

St John's CofE (C) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124283
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314874
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Clarke
Headteacher	Diana Higton
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Mill Lane Wetley Rocks Stoke-on-Trent ST9 0BN
Telephone number	01782 550309
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

pupils' progress and the standards they have reached this year, especially in Years 2 and Year 6

the effectiveness of the actions taken to improve mathematics for all pupils, and writing for more able pupils

how well all staff, including leaders and managers at different levels, understand their roles and contribute to whole school improvement.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, scrutiny of national published assessment data, analysis of the school's tracking and assessment data and discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils. The views of parents were gathered from the returns of Ofsted questionnaires. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This smaller than average primary school has a below average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is also below average. Each year, a number of Year 4 pupils leave to attend a nearby middle school while a number of other pupils join the school in Years 5 and 6. The school was very recently awarded the Artsmark.

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. The headteacher in particular provides it with a clear sense of purpose that has resulted in the increasingly good use of assessment information to plan pupils' learning in English and mathematics. This has improved progress for all pupils. Children start school with skills and experiences below those expected for their age. Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps them overcome this and sets them off on the path to good progress, which continues throughout the school. As a result, achievement is good and standards are above average by the end of Year 6.

The school sets itself challenging targets, aimed at helping pupils to make better than expected progress, especially in Years 4 to 6. The school caters well for all pupils, from the least able to the most. However, although teachers usually match pupils' work to their different levels of ability in class, they do not always show in their planning how they intend to do this. As a result, there is little to show whether pupils' needs are met consistently well in all classes.

Pupils' 'Progress Books' books demonstrate clearly the good progress they are now making in writing in all year groups. Teachers' planning identifies clearly where writing can take place in each subject. However, in science, the over-use of worksheets in some classes limits opportunities for pupils to write at length. Nevertheless, good links are made between different subjects, the content of which often provides the stimulus for writing in literacy lessons. This was noted when, as pupils in Years 5 and 6 explored the text of 'The Wind in the Willows', they also learned about rivers, erosion and the changing environment.

The headteacher and key staff carry out rigorous checks on teaching and learning, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring that improvement occurs. Staff even request follow-up observations themselves, to show that they have acted on advice given. Joint observations with local authority staff have led to focused work on improving pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical skills in problem-solving activities. This is successfully improving progress in mathematics as pupils learn to think and make such links for themselves. For example, Year 6 pupils explained they had to use a line graph when recording temperature over time, saying 'we can't use something like a bar graph because it doesn't let you show enough information.'

The good links with other schools and external agencies contribute well to the pupils' improved progress in English and mathematics. The good range of visitors, visits and extra-curricular activities successfully enhance pupils' learning. These also contribute effectively to pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils behave well and they very much enjoy school because they are cared for and supported well. However, their attendance is only average because a small minority of parents continue to take holidays during term time even though the school strongly encourages them not to do so and does all it can to encourage better attendance.

Pupils feel safe in school, free from any bullying or harassment. They report that they have 'done lots on anti-bullying'. They praised the introduction of 'bullying boxes' which allow them to seek help anonymously but explained that it was far more important to talk to somebody if they had any concerns. They cited their teachers as one of the best things about the school because 'they care about the children and how they learn' and they 'sit with you to help you if you don't understand'. The vast majority of parents voiced similar sentiments, praising the quality of teaching and the school as a whole for what it does for their children. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of making healthy food choices and of the need for

regular exercise. The school puts on a good number of sporting activities for them, which they greatly appreciate. They contribute well to the school, eagerly accepting responsibility, for example as school councillors, and know that their views are valued and acted upon. A good example of this is the reorganisation of lunchtimes. Pupils make a good contribution to the community, including through the school's good links with the church, and they have a sound understanding of major world religions. However, their understanding of the range and diversity of culture in Britain today is underdeveloped. The school knows this. The curriculum, which is well planned to meet the needs of pupils in mixed age classes, is currently being re-planned to meet the needs of single age classes from September this year. Within this, the school clearly identifies multiculturalism as a strand to be addressed in all topics.

All pupils know the targets they have for English and mathematics, and they refer to them as they do their work in different subjects. The school has reviewed its marking policy and is piloting a new system in some classes, which includes pupils assessing their own and other pupils' work against clear success criteria. Where this happens, pupils are very clear about how to improve their work and spoke knowledgeably about 'success criteria' and 'marking ladders'. This good practice does not yet extend to all classes. Where pupils' writing is marked, in literacy or in other subjects, most teachers provide some guidance for pupils related to their targets. They then give pupils time to improve their work by responding to the comments. Pupils appreciate how this helps to improve their progress. Such good practice is rarely seen in mathematics or other subjects.

Leadership and management are good. Governors support the school well and check that it is keeping pupils' progress on track. School leaders have an accurate view of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve. This, alongside the good teamwork evident among the staff exemplified in the way they seek and act on advice, gives the school good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good provision for, and leadership and management of this age group ensure children reach average standards at the end of their Reception Year. This happens because the curriculum is well organised, children's learning is carefully assessed and the exciting activities planned for them are securely based on their developing learning needs. This was evident in an imaginatively taught phonics session that successfully encouraged individual children to link different sounds and letters. The good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities enables children to make sensible choices for themselves under the watchful eye of the adults, who intervene appropriately to extend children's learning.

Teaching promotes children's personal, social and emotional development well. Good induction procedures help children settle quickly into school life. They understand and follow the established routines well. They behave well, listen carefully to adults and to each other, put their hands up, and wait their turn to speak. Staff make sure each child gets that chance, successfully building their self-esteem and preparing them well for their work in Year 1 and beyond. The only downside is that children do not have enough opportunities to continue all aspects of their learning out of doors as and when they want to. The school has plans to tackle this in the near future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupils' work is marked equally in all subjects and in all classes so that pupils always have clear guidance on how to improve it.
- Improve teachers' planning to ensure it shows clearly how teachers intend to meet the needs of different ability groups in their classes.
- Improve pupils' understanding of the range and diversity of cultures in Britain.

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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	2

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	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	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	2
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

13 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Johns C of E (C) Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent ST9 0BN

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school yesterday, and for talking to me about the school and your work there. I was pleased to note how much you enjoy school and that you feel your teachers care for you and help you to learn well. Despite this, I noticed that attendance is only satisfactory, because a few of you miss school when your parents take you on holiday during term time. You, and the vast majority of your parents, are right in thinking you go to a good school, where you make good progress and become mature young people ready to face life beyond primary school.

Your headteacher and the governors lead and manage the school well. The headteacher helps the staff to do their job well, giving them the same sort of good support and guidance that they give you. You clearly understand all about healthy lifestyles, and you know how to keep yourselves safe and fit. You told me that the school had done 'an awful lot on anti-bullying', and made it very clear that you know what to do should any bullying occur. You behave well and I noted how polite you were, holding doors open, greeting adults courteously and helping each other with your work. You take responsibility well, for example as school councillors, and are clearly very proud of what you have achieved so far. These are important qualities that prepare you well for the future.

I have asked the school to do the following things to help you make even faster progress.

- Make sure your work is marked equally well in all subjects and in all classes so that you always have clear guidance on how to improve it yourselves.
- Ask all teachers to show in their planning how they intend to meet the needs of different ability groups in their classes.
- Give you more opportunities to learn about the range of different cultures in British society.

You can help in all of this by continuing to work hard and listen to your teachers. I hope you will continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now, for the rest of your lives.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell Lead inspector