

St John's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118755
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339294
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2010
Reporting inspector	John W Paull

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	697
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Bruce
Headteacher	Ann Marie Ratcliffe
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed the school's work, spending about half of the time looking at pupils' learning. The inspectors visited 22 lessons and some small teaching groups. Twenty-three different teachers were observed. Discussions were held with the headteacher, teachers, governors, some parents and groups of pupils including school councillors and 'ecowarriors'. The school's documentation was scrutinised carefully and included documents related to safeguarding, pupils' attainment and progress as well as policies and planning. In addition, 227 parental questionnaires and 27 staff questionnaires were analysed.

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

- how well the school's leaders and governors use assessment and other data to track pupils' progress, and then use this information to adapt and drive teaching, learning and progress in all age groups, including in Nursery and Reception classes
- the extent to which all pupils, including those in minority groups, feel that they are well cared for, enjoy school and support the senior leaders' views that many outcomes are outstanding
- how far senior leaders' evaluation that the school's provision is of high quality, including in the Nursery and Reception classes, is accurate.

Information about the school

St John's is a very large primary school. It caters for three- to five-year-olds in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its own Nursery and Reception classes. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school draws pupils from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils are White British. Other ethnic groups represented in significant proportions have Black African, Black British or Asian heritages. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The school has an average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including some with specific difficulties associated with language and a few with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

The school has received several awards, including Healthy School and Silver Standard for its teaching of French.

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

1

Main findings

The very large majority of parents express in questionnaires their happiness with the experiences provided for their children at this outstanding school. One typical comment states, 'Our child is making tremendous progress owing to the high quality of teaching.' Teaching is indeed of exceptional quality and ensures that the capacity for sustaining high standards is also excellent. Senior and subject leaders and managers evaluate the work of the school accurately and conscientiously. In spite of the school's many strengths, leadership is characterised by an absolute absence of complacency. Leaders use information in highly adept ways to maintain and sustain quality, ensuring an outstanding capacity to sustain the school's excellence. This consistently high quality means that pupils' learning is very secure and that progress advances at often very rapid rates. As a result, attainment by Year 6 is significantly above average and is currently improving even further in lessons, even though pupils' starting points are often below average. Pupils' progress is also extremely well enhanced by the curriculum, which is particularly strong and based on highly effective planning and much creative enrichment that meets all pupils' needs.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They work together in a spirit of great harmony. Singing and art, including three-dimensional work, are of a very high standard and add much to the school ethos. The reverence shown in assemblies and respect for reflection and prayer are excellent. Behaviour in lessons and around the building is remarkably good. Pupils demonstrate a cheery politeness, holding doors open, offering unstinting smiles and friendly greetings to staff and visitors alike. Pupils spoke to inspectors willingly and confidently, giving every impression of enjoying the opportunity to support their school with their positive views about it.

Exceptionally well-organised assessment and pupil tracking systems enable all staff to use the highly detailed information they gather to set challenging targets and to help pupils overcome barriers that might prevent them from achieving these. That said, some aspects of ongoing assessment do not quite match the excellence of these formal procedures. Written marking, for example, is carried out conscientiously and is kept up to date, but does not always offer pupils information about the next steps to improve their learning and understanding. Similarly, in the Reception classes, some of the talk and questioning between adults and children does not consistently show children how to deepen learning and development during times when they choose activities themselves.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the use of marking to inform pupils about the next steps that they should

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take in their learning and, similarly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, to increase the use of talk and questioning to this end, especially when children choose activities for themselves.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils' significantly above-average attainment in English, mathematics and science is evident in the standard of their work in lessons and their workbooks. For example, older pupils tackle long division extremely competently, as a challenge that they relish. Standards in other subjects are also high, as demonstrated by their considerable skills in art, music and information and communication technology. This was seen particularly in the expressiveness of pupils' singing and in the Wizard of Oz figures on display. This particularly strong performance occurs because of consistent strengths in teaching which give pupils an excellent capacity to build layer on layer of learning. This holds true for pupils of all differing abilities and backgrounds. Pupils who achieve above-average levels at the end of Year 2 sustain their performance exceptionally well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also learn very successfully because of the excellent additional care that they receive. This is also true of pupils with English as an additional language, who are very well represented in the school's classes for higher-ability pupils in English and mathematics.

Pupils say that they enjoy school immensely and feel extremely safe here, being able to give many examples of how to look after themselves. They are able to give very convincing information about healthy living and eat lots of fruit and vegetables, which reflects the Healthy School award. Pupils are especially willing to help the staff, contributing to the smooth running of their classrooms. They are also proud of the ecological contributions that they make to the community as 'eco-warriors', ranging from ideas about how 'to green the neighbourhood' to vital activities such as 'litter picking'. Another strong contribution to the locality is evident in the choir's performances at local venues, including Bluewater, the parish church and care homes. Pupils' high quality acquisition of basic skills, added to good attendance, punctuality and sociability, means that development of skills for the future is outstanding.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

High quality French teaching, for which the school holds an award, and enrichment through clubs, day and residential visits, visitors and similar activities contribute considerably to an outstandingly rich curriculum. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is also very strong. The school council plays a leading role in much of this. During an assembly, for example, their 'PowerPoint for Friendship Week' was of high quality and played while each councillor gave an award in celebration of classmates who had behaved in particularly friendly ways. Teachers' knowledge of how skills and content in the curriculum increase in difficulty as pupils progress through the teaching programmes is exceptional. It results in pupils' learning building extremely successfully lesson by lesson, irrespective of backgrounds or starting points. This compensates considerably for only spasmodic information given to pupils in marking about what they should do next to improve their work. Teaching is pacy, interesting and adapted to the needs of pupils of all different abilities. Pupils are provided with much careful guidance about any difficulty that they encounter. Teaching assistants are skilful in supporting individuals and groups, helping them to understand what to do to progress well. Booster classes and similar groups, whose membership is based on the results of detailed and astute tracking of progress, are employed very successfully to accelerate particular pupils' progress further. All required elements of care are exceptionally well planned. Key staff are well known to all adults and well trained, especially in vital areas such as child protection and first aid. Excellent partnerships with specialist agencies ensure high quality additional support for any pupils who need this. A telling example is how the levels of attendance leapt in 2009, after local authority involvement was sought to

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encourage the families of those children who were absent too often.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's many strengths occur because leadership and management are extremely good at directing and embedding ambition. This is demonstrated by the very strong teamwork amongst the staff. Responses in staff questionnaires suggest an exceptional unity of purpose based on a mission to inspire pupils creatively, academically and spiritually. There is an absolute determination to drive progress for all pupils in the school. Senior and subject leaders, particularly the headteacher and deputy headteacher, monitor teaching and assess and track pupils' work and progress with great care, as a means to maintaining equality of opportunity and the performance for all groups of pupils. Governors and staff take great care to ensure that all statutory policies and procedures for safeguarding are in place. These result in excellent procedures, for example, in health and safety, first aid, child protection training and risk assessment. Staff vetting and safe recruitment are meticulous. Provision to ensure community cohesion is particularly extensive and has a powerful impact on pupils' personal qualities such as sociability and helpfulness. An exceptionally strong aspect is how overseas links are pursued through projects known as Comenius. As a result, pupils develop highly positive attitudes about, and insights into, people's lives and cultures in a global context. This is in addition to pupils' numerous contributions to local and national communities. The school's many strengths mean that it provides excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter the Nursery with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding below those usually found nationally. This is particularly the case in communication, language and literacy skills. Excellent induction procedures ensure that children settle very quickly. A strong and highly effective emphasis is placed on personal, social and emotional development in all Nursery and Reception classes which, linked to careful assessments of children’s needs, ensures that learning and development proceed extremely well. Progress is very rapid and the majority of children reach the age-related expectations by the start of Year 1. In Reception classes, children know ‘what is good for you’ and are happy to eat the healthy snacks provided. Overall, outcomes are excellent.

Outstanding provision is based on a very carefully planned curriculum. This results in extremely well-balanced activities between those led by staff and those chosen by children. Very well-equipped and highly stimulating activities indoors and outside engage children’s interest and enjoyment extremely effectively. Procedures to record how each child responds to activities are remarkably thorough. This information is used exceptionally well to plan the next stages in learning. The staff are highly skilled practitioners who manage children’s learning and developmental needs very well. The only exception to this overall high quality is when occasionally in Reception classes, conversation between adults and children does not focus sufficiently on deepening children’s learning experiences.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The views of a small sample of parents spoken to directly match those in questionnaires.

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The large majority are delighted with the school and what it does for their children. Many took the time to write about the school's extensive strengths; for example, 'I believe firmly that the school is doing all it can to equip the children for their future challenges.' The large majority of parents and carers feel that the school supports them and their children extremely well. However, senior leaders and governors have not been able to allay the concerns of a few parents and carers who feel uncomfortable in approaching them and feel that communication is not as strong as might be. Staff and governors are well aware of this and are currently seeking ways of dealing with it.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's Catholic Primary 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 227 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 697 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	135	59	85	37	6	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	123	54	89	39	5	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	110	48	83	37	23	10	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	117	52	88	39	11	5	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	132	58	81	36	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	101	44	100	44	18	8	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	100	44	109	48	10	4	2	1
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)	102	45	109	48	9	4	7	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	82	36	118	52	10	4	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	93	41	104	46	15	7	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	79	35	106	47	20	9	9	4
The school is led and managed effectively	87	38	102	45	18	8	8	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	116	51	95	42	9	4	3	1

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.



4 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's Catholic Primary School, Gravesend DA12 2SY

Thank you for your excellent behaviour and politeness during the two days when my colleagues and I inspected your school. You were very helpful. We enjoyed speaking to you outside in the playground, in the dining room and classrooms, and seeing your work. It is great that so many of you told us that you enjoy school so much. We enjoyed speaking to your school councillors. They told us that they think your school is brilliant. We agree with this comment. It is indeed an outstanding school.

Here are some important things that we found out about your school.

- Your learning and progress are outstanding, including that of the children in Nursery and Reception classes.
- You are considerate of each other.
- All the staff care for you a lot and the teachers teach you very well indeed; although we have asked them, when they mark your books, to give you more written notes about what to do next.
- You know a lot about how to stay safe, and to live healthily.
- You are very willing to do little jobs around the building, to go out into the community, singing and showing your work, and your Comenius Projects are remarkable.
- Your achievement is outstanding, academically, personally and spiritually.
- Your headteacher, deputy headteacher and other staff have good ideas about how to make your school even better. You can help by telling them your ideas through the school council and at other times.

All four of us wish you every success in the future and hope you will always enjoy school as much as you told us you do now.

Yours sincerely,

John W Paull

Lead Inspector

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