

St John's CofE Foundation Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117001
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326516
Inspection date	25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Middleton HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	592
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Marns
Headteacher	Wendy Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2006
School address	Watt Close Bromsgrove B61 7DH
Telephone number	01527 832376
Fax number	01527 570258

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- current pupils' standards and progress, particularly in English and writing
- the quality and consistency of teaching and learning
- the impact of the school's mission and ethos and its strategies on promoting community cohesion.

Evidence was gathered through discussions with senior leaders, other staff, pupils, representatives of the pupils' learning council and the Chair of the Governing Body, together with visits to lessons and review of relevant school documents. 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

As a result of its Christian ethos, the school welcomes pupils from a large number of primary schools in and around Bromsgrove. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The great majority of pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportions of pupils who find learning difficult or have a statement of special educational needs are average. The school has been awarded Sportsmark and Eco Bronze Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St John's Church of England Middle is a good school. Staff, pupils and almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the ethos of the school and valued the increasing opportunities to develop their role in the school community.

Pupils' achievement during the time they are at the school is good overall. Those who find learning difficult also progress well in their academic and personal development. Assessments when pupils arrive at the school indicate broadly average attainment. However, this includes a significant proportion of pupils who are able, articulate and committed and an equal proportion whose writing in particular is below average. By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve above average standards in national tests in mathematics and science but the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in English is average. Assessments of pupils at the end of Year 8 indicate that when pupils leave the school, they are well prepared to succeed at secondary school. Many have already achieved above average results in the optional mathematics tests. In English, while previous assessment records indicate satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 8, their current work and performance in lessons is stronger due to a wide range of new strategies that are employed to improve their rates of progress. Pupils also show that when inspired and supported to write well in other subjects, they are able to develop and apply their skills, for example in writing their prayers. However, whilst teaching in many subjects develops pupils' awareness of specialist words, not all use opportunities to reinforce improvement in writing.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Amongst the many positive comments expressed by parents, one stated, 'As you walk into the school, there is always a family-friendly atmosphere.' However, a small but significant minority of parents raised concerns about inconsiderate behaviour, particularly by older pupils and out of school. During the inspection, pupils in all year groups behaved well and those involved in discussions and as guides were exemplary. The school provided evidence of robust systems to support this. Pupils say they feel safe and secure in school. Evidence of their conduct out of school, in a whole-school celebration of music at the local park and at church events, also included high praise by the local community. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good and supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils' awareness of the school, its locality and the world as a community is evident in their school and charity work. A recent 'tolerance and diversity day' not only deepened pupils' understanding about other communities, but working with pupils from different year groups contributed to their awareness of the school as a community. Links with a school in a contrasting area of England are at an early stage but this development accurately reflects the school's view that pupils' experience of cultural diversity in England needs to be wider. Pupils take on responsibilities to contribute to the school seriously, which is evident in the work of the school council and their support for extra-curricular activities, including the 150 applicants for the 'eco club'. The newly formed learning council has developed perceptive ideas about how to improve learning and the school plans to act on their suggestions. These include making the environment more stimulating; some areas of the school do remain uninspiring.

Pupils say they enjoy their lessons, particularly those with a clear purpose that get them actively involved. Several different examples of good teaching were observed during the inspection but a consistently good feature was teachers' good knowledge of their subject and individual pupils, used to stimulate and develop challenging discussions. The best lessons are well planned to take account of pupils' interests and involve them in demonstrations and problem solving,

individual and group activities, along with opportunities to reflect on and share their work. Pupils show great interest in their learning and excellent knowledge of their current level of work, and how to improve it. Their knowledge of their targets in subjects such as English is impressive because pupils review their own progress with staff, agreeing areas for improvement. The use of assessment information to track pupils' performance and target support is generally good. Learning support staff work effectively alongside teachers and pupils. However, performance data also indicates that for some pupils, their progress varies significantly between different subjects and teachers. Some lesson plans show that starting points and follow-up activities remain too similar for pupils with different levels of ability.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff show interest in the pupils as well as their work. They ensure that pupils transfer from the high number of feeder primary schools with minimal worry and soon integrate. Links with outside agencies are productive. Good working relationships develop between pupils and adults and between pupils. The Christian ethos of the school and direct links with the local church also contribute to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school fulfils all the requirements for the safeguarding of pupils.

The curriculum is good, especially in the opportunities it provides for enrichment. Interesting topics motivate the pupils successfully in subjects, such as science. A geography lesson, taught as a role-play of an aeroplane flight to St Lucia, also demonstrated the impact of topics that draw on the experiences of teachers. The school is taking good account of popular schemes of work that are raising standards, for example pupils' responses to a 'Gothic horror' theme and a 'Dragons' Den' initiative which contributed to their economic understanding. Visits are used effectively; for example, in religious education, their visits to different places of worship are followed up well in school. The history course has recently developed a more experiential approach that is also proving popular with the pupils. Cross-curricular work is at an early stage of development, but is well planned to fulfil specific objectives. Extra-curricular opportunities are wide and often extend learning in lessons. For example, music, drama and sports activities contribute to pupils' enjoyment and achievement, and their awareness of how to develop a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Leadership and management at all levels are good. There is a purposeful drive to ensure the school realises its potential to become outstanding, which is underpinned by the headteacher's determination and vision. Shared purpose is a strength of the school: staff, pupils, parents and governors expressed support for increased communication and the opportunities to share views and work collaboratively. Significant improvements have been made in monitoring pupils' progress and increasing pupils' self-awareness about how to progress. However, a more recent focus on less effective subjects and teaching has not yet fully impacted on improved outcomes for pupils. Strong leadership by example is a quality of middle leadership in some subjects that has proven successful. For example, passionate leadership in subjects such as mathematics and music motivates staff and pupils to aim high and succeed. Governors know the school well, make regular visits and review progress through regular links with subject leaders. There are good links with local schools and support agencies. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well and that while improvement is evident, there is scope for more. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure that standards continue to improve in all subjects, and particularly in English and its wider application across the curriculum.

- Ensure that support and challenge for individual pupils is consistently high in all lessons and coherent across all subjects.
- Ensure that pupils' views are taken fully into consideration, for example about making the learning environment more interesting and inspiring.

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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?	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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

26 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's C of E Foundation Middle School, Bromsgrove, B61 7DH

Thank you for the enthusiastic and courteous welcome I received when I visited your school. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss your school with those of you I met, observe some of your lessons, and share your achievements. Your views, and those of your parents and carers, were very helpful in evaluating the evidence provided by staff and confirming their view that yours is a good school.

These are the particular strengths of your school.

- Your headteacher, staff and governors have brought about improvements.
- You make good progress in lessons, including pupils who find learning difficult.
- Your teachers and other staff are caring, providing good guidance and support.
- You support opportunities to get involved through different councils and clubs.
- Your personal and social skills develop well and prepare you well for your future.
- You appreciate the teaching that uses subject knowledge to inspire interest.
- Your parents think the school is good and support its work.
- You enjoy learning through practical activities that get you involved.
- Your courses and extra-curricular opportunities offer a good range of experiences.
- You contribute to making the school and locality work well as a community.

To help it improve further, I have asked the school to:

- continue to raise your standards, particularly in English and writing
- support and challenge you in all lessons to ensure that you achieve your best
- use your good ideas, for example about improving the learning environment.

I wish you enjoyment and success at St John's C of E Middle School and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton Her Majesty's Inspector