

St John's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106105
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309030
Inspection dates	15–16 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Sykes
Headteacher	Mrs Jacqui Ames
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2004
School address	Poplar Street Heaton Hersey Stockport Cheshire SK4 3DG
Telephone number	0161 442 7424
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Age group	5-11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This school of below average size caters for boys and girls aged from 5 to 11 years. Three fifths of the pupils come from the area of Heaton Mersey and two fifths from surrounding areas including beyond the local authority of Stockport. Pupils start school with skills and abilities similar to those typically seen. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is below average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Over a third are from minority ethnic heritages and English is not the first language of a quarter of pupils.

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. It has emerged successfully from a period of staffing instability and reducing pupil numbers. In the last two years, it has improved considerably especially in its quality of teaching and learning, the morale of staff and the extent to which they work as a tightly knit team. This good improvement has been secured by the headteacher's very effective management of change and a sharp focus on enabling pupils to reach the high standards of which they are capable. She has been very capably aided in this by the deputy headteacher and middle managers. Between them they have forged a strong collegiate spirit. An active governing body has struck a fine balance between providing support and challenge to the staff of the school. Procedures to assess the progress made by pupils and evaluate the performance of the school are good. The school has a clear sense of what to develop next, as a result.

Standards are high and achievement is good, as seen in lessons and the pupils' work. Standards are a little higher in English than in mathematics and science. However, this high attainment has yet to be demonstrated in national tests. Performance in these dipped to average in recent years when there was staffing instability. The good progress seen reflects careful planning of the curriculum and the content of particular lessons, as well as the dedication of the teachers. Teaching was good, and sometimes very good, in most of the lessons seen. Teachers are well supported by a good number of well trained assistants. A particular strength lies in the way in which lessons are well tailored to meet the needs of pupils where classes have been organised into subgroups of pupils with different levels of ability.

Pupils receive good levels of care, guidance and support. They feel safe and enjoy their time in school and their behaviour is excellent. Support for pupils with particular learning needs is very well targeted and effective. Because of this, the good teaching and the family atmosphere of the school, pupils thrive and develop well personally. The vast majority of parents are pleased with the provision. A small number have concerns about specific instances of pupils not being fully stretched by the work, a lack of attention in the large junior classes, and the alleged misbehaviour of a few pupils. The inspection did not reveal evidence to support these concerns. Attendance is average. It is depressed by the number of pupils taking holidays in term time.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Reception class gives children a good start to their schooling. They begin with levels of attainment which are expected for their age. They make good progress and end reaching standards which are at least in line with and usually above expected levels. Children are welcomed into a warm and bright environment where they feel safe and settle well into the daily routine. They are taught to behave well and are happy and confident. They learn to work cooperatively as a result of good teaching and support. Good use is made of the indoor and outdoor spaces where the children initiate activities and have time to explore ideas and interests in depth. They have particularly good access to physical exercise aided by specialist sports coaching. Transition arrangements are good and children settle in quickly and confidently. Parents are kept fully informed about their children's progress. The Foundation class is well led and managed and the different learning needs of children are met effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate and strengthen the recent improvements in teaching and learning to raise standards further in mathematics and science.
- Improve performance in national curriculum assessments and tests in Years 2 and 6.
- Increase the attendance rate.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are now high and achievement is good. In recent years, the standards attained in the national tests declined from above average to average. The 2007 results showed that attainment was average, and that progress was satisfactory in English but less so in mathematics and science. Standards have recently improved, as shown clearly in the high quality of the learning observed and the teachers' very good marking of pupils' work. On this evidence, progress is now good throughout the school, attainment is above average, and a high proportion of pupils are expected to have progressed through two levels of National Curriculum attainment between assessment in Year 2 and the tests in Year 6. This has yet to be confirmed by the 2008 national tests.

Pupils enter the Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are typically seen. A significant proportion of them have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or do not speak English as their first language. In the Reception class they make good progress and attain above the local authority average in the Early Learning Goals. In Years 1 and 2, attainment in the lessons seen was above average. Similarly, attainment seen in lessons in Years 3 to 6 was high. The very good work seen in writing in Years 5 and 6, for example, augers well for future test results. Throughout the school, pupils make good progress.

Much has been done in the last two years to raise standards and this is bearing fruit. This work now needs to be translated to high attainment in national tests and assessments.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school very much. They are positive about their learning. Their behaviour is excellent, especially so in the school's open plan environment. They are careful about the way they move around school without disturbing others and have respect for individual spaces and their function. They are polite to staff and visitors and they get on well with each other. Incidents that involve racism are rare and the few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils feel safe.

Pupils enjoy and take part in a range of activities designed to promote their health, emotional well-being and overall enjoyment at school. These include trips to museums, churches and the local airport which help to enrich their learning. They enjoy the wide range of sports and other activities such as the school's steel band. Pupils speak highly of rewards for good behaviour in the form of 'golden time' where they can take part in a range of interesting activities at the end of the school week. They also report favourably about special themed days such as 'around the world' where they learn about different cultures. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enthusiastically take on roles of responsibility which prepare them well for the future, such as representing their classes on the school council and as play leaders.

Some children take extended holidays within term time in spite of measures the school has taken to prevent this. This depresses the school's attendance rate which is average. It also hinders the progress of those children who miss such time at school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school is effective in meeting the specific learning needs of all children. Teachers and assistants work well with each other to plan and teach lessons: for example, they use various ways of organising groups to ensure that the needs of differing abilities are met. As a result, pupils make good progress in lessons, behave very well and work harmoniously together. In the very best lessons, pupils were clear about what gains were to be made in their learning and they could assess how well they had achieved their objectives. Teachers use stimulating activities to sustain interest throughout lessons. This includes the effective use of interactive whiteboards to focus attention and reinforce learning. Teachers also encourage participation in lessons by pairing pupils to share and discuss their ideas. On the rare occasions where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, it was so because pupils' interest in the work was not fully sustained throughout the lesson. They were sometimes unclear about the tasks set. The school is aware of where the teaching is most effective and of areas that need to be improved: for example, it is currently and rightly focusing on developing mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The school covers the core subjects of English, mathematics and science thoroughly. This has been strengthened in recent years by good use of the National Strategies programme. The school also teaches the other subjects of the National Curriculum in a broad and balanced way. The curriculum is enriched by the teaching of French and Portuguese, the latter aided by the school's strong links with schools in Brazil. It is also enriched by well planned cross-curricular themed days to give pupils opportunities to develop their creativity. The coverage of areas such as religious education and the teaching of English as an additional language are presently being strengthened as staff work in cooperation with staff in other schools. The school and its teachers plan the curriculum very effectively and this ensures that pupils receive a good grounding for their transfer to secondary school. All groups are catered for well and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is not the first language are given programmes well tailored to meet their specific needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good pastoral care. Procedures to promote child protection and the health and safety of pupils meet the government's requirements. Pupils told us that they settle well into school. They feel they can turn to all staff to discuss problems. They have ample opportunity to voice any concerns in class. Provision for the wide range of needs is good and developing, indicating that, throughout the school, every child matters. Specialist support is provided as needed for children for whom English is an additional language. Children at risk of not reaching

targets and in need of additional help are well supported through a range of intervention groups. This helps them to achieve what they are capable of and to acquire basic skills.

The marking of work is good and gives clear guidance on how pupils can improve. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are effective. Assessment information is increasingly being used to good effect to set targets and to monitor pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The morale of staff has improved considerably in recent years and they work very effectively both individually and in teams. Parents rightly stress that among the school's key strengths are its strong family atmosphere and the openness of staff and the headteacher. The very capable headteacher and deputy headteacher cooperate well and are strongly supported by other staff with management responsibilities to provide strong and very effective leadership. This has focused sharply in recent years on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to reverse a previous slowdown in the progress made by the pupils. This has been very effective though it has yet to be demonstrated by the results of the national tests. The good learning seen during the inspection shows that the school has managed its drive to improve very well and that it also has the capacity and the ambition to continue to improve. The campaign to improve teaching has been well supported by a good level of carefully chosen staff training and considerable effort by the headteacher to help the staff work with pupils consistently throughout the age range, thus helping them to develop well.

Communications with parents are extensive and the school goes to some lengths to gauge their views of the education provided, and help them to be aware of what is going on in school and how well pupils are developing. The school runs very smoothly and staff are skilled in managing pupils within the open plan building. All statutory requirements are met. Recent reductions in pupil numbers and the budget have been very effectively managed, though class sizes in the junior phase are very large. The school gives good value for money. The staff are very well supported by an accomplished and active governing body. Governors have a clear idea of how well the school is performing and they are aided in this by the accurate information provided by the staff. They also share with the headteacher appropriate and ambitious goals for future development.

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Annex A

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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.

Annex A

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School, Stockport,
SK4 3DG

We visited your school recently. I promised to write to you to let you know how good we believe that it is. St John's School is a good school. It has improved a lot in recent years. The headteacher is working very hard to ensure that it gets even better.

- The work you do is of a high standard. It is higher in English than in mathematics and science.
- You make good progress in lessons and as you work throughout the year.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you enjoy your time in school.
- Your teachers are very good at ensuring that you learn well and that you get all the advice you need.
- They work very hard to give you interesting lessons. They mark your work clearly to show you how well you are doing.
- You learn in a wide range of subjects including foreign languages, and are well prepared to move on to secondary school.
- The school is a very pleasant place for you to learn in. You are well looked after and you feel safe there.
- The school is very well managed and gives you a good education. I do hope that you appreciate this.
- Some of you take holidays in term time and this hinders your progress.

As I have said, the headteacher wants to make the school even better. We have suggested some things which will help in this: firstly to ensure that the national test results show how good you really are (and you will need to work hard to help with this); secondly to improve your learning in mathematics and science; and thirdly to improve attendance.

I wish you well as you continue to work hard at school.