

# St James' CofE Primary School

West Malvern Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 4BB

## Inspection dates

9–10 May 2018

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Governors acknowledge that, after the school was last inspected, they 'took their eye off the ball'. They assumed that the quality of education remained high. This lack of rigour is the reason why the quality of education declined between 2011 and 2015.
- Leaders in the past did not paint a complete picture of the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the curriculum. Governors were unaware that pupils were not making as much progress as they should be. Governors therefore believed that standards were still acceptable.
- Improvements began in 2015, when leaders started to tackle the weaknesses in the quality of teaching. However, their efforts were thwarted by substantial turbulence in leadership over the following two years. This is why pupils' recent results in the key stage 2 national tests have been so weak.
- Pupils' progress in writing is hampered by weak spelling and, at times, by poor presentation. As a result, some pupils do not reach the high standards of writing that they could.
- The school's early reading programme is ineffective. Some pupils struggle to read accurately or to spell correctly because they do not apply phonic knowledge well.
- Some teachers have been slower than others in making necessary changes. Therefore, the quality of teaching is inconsistent.
- The early years provision also declined substantially after the previous inspection. Children make less progress that they could in some areas of learning, given that they are well prepared to start school, behave sensibly and are keen to learn. Leaders have begun to tackle the weaknesses. Improvements are slow, but children's progress is speeding up.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are now driving rapid improvements in the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils' progress is speeding up fast.
- Governors now hold leaders to account for the quality of education provided.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics.
- The school promotes pupils' personal development and welfare well.
- Pupils behave well at all times.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching by making sure that:
  - the school’s policies are having the desired impact on outcomes for all pupils
  - teachers act consistently on the advice they receive on how to improve their teaching.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
  - pupils with middle prior-attainment make as much progress as they could so that they reach the standards of which they are capable
  - unnecessary spelling errors in pupils’ work are eliminated
  - poor presentation does not undermine the quality of pupils’ work
  - the teaching of phonics enables all pupils to read accurately and to spell correctly.
- Ensure that the quality of the early years provision enables children to make good progress in all areas of learning by making sure that:
  - teachers use accurate information about what children can and cannot do to provide high-quality experiences that develop a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding, appropriate to their ages and abilities
  - leaders in the early years have the skills that they need to lead improvements to the provision.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- After a long period with few changes, leadership has been turbulent in recent years. The circumstances were unavoidable, but it has been very unsettling for the school. It means that the effective work that was started in 2015 to address the previous decline in standards was stalled. Leadership is, once again, stable and effective. Leaders are systematically tackling the issues that caused the decline. As a result, the quality of teaching is recovering rapidly and outcomes are improving quickly.
- The headteacher leads with a calm, quiet determination to succeed in turning the school around. She communicates this ambition with conviction and authority. As a result, staff have come to share her vision. They have accepted the need for change. Staff understand that the quality of teaching had stagnated and are now keen to get it back on track.
- The headteacher's efforts are supported increasingly well by a growing team of leaders. Since she assumed the post on an acting basis in September 2015, the headteacher has enabled a wider group of teachers to take leadership responsibility. Initially, this was a new direction for the school. In the past, leadership responsibilities were carried out largely by the headteacher. This small team is improving the quality of teaching. For example, the deputy headteacher has successfully overseen the introduction of a new approach to teaching mathematics. Standards in mathematics have recovered as a result of his actions.
- Leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. Where weaknesses are found, leaders give helpful pointers for improvement and provide appropriate training. As a result, teachers now have the knowledge and skills they need to teach the national curriculum requirements effectively. This is why the quality of teaching has improved considerably from the very low point it reached in 2017.
- Nevertheless, the quality of teaching is not consistently good, because some teachers do not implement the suggested changes as well as they might. Leaders make clear to teachers what the expected approaches to teaching in the school are. However, leaders do not always check that these policies, and the support that they give to teachers, make the intended differences to pupils' learning. For example, leaders have introduced a 'non-negotiable' stance on handwriting and presentation of pupils' work. Some teachers adhere to this rigidly. They ensure that their pupils' work is of high quality. Others follow the guidance inconsistently. Their pupils' work is not consistently neat.
- Leaders have set up useful systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers now use these to build an accurate picture of outcomes. Leaders use this information to identify pupils who may be falling behind. Leaders take appropriate action if this happens, providing support for pupils or challenge for teachers as necessary. As a result, most groups of pupils are now making better progress.
- Leaders use additional funding to support particular pupils well. This is why pupils who have special education needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make strong progress. Similarly,

disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are improving. This shows that leaders are using the pupil premium effectively.

- Leaders have created a curriculum that serves pupils well academically, and strongly promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The carefully structured approach builds pupils' knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding. It helps pupils become well-rounded youngsters. They are tolerant and respectful of others. They show empathy and an understanding of the difficulties faced by those less fortunate than themselves. They are beginning to understand concepts such as democracy and equality.
- The curriculum is enriched considerably by a wide variety of experiences beyond the classroom. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the many visits to places of historical, geographical or cultural interest. They also appreciate the opportunities to learn about other cultures. For example, they speak enthusiastically about the links that exist between their school and one in Tanzania.
- Similarly, pupils say they enjoy the increasingly wide range of sporting activities on offer. Leaders have used the primary physical education and sports premium to bring in appropriate expertise. This has increased not only the quantity but also the quality of physical education and out-of-school sporting activities. Many pupils take the opportunity to be active frequently as a result.
- During the recent highly turbulent period in the school's life, leaders have benefited from an intensive programme of high-quality external support. The company that provides school improvement services on behalf of the local authority and the school improvement adviser from the diocese have provided effective training for leaders and teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and leadership capacity has grown.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance has improved after a long period of ineffectiveness. Governors accept that they did not hold leaders well enough to account in the past. They believed that standards were high when, in fact, they were declining substantially.
- Governors were surprised to learn the extent of the decline in standards, identified through a review of the school's effectiveness commissioned by the local authority. Governors resolved to address the weaknesses. They were helped to do so by an independent review of governance that was arranged by the local authority.
- Governors have now sharpened up their systems considerably. They now have a far more efficient approach to scrutinising the school's work and holding the headteacher to account for its quality.
- Governors now:
  - insist that they are given frequent and detailed information about pupils' attainment and progress
  - visit the school to gather first-hand evidence about aspects of its work
  - ask pertinent and challenging questions

- are not satisfied if pupils are not making enough progress
- oversee arrangements for safeguarding well.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's culture is built upon strong Christian values. Care is at the heart of all aspects of its work. Pupils' welfare and well-being are given the highest priority.
- The family-like ethos means that all staff know pupils very well. They are vigilant for signs that all may not be well. They are well trained in knowing what to do if there is a concern. They follow appropriate procedures quickly, correctly and thoroughly to ensure that pupils and their families get the help they need to keep pupils safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- Inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching. Recent improvements have led to better progress for pupils in some classes and some subjects. However, this is not the case universally. That is because the quality of teaching is not consistently good.
- Teachers have struggled in recent years to know how to teach the national curriculum. The government introduced new, more challenging content in 2014. Teachers were not adequately trained in how to deliver this, so they were unable to do so effectively. This inability is the key to why standards in the school declined.
- Teachers have, largely, responded enthusiastically to the training they have now received. As a result, they are increasingly confident in knowing what to teach and how to teach it, particularly in mathematics. This is why pupils' progress is improving and they are making up lost ground. However, some teachers have taken longer to grasp the new ways of working. As a result, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent.
- Sometimes, teachers do not expect the best from pupils. When this happens, some pupils do not work as hard as they could. The quality of their work suffers as a result.
- On the whole, teachers' expectations for the quality of pupils' work are increasing. As a result, many pupils present their work neatly and take care to make it correct. However, some teachers still accept poorly presented or careless work, particularly in pupils' writing. For example, some pupils' books show that teachers overlook incorrect spellings, even when the pupils know the words well and the errors are repeated. This hinders pupils' progress and prevents some from reaching the higher standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers now assess pupils' work accurately. They use the information to plan appropriate work for most pupils. As a result, the work is usually not too easy and not too hard. However, sometimes teachers do not challenge middle-ability pupils well enough. Some of these pupils could be attaining higher standards than they are at present.
- Teachers now make the purpose of lessons clear to pupils. This helps pupils to make sense of the work they are doing. Teachers provide useful tips that help pupils know how to complete their work correctly and how to make it better if necessary. Pupils

know these as 'learning labels'. They say that this approach helps them know how well they are doing and what they could do to improve.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' physical and emotional well-being is at the heart of the school's culture. The caring, family-like atmosphere means that pupils feel welcome, secure and nurtured. Pupils spoke eloquently to the inspector about the support they receive when they are feeling anxious or unhappy. They are very grateful. They know staff care about them.
- Pupils are confident that staff would support them if they were being bullied. Staff keep a lookout for signs that bullying may be happening. If it appears to be the case, staff deal with it quickly and sensitively. As a result, bullying is rare.
- Parents and carers, too, value the lengths staff go to in ensuring that their children are safe and happy. Those who spoke to the inspector gave many examples of how they feel very well supported by the school.
- The strong Christian ethos of the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and social development very well. Pupils are kind, caring, thoughtful and reflective. They respect different beliefs, cultures and ways of life. They are beginning to build knowledge about other religions. These characteristics are preparing them well for adult life in British society.
- Visits and other out-of-class experiences contribute much to pupils' cultural development. They are beginning to appreciate the diversity of cultures within British society. The strong link with a school in Africa makes pupils aware of wider cultural horizons.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves around school quietly and sensibly. For example, they file in and out of assembly in silence. They open doors for each other and remember to say 'thank you' for others doing so.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They listen to the teacher and get on with their work promptly. On the whole, they concentrate very well. Just occasionally, when the task does not quite capture their interest, their attention drifts off and they become a little chatty. However, lessons are rarely disrupted by misbehaviour.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their high levels of attendance. Most pupils only take time off when they are genuinely unwell. A few families ask to take their children out of school for holidays. The headteacher maintains a firm stance that this is not acceptable in normal circumstances. Most parents acknowledge this. Therefore the amount of time lost to unauthorised absence is small.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- At the time of the previous inspection, pupils were achieving very well. Their attainment was above the national average. Since then, standards have fallen year on year. By July 2017, pupils' attainment in reading was only just in line with the national average. It was considerably lower in writing and mathematics. Starting points for many pupils are high. Therefore, these standards of attainment show that pupils have made inadequate progress in recent years.
- This significant decline has been overturned. Outcomes have improved considerably from the very weak point they reached last year. However, outcomes still require improvement, because not all pupils achieve as well as they should.
- Outcomes are improving because pupils' progress is speeding up in a wide range of subjects. More rapid progress is leading to better attainment. Most pupils are now working at appropriate standards for their ages. Nevertheless, some pupils' attainment could be better. This is because some pupils still do not make consistently strong progress in some classes and some subjects.
- A sizeable group of pupils in each class is working at a typical standard, given their ages. Not enough of these middle-attaining pupils are making the swift progress they could do. Some of these pupils are capable of exceeding the minimum age-related standard. Many are not doing so.
- Pupils' writing has improved notably. Pupils now write technically accurate sentences, using appropriate grammar and punctuation. Nevertheless, pupils' writing is still not good enough in many cases. This is because they make too many basic errors in their work. For example, some pupils repeatedly misspell simple words, yet they write harder words correctly. Some pupils do not take enough care over the presentation of their work, which makes it difficult to read. Some form their letters incorrectly. These weaknesses slow down the speed of their writing and hinder their progress.
- There are weaknesses in the teaching of phonics that impede pupils' reading and writing proficiency. Pupils recognise letters and the sounds they make confidently. However, pupils' understanding of phonics is often superficial. As a result, some otherwise capable pupils struggle to work out unfamiliar words when they read. It also contributes to the weaknesses in spelling that limit pupils' attainment in writing. Some pupils do not know which letters they need to make a particular sound in some words. For example, they write 'stai', rather than 'stay' or 'bin', rather than 'been'. This problem is not exclusive to younger pupils. It is evident in books from all classes.
- The most able pupils are beginning to achieve appropriately high standards in many classes. This is because teachers are challenging them to think more deeply and produce work of a higher standard.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers identify accurately what they need to help them learn and provide well-targeted support. As a result, these pupils are working well towards attaining appropriate standards for their ages.
- Pupils now make strong progress in mathematics. This is because the quality of teaching in this subject is now secure.

## Early years provision

## Requires improvement

- Most children start school with skills that are at least typical for their age. A notable proportion of children have skills that are more sophisticated than those of most four-year-olds. However, in recent years, the proportion that has gone on to achieve the good level of development necessary to cope with the demands of Year 1 has not been good enough given these high starting points. Children have not made acceptable progress.
- The leadership of the early years has not been strong enough to ensure that the provision has been of acceptable quality. Leaders have failed to ensure that the quality of teaching was adequate to meet children's needs or that the curriculum covered all the required areas of learning.
- Extensive external support has been given to staff in the early years to improve urgently the quality of provision. This is having a positive impact. Leadership is stronger, and children now receive an acceptable standard of education. However, it is not good. It requires improvement so that children build on their high pre-school starting points and achieve well before they start Year 1.
- Leaders are in the process of refreshing and updating the facilities in the classroom. As a result, children can now practise their skills across the whole early years curriculum. However, the environment needs further work. It does not yet provide good-quality experiences in all areas of learning. This limits the progress children can make.
- Teachers' assessment of children's skills is improving and is now broadly accurate. Teachers are beginning to adapt plans and activities to cater for children's needs and interests. As a result, children are making better progress in writing and mathematics than in previous years. However, the weaknesses in the teaching of phonics that hinder children's attainment in reading and writing persist. Therefore children still do not make strong-enough progress.
- Staff in the early years now share their ongoing assessments of children's progress with parents. This is a positive move. It keeps parents informed and enables them to play a part in shaping their children's learning.
- Children settle quickly into school life because staff make them feel secure and welcome. They learn to listen to the teacher and follow instructions quickly. They play happily together and learn to share very well. For example, two children were observed playing in the area known as 'Paddington's House'. They co-operated impressively in their imaginary world. They listened to each other's ideas and played together sensibly.
- Children are well looked after in the early years. Staff take their safety very seriously. They are acutely tuned in to children's emotions and act swiftly if they have any concerns.



## School details

Unique reference number	116903
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10048182

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	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jennifer Close
Headteacher	Mrs Gemma Martin
Telephone number	01684 561207
Website	<a href="http://www.stjames.worcs.sch.uk">http://www.stjames.worcs.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@stjames.worcs.sch.uk">office@stjames.worcs.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	20–21 October 2011

## Information about this school

- St James is a very small primary school. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. Each class has pupils from two year groups.
- Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. This means the number of disadvantaged pupils is too small to make information about their achievement meaningful. Their outcomes have not been compared to those of their peers in this report in order to avoid the risk of identifying individuals.
- The previous headteacher retired in July 2015. She had been in post for ten years. The current headteacher joined the school as deputy headteacher in 2014. She became acting headteacher upon the retirement of her predecessor. She was appointed to the substantive post in February 2016. From September 2015 until September 2016, the

school did not have a deputy headteacher. A deputy headteacher took up post in September 2016. The headteacher was on maternity leave from December 2016 until July 2017.

- During the headteacher's maternity leave, the school was led by a part-time executive headteacher. She acted simultaneously as the substantive headteacher of a small first school.
- The school receives support for developing leadership from the company commissioned by Worcestershire local authority to provide school improvement services on its behalf. The deputy director for education from the Diocese of Worcester has provided training and professional development for teachers.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning by visiting lessons in all classes, accompanied by the headteacher. During these visits, the inspector spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. In addition, the inspector scrutinised separately the work in a selection of pupils' books.
- The inspector watched an assembly.
- Meetings were held with: the headteacher; school staff; the chair and vice-chair of the governing body; another governor to discuss safeguarding; and two representatives of the school improvement services. A telephone conversation was held with the deputy director of education from the Diocese of Worcester.
- The inspector toured the school with a group of pupils and spoke informally to other pupils.
- The 26 responses to the online survey Parent View were taken into account, along with written communications to the inspector. The inspector spoke with other parents as they collected their children from school.
- A number of documents were examined, including: the school's evaluation of how well it is doing and plans for improvement; information about current pupils' progress and attainment; leaders' checks on the quality of teaching; evidence of how leaders tackle weak teaching; and records relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance and their behaviour.

## Inspection team

Sandy Hayes, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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