

St John's CofE VC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115094
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311828
Inspection date	6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	287
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Nicholson
Headteacher	Mr Peter Tidmarsh
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2005
School address	High Road Buckhurst Hill Essex IG9 5RX
Telephone number	020 85042934
Fax number	020 85592956

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspection focused on the following.

- How the school is seeking to improve achievement in writing, particularly for boys.
- How the school assesses the attainment of children when they enter Reception and the progress they make by the start of Year 1.
- How well marking and the use of targets help the pupils to understand the steps they need to take to improve the quality of their work.

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 given in the self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St John's is larger than most primary schools. The proportion eligible for free school meals is low and the number with learning difficulties is less than in most schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is close to the national average, but virtually all pupils speak English as their first language. Pupils at Key Stage 2 are taught in six mixed-age classes.

Since the last inspection, the school has gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark 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 has made great strides forward in recent years and now provides an outstanding quality of education. It is popular, oversubscribed and makes a very considerable contribution to its community. Parents are overwhelming with praise for the headteacher and staff. One parent summed this up well by writing, '... the improvements that have been made are brilliant.' There is no complacency. Everyone continually looks for ways to improve, one example being the impact of recent building work on making a more attractive environment.

The pupils are impressive young people, not just in their academic achievement but also in their attitudes, behaviour and personal development, which are excellent. The school prides itself on developing courtesy, politeness and good manners. Its success in this immediately strikes any visitor. The pupils are friendly, confident and superbly well-behaved. They take their responsibilities very seriously, whether this is as prefects or as members of the school council. They are keen to help others through a wide range of charity collections. They sat in rapt attention in assembly to a video showing how their 'shoe boxes' brought happiness to disadvantaged children. Pupils of all ages also develop a sharp insight into other cultures as seen through the wonderful display of Divali masks in the 'conservatory'.

From attainment on entry that varies, but which is never less than that expected of four-year-olds, pupils make rapid progress while at the school. Their achievement is outstanding and standards are exceptionally high by the time they leave Year 6. The main reason for their success is the outstanding quality of the teaching throughout the school that focuses sharply on individual learning needs. Pupils say how much they like their teachers and how they teach them. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils, who respond by trying hard. Lessons are interesting, and learning moves forward rapidly by skilled questioning that keeps pupils' attention at all times. Pupils with particular talents are extended and their thinking challenged so they become independent and able to explore new ideas in depth. The pupils' excellent achievements combine with their outstanding personal qualities to prepare them well for success at secondary school and beyond.

It is not just in English, mathematics and science that pupils do so well, because an excellent curriculum ensures that pupils' experiences in other subjects are varied and interesting. One parent was spot on when saying, 'The teaching is excellent, the extra-curricular activities superb and the environment and the grounds are beautiful'. The pupils really enjoy events such as 'Arts Week' when they take part in workshops run by visiting artists, musicians and drama groups. Opportunities to use a wide range of new technology such as interactive whiteboards, laptop computers and digital cameras help pupils develop their skills and make learning more interesting. Pupils fully understand the value of diet and exercise in helping them to live healthily. Sport plays a major part in the life of the school, as recognised when gaining the 'Active Mark' accreditation. Pupils speak with much enjoyment about the many clubs, competitive sports teams and inter-house competitions.

The school provides an exceptionally high standard of care, guidance and support for its pupils. Parents are very happy that the care and well-being of their children is of paramount importance to all staff. Pupils say they feel safe and that there is always an adult to turn to if they are worried about anything. No pupil is allowed to fall through the net. All adults are always looking for ways of helping them to be successful whether this is academically or in other areas. Regular discussions between the headteacher and staff about each pupil's development, based on better

assessment arrangements, result in sharply focused action. This enables those who have fallen behind the school's expectations of them to catch up and the needs of pupils with learning difficulties to be met so that they achieve similarly to others in their classes. Pupils evaluate their personal targets, aided by constructive marking that helps them to see how well they are doing and what needs improving. This works well in helping to improve their writing. Even though standards are higher in writing than in most schools, this is the least strong element of the pupils' achievement and an area all staff are seeking to improve. Pupils are starting to benefit from the opportunity to write in a wide range of contexts. Spelling, identified as a less secure feature, is also receiving careful attention.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Highly effective staff teamwork, based on an enthusiasm and a drive to do better, is the key to the school's success. The headteacher and his deputy work closely to maintain the school's clear direction. Much tighter systems to monitor and improve performance have been introduced. From this, staff and governors gain a very clear picture of the school. They are slightly modest in places about its qualities, but this is a sign that they are never satisfied and are continually striving to make it even better. Governors now balance challenge and support for the school with a more rigorous strategy for identifying how well the priorities they have established are implemented. The school's capacity to improve further is exceptionally strong because it has a very firm platform from which to launch its drive to become even better.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children have a good start to their school life in the Reception class. Although under new leadership, the provision is improving. Links with home and any pre-school settings help to give the children a smooth beginning to school life. The staff team works well together to plan a wide range of tasks that interest the children and promote all areas of their learning effectively. As a result, children's achievement is good. Their skills develop well and are often higher than usually found nationally by the time they enter Year 1. Assessment has recently become more refined, so that a clearer understanding of each child's skills is gained and used to match activities and adult intervention closely to individual needs. One example of this is the method being used in the current group to support the children's early attempts at writing. The good balance between activities directed by the adults and those initiated by the children, helps them to learn how to take responsibility for their learning and make sensible choices. The outdoor area has seen recent improvements, working within the limitations of the space available. It is not the most suitable space, and its use is limited during inclement weather.

What the school should do to improve further

- Evaluate carefully the impact of action to improve achievement in writing and particularly the pupils' spelling.

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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	2
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

7 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's C of E VC Primary School, Buckhurst Hill, IG9 5RX

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to me when I visited your school. You were very kind, polite and helpful. You showed me how proud you are of your school. I enjoyed talking with you and your teachers. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that your school is outstanding.

You make excellent progress during your time at school. Nearly all of you reach the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school. Very many of you do better than this. You thoroughly enjoy school, attend regularly, work very hard and behave sensibly. Your teachers provide interesting tasks to help you learn and you clearly enjoy extra activities such as trips and visits. All members of staff help to make sure you are safe and cared for very well. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a huge contribution to the life of the school. You have an excellent understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle. I really enjoyed the school lunch I had with you. You are lucky to have such tasty and healthy food.

Your headteacher, other staff and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. I think that there is one thing in particular they could do, so I have asked your teachers to:

- continue to help all of you to improve the quality of your written work and your spelling in particular.

I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make these improvements.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector