



St James' High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113507
LEA Devon
Inspection number 283110
Inspection dates 3 November 2005 to 4 November 2005
Reporting inspector Pauline Robins HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Summer Lane
School category	Community		Exeter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Devon EX4 8NN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01392 209922
Number on roll	626	Fax number	01392 209921
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Alderman P Spoerer
Date of previous inspection	3 November 2003	Headteacher	Mrs F Hart

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	3 November 2005 - 4 November 2005	283110

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two HMI and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St. James' School is a smaller than average mixed secondary school. As part of the Exeter-wide reorganisation plan, the school has been redesignated to admit pupils from 11 to 16 years, where previously it was 12 to 16. As a result two year groups joined the school in September. This year the catchment area has been redrawn as part of the reorganisation, but still includes some of the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in Devon. Attainment on entry is below the national average. There is an above average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs. Adjacent to the current site a new school is being built as part of a privately funded finance initiative (PFI). These premises were due to be ready for occupation at the start of the new school year. However, a late delay to the completion of the buildings has necessitated the pupils remaining in the existing school. The growth in the pupil population has resulted in a number of classes being taught in mobile classrooms, this does not provide sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of all pupils. The growth in pupil numbers has also put increased pressure on the limited space available at break and lunchtimes. At the beginning of the academic year St James' became a school with specialist status for mathematics and computing.

When the school was inspected in May 2005, in connection with the pupils' behaviour, inspectors had serious concerns about the standard of education provided.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. The school does not give value for money.

In September the school gained specialist status; there is a clear action plan and vision for the future. Although hampered by the delay in moving to the new facilities, a number of initiatives is already in place; as yet it is too soon to make judgements with regard to impact.

The school has made progress in addressing the previously identified issue of unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality. However, standards at Key Stage 3 are in decline and the GCSE results for 2005 have fallen. The school has identified, but failed to halt, the inadequate progress made by the pupils. The pupils' behaviour hampers their progress still further and prevents many teachers from teaching effectively. The systems and procedures used to monitor teaching and learning and to track the pupils' behaviour are weak and inconsistently applied. As a result the senior managers do not have an accurate perception of the school's strengths and weaknesses; they have been unable to identify what needs to be done to move the school forward. They have not assiduously tackled existing weaknesses and are not demonstrating the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

To raise attainment the school should:

- raise standards of behaviour so that all pupils are able to learn effectively
- secure leadership and management which effectively addresses the weaknesses in the school
- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it reaches the quality that is typically found in other schools.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate. In the end of Year 9 tests results continued the decline which began in 2004. At GCSE level results showed a significant decline over the previous year.

The proportion of pupils who reached the expected Level 5 at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science fell substantially below the targets which the school had set on the basis of these pupils' prior attainment. Results in all three subjects were very low compared with national averages and demonstrated a decline compared with the previous year. In particular, results in English fell significantly below those expected, especially so for pupils in the lower ability range. Boys' performance in both mathematics and science was significantly lower than expected. The proportion of

pupils who were absent for the tests, at over 10%, was well in excess of the national average rate.

In GCSE examinations, results in 2005 declined compared to the previous year and thus broke the steady upward trend established over the previous four years. The proportion of pupils who gained 5 or more A*–C grades fell significantly below the target set by the school. However, the proportion was not significantly below that for similar schools nationally. The proportion of pupils who gained 5 or more passes at grades A*–G increased compared with 2004, and the proportion of pupils who gained no passes was low and repeated the improvement achieved in 2004. The proportion of pupils who gained 5 or more grades A*–C, including English and mathematics, is significantly low, reflecting inadequate achievement by too many pupils in these core subjects.

Taken overall, pupils are not making adequate progress as they move through the school, particularly in Years 8 and 9. This is because their learning is disrupted in too many lessons. There is inadequate behaviour management by a significant number of teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

The pupils' personal development and well-being are inadequate overall. Behaviour is unsatisfactory and has declined since the previous inspection. Many pupils disrupted the lessons by calling out, interrupting and being disrespectful. This hampered the progress made by the majority of pupils and had a negative impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. In lessons when the behaviour was unsatisfactory, many pupils were disaffected and did not enjoy their learning. The working group of middle managers has worked extremely hard to draw up many useful initiatives. As yet these have not had time to impact upon the pupils' behaviour. However, behaviour strategies and sanctions are not consistently used, and this means that pupils do not have a clear enough understanding of what is expected of them. In order to increase the teachers' confidence in dealing with pupils who have behavioural difficulties, external advice and support has been provided. However, the effect of this training has yet to be fully evaluated.

Although many pupils behave well around the school, too many pupils are noisy and tend to rush from place to place, paying scant regard to the safety of others. Lunchtimes are calmer than at break because the older and younger pupils eat at different times. However, younger pupils complain that sometimes the oldest pupils push them around at breaktime, which causes them concern.

The pupils' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory. Too many pupils are unclear about the code for good behaviour. Opportunities to foster a real sense of community with common values have increased with the introduction of the house system, but the school ethos remains underdeveloped. The school encourages pupils to develop a healthy lifestyle. However, the school indicates that despite the encouragement given, too many pupils take too little exercise and do not choose a healthy food option. In some lessons pupils are rewarded with sweets

which clearly does not promote healthy eating. The student school improvement group meets regularly and enables the pupils' ideas and views to be considered. Pupils have reasonable opportunities to make a contribution to the community.

Attendance has improved during the last year and during the last term, although it remains below the national average. Pupils' absences are carefully followed up and monitored. Rigorous systems are in place with clear procedures including first day telephoning to parents. A useful attendance policy has recently been agreed. The education welfare officer works in the school at least four days a week, ensuring close liaison with staff, pupils and parents. Punctuality has improved although too many lessons start late because it takes too long for the pupils to settle to work. During this term to date there have been two permanent exclusions and 43 temporary exclusions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. Despite some good teaching, there is too much that is ineffective and not enough that is good. The predominant feature that restricts the quality of the teaching is the poor ethos in too many lessons, characterised by frequent incidents of inattentiveness and unsatisfactory behaviour. This prevents teachers implementing effectively planned lessons. Some of the teaching captures the interest of the pupils because it includes a variety of strategies, presents challenging work in an interesting manner, and ensures the pupils are fully involved in their learning. Even in these lessons behaviour is sometimes unsatisfactory. In many other lessons only a restricted range of teaching strategies is used because the pupils' behaviour is judged to be too unpredictable for them to work collaboratively and to develop independent learning skills. This concern is understandable, but the consequence is that the quality of both teaching and learning is reduced markedly. In addition, learning is restricted by the pupils' weak literacy skills, especially the capability to listen for longer than a few minutes. Low aspirations and poor problem solving skills lead to an overdependence on adult help to make any progress. Marking varies in quality but is satisfactory overall. However, pupils rarely take notice of written comments or use advice to improve the standard of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It satisfies statutory requirements and includes appropriate vocational courses for older pupils, some provided by the local college. The curriculum is suitably enhanced by visits, visitors and residential experiences. However, the effectiveness of the curriculum is reduced by the high incidence of unsatisfactory teaching and the low aspirations of the pupils so that their progress is inadequate. There is a good range of clubs and activities after school which cater for

pupils who have a particular interest in sports, the arts, computers, and for those who are gifted and talented.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Care, guidance and support are inadequate. There is insufficient mutual respect demonstrated between staff and pupils although staff have the welfare of the pupils at heart. Most pupils feel safe and know who to approach if they are experiencing difficulties. However, Year 7 pupils expressed some reservations about the behaviour of older pupils towards them when not in lessons. The arrangements and procedures for child protection are secure. However, the governors have been late to elect a named governor with this responsibility.

There is a good system for assessing attainment and monitoring the pupils' rate of learning; this shows that too many make slow progress. The information is provided to all teachers, but insufficient use is made of it to design lessons that meet the learning needs of pupils at different stages of understanding. Neither are the majority of pupils sufficiently aware of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to raise their standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The quality of leadership and management is unsatisfactory. Senior managers have not acted effectively to halt the decline in standards, pupils' poor behaviour, and the high incidence of unsatisfactory teaching. The headteacher has worked hard to lead the complex building project of the new school, but this has diverted her from energetically tackling the main weaknesses that have caused the school's provision to decline. When inspectors spoke with staff at all levels it was clear that they recognised the seriousness of the school's downward spiral, and several felt unsupported by the headteacher. Leadership and management elsewhere in the school vary in quality from very good to ineffective. However, too many leaders are working in isolation and their work is diluted by weak structures that do not capitalise on good practice. The school does not have a consistent or sufficiently rigorous approach to self-evaluation.

The governors are very supportive of the headteacher and have a strong commitment to the school. However, they are over dependent on reports from the school and have not used other sources of evidence adequately to monitor the school's progress. Consequently, they do not have a realistic grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have not done enough to hold the school to account, especially for the decline in standards and behaviour.

The local authority has recognised difficulties within the school by placing it in a cause for concern category. They have taken action and invested resources to rectify the weaknesses but there has been only limited impact.

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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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	No	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4	NA
The behaviour of learners	4	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	4	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	4	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	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?	4	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	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	No
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	No
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	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

St. James' High School Summer Lane Exeter Devon EX4 8NN

7 November 2005

Dear Students

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school when we came to visit on the 3 and 4 November. We recognise that your school has been through a difficult time in preparing for the move to the new school, and your frustration now that this has been delayed. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views about the school. The two groups of students who were selected to meet with the inspectors were polite and put forward their feelings and impressions of the school clearly on your behalf.

By now you will be aware that the school has been placed in special measures. This means that we have serious concerns about the standard of education you are receiving and the progress you are making. Over the next few terms the school will be visited by a team of inspectors to make sure the school is improving and you are receiving the education you deserve. However, it is important to remember that you must also contribute to the improvement by working with the teachers.

There has been some improvement in attendance and punctuality to lessons but these are not yet good enough. There are some good teachers in your school but often they find it impossible to teach effectively because some pupils misbehave and prevent others from learning. You told us that you were not clear about the school's code of conduct, what the consequences are when you misbehave, or how to earn rewards.

We have asked the school to focus on three things which will help to improve the school in the future:

- raise the standards of behaviour so that teachers can teach and pupils can learn without being disrupted.
- the senior staff need to look closely at those things in the school which are not working well and make the necessary changes. This will involve making sure that rewards, sanctions and other systems are consistently used.
- teaching needs to be much improved.

The teachers in your school have your best interests at heart and want you to do well. They know what needs to be improved. We are sure that by working with the teachers, co-operating in lessons, and being positive about the future of your school, you will find that St James' High becomes a more studious and enjoyable place to be.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins HMI