

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St James' CofE Academy

Main Road, Biddenham, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK40 4BD

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

St James' CofE Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Alison Barden. This school is part of Diocese of St Albans Multi Academy 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), Anna Rogers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jenny Jenkins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending St James' Church of England Academy. The school places a high value on everyone's well-being. The school's strong ethos of flourishing together is visible in every aspect of school life. This creates a caring and nurturing environment where pupils feel happy and safe.

Pupils enjoy their learning. They study a broad and stimulating curriculum. The school has worked hard to ensure that learning is interesting. Pupils respond well to the high expectations that staff have for them. This is helping pupils to achieve increasingly well.

Behaviour is a strength in the school. Pupils treat everyone kindly and with respect. The school's behaviour code of 'be ready to learn, show respect and stay safe' is promoted effectively in all aspects of school life. Pupils' learning is rarely disturbed.

Pupils elect members to represent their views on the school's leadership teams. They hold various fundraising activities and help decide who to support with the money they raise. Playtime and lunchtimes are fun and enjoyable for pupils. The school encourages pupils to take great care of the school environment. This helps them to become responsible citizens.

Most parents feel supported by the school. They appreciate the useful information the school shares with them.

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

The school has designed a curriculum tailored to the pupils' needs and interests. It has developed a curriculum that is broad and stimulating. Teachers make links between subjects, so that pupils have opportunities to rehearse the knowledge they have learned across different areas. For example, pupils are encouraged to use their recent learning in English when writing in their geography lessons.

Teachers explain learning clearly to pupils. Learning is broken down into manageable parts. This helps pupils to build on what they have learned before. Teachers regularly check on pupils' understanding during lessons. They check whether pupils have remembered important knowledge. Teachers use this information to adapt their future teaching and planning. This helps them to ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge are closed.

In the early years, learning is carefully planned and skilfully delivered. Teachers ensure the youngest pupils learn important fundamental knowledge in English and mathematics. This means they are well prepared for their next stage of learning.

The school's phonics programme is well structured. Children start reading from the moment they start school. Well-trained staff teach phonics consistently well. As a result, pupils learn quickly and remember the sounds they are expected to. Most pupils become confident readers. Those who need more help to succeed in their reading are identified quickly. They receive some support in lessons to catch up. However, this is not the case for all pupils. There are cases where some pupils do not receive the extra support and expert guidance they require to become fluent and confident readers.

The school and the trust have worked hard to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has raised expectations for pupils with SEND. The school accurately identifies the additional help these pupils need. Teachers skilfully adapt their teaching and provide pupils with personalised support. This helps pupils to overcome their barriers to learning. As a result, pupils with SEND settle well and learn the curriculum well alongside their classmates.

Staff set high expectations for behaviour. Pupils behave exceptionally well. They move around the school sensibly. Most pupils are enthusiastic and motivated learners. In lessons, they listen to their teachers and follow instructions. As a result, learning flows smoothly.

The school has worked hard to promote the importance of regular attendance. It supports families to overcome any difficulties they may have in ensuring that their children attend school. As a result, more pupils attend school regularly.

Staff teach pupils about diversity and difference effectively. Pupils understand the meaning of democracy and how this affects them. They can describe how it is used to make choices in school and to select other pupils to represent them. Pupils are elected to be pupil governors and school council members. The pupils' 'agents for change' group

work to promote equality and diversity. They run assemblies to share this work. Pupils in the school have a strong sense of fairness and know that discrimination is wrong.

Staff enjoy working at the school and they feel well supported. Governors check the work of leaders. They know what the school does well and where it needs to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small number of pupils are not receiving the extra help and guidance they need to be able to read independently. Although these youngest children are learning the necessary knowledge of phonics to decode words, they are not gaining the skill and confidence they need to be fluent readers. The school needs to ensure that these pupils are provided with guidance and support by expertly trained teachers to develop their confidence when reading aloud. This will enable them to catch up more quickly.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school St James' Church of England VA Lower School, to be good for overall effectiveness in March 2012.

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	148982
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10345553
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jenny Jenkins
CEO of the trust	Anna Rogers
Headteacher	Alison Barden
Website	www.stjamesprimary.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St James' CofE Academy joined The Diocese of St Albans Trust in 2022.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2023.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of St Albans. The last inspection to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school's denominational education and worship, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in June 2017.

Information about this inspection

- 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leader with responsibility for the provision for pupils with SEND and teaching and support staff. The inspectors also met with the local governing body.
- The inspector met with the CEO of the trust and trustees.
- The inspector 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 inspector 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 inspector spoke to several groups of pupils and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The inspector met with groups of staff.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, as well as the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Rod Warsap, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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