

St James CofE VA Primary School

Harlestone Road, St James, Northampton, NN5 7AG

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Standards are well below average by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length.
- Pupils do not use and apply their mathematical skills sufficiently in solving real-life problems.
- There is not enough chance for pupils to read in subjects other than guided reading and phonics (the sounds that letters make).
- Teaching has not been good enough to raise standards rapidly over recent years.
- The quality of pupils' work in books varies from class to class.
- The work is sometimes too easy for more-able pupils; too few of them reach the higher levels of attainment.
- Marking does not consistently show pupils how to improve their work.
- Leaders, managers, and governors, have not established a trend of sustained improvement over the past few years.
- Governors do not have a sufficient understanding of pupils' achievement, the impact of the pupil premium spending or the quality of teaching to challenge leaders rigorously.

The school has the following strengths

- Much teaching is now good, following changes to the way key subjects are taught.
- This year, most pupils have been making good progress, as they did in the summer term.
- The quality of teaching in 'The Zone' is good and pupils are well cared for.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve well because they receive good support.
- Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe in school.
- Subject and other leaders are having a positive impact on their areas of responsibility.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 30 lessons or parts of lessons, many jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- The inspection team heard pupils read and, with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors considered the 10 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke informally to parents.
- The inspectors considered the staff questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lee Nixon	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- A Nursery run by the school opened for up to 60 part-time children in April 2013.
- More than two thirds of pupils come from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, which is well above average. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. An increasing number of pupils join the school speaking no English.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (which in this school provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is well above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is also above average.
- Many more pupils than usual join and leave the school partway through their primary education.
- The school provides specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs in the form of a base for up to 10 pupils with behavioural difficulties. This is known as 'The Zone'.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching has a more positive impact on raising standards by:
 - making sure that the written work set for pupils fully reflects teachers' high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - consistently using marking to show pupils how to improve their work
 - giving enough challenge to more-able pupils to reach the higher levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that:
 - pupils have lots of opportunities to write at length
 - teachers encourage pupils to talk about their work so that they become more fluent in language and have a good understanding of what they are learning
 - pupils have enough chance to use and apply their mathematical skills in solving real-life problems
 - teachers promote reading in other subjects, in addition to guided reading and phonics lessons.
- Build on the recent improvements in teaching and pupils' progress and increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that governors have a full understanding of pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and use this to challenge school leaders rigorously.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Standards are well below average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. While they have improved in the past, this has not been sustained to make enough of a difference.
- Children join the Nursery and Reception classes with skills well below those typically found in all areas of learning. The Nursery has not been running for long, and so has not had time to raise the attainment of children joining Reception.
- Children achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes because they are carefully assessed and given every support to make rapid progress, especially in their language development and in developing dexterity with their fingers. This helps them to manipulate small objects ready for writing.
- There are lots of opportunities for children to work with adults and improve their social skills. For example, during snack time in the Nursery, when a child pointed and said, 'Me bicket', the adult replied, 'I'd like a biscuit. Would you like a biscuit?' showing how to ask correctly.
- Too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. This is because more-able pupils are not always given difficult enough work to do.
- While progress has been speeding up over the past nine months as a result of more effective teaching, this is not showing through in rapidly improving standards. Pupils do not write at length and do not use and apply their mathematical skills enough to solve real-life problems. For the past two years, Year 1 pupils have not performed well in the phonics reading check, although changes to the teaching of phonics mean that, this year, pupils are on course to do much better.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make expected progress, in line with such pupils nationally. Their performance is about three terms behind the others in reading, two terms in mathematics and less than two terms in writing. Their progress requires improvement because the gaps are not closing quickly enough.
- Because many pupils leave the school before Year 6, and others join in older year groups often speaking no English, this means that the end of key stage test results do not fully reflect the impact of what the school offers its pupils. The school has data which show that those who stay throughout, reach higher standards.
- Pupils in 'The Zone' make good progress because they are well supported by knowledgeable staff who understand their needs. Pupils gather together as a group to review and exchange experiences and enjoy social times.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs throughout the school receive the help they need to make good progress, so that they make faster progress than other pupils. Pupils new to learning English are also supported well in acquiring the language.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has not been strong enough to sustain improved standards in recent years. In particular, the written work set for pupils does not consistently reflect high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Marking does not always help pupils to improve their work; sometimes, teachers praise the work but do not explain how it could be made better.
- Pupils sometimes find it difficult to express themselves clearly and are not always encouraged to do so. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher explained how to solve a problem rather than asking the pupils to explain their ideas first.
- Older pupils, in particular, have a growing awareness of how they are doing through their 'rainbow folders' which clearly indicate what they must do to reach the next level of attainment. Pupils enjoy tracking their own progress by using a grid which sets out the levels at which they are working, and seeing how they are improving over time.
- Teachers have adopted a more flexible approach to teaching this year. Pupils are grouped according to their ability, and planning focuses on their particular needs and abilities. Teachers do not move on to the next piece of learning until they are convinced that all pupils have understood the concepts involved. Progress began to accelerate last year and the school's data show that this is continuing this year too. New apparatus for mathematics is proving effective and adding to pupils' enjoyment.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning during all parts of the lesson. They ask searching questions to check understanding and get to know pupils well. They offer good support to pupils who speak English as an additional language, making use of pictures to help them.
- This year, phonics is taught well, and pupils are using their knowledge to tackle new words. Purposeful guided-reading sessions are developing a range of reading skills, and pupils make good use of the well-resourced and attractive school library. However, teachers do not encourage pupils to read enough in other subjects to widen their experience.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and develop resilience. This means that if they get stuck they do not wait for the teacher to help them but think of ways of helping themselves; for example, through consulting the information on the walls, or asking a friend.
- Pupils are polite and friendly. They understand the school's values and this shapes the way they treat one another. Inspectors witnessed small acts of kindness among pupils. Pupils said, 'We always look out for each other.'
- Pupils in 'The Zone' work in a calm and harmonious environment and behave well. They are given good support when they work in mainstream classes, which enables them to take a full part in the lessons with their peers.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say this is a 'non-bullying school'. Parents who expressed a view were unanimous that their children were safe. Pupils know about different types of bullying, and how to keep safe when using the internet. They know about road safety and how to look after themselves. They value the school's caring attitudes. As one pupil said, 'It doesn't matter what colour or religion you are, they want you to do your best.'

- Pupils raise lots of money for charity; for example, through selling cakes and running their own tuck shop. They readily take on responsibilities; for example, helping new children.
- Pupils do not always take a pride in their work, or do enough writing. This is evident in their books. More-able pupils sometimes lose interest when the work is not demanding enough.
- The school has done much to work with families to improve attendance, with very positive results. Attendance has risen rapidly over the past year and is now in line with the national average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders, managers and governors have not sustained past improvements to see a track record or rising standards over recent years. Standards are not high enough. Leaders have not ensured that there has been enough consistently good teaching to have a marked effect on attainment.
- The curriculum was not tailored sufficiently to pupils' needs in the past, and help was not targeted enough at individuals. The effect of this is still evident in the lower attainment of older pupils in the school.
- Recent improvements, especially in Nursery and Reception, and the development of a relevant and engaging curriculum, mean that younger pupils, in particular, are starting to see standards rise more quickly. The proportion of pupils with attainment at expected levels compares favourably with the national picture in year groups up to and including Year 3.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher give a strong lead to staff and have been successful in developing subject and other leaders, who are having a positive impact on driving improvement. For example, the writing leader has devised an excellent grammar handbook that shows staff exactly what pupils should know in each year group, and gives helpful examples.
- Leaders at all levels keep a careful check on how pupils are doing, and this means that any at risk of falling behind are picked up quickly and helped to catch up. Leaders produce meticulous reports each term that set out strengths and areas for development. These link to the school's comprehensive 'raising attainment plan'.
- The deputy headteacher showed inspectors the systems the school uses that make data easily accessible to staff. These clearly show staff how different groups of pupils are doing. This helps them to plan work that is suited to most pupils' needs.
- Changes to the way key subjects are taught, and to the way pupils are grouped, mean that teachers are more confident in meeting their needs. The impact of this has been to improve teaching across the school, and to accelerate pupils' progress, so that much is now good. However, it is too soon to see this feeding through into improved test results.
- There is good leadership of 'The Zone' and staff work very closely together, making sure that pupils have positive experiences when they are working in mainstream classes. Additional teaching spaces, such as the recently erected 'Qube', enable small teaching groups to run smoothly.
- The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development. Its values underpin its work and mean that all pupils are given every opportunity to succeed. No discrimination is tolerated. The school's diversity means 'every day is an international day' as pupils celebrate one another's cultures.

- The curriculum is enhanced with a wide range of art, music and sport. All Year 5 pupils learn a musical instrument. The additional sports funding is being spent on coaching for pupils and staff, and sports tournaments. This is increasing the pupils' participation rates in sports and is having a beneficial impact on their well-being.
- The local authority provides a good level of challenge to school leaders.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are very supportive but do not fully understand data to provide sufficient challenge. They have a general understanding about the quality of teaching and the management of performance, but not in sufficient depth to ask searching questions. They understand the principle of performance-related pay and ensure that each teacher's pay is tied to their pupils' progress. They know how the pupil premium is spent, but are not totally clear about the impact it has had on eligible pupils. Governors make sure that safeguarding requirements are met. A recent external review was limited in scope and relied too heavily on governors' own view of themselves.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122035
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	440449

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Craig Crawford
Headteacher	Julie Barke
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2011
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