

St Johns CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111334
Local Authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	331098
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	133
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev J Bacon
Headteacher	Mrs Aldred
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Heath Road Sandbach Cheshire CW11 2LE
Telephone number	01270 762859
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

Description of the school

St John's Church of England Primary is situated on the edge of Sandbach in Cheshire in a part of the town known as the Heath. It is smaller than the average primary school. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including the proportion with a statement of special educational need, is in line with the national average. Most of the pupils are of White British heritage, although there are also pupils from the local Traveller community and a small number of pupils of Chinese heritage. The Chinese pupils are learning English as an additional language. Provision for children in the Reception class is reported in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

When the school was last inspected, in January 2008, it was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school was judged as providing an inadequate education in January 2008. For several years the school has been plagued by disruptions to staffing that has meant pupils have had little continuity in teaching and that the school has several headteachers. Pupils' standards fell and some parents lost confidence. Under the leadership of a seconded headteacher and with the support of the local authority and the Diocese of Chester, the school is fully recovered. Consequently, in accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Pupils are making good progress. The provision made by the school is good in all respects. However, the school is judged no better than satisfactory in its effectiveness at present because pupils' achievement from their starting points is no better than satisfactory, overall. Pupils' good current progress is mitigated by the legacy of weak progress in the past. In addition, the good provision is often new and still embedding. Pupils' standards are broadly in line with the national average, from a broadly average start.

The leadership and management of the seconded headteacher have proved crucial factors in the school's improvement. She has orchestrated the support for the school extremely well, built confidence in pupils and with parents, including with the Traveller community, and championed the causes of equality and diversity. A strong teaching team has been formed that is teaching well and developing the curriculum to make school life more interesting for pupils. The tracking of pupils' progress is thorough and there is clear evidence that progress is now good for all pupils except those whose education has been most disturbed. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is of outstanding quality. The care, support and guidance for pupils is good, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who are learning English as an additional language and for those pupils generally who are at risk of not doing as well as they might. Teaching assistants play a very effective role in helping children at risk of underachievement and in the life of the school generally. Although not deemed an issue to improve by the last inspection, the school has successfully developed programmes aimed at promoting pupils' personal development and well-being and pupils have responded well, by improved behaviour and increased maturity and by developing a good sense of responsibility for others.

Leadership and management are strong at all levels. Apart from the headteacher, senior teachers and subject leaders play a full part in leading on school improvement. The governing body is much better prepared to exercise oversight for the school than it was at the time of the last inspection. The transition from the seconded headteacher to the new, substantive headteacher, an understandable source of concern for parents, has been managed very well and the two are working together over the summer term to ensure a smooth succession. The secure improvements to date indicate that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in Reception have the best possible start to their schooling. They are very happy, settled and making good progress in their learning. They show great enthusiasm for all the varied activities made available to them, whether in the more formal sessions learning reading, writing and mathematics, or in exploring learning through play, within the classroom and

outdoors. They cooperate very well with each other, willingly take on small responsibilities and play together in harmony. The teacher and teaching assistant work extremely well together. The teacher is very skilled at building opportunities for learning through the observation of individual children's interests and enthusiasms and also in making the experiences first-hand, active and relevant. The quality of the provision indoors and out is excellent and being developed further in the woodland classroom. Children's language and vocabulary are promoted very effectively by teaching that skilfully draws out responses from children and encourages discussion. Staff praise children frequently and build their confidence very effectively. The provision is extremely well led and managed, with rigorous assessments, very careful attention to children's welfare and well-being, and close linking with parents and neighbouring playgroups. It has benefited from good support from the local authority.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement further, building on the good start already made, through introducing further enrichment and creativity into the curriculum, including outside of the classroom, and providing greater challenge for the more-able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, overall. Standards at Year 2 and 6 are broadly average. Class sizes are small, and the variation in standards due to the natural differences in the capabilities of pupils from year-to-year are to be expected.

Pupils' progress is generally good. It is less good in classes that have had the most changes in teachers and the more-able pupils have not always achieved as much as they might, although a higher proportion of pupils is expected to achieve the higher levels at Year 6 this year than in previous years. The school's records show that pupils slipped behind with their work during the period of disruption – standards were particularly low in 2007- but tracking records indicate that pupils are now mostly on track to achieve, and for a minority to exceed, the challenging targets set for them.

All three groups that are vulnerable to underachievement, the children of Traveller families, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those pupils who speak little English all make good progress. The school is especially effective at identifying and meeting the learning needs of pupils falling behind with their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Promoting pupils' personal development and raising their confidence and self-esteem is an aspect of the school's work that has been emphasised. The outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils enjoy school and show considerable pride in it; parents reported that children are once more keen to talk about what has happened at school. They are more involved in decision making than before and consulted more often. Behaviour is good and pupils take on responsibilities, including older pupils taking good care of younger ones, promoting the family and Christian ethos of the school. Pupils have plenty of exercise and good knowledge of how to stay healthy and safe, although inspectors noted many pupils eat less than healthy packed lunches, suggesting that they do not always follow what they know to be best for them. Pupils are actively involved in raising funds for those less fortunate than themselves in this country and abroad. They are

well prepared for the next phase of education in many respects, but their average standards make their prospects satisfactory rather than good. Attendance is below average, but the school and authorities are doing everything in their power to ensure pupils attend regularly.

Pupils are developing their sense of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well. They make good progress in Reception and in both key stages. They generally work and play together in harmony and form friendships across cultural and ethnic divides. They have a developing sense of what is right and wrong and a growing knowledge and understanding of environmental and conservation issues.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning are good. Most lessons observed during the inspection were of good quality and outstanding teaching was seen. Pupils and parents are quick to acknowledge the positive difference that new teachers have made to pupils' enjoyment and achievement. Teaching assistants are very experienced, well trained and well deployed to provide effective support in class and by working with groups of pupils who need extra support. Typically, teachers have good relationships with their pupils. They plan lessons well, providing appropriate challenge to pupils of different levels of capability. They make the learning they expect clear to pupils and when they mark books, teachers always find something to praise and a next step to aim for. Increasingly, they are seeking activities that interest and excite pupils and which motivate them to do well. Not all pupils are learning as well as they might, some boys, for example, in classes which have seen many changes in teacher, and some more-able pupils, who have not been challenged sufficiently. However, pupils agree that they are now receiving work pitched at the right level for them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant. The need to raise core skills, of numeracy, literacy and information communication technology, means that lessons in English and mathematics in particular, are apportioned significant blocks of time. However, the school is actively developing work on projects that meet the National Curriculum requirements of other subjects, provide opportunities for pupils to practice their core skills, and which, moreover, pupils find interesting and exciting. This work has already begun and is proving popular with children and effective in motivating them to learn. Pupils learn French. Learning about the environment is popular and pupils grow fruit and vegetables within the grounds. Programmes to promote pupils' personal and social development often involve visits out of the classroom: in the grounds, into the community and further afield for residential visits. Many visiting speakers are welcomed into school to talk to the pupils and expose them to new ideas and challenges. Pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities, amongst which sport features prominently, open to boys and girls. A small number of parents wrote to say that they felt football was not promoted strongly enough, but inspectors could find no evidence for this view.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are cared for well. All the requirements to keep pupils safe, concerning child protection, health and safety and through the assessment of risk, are in good order and meet the government's requirements. The school monitors racist incidents and the reasons for pupils' poor behaviour thoroughly. The care, support and guidance for pupils vulnerable to underachievement are good. Parents are kept well informed and are fully involved in reviews of their children's progress. Improvement plans are of good quality. The teaching assistants play a very effective role in working with vulnerable pupils and their parents. The school works effectively with a range of external agencies, including those within the local authority, and it benefits by tapping into the resources of the local schools' partnership and the local secondary schools. Soon after the last inspection the school developed thorough systems to track and monitor pupils' progress in their learning. These systems are now well developed and enable the teachers and senior leaders to accurately identify which pupils are at risk of falling behind in their work and those who are making good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good at all levels. The work of the seconded headteacher over the past year has proved exceptionally effective. She has provided vision and direction for the school, providing excellent leadership for the staff and coordinating very well the support from the local authority, diocese and outside agencies. The work of the school is rigorously and accurately evaluated. The confidence and morale of staff and pupils are much improved. Most parents recognise the extent of the improvement, but such was the impact of disruption that several families removed their children from school, and even now, from the questionnaires returned to the inspectors, up to a third of parents remain to be convinced that the school is fully recovered. The seconded headteacher has built an effective senior leadership team that is taking significant responsibility for driving improvements in the curriculum. Leadership and management of inclusion is a strength and provision for vulnerable pupils is secure. Teachers and teaching assistants each take on several responsibilities and the level of involvement of support staff in leadership roles is quite exceptional.

The governing body has been refreshed through the appointment of new members. Governors provide a wide range of expertise and good community representation. They are much better trained, informed and organised than in previous years and each takes a key role as a link governor, maintaining a good level of support and challenge for staff. The succession of the new permanent headteacher has been very well managed by the school, in partnership with the local authority, with time provided for the newly appointed and seconded headteachers to work together during the summer term. The school finances are in order and well managed. The school is carrying forward a small planned deficit with the agreement of the local authority. Community cohesion is promoted well at a number of levels, including at a local level and more globally.

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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?	3
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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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	3

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	1
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**

Inspection of St John's Church of England Primary School, Sandbach, CW11 2LE

You may recall that Mrs Ravey and I inspected the school recently. I am writing to you to tell you what we found out during the inspection. Thank you to all of you for making us very welcome, and a particular thank you to those pupils who talked to us in the classes, around the school and in meetings; the discussions with you helped us to come to our judgements.

When St John's was last inspected fully in January 2008, it was judged as a school that was not giving you an adequate education. Since then I have visited the school four times, on each occasion it has been better than the time before. On this visit, Mrs Ravey and I had no hesitation in deciding that the school has fully overcome the difficulties it has faced. It is now providing you with a satisfactory education and is improving fast.

It has been a difficult time for many of you and for your parents. There have been several changes of headteacher and many changes of teachers, all of which has disrupted your education and meant some of you have not done as well as you ought. Thankfully, this period is over now and you can look forward with confidence to receiving a good education.

Many people have contributed to the school's improvement, but I want to make a special mention of the work of Mrs Aldred. Over the past year, Mrs Aldred has led and managed the school exceptionally well. She has fought very hard for what is best for you and shepherded the school through all its difficulties. The handover to your new headteacher, Mr Whittle, has been handled very smoothly. Your teachers teach and care for you well and you are very fortunate to have such a dedicated team of teaching assistants who provide you with individual help when you need it. The governors are much more knowledgeable and better organised than they were and able to provide the school with good oversight.

Your work is much more exciting than it was when I first visited the school. We want the school to continue to develop the curriculum in this direction, to continue to make learning really interesting for you and to challenge your thinking more. Teachers have exciting plans for the coming year. Your awareness of the environment and the need to protect it is improving rapidly; this is knowledge and understanding that will be vital for you as citizens of the future.

You are now doing much better than in January, 2008. You can do better still. This inspection marks an important milestone for all those connected with St John's. It marks the end of a difficult period for the school and ushers in a new beginning. Your parents told me that St John's once had a very high reputation in the community as a very good school. It now has the strengths that should enable it to be very good in the future.