

St James' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112351
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	378472
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2012
Lead inspector	Naomi Taylor

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Rogers
Headteacher	Nerissa Nicholas
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Naomi Taylor
Jim Bennetts

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed eight teachers and visited 20 lessons. Discussions were held with school staff, groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding documents, the school's self-evaluation and development plans, local authority evaluations, records of pupils' attainment and progress, and pupils' work. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View in planning the inspection. The responses in questionnaires from 64 parents and carers and those completed by pupils and staff were also analysed.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average-size primary school. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is much lower than the national average. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are less than half the national average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school meets the current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

The school holds the Investors in People Award, Healthy School status and the Activemark in recognition of sporting achievements. Since the previous inspection there has been a significant turnover of staff. Although the school remains oversubscribed, there has been a decrease in the number of pupils joining the school since the previous inspection due to families moving out of the area.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because, due to unavoidable staffing issues, teaching is inconsistent and aspects of writing and mathematics could be better. Parents and carers are overwhelming positive about the school. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. From starting points that are usually in line or below those expected for their age pupils make satisfactory progress to reach broadly average attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Too few pupils reach the higher levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in these subjects. Pupils grow in confidence to apply their numeracy skills but are less secure in mental mathematics. Attainment in writing is rising as pupils express their ideas imaginatively, but not all check accuracy in punctuation and spellings and so errors remain.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and based on good relationships with adults. The best lessons have good pace and challenge and enable pupils to work things out for themselves. When teaching is less effective teachers do not provide enough challenge for the range of ability.
- Behaviour is consistently good. Pupils are safe and take good care of each other. They show good cooperation and respect when working and playing in school. Pupils say that bullying is not tolerated and are confident in their ability to stay safe. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is above average.
- Leadership is good with a real strength in the effective management of performance. As a result, achievement is rising and senior leaders are tackling issues that require attention. Through working with the local authority progress in mathematics is improving. The monitoring of teaching is becoming more rigorous although changes in staffing have hampered the pace of improvement and shortcomings remain.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise attainment in English and mathematics so that more pupils achieve the higher levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 by:
 - ensuring that lessons meet the needs of pupils of all abilities, especially the more-able pupils
 - extending pupils' ability and confidence in using mental mathematics and consistently applying these skills when calculating and solving problems
 - improving pupils' ability to correct their spellings and punctuation across all subjects.

- Ensure the monitoring of teaching consistently identifies areas for development and puts in place actions to successfully address them.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In the Early Years Foundation Stage children make satisfactory progress. Since the previous inspection, effective leadership has improved outdoor provision and adults make good use of this. This increases children's enjoyment of learning and they quickly settle and learn to cooperate and work well together. Most activities are pitched accurately at children's interests and abilities, although occasionally tasks lack sufficient challenge. There is greater challenge in reading. Higher expectations and skilful teaching of letters and their sounds are accelerating children's confidence to read new words. The close relationships children develop in the Early Years Foundation Stage are maintained throughout the school and this underpins their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2 is satisfactory and rising as staffing stabilises and the impact of change starts to yield results. Overall attainment is broadly average. Attainment in reading is average by the end of Year 2 and is improving in response to better organisation of the teaching of letters and sounds. Pupils who read to the inspectors demonstrated confidence in applying their skills to tackle unfamiliar words. Attainment in reading is broadly average by the end of Year 6. Writing is slightly higher because pupils recognise different styles of writing and make their work imaginative. However, pupils do not always ensure that their spelling and punctuation are correct. Attainment in mathematics has been variable, particularly in Key Stage 2, with some lack of confidence in mental mathematics. Effective management identified this as a priority. Attainment has risen and is now securely in line with other subjects. The headteacher has been pro-active in working with the local authority to secure improvement throughout the school.

All pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special education needs, make satisfactory progress, which is equal to that found nationally, irrespective of their starting points. A few disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good or better progress due to highly effective interventions. However, the more able pupils do not always make enough progress to reach above average levels in English and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and 6.

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire felt that their children make good progress. Inspection evidence found progress to be satisfactory although recognise the increase in pace as staffing stabilises. Learning in lessons is satisfactory. It is not yet consistently good because work does not always meet pupils' needs well enough. Occasionally, work is too easy or too hard, resulting in pupils' progress being restricted. Nevertheless, pupils persevere and show good attitudes to learning. They enjoy trying out something different and finding out things for themselves. They are starting to evaluate their own and each other's work and this helps them to understand how to improve. This is more effective in mathematics than writing.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers regard teaching as good. Inspectors judge teaching as satisfactory although the amount of good teaching seen shows an improving picture. A common feature in lessons is effective management that ensures learning takes place in a calm atmosphere. In good lessons, pupils' work challenges them to think for themselves and they show a great deal of enthusiasm and curiosity so make good progress. For example, in a Year 4 English lesson, pupils effectively drew on their experience of visiting the theatre to develop their writing skills. They enthusiastically shared their ideas and successfully wrote a persuasive article to encourage people to visit the theatre. Effective questioning encouraged reflection and concentration was sustained. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff ensure children enjoy learning by providing a good balance between adult-led learning activities and those that children choose for themselves. As a result they learn to be independent as well as interacting socially with friends. Throughout the school, when teaching is satisfactory rather than good, there are inconsistencies in matching work to the ability range of pupils. The pace of learning slows when all pupils are given the same explanation or task. The more able pupils are sometimes not making enough progress due to whole-class explanations that reduce the time for independent work. In some mathematics lessons, a few pupils lacked the support needed to raise their ability in using mental mathematics skills to solve problems.

Marking of pupils' work is regular and helps pupils understand how they can improve. Occasionally, pupils are unsure of spellings and the accurate use of punctuation, and need more encouragement to check their work independently to reduce the number of errors.

Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and play a vital role in supporting different groups of pupils. This is especially beneficial for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are very well supported and this greatly accelerates their progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers overwhelmingly appreciate what St James' has to offer. The views of almost all are reflected in the comment, 'Absolutely delighted with the way my child is treated and educated.' In an environment where there is mutual respect for each other, the pupils settle quickly and grow in confidence. Pupils overwhelmingly say they are happy to come to school and feel safe. This is reflected in above average attendance and punctuality.

Pupils told inspectors how they learn to stay safe both in school, within their local community and when they go on visits. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying. Parents and carers are accurate in their extremely positive views about pupils'

safety and they feel their children are well looked after. They and their children agree that that bullying is not an issue. The school's records indicate that behaviour is normally good and incidents of unacceptable behaviour or harassment are rare. Links with parents and carers are strong and provide very solid grounding for the good relationships between pupils and adults maintained throughout the school. The school has a calm atmosphere reflecting the values of respect, tolerance and cooperation, which are consistently upheld by everyone. As a result pupils are polite, well-mannered and considerate towards each other, to visitors and to the environment. Staff provide a wide range of experiences beyond the school and visits to cities, a range of places of worship and residential visits to London are highly valued by the pupils. These opportunities, together with links to Nepal, help to broaden pupils' horizons. As a result pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides persistent and steadfast leadership and has most effectively overcome challenging circumstances during a period of unavoidable staffing issues. Although this has slowed up the pace of change, especially in raising the quality of teaching, the school ran smoothly and pupils' attainment did not slip. Subject leaders are extending their roles and making positive changes, although inconsistencies remain in the monitoring of teachers' planning. Nevertheless, monitoring has maintained a focus on improving teaching through performance management and a raft of professional development. For example, support from the local authority has greatly improved the teaching of mathematics. Convincing evidence shows that slower progress in mathematics has been eradicated. Monitoring of performance is effective and the school identifies pupils who need extra support. Success can be seen in the support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who make satisfactory and occasionally better progress. The school is clear about the way ahead and, with greater stability, actions are having more impact on raising attainment. Capacity to improve is good.

The governing body is conscientious and its members extend their knowledge and skills through effective training. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas requiring improvement, and they challenge the school when deemed necessary. They ensure safeguarding meets requirements. Leaders and the governing body promote equality of opportunity effectively by tackling any discrimination. Improved tracking and better teaching is closing the gaps in performance in mathematics and for the more able pupils.

The curriculum is good. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a stimulating environment, both indoors and outside, with well-planned activities for children to choose for themselves. There are good opportunities throughout the school for all pupils to take on responsibilities and extend their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Topic work, such as the Titanic, engages pupils and they use their imagination in developing writing, reading and mathematical skills. Sports coaches and musicians enhance the curriculum and pupils are good ambassadors in regional competitions.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



24 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Catholic Primary School, Millom, LA18 4AS

Thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave the team when we came to inspect your school recently. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and about the raft of opportunities that you have beyond school which the staff work hard to provide. It was lovely to hear how well you achieve in sports and music competitions and the contribution this makes to your local community.

Yours is a satisfactory and improving school. Some of you have experienced significant but unavoidable changes of teachers but the headteacher and all the staff are totally committed to helping you progress in all your subjects. You show a great deal of respect for each other and for adults which leads to a very happy school environment.

We have asked that the school improves the monitoring and quality of teaching and learning to raise your standards in English and mathematics so that more of you achieve the higher levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Teachers will ensure that lessons are more appropriately planned to meet the needs of all ability ranges. They will help to build upon your ability and confidence in using mental mathematics by encouraging you to consistently apply these skills when working on number sentences and problem solving. Whilst you are skilled in writing, you need to develop more independence in your ability to correct spellings and punctuation.

You can help your school to improve further by continuing to attend regularly and working hard at all times.

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Lead inspector

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