

St James' Church of England First School, Alderholt

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113752
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	357408
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Sims
Headteacher	Clare Tickel
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They saw seven lessons and observed six teachers and held meetings with parents, pupils, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at its policies, improvement plans, assessment information and 50 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The most recent trends in pupils' attainment, particularly in Year 4 and in mathematics.
- Whether teaching offers sufficient challenge to gifted and talented pupils.
- The effectiveness of the shared leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is a little above average; most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is very low. Last year the school had temporary leadership arrangements during the headteacher's maternity leave.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St James' Church of England First School provides an outstanding education. It is very successful in meeting the needs of all pupils and has conspicuously closed the gaps in attainment between groups of pupils, including raising the attainment of those who are gifted and talented, providing excellent equality of opportunity. Outstanding care ensures all pupils are well known as individuals and the school works very effectively to help any faced with challenging circumstances. The excellent curriculum is fully adapted to meet pupils' needs, providing memorable experiences and outstanding opportunities for learning and personal development.

Consistently good teaching with interesting, challenging lessons ensures good progress at all ages. Very good planning makes study enjoyable and pupils' excellent behaviour and very good relationships promote harmony in classrooms. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in including every pupil in learning activities. Marking is inconsistent and some pupils do not benefit from clear guidance on which areas need improvement. The pleasant atmosphere in the school contributes to pupils' strong feelings of safety and they show a good grasp of how to behave in potentially risky situations, such as when walking to school or using the internet. They know they are well looked after; as one pupil said, 'they keep a close eye on you.'

The quality of provision has led to steadily improving attainment across the school. Assessments in Years 2 and 4 shows steady gains in attainment, which is above average. Given children's lower-than-expected starting points in the Reception class, this represents good achievement for all groups of pupils, including those with moderate learning difficulties.

Parents, carers and pupils like their school very much. Parental questionnaires reveal a very high degree of satisfaction. A very large majority of parents who returned inspection questionnaires were happy with their children's experience of school.

The school's actions to promote improvements have been most effective in raising attainment. Issues raised in the previous inspection report have been comprehensively addressed; for example lessons have much-improved pace, and outstanding aspects of the school have been maintained. The school's self-evaluation provides it with a lucid view of its strengths and weaknesses and it compares its performance against challenging benchmarks, setting rigorous targets. Leaders and managers embed ambition and the school's very thorough development plans provide a very effective guide for future improvements. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2011, ensure the school marking policy is followed in all classes so that pupils' books contain useful advice on what they need to improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Attainment has steadily improved over the last two years and is above average overall. Previous relative weaknesses in mathematics performance have been fully addressed and there are now no variations in attainment between subjects or groups of pupils. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills below those usually seen for their age. They transfer into Year 1 with skills and abilities expected for their age and, continuing to make good progress, pupils leave Year 4 with above average attainment.

Lively, focused lessons ensure that pupils invariably enjoy their work and learn well in class. For example, in a fast-moving Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils quickly grasped the intricacies of bar charts. They progressed well because activities were carefully adjusted to provide the correct level of support and challenge for all and because the teacher and teaching assistant both communicated high expectations that pupils were keen to meet. The school's exceptional commitment to inclusion ensures that all pupils' learning is strongly supported. The achievement of all groups, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, is good.

Pupils enjoy their school lives, as demonstrated by their outstanding behaviour. They are considerate and supportive of one another and this has a very positive impact on their learning and personal development. They appreciate what the school provides, one reporting, 'we have a wide range of things to help us develop.' There is minimal bullying, any hints of which are sternly dealt with, and the school has not excluded any pupil for some years.

Almost all pupils are outstandingly aware of what is required to grow up healthily. They appreciate the benefits of a balanced diet and many adopt good practices, such as cutting down on carbohydrates and eating more fruit. They know where exercise fits into this picture and take part keenly in daily 'wake 'n' shake' to start the day, as well as in numerous sporting opportunities.

Pupils are proud of their school and fully involved in it and the wider community, for example through church events. The school council provides a forum where pupils happily make their views known, but it can be rather dominated by teachers. It regularly raises money for charities and also brings about changes in the school, such as improved dining and play arrangements. Pupils make good progress in skills that equip them for the future. Their attendance is improving and is above average. The school's Christian ethos contributes well to pupils' outstanding spiritual understanding and they keenly discuss moral and ethical issues. Their positive, collaborative attitudes are a fine testament to their excellent moral and social development.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Excellent planning underpins an exciting curriculum that fully meets pupils' needs. Improvements have been brought about through collaboration with other local schools. Subjects are linked innovatively through interesting topics that fire enthusiasm and provide excellent opportunities to develop skills in a range of contexts. For example the study of an Indian village led to work in English, geography, art and design, information and communication technology, design technology and religious education. Numerous visitors bring their expertise in areas such as sport into the school. After-school clubs, such as cookery, chess and football, are popular and well attended.

Lessons provide enjoyable learning experiences. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan carefully to provide varied challenges that ensure good progress. At the start of lessons, learning objectives are carefully outlined, so that pupils know what is expected. Pupils are managed with great assurance so that lessons run smoothly. Their mature, responsible behaviour is recognised in the many opportunities they are given to work independently. Pupils work very well in pairs and groups, always ready to debate issues with their 'learning partners' and others. In most lessons, work is pitched at the right level so that all are correctly challenged. Perceptive questioning, targeted at different groups, tests individuals and keeps everyone at full stretch until, as one pupil jokingly commented, 'my brain hurts'.

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Regular assessments identify pupils whose progress may be faltering and carefully tailored personal study programmes support pupils with different needs. The school marking policy is not consistently followed so that some pupils' books, while checked by teachers, do not contain useful advice on what needs improving. In consequence, there is inconsistency in pupils' understanding of the next steps in learning.

Pupils are all well known as individuals and are confident in the assistance they receive. They are able to make the best of opportunities provided by the school because they receive such precisely targeted support. Assessment data is used well to quickly identify difficulties in pupils' learning and effective action is taken to provide extra support. Skilled teaching assistants understand the needs of individuals and contribute significantly to learning. Not only do they address issues such as difficulties in literacy and numeracy but also other areas, such as where pupils have limited physical skills or emotional problems. Close liaison with families, other schools and outside agencies ensures pupils' transfer into and out of school is as painless as possible.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The strength in depth of leadership and management is demonstrated in the school's continuing improvement during a recent period of temporary leadership during the headteacher's maternity leave. The return of the headteacher has redoubled the school's ambition and staff work cohesively to provide excellent care and outstanding opportunities for learning. Monitoring of activities is thorough and has sharpened up this year, ensuring that teaching remains at least good, despite recent staff changes. Careful analysis of assessment information by the headteacher enables leadership to hold staff to account. Such information is also used effectively to establish the school's priorities in its excellent future planning. Sophisticated use of assessment data and a consistent commitment to inclusion ensures that there is no significant unevenness in pupils' performance, that there are equal opportunities for all and no discrimination.

The governing body is fully involved in the school and monitors it regularly. Its work on interim arrangements during the headteacher's absence last year helped the school to continue to function effectively. Careful monitoring of finances ensures it provides excellent value for money. The governing body is involved in identifying priorities for the future and regularly evaluates the progress of the school development plan, but there is little independent analysis of test results. The governing body ensures safeguarding is effective, showing a clear understanding of procedures and policies. Pupils are confident in

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their safety at school and staff are very vigilant of their charges. Thorough policies are fully up-to-date and links with outside agencies enhance the school's safeguarding work.

Positive relationships with parents and carers fully support pupils' progress. Regular surveys and daily informal contacts keep the school informed of parent's views. An 'open door' policy encourages good communication and newsletters and the school website provide useful information. The active parent/teacher associations have raised valuable funds for the school. The school makes exceptional use of partnerships to improve provision. The local cluster of schools has a strategic plan to provide specialist mathematics teaching, business management expertise, clerking and governance support. Links with middle and upper schools have improved sports coaching at the school. Funding for some of the excellent support and nurture groups for pupils facing difficulties has come from another local schools partnership.

The school has carefully analysed its context as a basis for developing community cohesion. The excellent curriculum ensures that the impact of its work is very strong both within the school and locally, and there are developing links with schools in Europe. However, the school is aware that there are few links with schools or bodies in contrasting parts of the United Kingdom and has plans to address this.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start in the Reception class with skills below those expected for their age. The welcoming, calm environment enables them to make a fine start to their schooling and their progress is good. Children quickly develop independence and good learning habits. They take responsibility for small tasks, play well on their own and with others and develop constructive relationships with adults. Children's good behaviour and

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consideration for one another demonstrate a willingness to keep themselves and others safe.

Adults plan a programme of activities that strikes the correct balance between indoor and outdoor sessions and between independent and adult-led activities. They ensure that all areas of learning are given their due weight so children make progress on a broad front. Teaching is good but, occasionally, children are not managed firmly enough and this reduces the pace of learning. Teachers and other adults work well to challenge all children and provide a pleasant learning environment, although the school is aware that the outside area lacks stimulation and has plans to address this. Regular assessments ensure children's progress is carefully tracked, although drawing this information together in an accessible summary has been delayed this year because of the new staff team in the Early Years Foundation Stage and shared leadership and management arrangements.

All staff are focused on ensuring children's welfare and progress. They promote constructive relationships with pre-school providers and have developed very good transfer arrangements. Friendly links with parents enable regular, informal exchanges of information that benefit parents and children alike. Ongoing self-assessment, regular team discussions and joint planning enable shared leadership arrangements to be effective.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are almost all very satisfied with the school and questionnaires reveal they hold particularly positive views about how well the school keeps its pupils safe and healthy. In every question the very large majority of responses were positive. A few expressed concerns over pupils' progress and the way the school takes account of parents' suggestions and concerns. Inspection evidence finds that the school has a good record in consulting with parents and that progress is consistently good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St James' Church of England First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 121 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	50	21	42	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	33	66	17	34	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	17	34	27	54	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	32	26	52	3	6	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	21	42	24	48	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	32	27	54	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	54	23	46	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	38	27	54	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	32	27	54	1	2	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	12	37	74	1	2	2	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	20	31	62	4	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	15	30	29	58	0	0	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	44	25	50	2	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Church of England First School, Alderholt SP6 3AJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views. It was good to see how happy you are at school. The inspectors find the school is outstanding.

There are a number of excellent features, especially the way that adults look after you so that everyone gets on well, and the very interesting mixture of subjects you study. We would like to congratulate you on your excellent behaviour. This makes a great difference to lessons so that you make good progress. Teaching is good and all of you receive the support and challenge that you need. Your attainment by the time you leave is above average.

The school is well led and continues to improve. We have asked the school to focus on improving one area.

- Marking should always give you the advice you need to help you improve your work. If you do not understand what you need to do, you should ask your teachers.

Once again, thanks for all your help. It was lovely meeting you, and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Carnaghan

Lead inspector

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