

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118640
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	339262
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheena MacDonald HMI

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Wyper
Headteacher	Diana Keating
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors visited seven lessons, a physical education session and an assembly. They held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and an advisor from the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including assessment and pupil tracking information, monitoring of teaching, safeguarding records and related policies, governor meeting minutes, school improvement planning and records of curriculum enrichment activities. Thirty parent questionnaires were received and these also form part of the evidence.

the impact of strategies to raise standards in speaking, listening and writing
how well the school enables pupils to become confident, enthusiastic learners who get on well together

the quality of differentiation and challenge in lessons and how well the needs of all pupils are met

the effectiveness of leaders, including governors, in school self-evaluation, identifying key priorities, setting challenging targets and driving improvement.

Information about the school

St John's is much smaller than most schools. Just over half of the pupils are from the White British community with the others representing an increasing range of minority ethnic communities, the largest of which is Bangladeshi. About a third of pupils speak English as an additional language and a few are at the early stages of acquiring the language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is similar to most schools but this varies considerably from year to year and has been much higher in previous years. Higher than average numbers of pupils are eligible for free school meals. There has been a period of uncertainty as a result of consultations around the proposed closure of the school and this issue was very prominent during the inspection.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St John's is providing a satisfactory education with strengths in some important areas. The school is characterised by a happy and harmonious atmosphere and a strong focus on ensuring pupils' safety and personal development. This is very much valued by the parents who are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school and who rightly comment on how well the school knows and treats each child as an individual. Relationships are warm and pupils feel valued and safe. Partnerships with parents and with external partners are also good and enable the school to extend its provision, expertise and enrichment activities beyond those which might be expected in such a small school

Pupils join the school with skills which vary but which are generally below those expected nationally. By the time they leave at the end of Key Stage 1, standards are broadly average. Over the two key stages, the rate of progress varies. All pupils make a good start in the Reception class and continue to make good progress in reading throughout Key Stage 1. However, progress in writing and mathematics slows and too few pupils achieve well for their age in both subjects. As a result, overall progress is satisfactory rather than good. The school quickly identifies pupils with learning difficulties and responds rapidly to give them good quality support and guidance. This is also true for pupils who are at the early stages of learning English. As a result, these groups make good progress.

Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to provide activities which interest the pupils. Behaviour and attitudes are good and pupils take a pride in their work. Teachers plan work for different ability groups. However, sometimes the pitch is not right and more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. There are also lessons which focus too much on managing the activities rather than identifying what pupils will learn from them. As a result, sometimes opportunities are missed for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills, demonstrate their learning or use their initiative. The curriculum is good with a strong and successful emphasis on personal, social and health education. There is also a good emphasis on understanding and celebrating cultural diversity within the school itself, the local community and the wider world.

Leadership and management and the school's capacity to improve are satisfactory. During the past year, there has been uncertainty about the school's future and this has taken up much leadership time and energy. Despite this, school leaders have remained steadfast in their determination to provide a caring and interesting environment where children feel safe and learn happily. They have done this successfully. However, school leaders have not been sufficiently rigorous in planning or putting into place strategies to tackle weaknesses such as attainment and progress in writing. Assessment information

is not used to identify trends or gaps in attainment and improvement planning. Monitoring and evaluation are not sufficiently sharply focused on pupil attainment and improving the rate of progress in key areas.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and the rate of progress in writing and mathematics by improving the use of assessment in lessons so that all pupils are appropriately challenged.
- Improve the quality of learning by clarifying and focusing on what pupils will be learning rather than doing, giving pupils more opportunities to talk about their learning and to use their own initiative.
- Make better use of the existing assessment information to identify trends and areas for improvement and implement strategies to tackle specific areas of weakness.
- Strengthen the links between school self-evaluation and improvement planning so that planned improvements are more closely linked to identified weaknesses, and outcomes are more easily monitored and measured.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In the majority of lessons observed pupils made satisfactory progress. Pupils behave well, are enthusiastic and keen to get things right and there were some good examples of pupils involved in lively and interesting activities. The pupils with learning difficulties and those at the early stages of learning English make good progress in their learning and confidence, because of the well-organised and effective additional help that they receive. However, in some lessons, the progress of the more able pupils was slower because activities were not sufficiently well matched to their abilities.

The school has maintained broadly average results in the end of Key Stage 1 assessments for several years. The rate of progress in reading is good and better than in writing and mathematics, where fewer pupils achieve well. Pupils from all ethnic groups make similar rates of progress.

The pupils feel very safe at school and know that their views and concerns are important and taken seriously. This is a 'healthy school' and pupils understand what they need to do and eat to stay healthy. They enjoy physical activities and are able to play happily and safely in the restricted playground space so that they and others do not get hurt. Pupils are enthusiastic about taking on responsibilities such as looking after new pupils and helping to tidy away playground equipment. The way the school includes and values each individual contributes well to pupils' understanding of different cultural groups. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is satisfactory and improving. They are developing good personal skills which enable them to move confidently into the next phase of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory. The inspection took place very early in the new academic year and some of the lessons observed were focused on revising learning and reminding pupils about routines and classroom management. All staff have very clear and positive systems for recognising and rewarding appropriate behaviour and the pupils respond very well. These positive relationships mean that pupils have good attitudes and enjoy their learning. Lessons are carefully planned with practical activities to engage the interest of the pupils. However, in some lessons, the activities are over-directed by adults and this restricts pupils' opportunities to use their own initiative. For example, pupils with number cards had to wait for the adults to help them to sort themselves into order, when some of them would have been capable of doing this themselves. This also means that the staff are fully occupied with organising activities and miss opportunities to observe and assess pupils' understanding. The special needs coordinator and teaching assistants provide valuable support in class and in small group sessions and, as a result, pupils with learning difficulties and those learning English make good progress. The school has effective systems to gather assessment information and uses this well to target additional support for pupils with special educational needs. It is also used to identify child-friendly targets so that pupils know what they need to do to improve. However, at this important time in the year, the end-of-year assessments of pupils' attainment are not being used consistently well to inform day-to-day teaching.

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

Pupils enjoy a broad curriculum and the school makes good use of partnerships with the church and the wider local community to develop good understanding of cultural diversity and to bring in external expertise. For example, a partnership with a local secondary school enhances the physical education provision. There are good opportunities for all pupils to experience a wide range of activities such as horse riding, theatre groups and taking part in large-scale music performances along with other schools.

The school knows and cares for each pupil very well and there is a very strong focus on ensuring their personal development and safety. The effectiveness of this is confirmed by parents and pupils. Staff, including governors, are well trained, and systems to ensure health and safeguarding are rigorous. There are good systems to identify, support and monitor the progress of pupils with learning difficulties. Strategies to improve attendance have been successful and there are good arrangements to welcome pupils into the school and to support their transition on to junior school.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and staff have maintained a happy school where good equality of opportunity is underpinned by the high value placed on treating each child as an individual. The strong shared commitment and unity of purpose to ensure the care, safety and well-being of pupils contribute to the safe and harmonious nature of the school and have a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Well-managed systems to support pupils with additional learning needs result in their good progress. A successful commitment to developing pupils' understanding of cultural diversity within the school, the local area and wider world means that the school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Partnerships with parents are very positive and there are good links with a wide range of other providers and organisations, both in terms of supporting pupils' progress and through enrichment activities.

Despite these very evident strengths, overall leadership and management are satisfactory because, although broadly average standards of attainment have been maintained, the school has been slow to implement strategies to tackle the relative weaknesses in achievement in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1. Although all staff monitor the quality and coverage in their different areas of responsibility, this is not always focused sharply enough on the impact of provision on pupils' attainment and

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

progress or on key priorities for improvement. Governors provide good support, and know the school well through regular visits. They contribute to important aspects such as ensuring that safeguarding systems are strong; however, their role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school remains underdeveloped.

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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

This year's intake of Reception children only started coming to school at the beginning of the inspection week but already know their way around and are confident and happy. Their parents are also happy and several took the opportunity to say how pleased they and their children are to be part of this school. The strong whole-school focus on care and welfare is very evident and there are good systems such as taster sessions and home visits so that the children and their parents quickly get to know the staff. These also provide the staff with the opportunity to start the process of assessing children's skills and adapting provision accordingly. Inside and outside spaces are well planned with interesting activities and useful displays designed to promote learning across all the different areas. Staff work closely together and are well deployed.

Although there is some variation between year groups, children generally come into the Reception class with skills and abilities below those normally expected for their age. They make good progress because adults know all the children very well and teaching is good. Assessment information is used effectively to identify individual pupils' needs and next steps. Assessment records are thorough and the staff have worked successfully with local authority colleagues to improve and make this aspect of their work more effective and accurate. The school is still at the early stages of using assessment

information to identify and tackle more general areas for improvement. When this has been done, for example when a weakness in calculation skills was identified, the school successfully targeted the weakness and achieved a marked improvement in children's skills. There is scope for further work in this area.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

Views of parents and carers

All of the parent questionnaires were positive, with a large majority very strongly positive about all aspects of the school. Several parents wrote comments on their questionnaires and these too were complimentary about the school. In particular, a number of parents commented on the high level of care and concern for the individual and this was confirmed by the inspection. The possibility of school closure was an issue of concern raised by several of the parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infants 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 73 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	76	7	24	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	79	6	21	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	79	6	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	80	6	20	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)	21	75	7	25	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	83	7	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	69	9	31	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	77	7	23	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	23	77	7	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	93	2	6	7	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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.



18 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School, Chatham ME4 6RH

As you know, I visited your school recently with another inspector to find out how well you were doing. Thank you for being so friendly, polite and welcoming, especially those of you who gave up your playtime to talk to us. Your school is giving you a satisfactory education and we agree with you and your parents when you told us that some things are good.

- St John's is a friendly school where you are happy. Your behaviour is good and everyone gets on together. Well done!
- The adults in your school take very good care of you so everyone feels safe.
- Your school makes sure that those of you who need it get good extra help.
- You get a great start to your education in the Reception class.
- There are lots of interesting activities and visits which make learning more exciting.
- Your school has good links with people in the local area and further afield so that you can learn more about all the different groups that make up your world.

There are some things which your school is not quite so good at so we asked the teachers and governors to do the following:

- Make sure that the work in lessons isn't too easy so that you have to think hard and then you will learn faster.
- Give you more chances to talk to each other about your work and think up your own ways of tackling problems.
- Use the information about how well you are doing even better so that they focus on the things that really need to improve.
- Make better links between all the different ways they have of measuring how well the school is doing and make sure that they keep a close eye on how well you are learning.

Thank you again for being so helpful, and good luck for the future.

Best wishes

Sheena MacDonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

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