



St John's School and Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126500
LEA Wiltshire
Inspection number 282124
Inspection dates 13 October 2005 to 14 October 2005
Reporting inspector Ian Stuart RISP

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Stedman Building
School category	Foundation		Orchard Road
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 4AX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01672 516156
Number on roll	1471	Fax number	01672 516664
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	20 March 2000	Headteacher	Dr Patrick Hazlewood

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St John's is a large comprehensive school with over 1500 students, including 265 sixth formers. It is heavily oversubscribed. It operates on two sites, 1.2 miles apart. Bold and exciting plans for a new school on a single site are at an advanced stage of preparation. The school became a specialist technology college in 1998. Its students come from a wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the mixed nature of the area. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. Attainment on entry is just above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. It has improved significantly in recent years. It also has a good capacity to improve further to become outstanding in all respects. Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior staff, there is a shared commitment at all levels within the school community to provide an interesting, enjoyable and relevant education for young citizens of the 21st century. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and inspection evidence supports the school's evaluation of its effectiveness. The inspection team also recognises the school's view that the split site and worn out buildings are costly in terms of stress, time and money. The eventual move to new buildings on one site is likely to help the school significantly as it strives further towards excellence.

Standards are significantly better than average, with good achievement. The quality of teaching is good, with much outstanding practice that encourages students to become articulate, independent learners. Learning is helped greatly by the outstanding curriculum. A fundamental assessment of the type of curriculum needed for this century has resulted in many very successful innovations. Students' personal development is outstanding, with excellent care, guidance and support. Excellent management of the school's technology college status has brought considerable benefits.

The headteacher, senior managers and governors have a very clear vision for future developments, with a good understanding of what still needs to be done to address less strong areas of the school's work. The school enjoys the support of the vast majority of parents and students. It has successfully tackled the issues from the last inspection. It gives good value for money and, rightly, it looks to the future optimistically and confidently. Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspection evidence also supports the school's evaluation of the effectiveness of the sixth form. It is good, with many outstanding features. Most students achieve well although some do less well in one subject than in their other subjects. With good and, sometimes, outstanding teaching, supported by excellent guidance and support, virtually all students complete their courses successfully. Standards are high and the sixth form gives good value for money. Students contribute very well to the overall life of the school. They are articulate and confident young people, well equipped to play their full part in today's society. Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

- improve achievement in English to match that in mathematics and science
- use assessment information more effectively in some areas to identify and address relative weaknesses in achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards by the end of Year 11 are significantly better than average. Provisional results for 2005 are similar to 2004 but, generally, standards have been rising for many years. The high standards are a result of good achievement by all groups of students during their time in the school. However, there is potential for achievement to rise from good to outstanding if some unevenness in progress between different subjects and different key stages is lessened. For example, achievement in English is less strong than in mathematics and science; boys do particularly well in Years 7 to 9, but not quite so well in Years 10 and 11.

The school is working hard to raise standards of attainment, and there is convincing evidence of the success of the school's approach to challenging students and encouraging high expectations. For example, the results of students who took several GCSE subjects a year early in 2005 are very good. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make the same rate of progress as other students. Targets for students in Years 9 and 11 are sufficiently challenging. In 2005, targets were met in nearly all respects.

The standards of students entering the sixth form are high because most of them do well in Year 11. Students continue to achieve well in the sixth form. Many do better than would be expected given their standards on entry. However, achievement is not always even, with some students doing slightly less well in one subject compared with their other subjects. Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development of students is outstanding. Every opportunity is taken by students to be independent, work co-operatively and take on roles of responsibility, both in school and the local community. The school fosters this very effectively through its innovative approach to teaching. Students confidently voice their views in lessons and through the school council, knowing that their opinions are valued.

Students' behaviour is good overall. There is a mutual respect between teachers and students that often results in outstanding behaviour. However, a few students do not behave well when they know that they can get away with it. Students enjoy learning and appreciate each other's views on a wide range of issues. Attendance is very good and the vast majority of students return to the sixth form to follow courses that meet their interests as well as their future work and study requirements. They are well prepared for successful economic well-being.

Students conduct themselves safely and are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The catering company has improved the range of healthy food choices following suggestions made by students. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their links with different schools and visits to different countries provide a particularly good insight into a variety of cultures. Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with many outstanding features. This explains why students enjoy their learning so much. The school fosters strongly its belief that all students should take responsibility for managing their own learning. There is a sharp focus on involving students in assessing and improving their own achievement. Many initiatives, such as the alternative curriculum in Year 7, have transformed students' experiences of learning. Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and make good efforts to bring about improvements where needed. Occasionally, teachers do not deal effectively with low levels of disruption and, consequently, learning suffers. Ideas for improving learning are actively sought and shared amongst staff. This has led to successful innovations to help students develop their learning skills. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well.

Throughout the school, the use of assessment to support learning is well established and target setting is very good. Discussions with students, and looking at their work, show that some teachers mark very well so that students understand exactly what they have to do to improve. Teachers are given a very wide range of information on achievement to help in checking students' progress. Generally, but not always, this information is used well. Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. An innovative approach in Year 7 provides integrated work across subjects, developing students' personal skills and competencies excellently. This has a particularly strong impact on the performance of boys and has encouraged high levels of self-confidence and enjoyment.

Personal learning programmes are well matched to individual students' needs. Many take courses in Years 8 and 9 which lead to very successful early GCSE entry in Year 10. These students have excellent opportunities for challenging extension and enrichment work in Year 11. Extra curricular opportunities are outstanding, with extensive participation by students. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are very effectively supported and also achieve well. Students' understanding of health and safety, contributing to the community and preparation for work is excellent.

The sixth form curriculum is also very good, with an excellent range of AS and A-level courses. These match students' needs very well and virtually all complete their courses. Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care for its students. Students say that they feel confident, when in need, to talk to a teacher, mentor or counsellor. The school trains Year 9 volunteers effectively in the skills needed to act as mentors. Exemplary child protection procedures are in place and staff are fully conversant with these.

Checks to ensure that students are able to reach their academic and personal potential are extensive and effective. Teachers are reflective in their support for students. They plan for every foreseeable eventuality from before students' arrival in Year 7 to the next stage of their education or work, whatever their choices. Students with learning needs and disabilities are very well supported. Parents are fully involved in the arrangements for support. The school works successfully with a wide range of organisations to provide the best support it can. There are very good procedures in place to deal with any incidents of bullying or racial harassment. Grade: 1

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for the school; much of its work is highly innovative. His vision challenges accepted ideas about education. This is conveyed so successfully to staff that they show great keenness to take on new ideas and try something different. Together, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers make a formidable team, with individual strengths that complement each other. They have involved a wide range of people both within the school and from outside in high quality and effective self-evaluation. Leadership at other levels within the school is generally good. Middle managers gain a good idea of the overall strengths and weaknesses in performance, but some important details, such as the differences in performance between boys and girls, in some instances are not identified clearly enough for the school to be able to address the causes consistently. Similarly, in the sixth form, teachers have a good understanding of students' progress in their own subjects, but are not always aware of how well this compares with other subjects the students are studying.

Governors play a very strong role in monitoring the school's performance. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in performance and play a full part in the frequent reviews of subjects. However, the outcomes from these reviews are not always translated into plans for improvement. This makes it difficult for governors to check that actions have been effective.

Overall, leadership and management are good. There are some areas of the school's work that are outstandingly well managed. The school's status as a technology college, for example, has led to rapid and significant improvements in standards in mathematics, science and design and technology. Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17th October 2005

Dear Students

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we inspected your school. Your views are very important and we value very much the help you gave us.

St John's is a good school with many outstanding features. Most of you are pleased with your school and proud of it. Nearly all of you are achieving well, getting better results than might be expected from your starting points when you joined the school. GCSE results are high, and this success is continued in the sixth form. Teaching is good and many of your teachers give outstanding lessons. Most of you respond very well to the efforts of your teachers to encourage you to think and grow in confidence. There are, however, a few of you who do not behave as well as you should. This sometimes stops you and others learning as well as you could.

Your school is excellent at helping you develop as people. The school's curriculum is outstanding, with the Year 7 programme being especially notable. The care, guidance and support you are given are also outstanding. Your headteacher provides outstanding leadership for your school. He has a passionate vision of what is needed for the best possible education for young people in this century, and all staff are committed to this ideal.

Like all aspects of life, there is always room for improvement. We hope you will also make suggestions, but we are asking the school to look at two things in particular:

improve achievement in English so that it is as good as in the other core subjects of mathematics and science

use information about how you are getting on a little better in some areas of the school so that teachers can spot more quickly when there are weaknesses and can take steps to put them right.

I hope this letter is useful to you and that you will play your part in making the school even better. The school has been improving very well in recent years and has a very bright future ahead of it. I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully Ian Stuart Lead Inspector