

St John's C of E (Aided) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114238
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	311525
Inspection dates	28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Mrs Sheila Mawer

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	230
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Valery Cadd
Headteacher	Miss Christine Large
Date of previous school inspection	June 2004
School address	Fenby Avenue Lascelles Park Darlington County Durham DL1 4UB
Telephone number	01325 380725
Fax number	01325 256001

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- The impact of teaching and learning on achievement and standards.
- Progress being made in improving information and communication technology (ICT) and speaking and listening across the curriculum.
- The quality of academic guidance.
- The systems in place to improve attendance.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work, the school's self-evaluation, assessment data and records of pupils' progress over time. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils, and questionnaires returned by parents were considered. A range of documentation was also examined. 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. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an almost entirely White British population. The percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is significantly above average, indicating a high degree of social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The number of pupils who join or leave the school part way through their primary education is higher than average in some classes. The school holds a number of awards including Investors in People, Basic Skills Award, Silver Artsmark, Activemark and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St John's is an outstandingly effective school. It works relentlessly to achieve excellence in all of its provision and gives outstanding value for money. Its 'I can do' culture gives everyone associated with the school the added impetus to rise to the challenges together and aim high. Pupils' achievement is excellent and challenging targets are often exceeded. The school's unremitting approach to improvements has placed it close to the top 10% of all schools in the country for the past three years. Never complacent, it reached the top 2% of all schools in 2007. This is a remarkable achievement for a school with a high number of vulnerable pupils and also many pupils joining partway through their primary education.

Standards reached by pupils by the end of Year 6 are significantly above average. The percentage reaching the higher levels has risen strongly. The only issue from the previous inspection was a lack of challenge for more able pupils. This has been addressed exceptionally well. Although standards at the end of Year 2 are below average, pupils make rapid progress from an exceptionally low starting point. Pupils receive excellent guidance about their progress and this contributes strongly to their outstanding achievement. Through teachers' helpful marking and by reviewing their targets, pupils know clearly how well they are doing. The use of marking ladders to assess progress in writing and self-assessment in mathematics are particularly useful in keeping pupils alert to what they need to improve next. A major strength of the school is the excellent progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is keenly aware of their circumstances and highly skilled staff are trained to deliver effective 'catch up' programmes.

High quality teaching and a vibrant curriculum underpin the impressive progress made by pupils. Close monitoring of progress helps teachers to match work accurately to different abilities. The most successful teachers demonstrate their exemplary practice to staff requiring further support. Pupils say their learning is fun and many examples of exciting teaching were seen. Whether pupils are baking cakes to practise their weighing skills or checking with a partner that sentences about the Great Fire of London are accurate, expectations in the learning are extremely high. Pupils are encouraged to show initiative from an early age and to do things for themselves. Specialist teaching in science and physical education is maintaining high standards in these subjects. The teaching and learning is constantly evolving, as the curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' needs in this strongly inclusive school. The governors, for example, consider pupils' views when making changes to the curriculum. Because ICT and speaking and listening are now being practised more widely across the curriculum, standards are rising. Special events weeks often focus on health and safety issues. Visits, visitors, and an excellent variety of clubs promote a strong enjoyment and well-being in pupils and they develop their talents.

The school works exceptionally well with other organisations to provide outstanding care and support for pupils. The school's trained counsellor works tirelessly with children's services to remove the barriers that hinder pupils' progress. The school has worked very hard to involve parents in their children's learning and their support impacts significantly on standards. Regular homework, newsletters, workshops and open afternoons are all successful strategies used by the school to bring out the best in pupils and strengthen parental support. Parents wholeheartedly appreciate the

devotion shown by staff. Two typical comments in questionnaires were, 'What stands out in this exceptionally caring school is how the headteacher and staff are so proud of the children.' and 'My child has been transformed into a confident, outgoing person.' Parents have every right to praise the school because it is a safe haven for pupils living in a neighbourhood affected by significant social issues. Pupils thrive in this warm family environment, self-esteem is raised and their personal development is excellent. They participate fully in all the school offers with enthusiasm and pleasure. Safeguarding meets national requirements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and behaviour is exemplary. Pupils strongly resist any form of bullying or racism and regular training strengthens their awareness. A multi-cultural week is used very successfully to promote racial harmony and tolerance through a wide variety of visitors who share their traditions and cultures. Pupils are very aware of the benefits of keeping fit, healthy and safe and they participate keenly in a walking and cycling to school initiative. The school council meets local councillors to share ideas for improved play facilities in the area. These successful initiatives give pupils a mature, caring and responsible outlook on life. Along with their exceptional learning skills, the school prepares pupils exceptionally well for the next stage of learning.

Staff work consistently well with external agents and parents to improve attendance. The mainly positive picture is adversely affected by a small number of pupils whose attendance is well below average. The school has not been afraid to prosecute persistent offenders in the past or to praise parents when attendance improves. Recently a breakfast club was started to target poor attenders and improve pupils' readiness to learn. Governors, who agreed to finance this, are very positive about the benefits. Recent figures show that attendance is improving significantly for a third of the lower attending group. One pupil's attendance has risen from 77% in the last school year to a remarkable 95% in the current school year.

Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding. The highly experienced headteacher provides inspirational leadership and is pivotal to the school's success. With the support of an excellent senior management team and exceptionally effective governors, they leave no stone unturned in their pursuit for excellence. They have created a school where pupils and teachers flourish. Rigorous and accurate monitoring and self-evaluation is well embedded. This is a school that clearly knows its strengths and weaknesses. Everyone connected with the school plays a valuable part in moving it forward and contributing to its success. Governance is excellent. Governors hold the school to account through well-established systems of management and tireless support. There is every indication from the excellent achievement over several years and visionary leadership and management that the school has an outstanding capacity to maintain its exceptional quality and performance.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of education in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Most children enter the Nursery with exceptionally low skills for their age, particularly in language and personal development. Because many children communicate in only single words and gestures, they are supported with a very effective programme for speech and

language. Language skills are extended in all activities and especially in imaginative play. Many children are unfamiliar with the world around them so regular visits are arranged to places like the post office. This helps them to play and communicate more confidently because they have experiences to draw on. Children in the Nursery settle quickly and most are well behaved. Many of them still need a lot of support from adults to get the most out of their learning. By the end of the Reception year the children have made excellent progress and are very keen to learn. Most are close to reaching the goals expected of five year olds in creative and physical development and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. In language, mathematics and personal development their skills are below what is typical for their age. The curriculum is excellent. The Foundation Stage unit has recently been refurbished and resources improved. A high investment in training for all staff has had a significant impact on provision. The Foundation Stage leader is a skilled practitioner and works closely with the co-ordinator for special educational needs to provide early intervention for the most vulnerable children. This includes monitoring and supporting those who have poor attendance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop and implement strategies that impress on a minority of parents the importance of the regular attendance of their children.

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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?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	3
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	1

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B



29 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John's C of E (Aided) Primary School, Darlington, DL1 4UB

Thank you all so much for welcoming me into your school. You and your parents were all very keen to tell me what a wonderful school you belong to. I thoroughly agree with you all. You go to an outstanding school that provides you with an excellent standard of education. You are in one of the best schools in the country. There is so much that is really special about your school and the list below gives you the main strengths:

- The excellent progress you all make to reach high standards by Year 6.
- How hard you try in lessons to do your best work and behave extremely well.
- How you all get on so well together and value each other.
- The pleasure you take and the responsibility you show in doing jobs around the school and working on your own in class.
- How well you know your targets and work very hard to improve them.
- Your teachers and all the staff are brilliant at helping you learn and they give you outstanding care and support. They are very proud of you.
- The learning is made fun through visits, clubs, visitors and lots of opportunities for ICT, drama and sharing your learning with your friends.
- The headteacher and governors are doing an excellent job in making your school the very special and highly successful place it is.

You told me that your school is perfect. Your headteacher, the governors and the teachers know how special it is. There is one thing that a few of you could do to make it even better. The school has tried very hard to make sure that you all attend regularly and arrive on time. It has started a breakfast club and a lot of you enjoy going to it. This is helping to make attendance better, but it could be better still. Some of you can make it better by attending more often so that you get the benefit of all the lovely things that happen in school. This will mean that the standards in the school will get even higher because you will be attending more regularly and learning more.

Good luck to you all and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Mawer
Lead inspector