

St James School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113507
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	301278
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	653
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Marshall
Headteacher	Helen Salmon
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2005
School address	Summer Lane Exeter EX4 8NN
Telephone number	01392 209922
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St James' High School has specialist status for mathematics and computing. It is of smaller than average size and moved into new purpose-built premises in spring 2006. Many students come from homes experiencing economic hardship and challenging circumstances. The proportion of students with a learning difficulty or disability is above the national average. The school was deemed to require special measures in November 2005 and has since been subject to regular monitoring visits. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made and St James' School now provides a satisfactory quality of education. Good leadership and management by the headteacher and senior leaders, combined with good use of external support, have been key factors in securing the school's improvement. Regular monitoring of all aspects of the school's work ensures senior leaders have a close understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. Students' achievement is satisfactory, although the standards they reach still vary between subjects and are below average overall. This is due to previous weaknesses in teaching and learning. There is now an improving trend for standards in most subjects. The role of middle managers has been strengthened and they are checking effectively students' progress in each subject. As a result, expectations of what students should be achieving have been raised and the school provides a more positive climate for learning. Some experienced members of the leadership team will be leaving the school at the end of the summer term. However, careful arrangements have been made for their replacement and the school demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Students' personal development and well-being is satisfactory. Students enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes. Their behaviour is good and attendance is in line with the national average. Students' speaking and listening skills are underdeveloped which limits their future employment opportunities and personal development. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Academic guidance is helping to raise expectations and support for students with learning difficulties and those with additional needs is carefully targeted.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Rigorous monitoring and focused professional development have tackled successfully areas of underperformance. Teaching has improved significantly, although the proportion of lessons which are good or better is still low. A wider range of activities has been introduced which helps capture students' interest and creates a positive atmosphere in lessons. The school has introduced excellent strategies to raise the performance of students with low levels of literacy. These are having a very positive effect on raising standards in reading. Teachers have increased opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills in lessons, although more needs to be done to raise standards further in this area.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. A much broader range of activities is now provided, supported by extra-curricular clubs and links with the community. The school's mathematics and computing specialist status has had a positive impact on raising standards in mathematics and improving the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The school met, or exceeded, its targets for these subjects in 2006.

Governors now have an increased knowledge and understanding of the school's work. Some aspects of the school's work continue to be funded by the local authority and are guaranteed for the short term. The school is rightly developing plans to ensure its longer term financial autonomy.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by increasing the proportion of good or better teaching.

- Increase opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Complete plans to ensure the school's long term financial autonomy.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Standards are below average due to the previously inadequate teaching and learning. Teaching has improved and, consequently, students' current achievement is satisfactory.

Students' prior attainment is below average when they start school, particularly in English. The school's literacy programme is very successful in improving many students' reading skills. However, speaking, listening and writing skills remain relatively weak, which impedes students' learning in other subjects. In 2006, standards in the Key Stage 3 national tests for mathematics and science improved significantly compared to the previous year, with a rise in the proportion of students entered for, and achieving, the higher levels. However, there was no marked improvement in students' performance in English. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving higher grade passes at GCSE in 2006 was well below the national average. Since September 2006, students' progress has improved. Recent mock tests in Year 9 and mock examinations in Year 11 indicate an improving trend in both achievement and standards for mathematics, English and science across both key stages. Available data suggests that the challenging targets set by the school for 2007 are likely to be achieved.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress. Those students for whom English is an additional language also make significant gains in their English language skills and progress for those studying their home language at GCSE is above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students have positive attitudes and feel a sense of pride in their school. Many link this with moving to the new premise. As one student commented, 'This is a good school. The building is better, resources are better and there's more space'. Students enjoy participating in the extra-curricular clubs and activities. Their behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. The school has introduced very effective procedures for dealing with any behaviour difficulties and, as a result, exclusions have fallen and there is a calm and orderly atmosphere in the school. Students recognise how the 'on call' support class, where students attend for short periods following a behavioural difficulty, has had a big impact on improving behaviour. Students are also pleased with the reward system which recognises their efforts and achievement, although a few feel it is applied inconsistently by some teachers. Students' attendance has improved and now reflects the national picture owing to the school's strong procedures for following up absences.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students' cultural development is good and the school has established international links with schools in France, Sweden, Oman and Sri Lanka. Students make a satisfactory contribution to their school and wider community, for example when they participate in the 'school improvement group' or raise

money for charities. Students recognise the need to lead a healthy lifestyle. They take regular physical exercise and a large number participate in the sporting clubs. Many students choose to eat the healthy food provided in the school canteen. Students' preparation for future employment is supported well by their knowledge of ICT, but limited by their underdeveloped speaking and listening skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is satisfactory. This is because the school monitors and evaluates lessons rigorously and identifies appropriate areas for improvement. The focus for improvement has changed recently, from how teachers teach to how and what students learn. In part, the greater emphasis on learning has been made possible by the introduction of very successful strategies to improve students' behaviour in lessons.

Typically, in lessons, learning is closely linked to assessment criteria. Students know exactly what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve their prospective levels or grades. Working relations in lessons are warm and productive. Students are regularly involved in assessing their own and each other's work, which helps to develop their self-critical skills. In the best lessons, students are fully engaged and levels of enjoyment and motivation are high. Teaching is lively, tasks and concepts are clearly explained, and activities are carefully designed to challenge the students to learn at a swift pace. Praise is used extensively to motivate students and good use is made of support from teaching assistants. However, teaching is often safe rather than challenging. Teachers spend too long explaining what needs to be done and there is too little dialogue with students. As a result, students are often passive, over reliant on their teacher for direction, and their speaking and listening skills are underdeveloped. The school is introducing more opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to discuss what they are learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced and is being appropriately adapted to meet the wide range of students' capabilities and interests. There are plans to provide more vocational options at Key Stage 4. An excellent literacy programme is targeted at those students who have learning difficulties or who are underperforming in reading. The curriculum is supported by strong links with the local schools, college and university. Specialist mathematics and computing status has had a substantial impact on the curriculum and on raising standards. There is improved use of ICT in most subjects and greater opportunities for students' independent study. However, there are insufficient opportunities to help students develop their speaking and listening skills. Extra-curricular provision supplements the curriculum well with many sporting activities, a homework club, and booster lessons. The school's success in establishing international links has earned it a British Council Developing Internationalism award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Thorough procedures are in place to ensure the health and safety of students and these are reviewed regularly. Child protection procedures are rigorous and there are up to date records

confirming the suitability of adults to work with students. Liaison with outside agencies is good. Students feel confident that they can turn to adults for help with both their personal and academic difficulties. One student commented, 'teachers are considerate, they always listen to us'. The school is very watchful of the care and progress of vulnerable children. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities, children in the care of the local authority, and those learning English as an additional language all receive good support from teachers, teaching assistants and mentors. This work is beginning to raise the achievement of these students.

Academic guidance and support are underpinned by rigorous and consistent assessment. Academic progress is checked frequently so that students know how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve. This is having a marked impact on raising expectations and supporting students' personal development. Guidance is increasingly influencing academic progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Students receive detailed and balanced advice on curriculum, career, and higher education choices and on staying healthy. The school makes good use of outside agencies to provide specialist support and guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's purposeful leadership has made a significant difference to the ethos of the school. Supported by a committed senior staff team, she has changed the culture of the school to one which is more aspirational and where students feel valued as learners. All students, including those with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language, have their needs met equally and they are included fully in the life of the school.

The school has established good systems for self-evaluation and has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement. The role of middle leaders has been developed successfully. They now have a more detailed understanding of the work of their departments and are using data well to check on students' progress. As a result, expectations of what students should be achieving have been raised and students are set challenging targets for improving their work. The school deploys its resources efficiently to meet the needs of students. Changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties or disabilities have been planned well. Some aspects of the school's work continue to be funded by the local authority and are guaranteed for the short term. The school is rightly developing plans to ensure its longer term financial autonomy.

Parents hold positive views of the school and the school responds diligently to any concerns or suggestions. Good links have been established with partnership schools and colleges which are improving teaching and the curriculum. Governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They work closely with the headteacher and senior leaders and are kept fully informed about developments in the school. In the past, they have not always challenged staff and asked critical questions about the work of the school, but they are now in a stronger position to do so.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

21 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St James' School, Exeter EX4 8NN

As you know, your school was inspected on 19 and 20 June. I am writing to let you know the judgements which the team of inspectors made about your school. I thank those of you who helped the inspection by talking to us about your work and life at school.

I have been visiting your school for over a year since its last inspection when it was placed in special measures. This was because there were concerns at that time about the standard of education and the progress you were making. I am pleased to say that your school has improved and now offers a satisfactory standard of education. It no longer requires special measures. The headteacher and staff have worked hard to bring about these changes. They provide a high standard of care and support. Several of you said how staff are helpful and how much the school has improved since moving to the new building. You also said you enjoyed taking part in the good range of clubs and activities on offer.

Most of you make satisfactory progress with your work. Those of you who experience difficulty with reading are making very good progress due to the extra support you receive in small groups. Teaching has improved and is now satisfactory. There is a much clearer focus on learning in lessons and the school has good arrangements for dealing with any difficult behaviour. As a result, you know what you need to do to improve your work and your behaviour is good.

There are still areas where the school needs to get better. The standard of your work needs to improve further, which should be achieved by raising the quality of teaching in some lessons. Your speaking and listening skills also need to improve. You can help by always working hard, being prepared to discuss your views and ideas, and by listening carefully when others are speaking. Finally, the headteacher and governors, who are responsible for the school, need to check the school's long-term financial arrangements to ensure there are adequate resources.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath Her Majesty's Inspector