

St John's School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126500
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	328508
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1499
Sixth form	273
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diana Trickey
Headteacher	Patrick Hazlewood
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2005
School address	Stedman Building Orchard Road Marlborough SN8 4AX
Telephone number	01672 516156
Fax number	01672 516664

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John's School and Community College is an oversubscribed comprehensive school on the outskirts of Marlborough. It serves a rural catchment area with about half the students arriving by bus each day. Almost all the students are White British and the proportion eligible for free school meals is low. About a quarter of students in the sixth form are eligible for Educational Maintenance Allowance. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is well below the national average. About a third of these students have moderate learning difficulties. A unit on the school site makes specialist provision for six students with specific learning difficulties, mostly dyslexia.

The school was designated a specialist technology college in 1998, with a second specialism in languages added in 2006. It is a lead practitioner school. The school is involved in a number of national pilots in relation to the curriculum. The school operates on two sites, just over a mile apart. A new school building is under construction and is due to open in October 2009.

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 so lucky to have such a good school on our doorstep!' This is how one parent described St John's and inspectors shared this view. Parents, students and staff describe a happy, secure and stimulating school, where relationships are warm and friendly, and students are enthusiastic, supportive of one another and keen to learn. Teachers and support staff enjoy working in this very inspiring, creative atmosphere with opportunities for regular, motivating professional development.

The headteacher and the leadership team are energetic and passionate in their enthusiasm to improve outcomes for students. They have introduced a range of innovative developments in the curriculum so that students of all abilities and aspirations are catered for well. Staff have a common sense of purpose because of the collegiate style of management, which ensures that everyone is actively involved in both evaluation and planning. Students are regularly consulted about the quality of teaching and learning, although they are sometimes unaware of how their views are acted on.

Standards are above the national average, and students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. This is because the quality of teaching is good, and the curriculum is creative and well matched to students' needs, particularly through the wide range of pathways in Years 10 and 11. As a result of specialist status, nearly all students study a language and an aspect of technology at GCSE. The innovative curriculum in Years 7 and 8 focuses on developing students' generic skills for learning as well as their subject knowledge. The strategies that teachers use in these lessons are very effective, because they allow students to be actively engaged in their learning. However, they are not consistently used across the school, and this leads to some low-level disruption in a small minority of lessons.

Students feel very safe and behave very sensibly around the school site. Their moral and social awareness is very good although there are fewer opportunities for their spiritual development. Students report that bullying and racial incidents are extremely rare, but if they do occur, they are confident that staff will sort things out quickly. Although students clearly enjoy being in school, rates of authorised absence in recent years have remained stubbornly high in comparison with those of other schools in similar contexts.

The care, guidance and support provided for vulnerable students are excellent, with parents and other agencies closely involved. Teachers receive training and advice on appropriate strategies to use with individual students. The use of assessment data to support students' learning has developed very effectively since the last inspection.

The school is accommodated on two over-populated, poorly maintained and under-resourced sites, with staff and some students needing to travel between them, sometimes several times a day. This unsatisfactory arrangement has a negative impact both on achievement and on the quality of care that the school is able to provide for students, and on the conditions of work for teachers. The ability of the school's leaders to maintain staff morale and students' achievement under these challenging conditions is commendable and indicates a good capacity to improve. The environment does not motivate or inspire students, yet they remain hard-working, very cooperative and loyal. The new school now under construction is a result of the efforts over a period of 10 years of governors and the leadership team, who have found the necessary funding and managed the project. There is considerable excitement amongst

staff and students about the move to the new building later in 2009. Governors and senior staff are aware that this will need to be managed carefully alongside other initiatives in order to avoid placing an unreasonable burden on staff.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students greatly enjoy the positive and friendly atmosphere in the sixth form, make good progress and reach above average standards. They achieve particularly well in their AS courses, although the same rate of progress is not maintained in their A levels. Although teaching is variable in quality, there are pockets of outstanding practice.

The large sixth form offers a very wide range of courses at AS and A level, numbering almost 40. In addition, the school introduced the International Baccalaureate in 2007 and now has a group in both Years 12 and 13. However, enrichment is limited to one lesson a week, and religious education, which is a statutory requirement, is not provided. Certain extra-curricular activities, including its successful rugby team, are an important part of sixth form life but the range offered is not attractive to all students, especially girls. Not all students take part in physical education. The school has a clear policy of not duplicating vocational courses that can be better provided in local colleges but is instead supportive of its Year 11 leavers through assisting them to find appropriate placements.

The students have less taught time for each AS/A-level subject than is often found and so the school places a good deal of reliance on them working independently. This self-reliance is encouraged well in lessons, where students are made to think for themselves. However, the students are not well supported by the school's poor study facilities and sixth form common room, and many prefer to work at home. The students very much appreciate the patient support they receive from staff when they seek help. They feel their work is carefully and constructively assessed and they have a clear understanding of their targets and their progress towards them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance in order to improve achievement.
- Apply the effective strategies already used to enhance learning in Years 7 and 8 consistently across the school.
- Improve the quality of the built environment and the range of resources available in order to increase achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at GCSE are above the national average and have risen steadily in line with the national trend and with the school's targets over the last three years. In 2008, the percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was well above the national average. After a dip in results in 2007, assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2008 showed a significant improvement in the percentage of students reaching higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Students make good progress in lessons and those currently in Years 9 and 11 are on track to achieve challenging targets in examinations in 2009. Overall, this represents good progress from students' average attainment on entry to the school. Most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress, although some with complex emotional needs achieve less well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' good moral, social and cultural development is apparent from their good behaviour, and their positive attitudes towards their peers and their learning. Opportunities for spiritual development are more limited but will increase as the new philosophy and religion course is embedded across the school. The provision of healthier food at lunchtime, initiated by the school council, has encouraged more students to consider their diet. However, although students are very keen, opportunities for some of them to take part in sport are limited, because building work on the school site has reduced the area available for sport at Key Stage 3, so not all students benefit from the recommended lesson time for physical education.

Many students make a positive contribution to the community through citizenship or fund-raising activities and some help in local primary schools, for example through the Junior Sports Leaders award. Some sixth formers support younger students' learning, although opportunities for this are limited by the split site. Students are frequently consulted on a wide variety of issues. For example, they have been extensively involved in making decisions about a new uniform for when the new school opens in the autumn. However, on some issues they do not always feel that their contributions have been worthwhile because they receive limited feedback. The way the curriculum is organised and the style of pastoral care encourages effective development of skills for the workplace for students' future economic well-being, such as literacy and numeracy, self-confidence and the ability to work independently. Poor attendance of a significant number of students has an impact on their attainment. This is a particular problem in Year 8.

The school council, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, has focused on improving the range of healthy choices available at lunchtime, developing eco-monitors and a recycling scheme together with their engagement with the county council's transport plan. As a result of an initiative from the school council, students in Years 10 and 11 organised a successful leavers' prom.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good, although there is variation across the school, with some outstanding and some satisfactory lessons. Relationships between students and teachers are very good and based on mutual respect. In the majority of lessons, students are engaged in active learning and enjoy challenging and stimulating activities. The school's innovative approach to the curriculum in the lower school has helped students develop good skills of independent learning, organisation and teamwork. They work well in groups and listen to one another's ideas. Students enjoy working in this way, which personalises their learning, and they are sufficiently motivated to work hard. These effective principles of teaching the innovative curriculum in Years 7 and 8 are not applied consistently in lessons higher up the school. In a minority of lessons, students spend too much time listening to the teacher so they are not actively engaged in their own learning nor challenged in their thinking.

Teachers generally provide students with feedback on their work, which helps them understand how to improve, although this is more often provided orally than through marking. Reliable and regular assessment data are now available about the progress of each student and these help teachers to meet the individual needs of every student, especially those with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, although this is not yet consistent across the school. A few parents report concerns that students are not working as hard as they would expect at home, and that sometimes teachers do not give enough feedback on the work they have completed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and meets the needs of all students throughout the school. In Years 7 and 8, the organisation of the curriculum ensures the development of valuable skills for learning. In Year 9, some students start GCSE courses in mathematics, science and philosophy and religion. In Years 10 and 11, a range of pathways offers a wide choice for all abilities and individual interests. An effective partnership exists with the local further education college to provide vocational courses and students participating in part-time college courses are still able to follow GCSE courses so that they complete Year 11 with valued qualifications. Some students, who are less well motivated, pursue an appropriate course, which encourages good attendance and achievement.

Suitable programmes are in place for vulnerable students and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good quality individual education plans ensure that they meet their targets, and many students exceed them. All students follow a new programme of 'well-being', which includes lessons and workshops on personal, social and health education. Citizenship is integrated into other subjects across the curriculum and an effective monitoring system is in place to ensure that all pupils experience a comprehensive programme. Although there is evidence of the use of information and communication technology in some subjects, poor resources prevent this from happening across the whole school, for individual students' work and whole-class activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very well managed and the deployment of resources is efficient. Intervention is negotiated with students and their families and a monthly surgery takes place where students experiencing difficulties can be assessed and given helpful advice on the same day. The poor attendance of some students in Year 11 affected the school's overall performance in the GCSE examinations in 2008. New systems put in place to tackle this are beginning to have an impact. Effective reintegration arrangements support the very few students who are excluded.

Students were keen to emphasise the smooth transition when transferring from primary schools. In Year 9, effective preparation for selecting subjects for Years 10 and 11 and future careers is provided as part of the 'Lifestyles' lessons. Academic guidance is generally good and in the best examples ensures that students know what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. Each student has a mentor with whom they discuss their progress and set targets for improvement. As a result, the majority know how well they are doing and what they need to do in order to improve. However, this system is not implemented consistently for all students. Some, who appear to be doing well, feel they get less attention than those who are underachieving.

Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and meet statutory requirements, with rigorous arrangements for training staff. Risk assessment procedures in

relation to school visits are robust. Trained 'Here to Hear' mentors provide peer support, which students value.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Rigorous self-evaluation at all levels involves staff and students and leads to effective planning, although the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is not always explicit. Careful analysis of examination data and thorough subject reviews identify areas for improvement. Current data show that the school is on track to reach challenging targets in 2009. The collegiate style of management allows middle managers considerable autonomy in the way they work. The introduction of whole-school systems ensures efficiency and consistency of approach, for example, the whole-school assessment and data system. Managers of different subjects appreciate the freedom to work independently within a secure framework, but would welcome the opportunity to share good ideas more frequently.

The school promotes community cohesion well. Links with the other schools in the local community through the school's language and technology specialist status are extensive. Some St John's staff spend time teaching in the feeder primary schools, and along with regular visits, this ensures that transition for Year 6 pupils is very smooth. Although links with the local community are more limited, the enthusiasm of a group of staff, who act as 'global champions', has led to involvement in the 'Globalisation UK' project, which is starting to raise students' awareness of life in a multicultural society. Associations with schools in the Gambia, Kenya and China as well as Europe, improve students' understanding of other cultures.

The long process of planning for the construction of the new school building on a single site has been an important priority for school leaders for several years. The project is now nearing completion and the whole school community is looking forward to the opportunities the new building will bring. However, senior leaders and governors have been careful to delegate the management of this process in order to ensure that their focus remains on the achievement of current students.

Parents are very supportive of the school, and many said how appreciative they were of the prompt way in which problems were handled. Governors challenge the headteacher very effectively and involve themselves in the broader life of the school.

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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	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

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/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	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	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

16 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's School and Community College, Marlborough, SN8 4AX

You will remember that inspectors came to your school recently. I would like to thank you for the friendly, open and positive way in which you talked to us about your school. In return, I would like to tell you about our findings and encourage you to read the full inspection report at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

We judge St Johns to be a good school. You behave very well around the school and your views are valued by staff and often influence the decisions they make. You make good progress and achieve examination results that are well above the national average because you are taught well. The staff have high expectations of you and provide you with good care, guidance and support. A very innovative curriculum ensures that there is a wide range of suitable courses for everyone.

One of the main reasons for the success of your school is that you have a strong headteacher and senior leaders, who are well supported by a very enthusiastic and hard-working team of staff, who are absolutely committed to providing the best for you, in spite of working under difficult conditions on the split site. We have asked them to do the following things to make your school even better.

- Improve attendance in order to improve your achievement – you can help by making sure you are absent as little as possible.
- Encourage staff to make teaching at Key Stage 4 just as interesting and stimulating as it is in Key Stage 3.
- Improve the quality of the buildings and the range of resources available in order to increase your achievement.

Those of you in Year 11 and Year 13 will miss the benefits that moving to a single site will bring. In spite of their excitement about the new school building, we are confident that the staff will not be distracted in the coming months from the important work they are doing to support you in achieving the best you can in 2009.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector