

St John The Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117432
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312612
Inspection date	6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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	154
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stuart Elsom
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Hillside Lane Great Amwell Ware Hertfordshire SG12 9SE
Telephone number	01920 870135
Fax number	01920 872543

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues: current progress and standards; pupils' personal development; aspects of leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from external data, the information that the school has on tracking pupils' progress, the school self-evaluation form and school improvement plan, and lesson observations. Discussions were held with members of the senior leadership team, the chair of the governing body, the local authority link adviser and a group of Year 6 pupils. Parents' questionnaires were analysed and the school's systems for safeguarding pupils were checked. Other aspects were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate within the report.

Description of the school

The school is oversubscribed and is smaller than average. There are more girls than there are boys on the school roll. The number of pupils with a minority ethnic heritage is low. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is also low. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and /or disabilities is below average as is the percentage of pupils with a statement detailing their specific educational needs. Children join the school twice a year and their attainment on entry, though it can vary slightly, is usually typical for their age nationally. Almost all children have had some form of nursery education prior to joining the school. The recently appointed headteacher was formerly the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher. The school has been awarded accreditation for its work as a health promoting school and its work in physical education.

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 that has made good progress since its last inspection. Most parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire judged that their children liked school and were making good progress. A number of parents wrote in warm terms about 'the warm family atmosphere' that the school has and its 'friendly and caring nature'. The school clearly values the individuality of its pupils, as is evident in the welcome in the newsletter of the new entrants to the Reception class.

A strength of the school is that it helps pupils in their personal development very well. Care and support are both good. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety and safeguarding are robust. Attendance is above the national average, and reflects pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils display both confidence and enthusiasm for their learning because of the enjoyable activities they have. They appreciate the efforts of their teachers and the opportunities they have to work together. The school encourages pupils' independent learning skills and also the skills of working together well; the easy camaraderie between pupils of all ages was evident throughout the inspection, as was the consideration shown by older pupils towards younger ones. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is behaviour. Pupils are instinctively kind to each other. They report there is no bullying or racism and they feel secure and happy in school. They have an excellent understanding of what a healthy life-style is and because of the school's work in personal, social and health education have a very good idea of how to look after themselves. They make a good contribution to the school community, and feel that they are listened to and have a voice through the school council. The school prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education.

Standards are above average and progress is now good. Although the small numbers involved mean the performance of individual pupils can make a significant difference to overall percentages, the school recognises that historically older pupils should have made better progress. This year, however, there has been a sustained improvement and pupils are making good gains academically. Historically pupils progress well in Reception and through Years 1 and 2 and attain above average standards. Current Year 6 pupils have also made good progress and are on track to attain above average standards. These improvements have been brought about by better use of tracking and sharper use of class targets as part of performance management to improve teaching quality and pupils' performance. In addition, whole school targets are now demanding. The school can now identify potential underachievement early and act promptly to support individuals or groups. There is an increased staff awareness of, and accountability for, pupils' progress across the school. Whilst the tracking process is in operation, however, it is not yet fully embedded in the school's professional culture or the school's self-evaluation. The time between periodic assessments is currently too long to maintain the clarity of focus on pupils' progress and attainment.

The school fosters good learning because teaching is good. The good relationships between pupils, the consistent development of their independent learning skills and their very good attitudes underpin the learning and indeed carry it forward. Work is pitched carefully to meet learners' needs so that high attaining pupils are challenged. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because of the support they receive. Learning support assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' learning, working with individuals or groups. The school has recently improved its approach to marking, making it more consistent, supportive and perceptive across the school. However, lesson aims, whilst shared with pupils, are not always expressed in

terms that make them clear or accessible. The school does not do enough to ensure that pupils understand how they are being assessed and what they need to do to improve their work.

The school functions well on a day-to-day basis. There is a strong feeling of teamwork so that adults are supportive of one another and share a sense of common purpose. The headteacher clearly has the support and confidence of staff and parents and this has helped ease the school's transition in leadership and minimised any potentially detrimental impact on pupils' learning. The headteacher has clear plans to take the school forward. The current headteacher, as acting headteacher, has led and managed the school well. She is building on and refining the management systems and structures that she helped to establish as a member of the school's senior leadership team. Governance is satisfactory; there is a good range of professional and personal experience amongst the governors who are committed to their role and understand the need to take the school forward and to act as 'critical friend'. The chair of governors is relatively new in post but shares the headteacher's high ambitions for the school. Leadership and management are good, as is the school's capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and most show a good level of development by the end of the year. They make particularly good progress in mathematical development, their ability to link sounds to letters and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Their personal development is good. In one lesson on mathematical shapes, the teacher used skilled questioning to develop and reinforce children's use of language, and extend their learning. There is good teamwork between adults and effective planning ensures good learning experiences. Children work and play together well and are encouraged to be independent. The indoor teaching area retains some vestiges of being a mixed age Foundation Stage and Year 1 classroom - this is the first year that the school has just one year in the Foundation Stage - and currently space is limited so that there are not yet the imaginative contexts for learning within the room. However, the outside play area is zoned effectively and provides a rich range of learning opportunities. The headteacher was, prior to her acting headship role, the Foundation Stage leader and has clear plans to develop it further in the light of the fact that it is now solely a Reception class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the processes of tracking of pupils' progress so that it is an ongoing focus for the school staff and used as part of the school's self-evaluation.
- Ensure that pupils know how their work is being assessed and what they need to do to make it better.

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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	3

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	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	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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John The Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Great Amwell, Hertfordshire, SG12 9SE

Thank you for making me so welcome in your school. I enjoyed my brief stay very much. I have no doubt that it will be a long time before I meet 'Harry Potter' and 'The Cat in a Hat' in a corridor at the same time as I did at your school. My particular thanks to the pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to me. What you had to say was thoughtful and very helpful.

You have helped create a good school, which is providing a good base for your future education. You are making good gains in your learning and Year 6 are on track to attain above average standards. You behave very well, enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. I agree with you that this is because you do lots of interesting things and learning is enjoyable. You have an excellent understanding of what makes a healthy lifestyle and you know how to look after yourselves very well. It is good to know that you all feel confident to approach an adult if you have any worries. It was also good to hear that pupils are kind to one another.

You work well for your teachers and they care a great deal about you and want you to do well. They create good conditions for learning in lessons. All adults work together well and provide you with good support. They keep a close eye on your progress. One of the things I have asked the headteacher to do is to make sure that all teachers keep checking how well you are doing so that they can pick out early those pupils who are finding the work difficult and give them extra help. I also asked that they use the information on your progress as part of the way that the school reviews how well it is doing. Overall, I was impressed with how grown up Year 6 were and indeed how considerate you all were to each other. Given your good learning skills, I asked the teachers to make you a partner in your learning and share with you even more information so that you know how you can improve your work and can aim even higher.

I wish you all well in your future school careers.

Yours sincerely

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector