

# St John's School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109738
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bedford Borough
<b>Inspection number</b>	337360
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Janet Thompson HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	143
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kirsten Rimmer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ron Babbage
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 January 2007
<b>School address</b>	Austin Canons Bedford Road Bedford
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed in 20 lessons, seeing 16 teachers, and held meetings with pupils, staff, parent governors, the governor with responsibility for safeguarding and the headteacher of Biddenham Upper School and Sports College. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including pupils' work, tracking of pupils' progress, a range of policies and the school development plan. They read 63 questionnaires completed by parents as well those completed by staff and pupils attending the school.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement of different groups of pupils taking into account different starting points and the ambition in the targets set by the school
- the social progress made by pupils who have complex communication and behaviour needs
- the impact of creative partnerships on enhancing the curriculum and increasing progress made by pupils across the school in skills and attitudes to help prepare them for their futures
- the range and quality of curriculum pathways available for pupils at 14 and 16 and how these lead to successful destinations
- the impact of specialist status on access to provision and on improving outcomes.

## Information about the school

St John's school is an extended school providing education for pupils with severe, complex and profound special educational needs. Many also have additional physical, medical and sensory disabilities and an increasing number have autism. The school is in its first year as a specialist school for communication and interaction. A large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a small proportion of pupils from a range of other ethnic groups. There are twice as many boys as girls and a few pupils who are looked after by the local authority.

Most students who are over 16 are educated in the St John's base at Biddenham Upper School and Sports College and the whole school is subject to reorganisation proposals to be co-located on the upper school site. The school has had awards for being a Healthy School since 2006. It was awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark in 2008 and the Sports and Achievement Mark in 2008 and 2009. It achieved the Investors in People Gold Standard Award in 2010.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

St John's continues to be an outstanding school. The focus on communication and interaction underpins the extremely positive interactions between pupils and staff and helps to maintain outstanding behaviour. Pupils make exceptional progress in their social skills and this is well supported by the many opportunities to work alongside pupils from mainstream schools. The sixth form centre being located on a local high school site provides many opportunities for the young people from St John's to have access to the high school's facilities as well as to work with and meet other sixth form students. This helps pupils to apply and improve their social skills in a wide variety of situations as well as supporting them in remaining confident and feeling safe without being over protected.

Pupils make good progress in the core academic skills identified by the school, namely English including communication, mathematics including early problem solving and reasoning skills and information and communication technology. Progress is better in speaking and listening or using other non-verbal communication than it is in other areas including reading and writing. Opportunities to apply and practise verbal and other non-verbal communication are well planned throughout the day and for some pupils this is exceptional in the work with the creative partnerships. Teaching is good and staff have a high level of understanding about pupils' needs and the levels at which they are working. Even with this good knowledge sometimes ambition for pupils' progress is not as high as it could be for all pupils and there are missed opportunities for pupils to apply literacy and information communication technology skills in other areas of the curriculum.

The provision to help improve communication skills in the upper school and sixth form has been enhanced by the additional speech and language therapy support purchased using specialist status funding. Progress made by the students interacting and responding to each other in the sixth form was exceptional in nearly all of the lessons observed. Although the vast majority of children make good or better progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage there are some who make satisfactory progress. The curriculum for Early Years Foundation Stage children is at times exceptional but not all of the youngest children have the same carefully orchestrated range of rich opportunities.

The senior leadership team has sustained a very high quality of provision and has continued to enhance what is on offer for the pupils. The very high levels of sensitive care are appreciated by parents and carers. This, coupled with excellent procedures for safeguarding, helps to ensure the well-being of pupils at the school. There is far better tracking than at the last inspection, based on very well moderated assessment of pupils'

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levels of attainment. Systems and analysis established to evaluate outcomes for pupils and to help the school continue to improve are robust and indicate a good capacity to continue improvement. The tracking of all outcomes for the pupils, not just academic progress, demonstrates strong commitment to ensuring the pupils are well placed for their futures but the level of challenge for progress in some areas of the curriculum is not as consistently high as others.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve equality of access to Early Years Foundation Stage provision by:
  - ensuring management structures for the Early Years Foundation Stage have an overview of provision and progress for all children within this age
  - ensuring all children are able to access the breadth of opportunities while retaining specific support for individual needs.
- Increase the level of challenge for some pupils so that all are able to make as much progress as possible by:
  - raising the challenge for learning so that all lessons are reliably good and more are outstanding
  - ensuring effective deployment of staff in all lessons
  - extending opportunities developed through creative partnerships for all pupils ensuring functional skills are fully transferable across the curriculum.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****1**

Pupils enjoy school very much and when a group were asked if there was anything they did not like about school their response was 'holidays'. Pupils who find it more difficult to communicate respond very positively to interactions from staff and appear keen to learn. The progress pupils make over time is usually good and for some it is outstanding. The school's analysis shows that, when starting points relevant to age are taken into account, boys do as well as girls and pupils from different backgrounds all make at least expected progress. The vast majority of pupils who are looked after also make good progress and staff work closely with carers to achieve this outcome. In some lessons observed, although the majority of pupils made good progress, there were pupils with more complex needs or with a higher level of attainment who made satisfactory progress and for whom there could have been greater challenge. Good decisions relating to the deployment of staff are not apparent in all lessons and this means there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to practise skills more frequently and in a range of different situations in preparation for the future.

Pupils show that they feel very safe and this is partly due to the very good relationships between staff and pupils as well as well-structured opportunities for children to learn and interact with each other. Pupils who have difficulty understanding social situations are supported exceptionally well and make a great deal of progress in learning how to communicate and therefore behave in more socially acceptable ways. Pupils are keen to

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be healthy and active and willingly participate in the many varied opportunities for exercise including responding well to physiotherapy programmes. Pupils appreciate their school and actively engage in opportunities to make decisions about their own learning as well as future developments. Close and recorded observation enables the responses from pupils with the most complex needs to be represented when decisions are being made.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and teachers have a good understanding of the level at which pupils are working. Staff teams accommodate pupils' additional needs well by providing consistent supportive structures for example, using symbol schedules and objects of reference. In some lessons staff have very high aspirations for the progress pupils can make. This is translated into well-structured and varied opportunities to learn new

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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knowledge and skills and to apply and practise previous learning. In some lessons information about what a pupil already knows or can do is not used to challenge progress. This happens most during sessions where staff are less well deployed and resources are not used as effectively as possible.

The curriculum is very wide ranging and provides interesting and exciting opportunities for learning including recent developments introducing 'Forest School'. Out-of-school activities and the range of additional events in school add a great richness to the curriculum. The exciting work observed with creative partnerships and food sculptures adds to this richness and provides innovative opportunities for learning. Staff create unusual learning experiences, for example, using the new media room.

Outstanding care and support is underpinned by a very high level of respect for all pupils. Staff are consistently positive and calm and no negative instructions or responses were heard throughout the inspection. The role of the 'pupil voice support assistant' is an excellent development enabling pupils to contribute to decisions as well as ensuring outcomes, other than academic progress, are recorded and acted on if issues arise. The emphasis on preparing pupils to move on to the sixth form and beyond is exemplary; the new post of transition manager makes a significant contribution to preparing pupils and their families successfully for moving on.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The senior leadership team has maintained an outstanding school. Through rigorous monitoring and robust systems of professional development new staff quickly gain the necessary skills to ensure good teaching and excellent care. Staff and the responsible governor have an excellent understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils. The school team works very effectively with parents and other partners to ensure the opportunities on offer for pupils are relevant to their needs and promote their health and well-being. Regular workshops for parents and support activities for siblings are just two of the ways in which the school engages with and supports the needs of a whole family. Governors are supportive and undertake good monitoring of the school's work. Moderation of the levels at which pupils are working is rigorous. Working with partner schools, as well as using robust internal systems, has established a high level of consistency in assessment. Analysis of the progress made by individual pupils and groups over time is well established within the school structure. This helps to assure

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that strategies to ensure equality of opportunity are effective. Challenge to raise expectations about the achievement possible in every lesson and every part of the school day, as well as over time, is not as highly developed as other aspects of leadership.

The school is well established in the local community of schools and has excellent links with different mainstream schools. This supports work to promote community cohesion both at St John's and in the other schools but the school does not have such excellent practice for evaluating its work in relation to national aspects of community cohesion.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

In nearly all the lessons observed children were encouraged to be as independent as possible. Rather than staff fully responding to requests for help, they gave sensitive support to enable children to do as much for themselves as possible. Most children make good progress across the areas of learning and, for some, progress in communication and thinking cognitive skills is outstanding. When progress observed was not at such a high level, it was because staff interactions with children did not reinforce learning sufficiently.

Staff consistently use a range of resources including symbols to support communication and to help children understand routines. This helps them develop confidence when moving from one activity to another. It also helps them to understand that sometimes other things need to be completed before they can go to their preferred activity. This is done sensitively so that child-initiated opportunities are not prevented. Moreover, children



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who have more complex difficulties, including those who may have obsessions that can get in the way of learning, are also sensitively challenged. Most children are able to choose from a wide range of well planned and engaging indoor and outdoor resources but this is not consistent for all children.

Work with partner schools helps to ensure skills learnt at St John's are transferrable to other settings. Assessment is frequent and adapted to meet the needs of the children. Achievements in the different areas of learning are recoded and specific individual targets are applicable to a range of activities. Careful tracking ensures additional support is given when children are in need.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

**Sixth form**

Students are very well prepared for their futures and an increasing range of options are being identified for them when they leave the school at 19. An emphasis on developing communication and interaction skills is helping students to learn about the subtleties of social communication in the adult world. Some of the students are based at the main part of St John's and all attend the high school site for some elements of their curriculum. This arrangement enhances the students' perception of themselves as more mature learners on the brink of adulthood, while continuing to meet their individual needs.

All of the students appear to enjoy their time in the sixth form and are very enthusiastic about the opportunities they are given. The curriculum on offer to individuals is personalised and relevant for improving levels of independence while ensuring that academic progress continues. It is very well designed to ensure students are taught at different levels according to their needs while acknowledging their needs as teenagers. A good example of this is the clarity with which students could talk about their understanding of how to keep safe and aspects of their sex and relationships education. Opportunities for transferring skills to real-life situations are strong, enabling students to take an ever increasing responsibility for themselves and their own well-being.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

## Views of parents and carers

All parents and carers believe that their child enjoys school, teaching is good and the school is well led and managed, keeping them informed of their child's progress. Similarly, parents were unanimous about the school helping their child to have a healthy life style. These views are reflected by one parent's response, 'St John's has a very positive influence on my daughter, both in her learning and her personal development. The school provides exceptional care and keeps me fully informed of her progress'. These and other strengths of the school were also found during the inspection. Most parents and carers were positive about all other aspects of the school although a few felt their child was not making enough progress. A few parents and carers felt they were not supported well enough to help their child or that the school did not meet their child's particular needs. During the inspection, inspectors found that some pupils were not making as much progress as possible but found that the care and support for pupils and families to be excellent and well adapted to individual needs. One parent had concerns that his child was at risk of being harmed by another child but felt the school would respond to their concerns. Inspectors reviewed procedures and actions that helped to keep pupils safe and found these to be exemplary; any concerns raised by parents were addressed quickly.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 143 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	84	10	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	81	11	17	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	49	78	14	22	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	65	17	27	5	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	47	75	16	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	63	20	32	3	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	63	23	37	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	38	60	24	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	45	71	15	24	3	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	67	18	29	0	0	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	70	17	27	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	73	17	27	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	75	14	22	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



21 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's School, Bedford, MK42 8AA

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleague to your school. We enjoyed our visit and were interested to see your work. Here are some of the things we found out about your school.

Your school is excellent and staff try to do everything they can to keep you safe.

You are all very happy to come to school.

You behave very well when you are there which helps you to learn.

You learn a great deal about how to keep healthy and we saw many of you were keen to be active both during and after school.

The opportunities for those of you in the sixth form are very good at helping you get ready to become an adult and do more for yourselves.

Your teachers make sure lessons are interesting but we think some of you could learn even more if you were given more opportunities to practise your skills. We have asked them to ensure some of the most exciting lessons happen more often.

The youngest of you also enjoy school a great deal. We have asked the school to make sure all of you can choose from a wide range of interesting activities so that you can make excellent progress.

I hope you continue to enjoy your education and wish you all the best for the future especially those of you who will soon be leaving the school.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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