



St James Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103450
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276924
Inspection dates 9 May 2006 to 10 May 2006
Reporting inspector Barbara Crane AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Leach Heath Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Rednal
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Birmingham B45 9BN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4532638
Number on roll	183	Fax number	0121 4579354
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Patrick Doyle
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Janette McMahon

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 9 May 2006 - 10 May 2006	Inspection number 276924
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St James is a smaller-than-average Catholic primary school on the outskirts of Birmingham. Families in the Longbridge Ward face a higher level of social and economic challenge than in most areas. It has an above-average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties. When children start at the school, their attainment is broadly average, but is below average in language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St James is a good school with some outstanding features. The school's view of its effectiveness is too modest. It is a happy community of which parents and pupils are proud and where the staff enjoy working. The school gives good value for money. Good teaching means that pupils achieve well and standards are above average. Pupils' different abilities are well recognised and catered for and so they make good progress throughout the school. Assessment is thorough and very well used to set targets that are known to pupils and parents. Pupils work hard to reach them. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, reflecting the very high quality of care, support and guidance provided by the school. They show a high level of respect for their teachers and each other. Relationships are excellent.

Good provision in Reception means that children go beyond the expectations for their age in most areas of learning but they lack sufficient opportunities to work and play creatively indoors and outdoors. Older pupils' learning is also restricted because they have too few chances to use their own ideas and explore ways in which they can organise their work and present it.

The good curriculum is very well enhanced by extra activities. Pupils do not, however, use their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) as much as they could in some subjects. Excellent links with parents and other agencies enhance pupils' learning and well-being.

Leadership and management are good and the school knows what it needs to do next to improve further. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in handwriting and spelling, and the school has the capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance pupils' opportunities to use their own ideas and provide more choice over the way that they carry out work.
- Broaden the curriculum so that Reception children benefit from more opportunities to be creative inside and outdoors and for older pupils to use ICT in different subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Challenging targets are set and met. Children make good progress through Reception so that when they enter Year 1, standards are higher than for many five-year-olds in most areas of learning. They make good progress in speaking, writing and reading, from a lower-than-average starting point, so that standards are average by the end of Reception. Too few opportunities for children to be creative in the classroom, in painting, modelling and role play outdoors, result in only satisfactory progress in this aspect.

Pupils' good progress continues through Years 1 to 6 and standards are above average in Year 2 and by the time pupils leave the school, representing good achievement for the different cohorts of pupils. Last year's Year 6 pupils did not make the progress that might have been expected in writing. The school has thought carefully about why this happened and has made a number of improvements over the last year to the way writing is taught. This has had a clear impact on progress, not just for Year 6 pupils, but in all other year groups. There is a good level of challenge set for more able pupils, throughout the school. The school recognises, however, that pupils of all abilities sometimes lack opportunities to set their own challenges and take a more active part in learning and that this is a limiting factor that prevents pupils' progress from being outstanding. Progress in ICT is slowed by the lack of opportunities for pupils to use the good range of skills they have learned. Pupils with learning difficulties are well guided to make good progress towards their targets and they achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The excellent relationships among pupils contribute very positively to the school's welcoming atmosphere. Children in the Reception develop very good attitudes to work and relish working and playing together. These very positive attitudes continue in later years. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they show great confidence and maturity in dealing with others. They are polite, friendly and show respect for each other and adults. Pupils comment that they 'feel privileged' to be part of the school community and they take their responsibilities seriously. They are very keen to help others, for example, through the system of 'prayer friends,' where Year 5 pupils take responsibility for helping younger children to settle into school. The school council very effectively gathers pupils' views and has acted to bring about improvements to the provision of play equipment. Pupils contribute very well to the wider community through their involvement with the parish, raising funds for many charities and performing for local groups. Pupils are well prepared for future life and make the right choices about keeping safe and leading healthy lives. Attendance is above average, reflecting pupils' positive attitudes and enjoyment of learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers are skilled at explaining ideas to the whole class and this is recognised by pupils who comment, 'Teachers explain things well and help us to move up the levels.' Relationships are excellent so pupils want to please their teachers and they concentrate hard on their work. This contributes to their good achievement. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and accurately. The results of assessments are carefully recorded, analysed and used

to help pupils achieve the next steps in their learning. Pupils are well aware of the challenging targets that teachers set for them and how to achieve them.

At present, teachers sometimes give too much direction to pupils and this does not allow them to take learning into their own hands. The school has rightly identified the need to further improve pupils' learning through more opportunities for pupils to use their own ideas and have more choice in the way that they carry out their work. Teaching assistants support pupils with learning difficulties effectively when they are engaged in independent work, so these pupils also achieve well. Parents appreciate the good teaching that the school provides and they effectively contribute to it by providing support at home for spelling, mental mathematics and other homework activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is well adapted to children's differing abilities in Reception and promotes skills in literacy and numeracy skills well. However, it does not allow sufficient opportunities for children to be creative and the outdoor learning area lacks stimulation for imaginative play, which restricts learning opportunities. The curriculum in Years 1 to 6 meets the needs of pupils of all abilities well and is effectively enriched by a good range of very popular out-of-school clubs. A good range of visits and visitors to school also contributes effectively to pupils' learning. Strong links with the local secondary school mean that gifted and talented pupils benefit from expert teaching, for example, in mathematics. The provision for pupils to understand how to make the right choices over diet and exercise and how to grow as responsible youngsters is good. The school has rightly identified the need to plan more opportunities for pupils to use and extend their skills in ICT in different subjects. Work on improving pupils' use of writing across the curriculum has been carefully planned and has helped to improve pupils' achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The provision here is outstanding. The school's care for the pupils makes a significant contribution to pupils' feeling of security and well-being. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and staff have a very good understanding of procedures for child protection. They pay very good attention to health and safety. This was demonstrated during the inspection when an overheated toaster set off the fire alarm and pupils evacuated speedily with the minimum of fuss.

The school uses links with external agencies to support its work and uses advice well to boost the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties. Guidance and support for pupils' work are very effective. Teachers have a very accurate picture of how well pupils are doing and what they need to do in order to improve. They give this information to pupils through marking work and setting targets, so pupils know precisely what they need to learn next. This helps them to achieve well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. There is good capacity to improve, reflected in good improvement since last inspection in pupils' spelling and handwriting, as well as carrying through more recent initiatives to set individual targets for pupils. The headteacher and deputy head give a good direction to an effective staff team, who are happy in their work. The school's managers, including governors, have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and know the part they play in taking the school forward. They are, however, too modest in their judgement of the school's effectiveness. The school works on the right things because of good self-evaluation. Good analysis of information about trends, data on performance and from monitoring teaching and learning mean that decisions are firmly based. The systems for tracking pupils' progress in writing, improving teaching and checking success have been carried out well and have raised pupils' achievement. There is still work to do to ensure that the same consistency is present in ensuring that pupils use their skills in ICT across the curriculum.

Parents' and pupils' views are used well when deciding on changes that need to be made and have been used to bring about improvements in the provision of competitive sport activities.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for helping us with our work when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking with you and finding out about what makes your school a special place. This is what we found:

- You enjoy school and do well in your work because teachers help you to meet your targets. The adults in school take very good care of you and give you extra help if you need it.
- You are a credit to your school and parents, and are growing up as sensible, very well-behaved young people who get on very well and readily help each other.
- Your school is well run and the staff work hard to get the best for you. They know what they need to do to make it even better for you.
- We think that Reception children need to have more chances to use their own ideas to create things in the classroom and to play exciting games outside.
- Those of you in Years 1 to 6 need more chances to use your own ideas and decide how to do your work, as well as using computers in different lessons.

We wish you all the very best for the future. Keep working hard and making the most of your opportunities at St James.