

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, Weymouth

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113836
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311395
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Geoff Burgess

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kim Greenslade
Headteacher	Diana Mason
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004
School address	Coombe Avenue Weymouth DT4 7TP
Telephone number	01305 785711
Fax number	01305 777932

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John's School serves an area of mixed housing. Many parents are involved in seasonal work in the tourist industry. The acting headteacher, who was previously the deputy headteacher, became permanent a few days before the inspection. With pupil numbers in the area falling, the school is midway through a process of moving from two-form entry to one-form. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties is higher than usually found. Most pupils now in school started school with attainment below the level expected for their age but attainment on entry is rising.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school which, while dealing successfully with a series of changes and challenges, has put in place many necessary improvements that are beginning to make a difference. In doing so, it has kept its positive ethos, maintained a stable and caring environment for its pupils, and not allowed financial constraints to limit its ambitions. Parents are happy with the way the school has developed. They feel the school 'has improved greatly' and give special praise to the contribution of the 'calm, caring, very approachable headteacher'. A good example of the impact this is having is in the Reception class where the school's investment of time and resources has seen the quality of provision and children's learning and personal development improve considerably. All are now good. Another example is the school's response to poor national test results in mathematics in 2007. A detailed analysis of pupils' progress through the school identified several issues, especially in Years 3 to 6. A new subject coordinator was appointed with a specific brief and as a result of his actions, a great deal has been achieved in bringing standards in mathematics up to expected levels. Overall standards are now average. While achievement is satisfactory, it is strongest in the younger classes where the teaching is good. As a result, improvements shown by national testing in Year 2 have been sustained and are being built on in Year 3. Teaching is not as strong in the older classes though the school has worked hard to compensate for the impact of uncertainties in staffing in Year 6. A feature of pupils' learning throughout the school is the contribution of very effective teaching assistants especially in supporting pupils who need extra help. Good pastoral care helps to ensure that pupils' personal development is good. Here again, the school's recent actions to improve attendance, punctuality and the attitudes and behaviour of a minority are making a big difference to the ethos of the school. Behaviour is good and often exemplary as in a whole school assembly. Most pupils are very happy in school. A parent notes that 'children feel good about themselves which gives them confidence'. The school is successful in encouraging pupils to be active, eat sensibly and stay safe. However, many older pupils would like to have a wider range of facilities and activities to get involved in at break times. The school's curriculum covers all the necessary areas and is enhanced by a good range of extra activities, notably in the arts and in residential visits. However, the school acknowledges that there is scope to be more creative in organising the curriculum to make activities more out of the ordinary, relevant and challenging. Work is planned at expected levels but improved arrangements for guiding and supporting pupils' academic work by setting targets and tracking their progress are not yet consistently effective in raising expectations and improving achievement. Well supported by the governing body, the new headteacher has shown clear vision and great sensitivity and determination in moving the school forward. Some longstanding weaknesses are starting to be remedied, and a challenging agenda with higher whole school targets agreed. Key staff are now empowered to make a much fuller contribution to bringing about improvement. Although these are early days in the process, the school has already shown that it is in a sound position to build on the strong foundations laid.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

A decision made early in the school year by the headteacher and governors to prioritise the development of the Reception class has been very effective. It is now a strength of the school providing a good quality learning environment in which children are thriving. All areas of learning are very well catered for in the spacious, well equipped and organised classroom. A parent

notes, 'The children are really looked after and helped to understand the topics they study. My child loves it all'. Well planned activities, inside and out, mean that children are happy, independent learners who are comfortable working and playing together.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations among staff, parents and pupils by setting targets that are more demanding for all pupils.
- Ensure that pupils of all abilities know how well they are doing and what they need to do to reach their targets, and that all teaching is good enough to help them achieve them.
- Provide more class activities that captivate, stimulate and challenge pupils and improve the school's outdoor facilities for pupils to work and play. A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average, though recent national test results have been mixed. At the end of Year 2, standards have been well below average in reading, writing and mathematics for two years, but improved to broadly average in 2007. The school's records and evidence from pupils' current work suggest that this improvement has been sustained in Year 2 and that standards in the Foundation Stage are broadly as expected. In Year 6, standards had been below average for some time but improved to above average in 2006. In 2007, this improvement was sustained in English and science but results in mathematics were well below average. The school has worked hard to put this right this year with some success and the evidence suggests that standards overall are now broadly average. Achievement is satisfactory. As with standards, national test results have indicated that it has varied in recent years in Years 3 to 6. The recent problems in mathematics have slowed pupils' progress, but this is now satisfactory due to the improvements the school has made. The school's much improved tracking records and pupils' work this year indicate that progress is strongest in Reception to Year 3 though still satisfactory in the older classes. The good contribution of effective teaching assistants ensures that pupils who find learning difficult make the same sort of progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond very well to opportunities in assemblies to pray and reflect sensitively on the plight of people in their partner school in Kenya. A parent reflects the views of many by commenting that the school has 'a strong Christian ethos which is reflected in its daily activities'. Behaviour is good with difficult attitudes among a few older pupils well managed. Attendance has improved to satisfactory and higher expectations for punctuality have improved this recently. Pupils enjoy their education, valuing in particular their good relationships with staff. They play safely, cooperating well in games at lunchtimes. Pupils say that the small amount of bullying that occurs is well dealt with, often by the school's peer mediators. Many pupils make good contributions to the smooth running of the school community and the school's strong connections with the Church and the local community mean that pupils have a good awareness of their responsibilities in this area. Pupils' sound basic skills and their ability to work in groups and in teams provide a secure foundation for future education and working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils' satisfactory progress in their learning is a good indicator that teaching overall is satisfactory. This was backed up by lessons observed during the inspection that were characterised by calm, purposeful teaching making good use of available resources such as the interactive whiteboards. Little time is lost in keeping pupils on task, and most pupils' good attitudes and willingness to contribute and try, make a strong contribution to their learning. This was most evident in the younger classes where pupils' progress was strongest. Teaching assistants play an important role in working with groups. Teachers are making increasing use of assessment to set targets and match and modify work but the quality of this, and of marking, is variable between classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils acquire skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils say that they particularly enjoy their work in science and the arts. All other subjects are covered appropriately and a start has been made on modifying the curriculum to make activities more relevant and exciting. However, not enough use is made of cross-curricular links, including the use of basic skills in other subjects so that pupils can develop these skills in different contexts. A good range of enrichment activities, including clubs, visits and especially much enjoyed residential trips, contributes well to improving pupils' attitudes to school and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good. The school's close connection with the on-site Nursery and strong relationships with its feeder secondary school mean that transfer arrangements are very effective. The school makes good use of all the various agencies to ensure pupils' well-being. Pupils' personal welfare needs are well known by all adults in the school and appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place. Pupils who have difficulty learning or conforming are identified early and their pastoral needs are well met. Pupils' academic guidance and support is satisfactory. The school recognises accurately that aspects of assessment and academic guidance are areas for improvement, though better practice is emerging, for example, in English. As yet though, the way this is implemented is inconsistent, with some pupils unaware of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The last 12 months have been a testing time for the school, with existing pressures on the budget and staffing, brought about by the planned downsizing, complicated by uncertainty. In this time, the governors and the acting leadership team have not just held the school together, but identified what needed to be done and involved the whole school community in bringing about improvement. Parents are pleased with their increased involvement. One comment was typical of many, 'The school values parents as valuable members of the team'. The governing

body, which has been actively involved in all the developments, is benefitting from improved information provided by the headteacher. Senior leaders are now fully involved in decision making and a new system for subject coordination is making much better use of expertise within the school. While maintaining a balanced budget this year, good use has been made of the extra space released by downsizing to provide a very good range of facilities. The school's leadership is pleased with progress so far but recognises that time will be needed to embed the changes and make them fully effective in raising standards. Because of this, leadership and management are satisfactory.

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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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**

- 19 April 2008 Dear Pupils Mrs Simms, Mrs Thompson and I would like to thank you for your friendly welcome to your school on our recent visit. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and watching all the activities going on around the school. We think your school is satisfactory, but we also think that you have everything in place to keep improving. These are the good things we found.
- Children in the Reception class enjoy school and do well.
- You behave well, enjoy learning, work hard and do your best.
- You know how to stay healthy, fit and safe.
- Everybody gets on very well together.
- Your teachers and helpers work hard to help you learn.
- They arrange a good range of extra activities for you to enjoy.
- You know that there is always someone to turn to should you need help.
- We know you appreciate all the adults do to make sure your time in school is as happy as possible.
- Your headteacher is very good at involving and getting the best out of everybody. To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do.
- Plan work and set you targets that are a little bit harder each year so that by the time you leave you have made even better progress.
- Make sure that you all have the same opportunity to learn by making teaching equally good in each class and by making sure you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve.
- Make the school an even better place to be by giving you more unusual, interesting and exciting things to do in class and during your breaks outside. You can help too by continuing to work hard and do your best. Again, thank you for all you do to make your school what it is. It was a pleasure for me to share it with you for a short time. Yours sincerely Geoff Burgess
Lead inspector

19 April 2008

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You can help too by continuing to work hard and do your best. Again, thank you for all you do to make your school what it is. It was a pleasure for me to share it with you for a short time.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Burgess
Lead inspector