

St George's Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114705
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338430
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margret Fisher
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Moore
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed 10 teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils, and spoke with parents. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, school improvement planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from pupils, staff and 92 parents and carers.

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

- how well the school caters for the range of different capabilities and needs in each class, including the more able and those who need extra help with their learning
- the impact of measures taken by governors and school leaders to improve provision and outcomes for pupils
- the extent to which pupils learn about the diversity of cultures and ways of life in Britain and around the world.

Information about the school

In this average sized school, most pupils have White British backgrounds. Although a below average proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, or speak English as an additional language, numbers have risen since the last inspection. An average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but this varies quite widely between year groups. At more than 36%, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in last year's Year 2 was high. Mobility is also high, with an above-average proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school part-way through Key Stage 1. The school has been awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark. It has an Activemark award and Healthy Schools status.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St George's provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The disruptive impact on learning of continued staff changes after the last inspection led to a fall back in standards. Staffing is now more stable and the success of initiatives taken by leaders to challenge pupils more and raise standards is evident in the rise seen in 2009 and in pupils' current standard of work, which is in line with national expectations. In particular, initiatives over the autumn and spring term to focus attention on boosting the performance of more able pupils have significantly raised the quality of these pupils' reading. The curriculum has been reorganised to better motivate boys, who previously did notably less well than girls. Boys and girls alike have been much enthused by the way in which subjects are now more imaginatively linked together. For example, pupils throughout the school used a famous Dutch painting as the stimulus for a raft of activities involving history, geography, information and communication technology and music, as well story-telling and art. Arrangements for pupils' welfare have also been moved up a notch since the last inspection. The school's Inclusion Quality Mark attests to its success in catering for its many vulnerable pupils, including some of those in temporary accommodation who join St George's part-way through Key Stage 1. The impact of the good arrangements for pupils' care, guidance and support is also evident in the pupils' now-positive attitudes to learning and the good behaviour seen in lessons. Such changes for the better demonstrate the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

School leaders and governors have an accurate picture of how well the school is doing. They celebrate the improvements, which are strongly endorsed by parents, who greatly appreciate the changes they have seen over the past two years and what they describe as the 'happy and supportive environment' that St George's provides. Leaders nevertheless recognise that the school still has further to go. Although more able pupils have been helped to make faster progress this year, teachers are not routinely getting the pitch of work right for their more able pupils. Sometimes, especially in mathematics, the work that is set for the able pupils is beyond the level that they can cope with. In some subjects, especially science, an over-reliance on worksheets limits opportunities for able pupils to practise and apply their literacy and other skills. The large majority of pupils are keen to volunteer answers to their teachers' questions, but too often it is only the volunteers that the teacher picks out to answer. This can mean that some pupils are less actively engaged. Teachers usually ask pupils to signal at the end of each lesson whether or not they have understood. However, a note is not always made of those who show they are not confident that they have met the lesson's learning objective so that extra support can be assured for these pupils in a subsequent lesson.

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Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from facilities which have improved since the last inspection, including a much better developed outdoor area. The outdoor area is not always used to best effect, however. Its use has to be timetabled between the three Reception classes and, even when it is their turn for access, children are not in every class encouraged to move freely between purposeful learning activities inside and out. In one class seen during the inspection, their turn for access to the outdoor area was mainly used as a breaktime, with children involved in activities that failed to capitalise on opportunities for them to learn through play. Time is not always used as well as it could be in the Nursery. On the day each week when the children have a physical education (PE) lesson, they do little else. There are no other activities planned, for example, for those who quickly change into their PE kit, and so these children are left to sit idly waiting for the others.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' learning by ensuring that:
 - work in all lessons is appropriately matched to the different capabilities of the pupils, particularly to extend the more able
 - teachers direct questions at those pupils who are slow to volunteer answers
 - a reduced reliance on worksheets gives pupils more opportunities to use and apply their writing skills
 - when pupils indicate at the end of a lesson that they are not sure that they are confident about what they have learnt, this information is recorded and used to target further support.
- Help children to get off to a faster start in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - giving them activities that enable them to make the best use of their time in school
 - ensuring that assessment information is used to plan activities, inside and in the outdoor area, that move the children's learning on.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons to attain broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In the past, relatively few pupils have attained higher levels in the Year 2 assessments, but this picture is improving as a result of initiatives to raise the attainment of more able pupils. The improvement this year is most marked in reading, but teachers' high expectations of the presentation of pupils' work and of their spelling and punctuation, have also resulted in improvements across the school in the standard of writing. Able pupils are still not always pushed enough, however. Pupils' work shows that there remain too many occasions when, despite the wide range of

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abilities within a class, all the pupils are given similar work to do. For pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, this is less of an issue. They are helped to make similar progress to their peers because they benefit from well-planned support. The same is true for pupils who are learning English as an additional language. The good support given to pupils who join the school partway through Key Stage 1 is evident in their achievement. Although they have been through the upheaval of changes of school, they are helped to settle quickly and go on to attain levels that are close to those of the others.

In lessons, the many hands that go up to answer show how much the pupils enjoy school and are eager to learn. As a parent explained of her daughter, 'She enjoys every day and comes home enthusing and wanting to share what she has learnt. The confidence she has gained through school is fantastic.' Pupils get on well together and treat each other, and the adults in the school, with respect. They feel very safe because they are sure that any problems they might have will be quickly dealt with by staff. They also develop a keen appreciation of the need for a healthy diet and regular exercise.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

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

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Teachers know their pupils well and they succeed in motivating them to work hard and do their best. Classrooms are managed well, so that pupils know exactly what is expected of them, in terms of both work and behaviour. Assessment information is often used well to plan lessons. This was seen, for example, in a Year 2 lesson, where the teacher picked up on previously identified spelling errors to ensure that the pupils correctly sounded out words in order to accurately write them. Not all of the teachers' marking, however, gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils when they are working individually or in small groups, but they are not always fully utilised during whole-class teaching. Opportunities are missed, for example, for them to note for the teacher which pupils are joining in most actively in question and answer discussions and which are more passive, or to jot down details of those who signal at the end of a lesson that they are not sure they understand what they should have learnt.

The introduction of cross-curricular themes to bring subjects together has made a major contribution to motivating pupils, and especially boys. Some of the activities on previous terms' projects have fired the imagination of staff as well as the pupils, resulting in some inventive activities; for example, bringing a 17th century Dutch painting to life by superimposing the children's faces on the characters in the picture. Leaders' monitoring has identified, however, that teachers have not always been careful enough to check that the details that they refer to are always accurate. An over-reliance on worksheets, in science and some other subjects, also limits the pace of pupils' learning.

As parents confirm, a notable strength of this school is its pastoral care of the pupils. The school caters for a number of vulnerable children with troubled backgrounds. Drawing well on the assistance of outside agencies, the quality of care and support provided by staff ensures that pupils feel very safe and succeed increasingly in overcoming barriers to their learning. Those who join St George's from other schools are helped to make friends and to quickly settle into the school's orderly routines.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The monitoring of lessons and of pupils' work carried out by the headteacher and leadership team has given them an accurate picture of the school and has enabled them to drive through the many improvements seen since the last inspection. The governing body too has played a key part in driving improvement. Governors visit the school, and

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reports written by individual governors are circulated to the whole governing body so that they do not depend on just the headteacher and staff for their view of the school. The governing body ensures that safeguarding requirements are fully met and that there are thorough systems in place to deal with child protection issues. Equal opportunities are promoted and discrimination challenged through the school's strong arrangements for pupils' welfare, so that even those with troubled backgrounds are helped to quickly settle, join in and make progress in their learning. The changes made to the curriculum have meant that boys are better motivated, helping them to narrow the gap that previously existed between them and the girls. Although there is more to be done to challenge and extend more able pupils, initiatives have this year already succeeded in raising these pupils' attainment.

Parents' comments confirm how closely the school works with them to support their children's education. One described how, 'Parents are kept very well informed with school happenings via text messaging and frequent newsletters.' Another parent praised the fact that, 'The headteacher has an open door policy and is always available to discuss any issues.' Community cohesion within the locality is promoted well through the school's links with the local church and children's centre. Pupils learn about different faiths in the United Kingdom and around the world, but the school has not evaluated its broader promotion of community cohesion, and leaders have identified that there is scope for further broadening pupils' experience of other ways of life.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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On entry to the Nursery class, most children have skills that are below those expected for their ages. Their welfare needs are suitably met and they learn well-ordered routines which help them to settle quickly into school life. At times, their daily experience continues to be highly regimented, however, and this limits the children's opportunities to learn through purposeful play. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is below that expected for children's ages. Progress here is faster, so that most children reach standards that are expected for their ages.

Literacy and numeracy skills are taught well, with a particularly effective emphasis on teaching letters and the sounds that they make (phonics). In the best lessons, adults encourage children to develop their vocabulary and every opportunity is taken to question and develop thinking. When adults are not directly working with a group, however, there is sometimes insufficient challenge, especially for more able children. Children share and play well with their peers, and relationships are good. Adults track children's progress carefully through day-to-day observations and keep sound records of their achievements, but this information is not always used rigorously enough to make sure that the independent activities provided are closely targeted to encourage individual children to take the next steps in their learning journey.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents express overwhelmingly positive views about all aspects of the school. They express particular appreciation of the caring learning environment provided for their children and the easy approachability of the headteacher and staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St George's Infant School and Nursery 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 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 233 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	65	31	34	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	59	64	33	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	51	42	46	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	49	53	39	42	3	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	50	54	40	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	49	44	48	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	46	48	52	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)	31	34	43	47	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	42	46	46	50	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	41	49	53	3	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	39	45	49	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	49	53	38	41	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	59	64	32	35	0	0	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). 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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



22 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St George's Infant School and Nursery, Colchester, CO2 7RW

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St George's is giving you a satisfactory education and we could see that there has been much improvement over the past couple of years, including in the interesting things you get to learn about. We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how well you all get on together. This is helping to make your school such a happy, friendly place to be. Staff take good care of you. They have helped, for example, those of you who have come new to the school during Year 1 and Year 2 so that you have settled in quickly with your new friends. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are making sound progress but we would like to see them do better. We have asked the school to look particularly at how activities are organised so that the children get the best out of their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. We have also asked staff to be sure to arrange activities inside and in the outdoor area that help the Nursery and Reception children to learn and build their skills through play.

Over the past year, the school has worked to stretch some of you to improve your reading. We could see improvements in other work too, especially in the care you are taking with your writing. Well done! We have asked the school to help you to make faster progress by being sure to give you work to do that is not too easy and not too hard. We would like you to have more opportunities to use the skills you are learning in literacy to write in your own words instead of filling in worksheets. We were pleased to see how keen most of you are to put up your hands to answer your teachers' questions, but we noticed that some of you can be shy to answer. We have asked your teachers to look out for this and to be sure to pose some questions too to those of you who are slow to volunteer. If you are one of the shy ones, you can help by always trying to have a go when your teacher asks a question. Teachers usually ask you all to show with your thumbs whether you have understood. We would like them always to make a note of any of you who are unsure about things so that they can give you extra support in the next lesson.

Thank you again for being so polite and friendly, and our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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