

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107701
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309480
Inspection dates	22–23 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Dodd

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	156
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Malcolm Brooke
Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Massey
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Boothroyd Lane Dewsbury West Yorkshire WF13 2LP
Telephone number	1924 325323
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Age group	5–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized school. It makes provision for Reception aged children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Pakistani heritage, is well above average and is increasing. Many of these pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English on entry to the EYFS. The school serves the local community, which includes an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. Although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is lower than average. The school has been accredited with the Activemark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school has an accurate view of its effectiveness and provides good value for money. The way in which pupils are cared for and nurtured is seen in the warmth that radiates from staff and the value placed upon celebrating their achievements, no matter how small. Making sure that pupils enjoy learning, feel safe and happy and play an active part in their community is a high priority. From a young age, children develop a keen sense of respect for people of differing cultures and faiths, within the school community and beyond. Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning reflect their enjoyment of their education. Most parents think highly of the school. They particularly appreciate the care shown by all staff and the many opportunities they have to get involved in their children's education.

Pupils, including children in the EYFS, make good progress from their very low starting points. Standards are below average by the time that pupils transfer to junior schools. The proportion of children reaching the national learning goals set at the end of Reception has been rising. There are early signs that this is now helping to improve standards by Year 2. In writing, however, standards not as high as in reading or mathematics. Although a number of recent curriculum adaptations aimed at promoting better achievement in writing have been made, these are yet to pay full dividends. This is because opportunities to practise basic writing skills across the subjects of the curriculum are sometimes missed.

Pupils' good progress reflects the good quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum. Teachers provide a good range of activities that enthuse pupils' learning and maintain their interest. Teachers record pupils' achievements regularly, and use this information in order to identify where their learning could accelerate further. They do not always use this information, however, to provide work that closely matches pupils' varying abilities in classes, particularly to provide additional challenge for the more able pupils. Effective support from teaching assistants, along with a good range of support programmes, make a strong contribution to the good progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

Leadership and management are good. Since the previous inspection, a completely new senior leadership team and structure have been established. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection, such as in provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Leaders have forged effective partnerships with parents, carers and other organisations in order to extend provision and to support pupils' good achievement and personal development. Staff seize with enthusiasm opportunities to further their leadership skills. As a result, they are now well placed to make a stronger contribution to finding out how well the school is performing, checking on the quality of provision, contributing to self-evaluation and influencing the agenda for school improvement. Although governors are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses, they do not yet have all the necessary skills and knowledge to hold the school to account for its performance. Nevertheless, improvement priorities are carefully chosen and well planned. This, along with early signs of rising standards gives the school a good platform upon which to build in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children start in Reception, their skills are well below those typical for their age. Their communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional skills are particularly low. This is why staff put a high priority on improving children's communication, language and literacy. Adults seek out every opportunity to help children to get along well together, talk about learning and behave well. Their dedication to helping children to learn in an exceptionally safe and secure setting reflects the rigorous adherence to all aspects of their welfare. This, along with the good range of stimulating activities, good teaching and learning and additional language support for the increasing proportion of children at an early stage of learning to speak English, ensures that children quickly learn that coming to school is enjoyable. When children transfer to Year 1, although many do not attain all the national goals set for their learning, their skills have improved. In the last two years, the proportion of children reaching these learning goals has risen significantly. This reflects the good leadership of the EYFS coordinator and the combined efforts of staff working together as a close team. They are well aware that their next steps include extending the provision for outdoor learning and forging closer links with Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills, so that standards in writing improve.
- Strengthen teachers' use of the information about pupils' achievements, so that the work set matches tightly their varying learning needs, particularly in challenging the more able pupils.
- Extend the skills of governors, so that they hold the school more fully to account for its performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good in relation to their very low starting points. In recent years, the standards reported at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics have been below average. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainments falls short of the national picture, and especially so in writing. School data and inspection evidence indicates that standards in 2008 were similar to that of 2007. However, pupils assessed in 2008 entered Year 1 with lower skills. There was also an untypically-high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The assessments reflect good progress from pupils' starting points. Challenging targets for 2009 are in place and progress towards achieving them is being tracked closely. There are early indications that standards are starting to improve. Current standards in writing, however, remain lower than in reading and mathematics. Although the school has put in place strategies aimed at promoting better achievement in writing, the full impact of this work is yet to be seen. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress because they often benefit from extra help in classrooms and access a good range of additional support programmes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. The school is a harmonious and caring setting, where pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. The high value placed, from a very young age, upon celebrating faiths and cultures enables pupils quickly to develop a strong sense of belonging to a community. As a result, pupils enjoy school and say that they feel safe. Pupils enjoy making their school a better place to learn. They take on responsibilities, such as being school councillors, with great enthusiasm. They talk sensibly about how they keep themselves healthy. Despite unrelenting efforts of staff, attendance remains well below the national average. This reflects the high incidence of holidays during term time, including extended holidays abroad and the observance of religious festivals. Most pupils attend regularly, however, and pupils are well aware of the importance of good attendance. Pupils' growing personal and social skills, along with good progress in literacy and numeracy, provide a sound platform for them to succeed at junior school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning enables pupils to achieve well. Good organisation, interesting and purposeful activities, warm relationships, successful management of pupils' behaviour and the thoughtful deployment of support staff all make a strong contribution to pupils' good achievement. Hard-working and committed teachers are responding with enthusiasm to recent changes to practice. Teachers are becoming increasingly adept at using interactive whiteboards. Procedures for ensuring that achievements are recorded regularly and accurately have been strengthened. This is helping to spot more swiftly and precisely where pupils' learning needs to quicken. Teachers do not yet always use this information effectively enough, however, to plan further work that matches tightly the range of abilities of their pupils. This means that opportunities to extend pupils' learning, particularly to challenge the more able pupils, are sometimes overlooked.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A broad, balanced and enriching curriculum enables pupils to make good progress. The strong emphasis on pupils' personal development is highly evident. Strong partnerships with parents and the community widen pupils' experiences. Opportunities to learn about different cultures and faiths and to take part together in sporting activities, for example, extend pupils' understanding of the community in which they live. Since the previous inspection, improved provision for ICT has helped to increase pupils' skills and there are now more opportunities for pupils to practise vital speaking and listening skills. Pupils do not always have enough opportunities, however, to practise their writing skills. The school's efforts to address this have yet to pay dividends. A good range of support programmes helps pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well. Pupils' learning is held back occasionally when their work does not allow them to build on what they can already do, particularly the more able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff know pupils and their families well and offer the right kind of care and support at the right time. Pupils are confident that someone will help them overcome difficulties and make them feel safe. Appropriate procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. The strong commitment to supporting pupils with additional social and emotional needs is seen in the effective partnerships with parents and carers and external organisations. The 'networking coordinator' ensures that a good and extending range of opportunities are available to parents, so that they can become more involved in their children's education. Academic guidance is currently strengthening. Keeping a closer eye on pupils' progress is helping to ensure that any underachievement is quickly spotted and highlights when pupils are not on track to reach their challenging learning targets. There remains scope, however, to develop pupils' own understanding of how to improve, including through regular discussion with adults and the marking of their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's passion for making sure that pupils are nurtured and achieve well, despite the additional challenges faced by serving an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage, is highly evident. She has successfully steered the school through a rapid period of staff change. A new senior leadership team and clear structure of responsibility are securely in place. The deputy headteacher makes a strong contribution to driving improvements in key areas, including in the EYFS and in developing rigorous ways of tracking pupils' progress. A high priority is placed on the professional development of the new leadership team. As a result, their skills in finding out how well the school is performing and in checking the quality of provision have strengthened. They are now well placed and eager to make an increased contribution to self-evaluation and to influencing the improvement agenda. Governance is satisfactory. Although governors are clear about school's strengths and weaknesses, many are newly appointed and, as such, they are yet to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to hold the school fully to account for its performance.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School, Dewsbury, WF13 2LP

Thank you so much for the warm welcome you gave inspectors when we visited your school. You were polite and answered our questions thoughtfully. Your behaviour was good, and it was pleasing to see just how proud you are of the badges and jewels you get when you have done something well. You helped me to understand why you feel so happy and safe in school. All the adults care a good deal about you. It was good to hear in your assembly that all of the worries you had about starting your new class in September have now totally gone. I was also particularly impressed with just how much you know about the different cultures and faiths of the children who attend your school. This is helping you all to get along well together and to learn in peace.

Many of your parents told me that they are pleased with your school. I agree with them. Your school is a good school. Although the standards you reach by the time you leave to go to junior school are lower than in some other schools, the rate at which you learn is good. The standards you reach in reading and mathematics, however, are higher than they are in writing. Your headteacher, other staff and governors have some good plans ready to help you to learn even faster. There are some things that could be better still. I have asked your school to make sure that:

- you have more chances to practise your writing, so that it improves
- your work is always just right for you and never too easy, so that you can always show everyone what you are capable of
- your school governors learn more about how to check that your school is doing as well as it should.

You can help your school by making sure that you tell your teachers if your work is too easy, by making sure that you know how well you are getting on, and by always checking what you still have to do to reach your learning targets. Of course, you should continue to try your best in everything that you do.