

St John's RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115466
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338588
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Bob Hamill
Headteacher	Ms Jacqueline Sheehy
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2007
School address	Turpins Lane Woodford Bridge Essex
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, and held meetings with governors, including a trustee, staff, a speech and language therapist, and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of school documentation including the school's improvement plan, policies and procedures associated with safeguarding, teachers' planning, records, data on pupils' progress and analysis of this.

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

- whether the school is evaluating progress made by pupils and students effectively, and what use it is making of this information to plan improvements to the provision
- how well staff have developed expertise in promoting pupils' and students' communication skills
- whether middle leaders contribute strongly enough to the process of school improvement
- how effectively the school is promoting community cohesion.

Information about the school

St John's caters for pupils with a variety of special educational needs. The largest groups are those with moderate learning difficulties, autism and severe learning difficulties. Smaller numbers have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or physical difficulties. All of the pupils have statements of special educational needs. Pupils come from a wide area, including 10 local authorities, nine of which are in Inner London. A higher than usual proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. There are many more boys than girls. Over half of the pupils are from backgrounds other than White British. Higher attaining pupils leave the school in Year 11, and pupils enter the sixth form from other schools as well as St. John's. The school offers training for staff in mainstream schools, particularly in the field of speech and language. It recently obtained the Investors in People Award. The current headteacher was appointed from September 2009, following a period from July 2008 during which she was the acting headteacher. The school is in the process of restructuring staff, so that there will be a headteacher and two assistant headteachers. Despite one round of advertising and interviewing, the governors have not yet been successful in recruiting a second assistant headteacher.

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****3**

Main findings

St John's provides a satisfactory quality of education overall, although it is good for primary pupils and students over 16. The latter two groups make the best progress, because teaching is most consistently good in their classes. Across the school, pupils and students make good progress in developing their communication skills because provision is good. All pupils and students receive a high standard of care, support and guidance. The school has some significant successes with those who find it hard to control their behaviour. Good support, particularly by learning mentors, enables them to make positive adjustments so that they are better able to learn. The staff also work effectively in partnership with parents and external agencies to secure specialist support and expertise that the school could not otherwise provide. The staff respond well to parents' suggestions, keep them well informed and involve them actively in school life and supporting their children's learning.

The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep safe, and additional support for vulnerable groups ensures that they have a good understanding of this. Pupils and students enjoy physical activities and frequently choose to do these, although some older boys would like more opportunities for competitive sports. However, not all adopt healthy eating habits at school. They contribute well to school life by helping one another, getting involved in making decisions such as the design of the new playground, and are active in enterprises to fundraise for good causes at home and abroad.

Students and pupils have well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The school is a cohesive community in which those from all races and backgrounds get on well together. This is largely because staff provide good role models and the school celebrates differences between cultures and religions and so pupils grow to understand and respect these. Pupils and students develop their basic skills satisfactorily.

Opportunities to develop writing skills are not always used effectively. Teachers frequently provide worksheets for pupils to record what they know or understand, but these often require short answers of a word or a phrase, when more able pupils can write in full sentences. As a result, pupils do not consolidate or extend their writing skills enough.

Despite some important strengths of teaching, some key weaknesses prevent it from being good across the school. In particular, planning for different abilities does not always ensure that there is a close enough match of tasks to abilities and occasionally work is too easy. A few parents and pupils recognise this too. One learning objective is set for all in a group even when more should be expected of some pupils. Staff do not always remind pupils of their personal targets or review learning at the end of a lesson

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to ensure pupils know how well they have done and how to improve. The skills of support staff are not used consistently well to support learning in lessons, although several make a strong contribution by leading small group sessions. These shortcomings are particularly evident in Years 7 to 11.

The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good at present, because without a second assistant headteacher, senior leaders are having to cover a number of additional roles. Middle leaders are fully involved in monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, including lesson observations. However, in evaluating teaching and learning, too little account has been taken of the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. The evaluation also relies upon observations of lessons using criteria that are not specific enough to the school's particular population. Challenging targets are set for raising pupils' attainment each year. There is thorough evaluation of this, by a skilled assessment coordinator, who has implemented a means of identifying small steps for those pupils who do not make measurable gains. In addition, there are plans to improve support by introducing a system for tracking progress in the shorter term, to supplement the termly reviews of progress towards personal targets from individual education plans. Governors provide good support and are often in school, but they are limited in the extent to which they can get involved in evaluating developments by the lack of success criteria in the school's improvement plan.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is good across the school by:
 - ensuring that teachers make effective use of assessment information to plan tasks that are both well matched to the abilities of pupils and provide a suitable challenge
 - giving pupils writing opportunities that are well designed to consolidate and extend their writing skills in all subjects,
 - making sure that pupils are frequently reminded of their targets, that they know what they are learning in lessons and understand how well they have done at the end of each lesson
 - making maximum use of the skills of support staff to support learning in lessons
 - implementing plans to develop a system to track pupils' progress over the short term and provide additional support for those not on track to achieve their targets
 - developing a shared understanding of what 'good' teaching and learning is at St John's and using this to evaluate lessons
 - evaluating teaching by making use of information that the school has on the progress made by pupils in each class and subject.
- Increase the school's capacity to improve by:

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- appointing a second assistant headteacher
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan identifies how governors and managers will measure the impact of developments.
- 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**

The school's refined data analysis shows no significant differences in the achievement of groups with different special educational needs or on the basis of gender. However, inspection findings and the school's data show that pupils achieve well in the sixth form, the primary years, and in the development of communication skills. Pupils and students also achieve well in music, and some are successful in obtaining external accreditation for this. Suitable links with mainstream schools mean that the most able pupils are successful in gaining GCSE passes. Others are successful in accredited courses such as those leading to Entry Levels and unit awards.

Progress in lessons is satisfactory, though better in the primary years and sixth form. Pupils and students generally show positive attitudes to learning and cooperate well with the adults who support them. They particularly enjoy practical activities, and usually concentrate well on tasks provided. Although they occasionally find tasks rather easy, they still complete them as asked. However, they do not always pay attention to correct punctuation, when completing worksheets, for instance. Pupils and students try hard to follow adult models, such as when signing, and persevere to improve these skills. They respond well to correction and prompting and are not over-reliant on adult support. Behaviour in the great majority of lessons is good, and there is little interruption to learning. Behaviour around school is good, and outsiders remark on pupils' and students' commendable behaviour in the community.

Pupils and students develop well as young people. Most show good enjoyment of school, and there is very little unauthorised absence. The school provides ample opportunities for recognition and reward so pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem. They have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, and showed impressive self-control and respect in the period of silence during the Armistice Day service. Their well-developed social skills are underpinned by the good progress they make in acquiring communication skills and the strong guidance they receive from adults in the school, who support the development of socially appropriate behaviour. Good opportunities exist for pupils and students to acquire a thorough understanding of the lives and beliefs of those from different religions or cultural backgrounds and the school is a racially harmonious community. In general, pupils leave the school adequately prepared for the next step, because they have developed their basic skills satisfactorily, acquired a good understanding of the world of work through work experience and enterprise activity, and acquired independence skills.

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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	*
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	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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?

Staff have good working relationships with pupils, and they manage them well. As a result, lessons are calm and purposeful. Time and resources are generally used well, although occasionally there is too much time spent introducing lessons and too little allocated for the completion of tasks. Interactive whiteboards, installed since the last inspection, are used satisfactorily. The frequent use of worksheets limits opportunities for extended writing. Support staff often lead sessions, as classes are usually divided into ability groups. In the best examples, support staff are active throughout lessons, recording pupils' and students' responses, preparing resources or annotating pupils' and students' work. On occasions teachers do not involve these adults enough in supporting learning. All pupils and students have personal targets, well displayed in ways that are meaningful to each individual. However, staff do not always refer to these in planning or

¹ 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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remind pupils and students of their personal targets often enough for them to be clear about how they can improve.

There are some good features of the curriculum, notably the residential school journeys and the twice-weekly after-school club, both of which add considerably to pupils' enjoyment and personal development. There is also a good emphasis on developing communication skills. However, there is room for improvement in the extent to which writing skills are developed in subjects other than literacy.

The school is a caring and welcoming environment, and this adds to pupils' and students' feelings of security and safety. Good arrangements to encourage improvements in behaviour include direct interventions, support by learning mentors and well designed behaviour management plans. Risk assessments are thorough, and identify appropriate strategies for reducing risks to a minimum. Good arrangements support pupils and students as they move into, through and out of the school. Effective liaison with, and involvement of, parents provides additional support for pupils and students. For instance, training in Makaton signing ensures that similar approaches are used in the school and at home. Speech therapists design programmes for pupils and students based on accurate assessments of their needs. They support staff in implementing these hence contributing to the good development of pupils' and students' communication skills.

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?

Leaders and managers share a vision for the school and all contribute well to school self-evaluation and improvement. However, the impact of this is not as great as it might be because there is a vacancy for one member of the senior team. Nonetheless, each has contributed to significant change, such as improving the teaching of certain staff or securing more robust and worthwhile systems of evaluating progress. The headteacher has ensured that responsibilities in this complex school are shared out effectively. Middle managers contribute soundly to monitoring, evaluation and school improvement.

However, their action plans are not all of equally good quality as they do not always include sufficient information to allow the success of developments to be measured. This weakness of the school improvement plan limits governors' ability to be fully involved in evaluation, although they take a full part in monitoring the progress of the plans and contribute ideas for improvement. They visit and meet regularly hence ensuring that

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those with leadership roles are held to account.

Governors have good policies and procedures for ensuring that pupils are safeguarded. For instance, all staff are trained in child protection and in suitable positive handling techniques, and some are accredited to train others. The school takes equality of opportunity seriously, analysing the performance of different groups, even where numbers are small. Because girls form a minority group, they have specific opportunities designed to appeal to them, such as the 'beauty club'. There is a suitable plan showing how the school intends to create greater access for disabled people and the more recently built sixth form is fully accessible.

The school is at an early stage in establishing how it can better promote community cohesion. Governors have developed a suitable policy, senior leaders have audited what the school currently does, and there is an outline action plan. The school's audit shows that it has a suitable range of strategies already; its links with the church give pupils a number of opportunities to appreciate how different life in is in other parts of the world, for instance.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
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

Sixth form

The separate accommodation for those over 16 provides a more adult environment, including a common room and a flat in which students can acquire independence skills, such as cooking and cleaning. There are good arrangements to support students making the move into the sixth form, whether this is from St John's or another school. Good guidance is provided, including support from a Connexions officer and visits to possible

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post-school destinations, such as residential or local colleges. A wide range of suitable learning experiences is provided, including an emphasis on work-related learning. However, staff occasionally miss opportunities to make learning experiences simulate workplace conditions.

Teaching is most often good and results in students making good progress and achieving well. Staff have good expertise in promoting communication skills. They use a variety of methods, such as modelling language, using signs and symbols, and encouraging verbal communication. They know students well and plan suitable activities that lead to external accreditation, such as Towards Independence. Enterprise activities are much enjoyed and students persevere with tasks that are quite fiddly, such as making Christmas cards for sale using peel-off transfers, and are clearly keen to make good quality finished products.

Physical activities are a popular choice of leisure activity, but students do not always make healthy eating choices at school. They readily accept responsibilities, for their own behaviour and for tasks such as clearing tables and running the tuck shop.

Leadership and management are successful in identifying the right priorities for development and the well-constructed action plan has clear success criteria that help with evaluation of developments.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are very positive about the school. They particularly appreciate the fact that their children enjoy coming to school. One summed up the views of several with the comment: 'We are delighted and relieved to have gained a place at this school'. Several noted that pupils quickly settle, are happy and improve the progress that they make at St John's. They also commented on the professional, caring and supportive staff. There were positive comments too about the sixth form, particularly for the help given to assist students make the move into the setting and the gains that are made in independence. Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. A small number of parents expressed reservations about the level of academic challenge and the use of worksheets, and inspectors agree that these are areas for improvement. A few parents also indicate concerns about how well the school helps their children to adopt healthy lifestyles. Inspection findings show that the school could do more to establish healthier eating habits.

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 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 99 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	58	13	42	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	61	10	32	1	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	55	12	39	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	42	16	52	2	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	48	15	48	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	45	16	52	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	48	12	39	2	6	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)	13	42	13	42	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	58	12	39	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	52	13	42	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	52	12	39	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	15	48	15	48	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	52	14	45	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



12 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's School, Woodford Bridge, IG8 8 AX

Thank you for making us welcome in your school. We enjoyed seeing you learn and get on so well together. The school provides you with a satisfactory education. This means that there are many good things about your school but also some important areas that need to be improved.

The good things about your school include the following.

You all feel safe and like coming to school.

Behaviour is good and helps you to learn.

You help to make decisions, do jobs around school and raise lots of money for the school and charities at home and abroad.

You make good progress in learning to speak, listen and communicate in other ways.

The staff are very caring and give you the help you need; they also ask others outside school to help you.

You do well in the sixth form and so do the pupils in the primary classes.

You get on well together and respect people who have different lives or beliefs.

You develop well as young people.

Your parents like the school and are pleased with the way you are getting on.

We have asked the staff to make some improvements in the teaching so that you can all make good progress in your lessons and your school can become better. The school is going to get another assistant for the headteacher. The governors are going to get involved in finding out how successful the school is.

You can help the school to improve by continuing to behave well and working hard.

We wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead Inspector

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