

St John's VA Church of England Primary School, Thornham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105806
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	308956
Inspection date	17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jim Kidd

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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Christopher Fallone
Headteacher	Mrs Beryl Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
School address	Thornham Lane Slattocks Middleton Manchester Lancashire M24 2SB
Telephone number	0161 6434687
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the quality of teaching and learning, the effectiveness of leadership and management, and improvements made by the school since the previous inspection. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form; nationally published assessment data; the school's own assessment records; relevant policies; observations of the school at work, including visits to lessons and analysis of parents' questionnaires. Discussions were also held with staff, teaching and non-teaching, the chair of governors, pupils, parents and the school improvement partner. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This small school is situated on the outskirts of Rochdale and serves a mixed area of semi-rural and urban housing. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. There are few pupils from minority ethnic heritages and none is at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has strong links with the

local church community. St John's received the Healthy Schools award in 2005 and is now working towards Eco School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'We are only small but we have a big heart!' sums up the high regard that pupils have of their school, of which they are so proud. Indeed, St John's is a good school in which pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Parents, too, are delighted with what the school is doing for their sons and daughters and pay tribute to the skilful and sensitive work of both teachers and teaching assistants.

From broadly average skill levels on entry to the Reception class, pupils make good progress across the school and by the end of Year 6, reach standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science which are above those usually found. The quality of pupils' writing has been a priority for the school since the previous inspection and teachers have introduced well founded and effective strategies to improve standards in this area. As a result, pupils in Year 6 reached their challenging targets in writing in 2007. Inspection evidence demonstrates that pupils in the current Class 3, from Year 5 and Year 6, are on course to maintain above average standards in the core subjects by the time they leave for the secondary school. Pupils with learning difficulties make the same progress as their peers because of the comprehensive support they receive from their teachers, their teaching assistants and also their classmates.

Pupils are totally engaged in all aspects of school life and their attendance is consistently above the national average. From the moment they enter in the morning to the time they leave in the afternoon, smiling is the order of the day and their behaviour is exemplary. They enjoy helping each other and are delighted to share in the success of everyone. They demonstrate a real generosity of spirit, and support a wide range of local, national and global charities. They also benefit from the ethos of the school, which teaches them just how important they are and how they must support other children, and also adults, who are not as fortunate. They have a keen understanding of how to eat healthily and how to keep fit and take regular part in a variety of sports and games. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is demonstrated by their willingness to express their views in assemblies and when they listen with rapt attention to stories about problems facing children in Kenya. Their good achievement in lessons and their increasing confidence in using computers prepare them well for the next stage in their educational careers. Teachers also recognise their duty to prepare their charges for life in multi-cultural Britain and provide pupils with a range of relevant experiences. Pupils are therefore aware of religious festivals which are different to their own and have opportunities to taste food from many countries. They dress up in Indian costume, celebrate Chinese New Year and show the highest respect for other cultures.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and pupils in all classes rise to appropriate levels of challenge and show themselves to be avid learners. They benefit too from the many opportunities they have to support other pupils in their cross-age classes, and work in pairs and groups with a maturity which belies their years. Teaching assistants are well qualified and their knowledge of how to foster higher levels of achievement among pupils with learning difficulties is secure. They work closely with teaching staff to plan activities which interest and motivate pupils. Relationships between pupils and staff, and amongst the pupils themselves, are a major strength in lessons and around school. Marking has improved since the previous inspection but is inconsistent in quality. Pupils are aware of the National Curriculum levels at which they are operating but are not always sure about how to improve their work.

The curriculum is good and the building of the new school hall has had a profound effect on the delivery of physical education (PE). The extent and quality of extra-curricular activities is particularly strong and the take up of after-school clubs, the homework and gardening clubs, for example, is impressive.

All staff at St John's care very much for the welfare of their pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants provide outstanding support for all pupils, irrespective of their levels of ability. Child protection procedures are in place and fully meet current guidelines. Parents make positive comments about the communication from school and add, 'It creates a caring environment for our children.' Assessment is much improved and day-to-day practice is satisfactory. However, the monitoring of pupils' progress is not fully embedded in all areas of the curriculum and, on occasions, does not inform the planning of teaching and learning and the setting of targets effectively enough.

Subject coordinators and relatively inexperienced staff pay tribute to the good quality of leadership and management at senior level, and are delighted to be given opportunities to take more responsibility and to help move the school forward. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher does much to maintain high staff morale. She leads by example in the classroom and is a highly visible presence around school. Governors are fully supportive of what the school tries to do and they are not afraid to hold the leadership rigorously to account.

Pupils' good progress, their outstanding personal development and effective leadership and management at all levels demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve further and that it provides good value for money. Without doubt, the welfare of its pupils comes first at St John's. As parents say, 'This is a lovely school which has happy children achieving well.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Effective teaching from teachers and teaching assistants, and a curriculum which provides a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities ensure that children enjoy learning and make an effective start to their school careers. From broadly average skill levels when they enter the Reception class, children achieve well and reach above average standards overall by the time they join Year 1. Opportunities for outdoor play have improved markedly since the previous inspection, but the area is not fully developed and does not ensure that children make maximum progress in their physical development. Care and support for all children is of a high order and there are strong links between staff and parents. Leadership and management are good and staff are fully aware of what needs to be done if indoor and outdoor activities are to be linked more effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency in assessment procedures and in the monitoring of pupils' progress in order that both staff and pupils are fully aware of the next steps in learning.
- Develop outdoor provision in the Foundation Stage in order that children can make better progress in their physical development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St John's VA C of E Primary School, Thornham, M24 2SB

Thank you all so much for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. You smiled at me from the moment you entered the main door on that cold, rainy and windy morning and your politeness and kindness all the way through the day was wonderful to experience! I really enjoyed talking to you in lessons and at lunchtime and would like to say a particular 'thank you' to those of you in Year 6 who came to chat with me in the headteacher's office. I would now like to tell you just why your school is such a good one.

Everyone connected with St John's is right to be very proud of it. Your parents say it does so much for you and keeps them very well informed about the progress you are making. Your progress is good in lessons because your teachers teach you well and the other support staff work hard to help you when you find things difficult. Your behaviour is excellent and you get on really well with your classmates. You have many responsibilities around school and older pupils like helping the younger ones. You also organise playground games and look after the local environment.

You have many opportunities to join clubs and sports activities at the end of the school day and many of you visit the local high school to take part in a wide variety of team games. You enjoy the theatre visits, and also when actors visit your school. Staff do all kinds of things to make sure you enjoy school and they take excellent care of you in everything you do.

Your headteacher and all the other adults in school know how to make St John's even better and, like you, they are delighted that there is a new school hall where you can have assemblies and also PE lessons. I have asked your teachers to take an even closer look at how well you are doing in all your subjects so that they can give you more advice on how you can improve your work. I have also mentioned to your headteacher that the school should organise the new outdoor area better so that children in the Reception class can spend more time learning in the open air!

Thanks again for your contribution to the inspection. I enjoyed watching you learn.