

Inspection of St James Academy

St James's Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3JE

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff expect the best of every pupil. 'Dreaming big' is a core school value, encouraging pupils to have high aspirations for their future. Pupils benefit from an extensive careers programme that gives them first-hand experience of the world of work and helps to widen their horizons. Leaders are proud that almost all pupils move on to school, college or training at the end of Year 11.

Pupils are respectful and good manners are a fundamental expectation. 'Please' and 'thank you' are frequently heard as pupils move around the busy corridors. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. There are warm relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils value the rewards given for positive attitudes and good work. Pupils are confident that the school will deal quickly with any instances of bullying. Pupils feel safe and enjoy attending school.

Teachers are passionate about their subjects and are ambitious for pupils to do well. However, teachers do not consistently help pupils to identify and remember the key knowledge they need for future learning. In some subjects, the key stage 3 curriculum has not been planned carefully enough to help pupils build the knowledge and skills they need for further study.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In most subjects, the curriculum is carefully planned. Key knowledge is introduced at an appropriate time and builds on pupils' earlier learning. In Years 7 and 8, pupils study a combined curriculum that includes elements of English, history, geography, and religious education. Leaders acknowledge that this has not enabled pupils to access a curriculum that delivers sufficient knowledge and skills in each of these separate subject areas.

Teachers use a range of approaches to introduce new learning to pupils. Many teachers provide clear explanations and carefully model examples. However, some teachers do not make key learning points clear enough. This makes it more difficult for pupils to remember the content they have been taught. Pupils struggled to recall earlier learning across a wide range of subjects. They could not link their current learning with topics they had covered earlier.

Many teachers carefully check that pupils understand their learning. This allows them to adapt their planning to deal with misconceptions. However, this is not consistent across the school. At times, pupils are unaware of what they do not understand, and this limits their progress.

School leaders celebrate the cultural diversity of the school through regular celebration weeks. External speakers include representatives of different faiths. The school actively promotes tolerance as one of its core values.

There is a high level of ambition for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers receive detailed information about the needs of each pupil. Pupils with SEND are provided with appropriate support. These include individual instruction sheets that set out what pupils need to do in lessons. The special educational needs coordinator knows pupils well and carefully tracks their progress. The support for pupils with SEND helps them to achieve well.

The school has recently introduced several initiatives to support and develop reading across the school. Strategies focus strongly on pupils' needs. Weaker readers receive support in small groups. In form time, teachers regularly read to pupils to encourage a love of reading. Some pupils in Years 9 and 10 train as reading champions so they can run clubs and mentor weaker readers.

Leaders are proud of how behaviour has improved in recent years. The behaviour policy is consistently applied across the school. The principal is insistent that rewards should be at the very centre of the policy. Many rewards are immediate. For example, pupils receive a merit stamp for outstanding work in lessons. Their names are then displayed on the classroom doors, enabling senior leaders to praise the pupils as they walk round the school. Pupils appreciate and value this recognition.

Pupils are encouraged to become leaders. Some run their own after-school clubs. Pupils stand for election to the school council. This helps them to understand the importance of democracy.

Trustees and members of the local advisory board are passionate advocates for the school. The trust provides invaluable support to the school and is integral to the school's improvement journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise keeping pupils safe. They engage effectively with parents and carers and external agencies. Safeguarding training for staff is thorough and frequent. When concerns are raised, there are robust systems in place to deal with them. Leaders take swift action to follow up concerns and make timely referrals to social services.

Pupils have meaningful opportunities to discuss relevant issues, such as bullying and sexual harassment, in their weekly lesson with their form tutor. They value the support they receive and are taught how to keep safe both in and out of school. They know where to get help if they need it.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In subjects taught through the integrated Year 7 and Year 8 course, the curriculum planning does not provide a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum that delivers the full range of knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. Consequently, pupils do not make as much progress in these subjects as they should. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum in these areas is reviewed and sets out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn to enable them to make strong progress.
- Some teachers are not aware of how well pupils have learned what has been taught. Therefore, they are unable to adapt their planning to address misunderstandings. Leaders should ensure that all teachers know how to make effective, regular checks on pupils' learning to help inform their planning and teaching.
- Teachers do not always make key learning points clear to pupils. This makes it more difficult for pupils to remember the content they have been taught and to use it to support future learning. Leaders should ensure that teachers identify the key knowledge that pupils need to build over time, and develop strategies to help pupils remember more.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	144657
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10212187
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	722
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lowell Williams
Principal	Ian Moore
Website	www.stjamesacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St James Academy converted to become an academy school in September 2017. When its predecessor school, Castle High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school is a member of the Dudley Academies Trust.
- The school uses full-time alternative provision at one registered provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The lead inspector met with the members of the board of trustees and the school's local advisory committee, the chief executive officer of Dudley Academies Trust, the principal and senior leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors met with teachers and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors also scrutinised samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited lessons in other subjects and reviewed pupils' work in those subjects. Inspectors spoke with leaders and teachers in other subjects and to staff working in pastoral roles. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their wider development and other aspects of school life.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of safeguarding documentation, including the school's single central record. They scrutinised other documentation, including leaders' records of attendance, behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and the responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Deborah James, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Warner	Ofsted Inspector

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