

St Johns CofE Infant School, Leigh

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106517
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324419
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Janette Corlett

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	129
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Heidi Lovely
Headteacher	Mrs Lilian Worthington
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Kirkhall Lane Leigh Lancashire WN7 1RY
Telephone number	01942 672825
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Age group	5–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St John's C of E is a small infant school that serves a mixed community. The proportion of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals is currently below average but this can vary widely from year to year. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. However, there are small groups from a range of Black, Chinese and mixed heritages. A very small number are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The school provides education for the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception class and holds the Healthy Schools Award, ICT Mark and Activemark Gold. A separate child care provision operates from this site and was not inspected as a part of this inspection.

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 outstanding in all areas of its work. Pupils receive the very best of starts in their education. Parents know this and typically say how much they appreciate the friendly and welcoming atmosphere, the exceptional levels of care for their children and the fact that the school constantly involves them as valued partners in their children's learning. The excellent care, guidance and support provided for pupils leads to their outstanding personal development and well-being.

Pupils make exceptional progress throughout the school and, by the end of Year 2, reach very high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The outstanding achievement of pupils is the result of excellent teaching and learning. Key strengths of the teaching include the very high expectations that staff have of the pupils and the ambitious level of challenge in the work they set. Pupils' learning is first-rate because they have excellent relationships with staff and concentrate very well in lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, make very good progress because of the high quality of the support they receive from all adults in the school.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. They are polite and very considerate toward one another. They take great pride in their achievements and those of other pupils. Pupils develop skills of teamwork and independence that stand them in excellent stead when they go on to junior school.

The school provides an exciting and stimulating curriculum, which is further enriched by many interesting outside visits and visitors to the school. Teachers make skilful use of information and communication technology (ICT) to engage pupils and nurture their enthusiasm for learning. A video-conferencing link with a school in New Jersey gives pupils valuable experience of another culture and supports their understanding of the diversity of society. Procedures to track the progress of pupils in English, mathematics and science are very good and used well to halt any signs of underachievement by individual pupils. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and there is consistently excellent practice in giving pupils clear indications of what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Partnerships with other schools, in particular the associated high school, and other agencies, are very good indeed.

Leadership and management under the highly effective guidance of the headteacher and deputy headteacher are outstanding. Parents hold the work of the staff in the highest regard. The school's commitment to do the best for pupils whatever their learning needs is excellent. Its impact is evident in the outstanding achievement of all its pupils. Procedures to evaluate the work of the school are very effective because of the secure assessment systems in place. Monitoring of teaching and learning is fully embedded in the school's routines and supports teachers in their continuous drive to improve their practice. The challenge and support provided by the governing body are good. The governors bring a very wide range of expertise to their roles and their contribution to strategic planning is increasingly effective in promoting school improvement. Based on all the above, the school provides excellent value for money and has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are below typical age-related expectations. Staff provide excellent quality teaching and care, which results in children making tremendous progress. There is much emphasis on communication and cooperation, and this is shown in the support children give each other. Children's improvement in the use of spoken language is particularly impressive, and this is because adults work exceptionally hard to encourage them to develop good skills in speaking and listening. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to the outdoor learning area, which is now very well organised. Procedures for assessment, including regular observations of children's learning, are firmly established. The Early Years Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. Teachers respond sensitively to children's contributions, linking the areas of learning in an interesting and stimulating way. Parents very much appreciate the time taken by staff in helping their children to make a smooth and enjoyable transition into the Reception class, and typically comment that, within a short space of time, children are 'settled and really enjoying coming to school'. From their earliest days in school children are supported in making informed decisions and choosing resources to work with. Adults are always there to help but allow children to decide the direction of their learning. As a result, children learn to be confident and independent learners. They are able to take risks without being unnecessarily fearful and just love playing and learning together in this warm, secure and happy environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- No significant areas for improvement were identified during the course of the inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. From their initially low starting points in the Reception class they make excellent progress and reach standards at the end of Year 2 that are exceptionally high. There has been a very slight decline in standards over recent years, but this reflects the similarly declining trend in children's levels of skills on entry to the school. Vulnerable children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress in the school's highly inclusive environment where every child is special, valued and encouraged to reach for the stars. The more able pupils make outstanding progress, reaching the highest possible standards by the end of Year 2. This is because teachers ensure that lessons are always stimulating and challenge pupils to learn as much as they can.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being is outstanding and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is equally so. Pupils are very confident and independent learners. They look after one another well and feel very safe, knowing that all the adults really care for them and are there to help. They learn the importance of taking plenty of exercise and eating a well-balanced diet to support a healthy lifestyle. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good both in lessons and at break times. This is because the school provides stimulating and exciting activities for play and learning throughout the day and pupils respond with exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. Although attendance is satisfactory overall, most pupils actually attend

well and love coming to school. There are, however, a small number of pupils whose attendance needs to be monitored carefully. The school is doing all it can to support these pupils and their families effectively. The high standards pupils reach give them an excellent start in the next phase of their education and prepare them very well for the future. Pupils also make a positive contribution to the community through fundraising for charities and environmental projects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

In all lessons teaching is stimulating and lively. The pace of learning is brisk and there is a very good balance between teacher-led and independent activities that keeps pupils fully engaged. Teachers' use of questioning is excellent and enables pupils to provide clear explanations. Teachers transmit their enthusiasm for learning to pupils through very high expectations. Planning for lessons is detailed and makes effective use of assessments so that the work can be pitched at a challenging level for pupils of all abilities. Teaching assistants make an excellent contribution to lessons. Pupils' work is marked regularly and consistently gives them clear guidance on how to improve their work. The outstanding quality of teachers' written comments in marking is reinforced in lessons, where pupils are frequently asked to say how well they think they are doing and what they think they might need to do next. As a result, progress is rapid and pupils develop high levels of confidence and become independent learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an exciting and interesting curriculum that supports pupils' outstanding progress. The high level of challenge and effective support provided for gifted and talented pupils mean that they thoroughly enjoy developing their individual skills and enthusiasms. The curriculum is truly inclusive and meets the needs of all those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. ICT is a real strength of the school. Pupils develop exceptionally high levels of skill, which are far beyond those normally expected of this age range. For example, Year 2 pupils are able to join together sound, text and graphics to make a presentation with a real sense of purpose and of the intended audience. Science teaching has improved since the last inspection because there are now more opportunities for pupils to undertake practical tasks and activities. The curriculum also encourages pupils' excellent personal development. There is a broad range of after-school and lunchtime clubs which are well attended. Provision for physical education is a further strength and supports pupils in developing a healthy lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

These are key strengths that contribute fully to the outstanding personal development and well-being of pupils. All aspects of child protection, health and safety and the safe recruitment of staff are in place. Parents are especially appreciative of the expertise and support of staff. A comment that sums up the views of many parents is; 'The teachers provide a safe, friendly environment conducive to learning. They not only teach, but empower the children to achieve their goal.' Links with outside agencies are good and contribute very well to making life at school the best possible experience for pupils, for example in the way the staff include pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning mentor works very effectively with

families, promoting the importance of attendance, following up on absence and ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive support for their needs. The tracking of pupils' personal and academic development is very effective and the information is used very well to meet pupils' individual needs and provide them with challenging targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher has very effectively maintained the drive towards school improvement since the last inspection, when the school was also judged to be outstanding. School leaders have certainly not rested on the laurels of their former success. With very good support from the school improvement partner and governing body, staff work together effectively as a team to share the challenges the school faces. School development planning is clear, well focused on standards and quality and the financial implications are carefully considered. The school's self-evaluation is similarly undertaken by the whole team, who analyse performance data carefully and take effective steps to address any areas of weakness swiftly. For example, a recent analysis indicated that boys were not making as much progress in writing as girls. Subsequent changes to the curriculum to include more drama activities and opportunities for speaking and listening have already been successful in significantly improving boys' progress in writing. The governing body is well led and parents lend their full support to the leadership of the school. Typical comments are: 'The school is very "parent friendly"' and 'It is a joy to be part of my child's learning.' Equality of opportunity is transparent in every area of the school's provision and the school actively promotes community cohesion.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St John's C of E Infant School, Leigh, WN7 1RY

Thank you all for giving me such a warm welcome to your school when I came to inspect it. You were all exceptionally polite and helpful, and I really enjoyed talking to you and finding out about all the fun you have in school.

Your school is outstanding. That means that it is one of the best in the country and you are right to be so proud of it. You make very good progress in your lessons and behave exceptionally well. Your teachers work very hard to make learning exciting and fun. You told me how much you enjoy the visits and clubs they arrange, and that they are all friendly and kind. You also said that they are always willing to give you extra support if you find things difficult, and that no-one ever feels bad about having to ask for help. During my visit I saw many of you using computers and could not believe all the complicated things you can do so quickly and efficiently. I would definitely have liked to buy a pair of 'St John's Slippers' after watching your brilliantly presented advertisements. I also enjoyed my visit to the 'Time Machine' in Year 1, where you showed me some of your writing about Neil Armstrong.

One of the jobs inspectors have to do is to try and find things that will make your school even better. However, St John's is already a wonderful school and I honestly found it really difficult to think of anything more your teachers might do for you. All the adults in your school put you at the very centre of everything they do and make it a wonderful place for you to learn and play. Each one of you is very special to them, and I am sure that you will all do very well in the future. Please continue to help them by listening to their suggestions and paying careful attention to their comments on your written work. Each one of you has a very important contribution to make in the future. Your headteacher and all the adults in the school recognise this and will help you to be the very best that you can be.

I wish you all the very best of luck.