

Inspection of St James Church School

Cranmer Road, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1XU

Inspection dates:	26 and 27 November 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Nigel Johnson. This school is part of The Bath and Wells Diocesan Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Nikki Edwards, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Pamela Cosh.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this inclusive and welcoming school. Staff have high expectations for all pupils. Pupils respond to these expectations; they behave well and are keen to learn. As a result, pupils learn the improved curriculum well.

The school is calm and pupils are safe. Pupils know there are adults they can talk to if they are worried. Warm and caring relationships between staff and pupils help build a sense of community. Pupils at St James are proud to say that they care for one another.

Pupils are respectful to visitors. They talk articulately about their roles of responsibility. For example, pupils who act as well-being leaders support younger pupils in the playground. The school is committed to providing pupils with enrichment opportunities to help them gain new experiences. For example, pupils visit the theatre to see live performances.

Pupils learn to stay safe online as well in the wider community. External visitors to the school, such as the police, help pupils to learn important messages from different trusted adults. The school works closely with its community and provides opportunities for parents to participate in cookery workshops held in school.

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

The school is emerging from a period where there have been significant changes to staffing and the curriculum. The trust, headteacher and the senior leadership team have managed these changes sensitively and effectively. They have supported the staff to develop a curriculum that is broad and ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). While these changes are having an impact on how well pupils now learn the curriculum, they are not reflected in the published outcomes of 2024 for key stage 2.

The curriculum has been designed to build knowledge and skills progressively from the early years. Some subjects, such as geography, are more established and refined. For example, to celebrate the rich and diverse culture of the school's local community, the school has chosen Nigeria for the study of a non-European society. As a result, pupils talk in detail about the differences in countries and cultures. They also have strong knowledge of physical geographical features such as tectonic plates. In other subjects that are still developing, pupils do not have the same level of understanding. In these subjects, pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Reading is at the heart of the school's curriculum. In the early years, staff read to children in a way that engages and excites them. Children are encouraged to use puppets and toys when retelling stories. This helps to foster a love of books from an early age. Skilled staff support those children who join the school speaking English as an additional language by translating new vocabulary as well as using actions and visual prompts to ensure that children are secure in what they are taught.

The school has a robust phonics curriculum that is designed to help pupils learn to read from the time they start school. However, some staff are still developing their expertise in delivering the phonics programme. This means that sometimes the teaching of phonics is not as effective as it could be. As a result, some pupils do not learn to read as quickly as they could.

The school has refined its approach to behaviour management in the last year. Staff have high expectations and adopt a consistent approach to managing behaviour. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of behavioural incidents and suspensions. As a result, the school is calm and pupils throughout the school behave well. Improving attendance is prioritised by the school. While the numbers of pupils missing school has reduced, the school is not complacent and actively works with families to provide support to ensure rates of attendance improve further.

Pupils with SEND are well supported. The school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND quickly. This helps teachers to adjust the curriculum so that pupils with SEND work alongside their peers and learn the full curriculum.

The provision for pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. The school's multicultural diversity is celebrated by all at every turn. Pupils are respectful of the views and beliefs of others. Pupils learn to be active and responsible citizens by working with local and national politicians to improve nearby parks.

Staff are committed to playing their part on the school's journey of improvement. They feel supported by trustees and governors.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff are still developing their expertise in delivering the phonics programme. This means that some pupils do not learn to read as quickly as they could. The trust should ensure that all staff are supported to deliver the phonics programme successfully, so that all pupils gain a secure body of phonics knowledge in readiness for their next stages in learning.
- In some subjects, the curriculum has been reviewed and is still developing. The previous curriculum has left some pupils with gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The trust should develop and embed the curriculum so that pupils achieve well in all subjects.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139324
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10334703
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	498
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Pamela Cosh
CEO of the trust	Nikki Edwards
Headteacher	Nigel Johnson
Website	www.stjamessch.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Academies Trust.
- The school is of a Church of England religious character. The last section 48 inspection took place in October 2022. The next inspection should take place by October 2027.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography, history and computing. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with teachers, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, trustees, members of the governing body and the CEO.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- The inspectors gathered parents' views by considering the responses to Ofsted Parent View and by talking to parents. The inspectors also reviewed responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

James Gentile, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Springett

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