

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115065
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311810
Inspection date	14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Baker
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Konarzewski
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2005
School address	Clay Lane Grove Colchester CO4 4HH
Telephone number	01206 841288
Fax number	01206 844611

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the consistency of progress and achievement across the school
- standards in writing
- how pupils' key skills are developed across different subjects
- how involved pupils are in their own learning.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, assessment, tracking and target setting information, evidence of impact of different initiatives to raise standards and discussions with pupils, key members of staff and a governor. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as detailed in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St John's Primary School is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils who need extra support for their learning is broadly in line with the picture nationally. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, few are at an early stage of learning English. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award and 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: 1

St John's is an outstanding school. The school's many strengths combine to form a winning combination and a high standard of education where pupils flourish. By the time pupils leave, they are equipped with the academic, social and personal skills to tackle confidently the next challenges in their lives. At the core of the school's success is the shared commitment of staff and governors to never standing still. The manner in which any identified weaknesses are rigorously tackled and improvements quickly secured is impressive. This, and its track record of accomplishment since the last inspection, put the school in excellent stead for the future.

The driving force behind the school's success is the excellent leadership of the headteacher. She has played a pivotal role in the significant improvement of all aspects of work in the school over the last six years. Her determination to make this an outstanding school has not wavered and the vision has become a reality. Many parents are very pleased with the school, although a minority are less positive. However, the school is keen to bring them on board by sharing and celebrating the school's numerous successes.

Children's attainment when they start at the school is below average. By the time pupils leave, standards are significantly above the national average in English, mathematics and science. This means that progress and achievement are outstanding. However, this is not a school that simply focuses on the core subjects. Pupils also reach high standards in art and the performing arts. Standards in writing for more able pupils dipped in 2007, but the robust manner in which this issue was tackled has resulted in standards reaching their highest level in recent years. This is an example of the school's readiness to try new ideas in the search for continuous improvement. This attention to detail is also reflected in the very good procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, setting challenging targets and holding teachers accountable for the achievement of pupils in their class.

Pupils readily take responsibility for their learning and have a very impressive awareness of their individual targets. Older pupils know precisely the levels they are working on and what is needed to move on to the next level. Marking, particularly in English, makes very clear to pupils what they need to do to improve. Pupils assess their own work and that of their classmates and then compare it to the teachers' assessments. This results in pupils taking a real sense of ownership for their work and they are more than able to rise to the challenge.

High quality teaching is a key to the pupils' achievement. In many instances, teaching is vibrant and fun, challenging and well paced with work closely matched to the pupils' differing needs. Just occasionally, these factors are not present in some classes. Books show that a great emphasis is given to teaching writing, and teachers' subject knowledge in many subjects is used to motivate pupils and bring learning to life. The use of specialist teachers in subjects such as art and music, and the use of outside sporting coaches are shining examples of capitalising on the individual talents of teachers. Across the school, teaching assistants make a telling contribution to supporting and enhancing pupils' learning.

There is little doubt that pupils make a major contribution to making the school what it is. Their love of learning is reflected in the high attendance rates. Pupils have a contagious enthusiasm and a strong desire to do well. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are great ambassadors for the school. This was summed up by one pupil who said, 'This is a great place to be, everybody has a part to play and nobody is left out.' Pupils are acutely aware of what is needed to follow fit, healthy and safe lives. They make a tremendous contribution to the school community and

beyond. The school council has instigated 'buddy stops', a trim trail, playground markings and even free Christmas dinners for pupils! They raise money for many charities, organise talent shows and summer fairs and participate in local community and environmental events. Pupils are very reflective, caring individuals who have a very strong awareness of how their actions can affect others and a good knowledge of different faiths.

Pupils' enjoyment and achievements owe much to the richness of the curriculum and the care provided. Covering subjects in depth provides the foundation for learning that is broad, wide and varied. Add to this themed weeks, an array of multicultural events, artists in residence, excellent school productions, opportunities to play musical instruments, many other visits and visitors, all topped off with lots of after school clubs - it is easy to see why the curriculum is a recipe geared for both excellence and enjoyment. The area for development accurately identified by the school, is to develop pupils' key skills and their enquiry skills in a more innovative and creative manner across different subjects and through other curriculum initiatives. Alongside the strengths in academic guidance lie the high level of pastoral support and care where pupils feel safe, valued and respected. The individuality of pupils is recognised and celebrated and they feel they are given a genuine voice in the life of the school. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are all very securely in place and pupils talk readily about how there is always someone to talk to if they have any concerns whatsoever and that 'bullying is not a problem at our school.'

St John's outstanding features are the result of tremendous teamwork. The headteacher is the first to recognise this and greatly values the high levels of support from the continually developing senior leadership team and subject leaders who together make a significant contribution to the life of the school. Add to this the high quality of governance and it is evident that this is a school never content to rest on its laurels but instead to simply set the bar of expectation higher.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage and make exceptional progress so that when they start in Year 1, standards are a little above national expectations. Much of this is due to the outstanding teaching and provision. The learning environment is a riot of colour and the excellent planning and provision of exciting activities enthuses and motivates the children in equal measure. All adults work together very well, and highly effective ongoing assessment means that all staff have an excellent idea of the levels children are working at. Teaching continually captures the imagination and interest of the children who are disappointed when the day ends. Very good use is made of the outdoor accommodation and the school has already planned to develop this aspect of the accommodation further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the opportunities for pupils to enhance their key skills and other creative thinking and enquiry skills across different subjects and through innovative curriculum initiatives.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

15 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St John's CE VA Primary School, Colchester, CO4 0HH

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first like to say thank you for making me feel so welcome and making my visit one that I will remember for a long time. I have told your teachers how you were all so helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you it was great to hear how much you love coming to school and how much fun you find it. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

I found so many wonderful and impressive things about St John's Primary School that I have to say it is an outstanding school! Teachers and other staff make teaching and learning challenging and fun and help you to achieve exceptionally well. The curriculum, the clubs, the visits and visitors are all excellent. The way in which the school helps you to keep safe and healthy and how it cares and supports you are all excellent. Mrs Konarzewski is an outstanding headteacher and together with all the staff and governors, makes the school such a great place to learn. There is another tremendous strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you, the children. What great ambassadors for the school you are! I was so impressed with your behaviour, your enthusiasm, how you know so much about keeping healthy and the way that you make a difference in school through its council and many other examples, is just tremendous. Well done!

Even outstanding schools like yours can improve. I have asked your teachers to help you further improve your learning by providing lots of opportunities to test out your many skills in different subjects and other exciting activities. Mrs Konarzewski, the staff and governors want the school to continue to be successful, and I know you will play your part by continuing to behave well and work hard. I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure and privilege to meet you.

Martin Newell

Lead inspector