

St James Church of England Primary School, Handsworth

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103401
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	286648
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Gerald Griffin

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	412
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Hibbert
Headteacher	Mark Lanyon
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002
School address	Sandwell Road Birmingham B21 8NH
Telephone number	0121 5235861
Fax number	0121 5235861

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of considerable economic hardship. Pupils come from a variety of cultural heritages. Small numbers of other pupils come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Most children enter the school with skills and experiences that are well below the levels expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. In September the school is moving into a new building on the same site. The building work has reduced the school's available outdoor space over recent months.

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. Standards are rising and are broadly average overall. This represents good achievement from pupils' low starting points. The school has successfully tackled the recent history of disaffection and poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils by strengthening teachers' class management, providing additional support for pupils from a learning mentor and changes to the curriculum that are making work more interesting. As a result pupils' personal development and well-being are good and pupils thrive in the school's friendly atmosphere. Pupils enjoy school, work hard and behave well. Pupils from all backgrounds get on very well together and they enthusiastically share each other's cultures, faiths and festivals. This prepares them well for life in a multicultural society. Bullying is now rare and effectively dealt with and pupils feel very safe in school. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and this is reflected in the significant drop in the number of exclusions from the school this year.

Teaching and learning are good. In lessons relationships are positive and the many lively, practical activities interest pupils well. This means that pupils are enthusiastic and work hard. In a minority of lessons the activities planned do not match the needs of different pupils so that not all of them are fully challenged. Teachers' plans now place great emphasis on developing pupils' skills in writing stories and other longer pieces of work. This has accelerated progress in English and ensures that it is consistently good. Progress in mathematics is slower, although it is still good for most pupils. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunity to solve mathematical problems. Teaching in the Reception classes is also good and children make good progress.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff excel at pastoral care and provide ready and effective support when pupils encounter problems. Pupils with learning difficulties and those at the early stage of learning English receive good support from well qualified staff who know their needs well. The school works tirelessly with parents, helping them to support their children's education. The curriculum is good and has been improved by extending the range of practical activities that pupils find interesting and relevant. It places special emphasis on celebrating the diverse culture of the school to develop pupils' self-esteem.

Parents are very happy with the education provided by the school. One parent summarised their views by writing, 'I am very pleased with the progress my child is making. The school provides pupils with excellent support, which builds their confidence, in a lively and safe environment.'

The recent improvements in achievement are the outcome of good leadership and management. The headteacher provides clear direction for the school. His determination to improve the school is enthusiastically shared by the whole staff. The record of recent gains shows the school is well paced to get even better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers' planning matches the needs of different pupils so that all pupils are challenged.
- Improve opportunities for pupils to practise their problem-solving skills in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards are broadly average in most years. However, standards in Year 6 are below average, and while their progress is now good, a significant minority are catching up with work missed through their disaffection and poor behaviour in previous years. The progress of pupils from Pakistani backgrounds is now good and has accelerated this year because the school has provided them with effective additional support. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and those at the early stages of learning English is also good. Children make good progress in the Reception classes, especially in reading, writing and mathematics and the majority reach the expected standard by the time they start Year 1. Children's physical development is satisfactory rather than good because building work has restricted opportunities for activities outside.

Progress in English is good and has improved because pupils have a better understanding of sentence construction and how to structure longer pieces of work such as stories, letters and reports. For example, story writing has been sharpened because pupils always start with an introduction, in which characters and the setting are established, before the tale unfolds. Progress in mathematics is good but not as rapid as in English. This is because pupils do not spend enough time applying their mathematical knowledge and understanding to solve problems and answer longer questions. Progress in science is good and has improved because pupils undertake more practical and experimental work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Pupils respect each other, adults and property. They readily help each other cooperate well. Pupils' good behaviour is underpinned by a clear sense of right and wrong. Behaviour is often outstanding in lessons and assemblies but in the corridors and dining hall it can be too boisterous. The many opportunities to celebrate each other's heritage make pupils very respectful of people from a different background to their own.

Pupils really enjoy school, especially the many practical activities in lessons. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils know how to work safely and how to keep themselves safe. They say they can readily turn to an adult if they have a problem, knowing their worries will be quickly dealt with. They have a good understanding about how to stay healthy and do their best to take plenty of exercise. They try to eat a balanced diet and eat fruit at break, but a few are tempted by chips when they appear on the menu. Pupils readily take responsibility as monitors and members of the school council, and make a good contribution to the wider community through their charity work and participation in local cultural events. The school council is very proud of its campaign that is helping the school to reduce significantly the number of bullying incidents. Although standards are average, pupils' positive attitudes, and their participation in mini-enterprise schemes mean their preparation for secondary school and future employment is good. Children in the Reception classes make good strides in their personal development. They play together well and talk confidently to adults.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has successfully improved teachers' class management skills by ensuring relationships are always positive and that pupils understand the consequences of misbehaviour. This means that classes are calm and well ordered and that teachers can focus on learning rather than on behaviour management. As a result, pupils generally make good progress and have positive attitudes towards their work. Teachers have high expectations and ask questions that make pupils really think. Occasionally teachers' plans do not match activities to all pupils' abilities and as a consequence some pupils find their work too easy while others find it too hard. Marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. There is much outstanding practice but teachers' comments do not always focus sufficiently on how pupils can improve their work. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to learning, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and those learning English for the first time.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school strives to meet the needs of all pupils by constantly checking that work is practical, engaging and relevant to pupils' lives. For example, pupils in Year 5 really enjoyed their recent visit to the Victorian schoolroom at Shugborough and enthusiastically set about writing a report and planning a drama based on their experiences. The school plans many activities that capitalise on the varied backgrounds of pupils, their faiths and customs. These, together with the good range of out-of-school activities and visitors to the school help develop pupils' self-confidence and aspirations. The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. For example, science lessons help pupils understand the biology behind healthy living. Pupils do not readily use and apply mathematics in other subjects to solve problems, however. The reception curriculum is satisfactory. There is a good range of adult-led activities but the opportunities for children to gain independence are too restricted.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The staff's excellent rapport with pupils and their detailed knowledge of their individual needs ensures learners are very well cared for. The learning mentor supports pupils with behaviour difficulties effectively, by providing encouragement and advice on building positive attitudes. As a result, most of them cope well in school, make good progress and avoid exclusion. The school works well with outside agencies and other schools to support pupils' education. Using expert advice, for example from educational psychologists, it ensures that the support given to pupils with learning difficulties accurately matches their needs. Attendance is below average, largely because of the high number of extended overseas holidays. The school is working hard with parents to reduce absence and is promoting good habits by rewarding pupils with good attendance. Health and safety arrangements and child protection procedures are robust. Pupils mostly receive good academic guidance. They are generally well informed about their targets and what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is well supported by other managers and together they have established outstanding procedures for checking the school's performance. For example, the progress of every pupil is reviewed each term and if it slows, effective additional help is provided to help them catch up. This has been most effective in accelerating the progress of pupils from Pakistani backgrounds. The work of the leadership team has led to many improvements. For example, they have worked with teachers to improve their class management skills so that classes are not interrupted by misbehaviour. The leadership team has expanded and updated the computer facilities to make learning more relevant and interesting. The school uses staff well to keep teaching groups small so that pupils get more individual help. This has been very effective in improving pupils' story writing.

The school has a largely accurate view of the quality of education it provides although it sometimes underestimates its strengths. The school properly identifies areas for improvement but plans do not always identify priorities clearly enough to ensure the most pressing issues are given the greatest attention. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and are beginning to use data well to challenge the school over its performance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James Church of England Primary School, Birmingham, B21 8NH

We enjoyed our visit to your school. You were very polite and friendly and you made us feel most welcome. We enjoyed the discussions we had with you about the work and activities you do at school. You clearly get on with each other and the adults in school very well and you are very proud of the school's happy atmosphere. We decided St James is a good school. Here are some of our findings:

- You make good progress in your lessons in Years 1 to 6 and good progress in the Reception classes.
- The good teaching helps you to reach average standards in English, mathematics and science.
- You enjoy school and feel very safe and secure.
- You behave well.
- You have good relationships with your teachers and you work hard for them.
- The curriculum helps you share each other's culture and faiths.
- Adults in the school look after you very well.
- The headteacher leads the school well and teachers are working hard to make sure the school gets better.
- We have asked the school to do two things to help it improve further:
 - Make sure teachers plan work that helps everyone learn quickly and achieve well.
 - Help you to become better at solving mathematical problems.

We wish you all success in the future and hope the move to your new building goes well.

Yours sincerely

Gerald Griffin Lead Inspector