

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School, Frome

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123843
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314738
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl HMI

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Max Wide
Headteacher	A Burgess
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Christchurch Street East Frome BA11 1QG
Telephone number	01373 462251
Fax number	01373 453713

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St John's is situated in the centre of Frome. Pupils attend from across the town, although most come from the immediate locality and are from a broad mix of socio-economic backgrounds. There is a slightly below average proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and most pupils enter the school with average levels of attainment. Thirteen pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), some of whom are at an early stage of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The school has had a period of unsettled staffing and has failed to focus on raising standards, which have remained static for a number of years. Standards reached by pupils in English and mathematics are average. Following a good start in the Foundation Stage, most pupils make satisfactory progress by the time they leave the school. Pupils with specific needs, for example those at an early stage of acquiring English and those with greater learning difficulties, make good progress because of the good support they receive.

The school can be rightly proud of the sense of community that has been established. It is cohesive, inclusive and welcoming, reflecting the effort that has been put into this aspect of school development. Parents are very pleased with the school and one pupil, when asked what they would like to improve, said, 'Make the school bigger so more children could come here.' Pupils enjoy school and get on well together. They behave well and have good attitudes in lessons. Pupils are aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Their ability to work collaboratively, their increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT), and the average standards they attain are equipping them satisfactorily for the next stage in their education and later for the world of work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has not, however, rigorously monitored and evaluated its performance in key areas. Consequently, while its most recent self-evaluation is accurate in terms of what needs to be done, the school leadership has an unrealistic and inflated view about how well it has been doing. The school has not been aspirational in its use of challenging targets to raise pupils' achievements. Therefore pupils' progress is mostly only satisfactory, reflecting the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics, which is also satisfactory. It is only very recently that the leadership has begun to analyse and develop assessment, carefully and strategically, in order to identify what needs to be done in detail at a whole-school and classroom level. The leadership has reorganised the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but has not yet begun to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad, and teachers successfully link subjects together to make work interesting. There are strengths in the provision of art and music and, since the last inspection, the school has successfully improved both physical education and ICT which were identified as areas needing attention; provision is now good.

Managers of key subjects are aware of main strengths and weaknesses but, because of the overall lack of the rigorous use of assessment and monitoring, little has been achieved in terms of raising standards. The introduction of a reading initiative has halted a decline in standards of reading. The governing body, under new leadership, has recently reorganised its working practices and is in a good position to undertake its duties more effectively. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enjoy learning and make a good start in the Foundation Stage due to the effective induction procedures and good links with parents. Relationships are warm and friendly, helping

children to develop in confidence. The 'shared maths' with parents at the start of the day enables children to settle quickly and engage in stimulating activities.

Attainment on entry is broadly at the level expected. Children make good progress and reach the goals expected because teachers know the children well and link planning carefully to their learning needs. This attention to individual needs helps children gain good levels of confidence and the motivation to learn. Children in the early stages of acquiring English language are supported well and make good progress. Teachers introduced new strategies for teaching reading which are beginning to increase children's progress not only in reading but also in writing. There are some missed opportunities for children to make their own choices about learning, in activities both in and out of doors.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are rigorous
- improve assessment and use it to set robust and challenging targets for all pupils to ensure they make good, rather than satisfactory, progress, thereby raising standards
- determine accurately the impact of initiatives and interventions on pupils' achievements.

A small proportion of the 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

The standards reached by pupils by the end of Year 2 are average and, apart from 2005 when standards were higher, they have remained the same for several years. In 2007, pupils did less well in writing and mathematics than in previous years. Most pupils make satisfactory progress by the time they leave the school in Year 4. Writing has been a focus of development this year and planning has been successful in ensuring that pupils write for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum.

The performance of some groups of pupils in Year 4 in 2007, for example girls in mathematics and some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, was weak. This was partly due to staffing difficulties, but a legacy of weak monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress means that the school has little robust information about how well pupils are doing. The school took immediate steps to improve performance for this year. It has introduced setting in mathematics in Year 4 and reorganised groups for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Both boys and girls are now making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are good. Pupils enjoy school and behave well. They value the strong sense of community in the school and particularly enjoy the opportunities provided by the range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. Pupils get on well together, contribute positively to life in the school through the School Council and take on responsibilities in their classrooms and around the school. They make a good contribution to raising money for charity and participate in a wide range of music, arts and other events in the local community.

Pupils feel safe and are confident that they can go to their class teacher or the headteacher with any worries. They have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and the contribution of diet and exercise. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have an awareness of their own and others' beliefs and a good understanding of right and wrong. They relate well to each other and understand features of other faiths and cultures, though their grasp of Britain as a multi-cultural society is weak.

A few pupils have poor attendance despite the school's efforts and liaison with outside agencies to tackle this. As a result, attendance overall is no better than satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons overall are satisfactory. Teachers know their pupils well and establish good relationships. Good routines mean that pupils get down to work quickly and participate with interest. They are keen to answer questions and be involved, but teachers do not sufficiently encourage pupils to think more deeply, particularly those who have the potential for higher attainment. The use of small whiteboards and number fans in whole-class sessions enables pupils to be involved and successfully helps teachers to judge pupils' understanding but there are missed opportunities to consolidate and extend pupils' knowledge and raise achievement.

Where the school has used specific teaching expertise, for example in PE, learning is good and is reflected in the improvement in standards since the last inspection. ICT, through the use of interactive whiteboards, is used effectively to make some lessons more visually stimulating and to help pupils understand what is expected of them. Teaching assistants work confidently in class or in withdrawal groups with pupils who have learning difficulties or other specific needs. Some pupils with significant learning difficulties and nearly all those at an early stage in their acquisition of English make good progress because of the well targeted support they receive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and includes all the required subjects. Whilst it has strengths and commendable features, it has not supported the raising of standards in the key areas of English and mathematics. It takes account of the needs of different abilities but does not always challenge the more able pupils, in particular, to reach high standards.

Curriculum 'focus weeks' enable pupils to reach 'high points' in aspects of their learning by stimulating and motivating them. Art and music remain strong features of the curriculum. Teachers have made good efforts to plan lessons that link curriculum subjects. The provision and learning in ICT and physical education have significantly improved since the last inspection. There is a wide range of clubs, which are well supported by pupils. Pupils at an early stage of learning English benefit from the opportunity to attend an English as an Additional Language (EAL) club. Visits to places of interest, for example to a steam museum, make a good contribution to the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes good care of its pupils and has developed a good range of support activities to help those who are less confident; for example, the 'forest school' and the nurture group help pupils develop collaborative skills and allow them to gain more confidence to tackle their classwork.

Pupils' work is regularly assessed using national guidance but the information is not used effectively to set more challenging and aspirational targets. Consequently, pupils are not challenged enough and make satisfactory rather than good progress. Academic guidance is satisfactory and pupils know their targets in literacy and numeracy. Work is regularly marked and pupils welcome teachers' comments in their books and find them helpful.

Pupils are encouraged to eat healthy diets and they regularly eat fruit snacks. They like the meals cooked on site and the school does all it can to procure local and healthy produce. Pupils have good opportunities to take part in physical exercise. Pupils of all ages say they feel safe in school. Issues of personal development are discussed effectively in group sessions in class, covering subjects such as achieving personal goals.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and staff have developed a cohesive and inclusive community where everyone is valued. This has been the focus of the leadership. Many parents rightly feel that this is a welcoming school. Good links are established with outside agencies and groups such as the family advice worker, the local school partnership, the local authority support for EAL and the Church.

Leadership has not given enough attention to raising standards which have remained static for a number of years. The school's self-evaluation has identified important and appropriate areas to develop but it is over-generous in judging how well it is doing and this has prevented a real sense of urgency in relation to the need to raise standards. There has been no history of sustained improvement in standards and the impact of a number of initiatives to support a variety of groups of pupils has not been systematically evaluated to determine how successful they are. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has not systematically identified what might be done to raise pupils' achievements, especially in English and mathematics. The school is weak in its use of assessment and challenging targets in order to drive up standards and ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.

Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet the statutory requirements although the designated person for child protection has not received up-to-date training. This is planned for next term.

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, especially in the areas of ICT and physical education which make a good contribution to pupils' learning and enjoyment of school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	4
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

14 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Church of England Aided First School, Frome BA11 1QG

Thank you very much for making us feel welcome in your school during the inspection. We all enjoyed talking with you and finding out about your school. We found that the school is giving you a satisfactory education. The headteacher and staff, with your help, have made it a very caring community where everyone feels welcome. You told us that you enjoy school and like your teachers. The 'forest school' looked fun and you have some good opportunities to take part in clubs.

You are developing into confident young people. You know how to keep healthy and are taking part in lots of physical activity. You behave well and you told us that you feel safe. Most of you are making satisfactory progress in your learning and those who are just starting to learn English are doing well. Some of you who find learning hard are getting on really well.

There are some things that we have asked the headteacher and staff to do to make sure that you make more progress in your learning. We have asked them to keep a better check on how well your lessons are helping you to learn effectively. We want the headteacher to ensure that information from tests and assessments is used to set you challenging targets for your future learning so that by the time you leave the school, you have made good progress. Finally, we want the school to make sure that all the additional activities, especially the smaller groups that help those of you who find learning more difficult, are helping you to make good progress.

You can help by continuing to work hard and making sure that you attend every day.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Towl Her Majesty's Inspector



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Daniel Towl
Her Majesty's Inspector