although, at times, they miss opportunities to challenge the school fully in their critical friend role.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is an effective, well organised and efficient unit. Provision is good and pupils are well cared for.

Teaching and learning is good. It is enthusiastic and well planned, with good support for students' individual needs and differences. Students respond with good concentration, great willingness and excellent behaviour. The curriculum is well planned, with strong emphasis on personal and social development, especially students' independence. Through these aspects, students learn many wider skills, for example in shops and restaurants, or when using 'The Flat' within the unit. Like the school, the sixth form is highly focused on supporting individual students' achievements. Many courses are practical, and are accredited through Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Individual pupils also take additional GCSE or Entry Level courses; one pupil for example is currently working towards an AS Art award. Students make good progress, particularly in developing their communication skills, ability to use numbers and money in practical situations and life skills such as paying for shopping or looking after themselves in public. The unit is well led and managed, and is effective in preparing students for their future lives, including through links with a local college that provides part-time education for St John's students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the ways in which the school gathers and analyses assessment data to evaluate the effectiveness its work and to identify the areas where it needs to improve.
- Improve the ways in which teachers use assessment to inform their teaching and help pupils understand better how they can improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

All pupils, whatever their needs or backgrounds, make good progress throughout their time in the school and sixth form. Their attainment remains significantly below others of a similar age, although a few individual pupils obtain the higher level Entry Level awards and GCSE qualifications by the end of Year 11 or in the sixth form. Students work towards Assessment and Qualification Alliance Unit units (AQA) awards and ASDAN awards from Key Stage 3 onwards. They achieve more units and/or the higher levels in these awards by the time they leave the school, than previous students, despite the increased complexity of student needs.

Pupils' social and communication skills improve particularly well because the school has considerable expertise here. Its speech and language therapists make a very strong contribution through their work with individual and groups of pupils and in their training of other staff. Pupils progress well in reading and write satisfactorily for a range of purposes; the school is already exploring ways of improving achievement in writing further. Pupils achieve well in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics, using their number skills well in other subjects and in visits and vocational opportunities. They make good progress towards the challenging targets set for them in Annual Reviews and individual education plans (IEPs) and in all other subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils grow in confidence, self-esteem and maturity and make significant strides in aspects of their personal development. Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding. They get on extremely well with one another and with the staff. Their level of concentration in lessons is often remarkable, given their specific needs. This happens because teachers make lessons interesting and help them to understand and achieve. Their attendance is good, despite a significant minority having entered the school having been disaffected previously, because they thoroughly enjoy school life.

Pupils feel safe and understand the importance of making healthy choices. They greatly appreciate the support they receive and the opportunities that the school provides. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also good. Very strong assemblies, religious education and PSHE support spiritual and social development very well. Progress in moral and cultural development is good. Pupils readily embrace opportunities to take responsibility. Occasionally too much is done for pupils that they could do for themselves, such as clearing away or getting out equipment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good because teachers have good skills in teaching pupils with very varied needs. Lessons are interesting and, where they have them, staff use the electronic whiteboards well. Staff begin lessons by making sure that pupils understand what the lesson aims are, and mostly end lessons with a clear review of what has been learned. Teachers and support assistants are especially good at managing pupils' behaviour, and ensuring that almost all lessons flow smoothly. Most lessons are well paced, with challenging work that pupils really enjoy doing, and that enables them to learn effectively. Staff have warm and positive relationships with pupils and pupils respond extremely well. Most teachers prepare different work for the different abilities of pupils in their classes. However, sometimes lessons do not take sufficient account of pupils' IEP targets or assessment levels and there are occasionally missed opportunities for pupils to evaluate how well they have done.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The learning experiences provided meet the very varied needs of pupils effectively. This is because the curriculum is well planned, carefully overviewed by subject leaders and supported by a range of resources. Occasionally, a commercially available teaching resource is followed too rigidly, and lacks relevance to the pupils' learning needs. The school is good at identifying individual students' talents and finding appropriate learning opportunities to enable pupils to achieve highly, often in partnership with a local high school or college or by exploring new award bearing courses.

The Foundation Stage curriculum is satisfactory, and is being reviewed to take account of Early Years Foundation Stage developments. Primary age pupils have a good mix of academic, communication and personal/social subjects. Secondary aged pupils are taught the whole range of required subjects, with an increasing focus on life and living skills, improving communication skills and on vocational and work-related learning. A good range of award bearing course are in place to recognise these achievements. Careers education, work related learning and a good range of work experience placements ensure that students are well prepared for leaving school.

Pupils have superb opportunities to attend clubs and go on trips, including residential visits such as sailing in the English Channel, and on cultural visits to Belgium.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has particularly good procedures for ensuring that pupils are safe and well looked after. Pupils' personal, social and academic progress is assessed well. Staff gather much information, and the progress that pupils make in each area is evident. However, this information is not used consistently when setting targets for individuals or groups or when planning lessons. Pupils rarely know what level they are working at, and have difficulty recalling what their individual targets are. Teachers do not routinely remind pupils what their targets are, how they are doing in relation to them or what they now need to do to improve.

The support that pupils receive is very good. Very well trained staff, including teachers, classroom support staff, therapists and learning mentors, form an effective internal team supported by a considerable host of people from outside the school. This ensures all pupils can benefit from the teaching and the curriculum that is provided, feel safe and supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher, governors and staff have a clear and shared vision for the school. The senior management has the considerable confidence of parents and other stakeholders who uniformly praise its work, particularly its focus on the individual. The school has excellent relationships with families and with other agencies. All this significantly benefits the pupils.

The restructuring of the senior management team and of the school departments since the last inspection has strengthened the leadership of the school considerably. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory; issues beyond the school's control, such as a high level of staff changes and illness, affected the pace of change but this has really moved on in the last two years.

The arrangements for monitoring the school's effectiveness are sound and improving. The school has a satisfactory knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. It has reliable and sufficient data on its achievements. However, when making judgements about itself it does not always evaluate fully the impact of its work on pupils' achievements, linking its judgements about its performance and its planning more to what it has done than to what this has achieved. Similarly, although the school's information on pupils' progress is analysed and their achievements summarised, the data is not yet used to set whole school targets as well as it could be.

The governing body and all staff are highly committed to ensuring the school provides the best for its pupils. Governors are very involved in the school and very supportive, fulfilling most of their duties well and overseeing the school's finances carefully.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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	2
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	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

29 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's School, Woodford Bridge, Essex

Thank you for making us welcome at your school. We came to see how well you are all getting on and find out what could make your school better.

We enjoyed our visit. You are part of a good school. Your parents are very pleased with the work it does. They say that it helps you and your families and everyone work together very well so that you can do your best. You also told us how much you enjoyed school, feel safe and know that it is helping you to learn. That is great, because it is what Mr Sainsbury wants the school to be good at. People at your school work extremely hard with lots of other people to make sure that you get the help you need.

You are all getting on well with your work at school. You behave excellently and are getting better at doing things for yourself. This is because your teachers and teaching assistants and others who help you in the school are doing a good job. You also have enjoyable lessons and lots of interesting visits out. The people at school take good care of you.

We have asked Mr Sainsbury, the governors and the staff to do two main things to make the school better. We have asked them to help you to understand your targets better and how well you are improving toward them. We have also asked them to set targets for the school's work that will help you all learn even better.

I hope that you will all keep up the good work.

Thank you and best wishes to you all,

Sue Lewis

Lead Inspector