

St James Primary School

Great Charles Street, Brownhills, Walsall WS8 6AE

Inspection dates

23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent and does not allow pupils to make good progress in all classes. Teachers do not all ensure that work is well matched to the different abilities of the pupils in their classes, particularly the most-able pupils.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make in words) within early reading is not sufficiently accurate across all classes to allow pupils to make rapid progress.
- School leaders have not yet developed and implemented a robust system of using the outcomes from their monitoring and evaluation to inform clear, well-thought-out and measurable plans for whole-school improvement.
- While the school places a high priority on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, it has not created enough opportunities for them to deepen their understanding of different faiths and beliefs.
- The systems that school leaders have in place for recording the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of pupils are not accurate or refined enough to monitor incidents and bring about the necessary improvements.
- The actions that the school has taken to promote good attendance are not yet sufficiently well managed and rigorous to ensure that all parents make sure that their children attend regularly and consistently.
- Teaching and learning in the newly established Nursery, including provision for two-year-olds, do not effectively support the children's language development.

The school has the following strengths

- Teaching is well matched to the needs of the children in the Reception class and as a result they make good progress.
- Expectations are high for disadvantaged pupils and they make good progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability are well supported and as a result they thrive in school.
- The newly appointed headteacher is making effective use of opportunities for staff to learn from good practice in other schools.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and improve the outcomes for all pupils by:
 - ensuring that teachers accurately match work to the abilities of all pupils, particularly the most able, and provide sufficiently challenging activities
 - establishing a consistent and effective approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make in words) within early reading that is understood and followed by all staff.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the outcomes of school leaders' monitoring and evaluation are used effectively to inform, develop and implement clear and measureable plans for whole-school improvement
 - providing further opportunities for pupils to develop a deeper understanding of different faiths and beliefs
 - making sure that logs and records of pupils' behaviour provide sufficient detail to identify, monitor and improve any inappropriate behaviour.

- Improve attendance by putting in place robust measures to ensure that all parents are aware of the need for their children to attend regularly and consistently.

- Develop and improve teaching and learning in the newly established Nursery and provision for two-year-olds by sharing and extending the good practice that exists in the Reception class.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- School leaders' self-evaluation is not yet sufficiently joined up or robust enough to identify accurately where the most improvements are needed and to then use this information to develop well-focused and measurable plans for improvement. Until recently, not all school leaders, including subject leaders, were sufficiently and actively involved in monitoring and evaluating teaching and pupils' outcomes across the school. As a result, insufficient action was taken to identify and address teaching that was less than good.
- Although the recently appointed headteacher has rightly identified where teaching is less effective and recognises which groups of pupils are not making the progress that they should, the plans for improvement do not provide sharp enough guidance on what action must be taken. The improvement plans lack clear success criteria and tight enough timescales for the completion of actions.
- A revised whole-school behaviour policy has been developed and implemented, which sets out clear expectations for all members of the school community. However, school leaders do not systematically record and monitor incidents of inappropriate behaviour and as a result, a small minority of pupils continue to display behaviour that is not in line with what is expected or required.
- The school places a high priority on supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. School leaders recognise that the pupils need to have a good understanding of other faiths and beliefs to support their development as citizens within modern British society. Pupils display good levels of understanding of the principles of democracy and understand the need for tolerance and respect. However, the school should provide more opportunities for pupils to deepen this understanding.
- The headteacher, together with governors, has a clear vision of excellence for the pupils at St James Primary School. They are beginning to address the lack of strategic direction that has been in place since the last inspection, which has meant that the actions that were identified then have not been successfully implemented. Other school leaders, including subject leaders, are now more involved in finding out about the quality of teaching and the progress of all pupils. They are being held increasingly accountable for progress within their areas of responsibility.
- The headteacher has arranged and made good use of opportunities for teachers to visit other local schools to observe and learn from good and outstanding practice. Staff are appreciative of these opportunities and recognise the improvements that are beginning to take place.
- Pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum that is enhanced by an exciting range of visits and trips. For example, all pupils in Years 1, 3 and 5 take part in a visit to London and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the work of Parliament. Older pupils take part in an annual residential visit to Bryntysilio in North Wales, which helps to broaden their appreciation of society and challenges them through a range of outdoor activities. Pupils are provided with good opportunities to apply their writing and reading skills through history and geography topics. Science is well led and pupils are encouraged to plan and carry out scientific investigations and to draw conclusions.
- The high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well at the school. This is because the school makes very effective use of the pupil premium funding (additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils) that it receives. Additional support is provided for pupils who are in danger of falling behind, through small-group and one-to-one interventions. The school employs a family support worker to work alongside pupils, parents and carers to carefully match provision to individual needs.
- Leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs or disability is very effective in identifying any barriers to learning and arranging and monitoring additional support where it is needed. This helps to make sure that these pupils make good progress that is at least in line with other pupils in school.
- School leaders have used the additional physical education and sport premium funding well to broaden the range of opportunities that the pupils can take part in and to develop teachers' confidence and skills in teaching this area of the curriculum. Teachers work alongside the specialist coaches that the school employs to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils have had opportunities to take part in activities such as wheelchair basketball, which has supported both their physical development and given them a greater understanding and empathy for people with disabilities in society. Over 90% of the pupils now take part in the range of extra-curricular activities available to them, including boys' and girls' football, martial arts and fencing.

- The very large majority of parents are supportive of the work that the school does with their children and recognise and appreciate the changes that the headteacher has introduced. Parents spoken to during the inspection said that they felt well informed about their children's progress and that the headteacher and staff dealt effectively with any concerns they raised.
- The support and challenge from the local authority have not been consistent over the past three years. While the local authority identified concerns over some of the teaching within school and the lack of action from school leaders to address these issues, there were too many changes of personnel, which resulted in the balance of support and challenge not always being appropriate to the needs of the school. This has improved recently and the local authority has successfully worked alongside subject leaders to develop their effectiveness.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors commissioned an external review of governance in the 2015 autumn term as they were aware of the need to improve the ways in which they operated and their effectiveness in providing challenge and support to school leaders. This has resulted in changes to their sub-committee structures and greater rigour in the ways in which they monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
 - Governors are now provided with detailed information on pupils' progress and use a range of external assessment and performance information to track the progress that groups of pupils are making. They are aware that teaching in some classes requires improvement and know that progress across the school is not consistent. They now provide greater challenge for the headteacher and ask searching questions in meetings. Governors are now more frequent visitors to the school and this is helping them to have a greater understanding of the quality of teaching across the school.
 - Governors understand how the finance and resources that are available to the school, including the pupil premium, are being used and carefully monitor the impact of spending on pupils' achievement. They are very aware of the specific needs of the pupils within the school and have made well-chosen decisions on providing additional support for the most vulnerable pupils in school.
 - Governors have a clear understanding of how teachers' performance is managed and the links between this and their pay progression. Until recently, this was not always applied robustly enough to bring about the improvements in teaching that were required.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders, including governors, place a very high priority on ensuring that children are safe and secure in school. Staff are well trained and have a very good understanding of their responsibilities and the actions they should take if they have any concerns. Good use is made of external agencies and expertise within the staff to support vulnerable children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school is inconsistent, with too much that is still not good. This is particularly the case in lower Key Stage 2 and in Year 1. The progress that pupils make in these year groups is not as good as in other years and as a result, there is often a great deal of catching up to be done in the final two years of school.
- Too often, teachers do not accurately match the activities to the different range of abilities within the class. Support is usually provided for the less-able pupils and this often helps them to make progress. The work required of the most-able pupils is too often not sufficiently challenging and easily within their capacity. As a result, they do not make the progress that they are capable of and do not reach the highest standards of attainment. Pupils spoken to during the inspection identified that they sometimes found their work too easy.
- There is not a coherent approach to the teaching of phonics within early reading and this means that younger pupils are not consistently taught how to recognise the sounds that the letters make and to blend the sounds to make words. This slows their progress in developing fluency in reading. Not all teachers and teaching assistants have sufficient subject knowledge or training to teach this aspect of reading effectively.

- Where teaching is good, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. They use good subject knowledge to enthuse pupils and plan activities that require them to think deeply. For example, in a Year 5 science lesson, pupils were set the task in groups of planning an investigation to separate a range of solids, including sand and pins, from a liquid solution. They cooperated well with each other and tested out their plans in a series of practical tests. The teacher asked searching questions and balanced this with demonstrations of how activities could be improved.
- Writing is usually taught more effectively, with a focus on ensuring that pupils learn key skills in punctuation, grammar and spelling and are then required to apply this knowledge in longer, independent pieces of writing. During the inspection, pupils in Year 6 enthusiastically wrote their own stories, linked to reading part of *The Wind in the Willows*, which showed how they were able to use a range of language well to create a vivid description of what was happening.
- The improvement of the teaching of aspects of mathematics has been a priority for the school this year and teachers now increasingly ensure that pupils use mathematical knowledge and skills in reasoning and problem solving. The subject leader has adapted planning and supported teachers in developing their confidence in teaching this aspect of the subject. As a result, most pupils across the school are making better progress.
- Teachers usually follow the school policy on marking accurately and provide feedback to pupils through marking that indicates how they have achieved and gives them guidance on how they can improve further.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to provide support to individuals and small groups of pupils. They are used particularly well to support pupils with special educational needs or disability and to adapt tasks and instructions to match the different needs and levels of understanding of the pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils are appreciative of what the school offers them and wear their uniforms with pride. However, there are occasions when moving around the school when some pupils show a lack of consideration and run through corridors without thinking about the dangers that they could pose to themselves and others.
- Pupils say that there is a small amount of bullying in school but that it is swiftly and effectively dealt with by adults. They know about different types of bullying, but while they know that name-calling is unacceptable, some pupils occasionally still use words such as 'gay' to cause upset.
- The before- and after-school clubs that the school runs are well attended and are enjoyed by the pupils. The trained staff ensure that there is a warm and welcoming environment where the pupils feel safe and happy. The breakfast club provides pupils with free snacks and drinks that help them to be prepared for the school day.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are effectively supported in developing their understanding of how to keep safe in a range of situations. They have a good understanding of the dangers that use of the internet can pose. They have benefited from road-safety and fire-safety training and older pupils take part in 'bikeability' courses.
- Pupils are polite and caring. Older pupils are careful to ensure that the younger children in school feel safe and happy on the playgrounds.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The headteacher has ensured that there is a whole-school policy on behaviour in place that is followed by teachers and other staff, and understood by pupils. Pupils appreciate earning 'golden time' as a reward for good behaviour. However, systems for recording and monitoring incidents of unacceptable behaviour are not sufficiently well developed to measure the impact that sanctions are having and to quickly identify particular pupils whose behaviour is unacceptable or causing concern.

- Attendance has been below the national average for the past three years. The proportion of pupils who have particularly low levels of attendance has improved and overall attendance is higher but still below the national average this year. However, the school still does not have robust enough systems in place to monitor attendance and to work with external agencies to ensure that all parents make sure their children attend regularly and consistently.
- The very large majority of pupils are well behaved both in lessons and on the playground. They generally settle quickly to their work and are keen to succeed. When teaching is not good, some pupils' attention wanders and they do not remain focused on the task that they have been set. However, teachers and other staff usually quickly intervene and other pupils' learning is not disrupted.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' outcomes require improvement because the progress that pupils make across the school is inconsistent and often gaps in learning are in place that are not effectively addressed until the pupils are in the last two years in school.
- School assessment information and evidence gathered during the inspection, including scrutiny of pupils' work in books, indicate that while the majority of pupils do make progress over time, it is much stronger in some classes than in others.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check fell in 2015 and was below the national average. A lack of a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics is limiting younger pupils' progress in reading.
- The most-able pupils in school do not achieve as highly as they could. At both Key Stage 1 and 2 in 2015, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher levels of attainment was in line with national averages. However, evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the most-able pupils who are currently in school are not being set sufficiently challenging pieces of work and the expectations of what they could achieve are not consistently high enough.
- In 2015, pupils in Year 2 attained standards in reading, writing and mathematics that were broadly in line with national averages. In the previous two years, standards had been well below the national average. School assessment information for pupils currently in Year 2 and evidence gathered during the inspection indicate that while these pupils are now making good progress, their standards of work are below those expected for their age.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 making at least expected progress from Key Stage 1 was better than the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. School assessment information indicates that pupils currently in Year 6, while making good progress and achieving good standards in their work, are not all yet making the progress expected of them.
- A revised system of assessment has been introduced since the start of the school year. This allows for more accurate tracking of the progress that pupils are making against individual targets for attainment. Teachers are working alongside each other and staff from other schools to ensure that assessments are accurate. However, this has not been in place long enough to judge whether it is effective in helping to improve pupils' progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress that is at least in line with, and often better than, other pupils in school and all pupils nationally. This is due to the individual support that is provided for these pupils and the efforts that the school makes to ensure that they are given the same opportunities as all other pupils.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability achieve good outcomes. Their specific and individual needs are accurately identified and they receive effective interventions either in small groups or through one-to-one support from trained teaching assistants.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Early years provision requires improvement. While teaching and learning in the established Reception class are consistently good and children make rapid progress, the recently opened provision for two-year-olds and even more recently opened Nursery class are not yet ensuring that children make the progress of which they are capable. This is because there is not yet sufficient attention paid to promoting children's language and communication skills and to ensuring that all areas of learning are appropriately supported.

- Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities that are below and sometimes well below those that are typical for their age. In 2015, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was below the national average. However, from their starting points, this showed good progress and more children attained a good level of development than in the previous year. Children in the current Reception class are making good progress and school assessment information and evidence gathered during the inspection indicate that a slightly higher proportion of pupils are expected to achieve a good level of development.
- Children make good progress in reading as phonics is taught well in Reception, with the teacher and teaching assistant using good subject knowledge to ensure that the children have a firm understanding of the sounds and how they blend together to make words. During the inspection, children enthusiastically joined in reading activities and were then able to accurately spell and write the words that they had learned.
- Staff across the early years provision establish positive relationships with the children that help them to feel safe and settled. There is a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, which helps to promote the children's independence and confidence. The classrooms are warm and welcoming places that support the children in all the areas of learning. The outdoor classrooms offers good opportunities for children to investigate and develop physical skills.
- Assessment is used effectively across the early years provision to establish what the children know and can do, and to monitor their progress. The outcomes from these assessments are used to good effect to plan activities that promote the children's learning.
- Parents express confidence in the early years provision and are encouraged to be involved in supporting their children's learning. For example, parents came into school to join their children in a 'French café', which gave them opportunities to see what their children had been learning and to find out how they could help them further in their communication development.
- Leadership of the early years provision is good. The leader has worked with the local authority to review and then plan for improvement in the newly established provision for two-year-olds and this is helping staff to have a clearer understanding of how they can improve outcomes for the children they work with.
- Arrangements for safeguarding and to ensure children's welfare and safety are good and as result children settle quickly and happily when they start at school. Children behave well and are developing an understanding of how to share and take turns. They are well prepared for when they start in Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	131581
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10002471

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dave Bishop
Headteacher	Lorna Harvey
Telephone number	01543 452328
Website	www.stjamesprimaryschool.com
Email address	postbox@stjames.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 October 2013

Information about this school

- St James Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Children in Reception attend full time. Children in Nursery attend part time.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils (those who are supported by the pupil premium funding) is above average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below that in most schools.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is above the national average.
- Pre-school provision for two-year-old children was established in September 2015 when responsibility and management of the former children’s centre on the school site were transferred from the local authority to the school governors. The school also provides before- and after-school clubs for its pupils.
- Nursery provision was opened for children by the school in January 2016.
- The school meets the government’s current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics for pupils in Year 6.
- The headteacher was appointed to the post in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 14 lessons or parts of lessons. A number of lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read. They met a group of pupils to gain their views of the school. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and at the end of the school day, as well as in lessons.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including: assessments and records of pupils' progress; the school's checks and records relating to safeguarding, child protection and attendance; records of how teaching is managed; and the school improvement plans.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and four middle leaders. The lead inspector met with three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. He met with two representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors talked to parents at the end of the school day and considered free-text responses from three parents. There were not sufficient responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for the results to be considered. They also looked at the 12 responses to the staff questionnaire and the one response to the online staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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