

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115131
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	302552
Inspection dates	26–27 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Robert McKeown 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	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father P Walker
Headteacher	Mr J Graham
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
School address	Guildford Road Colchester Essex CO1 2RA
Telephone number	01206 865747
Fax number	01206 791589

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St James Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School is situated in Colchester, Essex. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds; several children from Eastern European countries have joined the school recently. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is about average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties is typical for this size of school. The proportion of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English is well above the national average and rising. Most children start school with standards which are below those expected for their age. The school runs a morning breakfast club and weekly homework club. The headteacher has led the school since 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

St James Primary School is improving quickly and now provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. Many positive changes have been introduced since the last inspection and the school is well placed to make and sustain further improvements; it now offers satisfactory value for money. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures

Achievement is better than at the time of the last inspection and most pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress. Standards, however, remain too low, particularly in writing. The school is taking suitable action to raise standards and tackle underachievement. This includes tracking pupils' progress more thoroughly and placing greater emphasis on learning key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The school realises that progress has to be at least good to enable pupils to meet national expectations by the end of Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and those whose home language is not English are making satisfactory progress.

Pupils enjoy school because what they do is interesting, they feel safe and, as one Year 5 pupil said, 'I like learning.' Behaviour, an issue in the last inspection, is now good. The school systems for managing and monitoring behaviour are effective. All new pupils are welcomed into the strong, inclusive community. Relationships between staff and pupils are friendly which gives the pupils the confidence to turn to an adult if they have a problem and ensures pupils' satisfactory personal development. At the last inspection a significant proportion of teaching was inadequate. This is no longer the case and now all teaching is at least satisfactory and a significant proportion is good. There is a satisfactory range and balance of subjects and activities provided to promote pupils' learning. More interest and enjoyment has been introduced into the curriculum, through involving pupils in educational visits and creative activities. All members of the school community work well together to ensure pupils receive good care, guidance and support. School assemblies make a valuable contribution towards emphasising the school's aims and values.

Leadership and management, inadequate at the time of the last inspection, are now satisfactory. The very strong leadership provided by the new headteacher has brought much needed direction. Weaknesses have been tackled and expectations raised among staff and pupils of what can be achieved. Key members of staff such as the subject leaders for English and mathematics share management responsibilities and make increasingly effective contributions. However, leadership and management in other subjects require improvement. The school works very well with the local authority, taking full advantage of the support services it offers. There are also strong links with the local church. Communication with parents is satisfactory but the school lacks formal systems for collecting parents' views of the school's effectiveness. Governance has improved since the last inspection. The governing body has adopted a more systematic approach to monitoring the work of the school to ensure the good progress made since the last inspection is sustained.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards, particularly in writing
- Strengthen the leadership and management of curriculum subjects
- Involve parents more formally in reviewing the school's effectiveness

A small proportion of the 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

Children now get a good start in the Foundation Stage. Children make good progress because of the quality of provision. By the end of the Reception year standards are broadly average, although aspects of social and emotional development and writing skills are still weak. The two year decline in standards in Year 2 was halted in 2006. Most pupils are now making good progress in Years 1 and 2. This year, standards in Year 2 are expected to be close to average in mathematics but below average in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils working at higher levels in reading and maths has increased and capable pupils including boys are achieving more. Pupils' writing remains a weakness.

Standards at the end of Year 6 in 2006 were broadly average in English and science but below average in mathematics. Outcomes in 2007 are expected to be lower in English and science and results overall are anticipated to be below average. A legacy of weak teaching in Years 3 and 4 has resulted in pupils making little progress in these year groups. Despite making good progress in Years 5 and 6 many pupils do not catch up enough to achieve their potential. Action has been taken to strengthen teaching to ensure pupils make consistently good progress from Year 2 to Year 6. A stronger emphasis on improving outcomes for pupils at the early stages of learning English and on catching up in reading has been successful, particularly in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6. Standards in ICT, an issue in the previous inspection, are improving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Developing pupils' respect for others is a core value of the school. Staff work hard to foster pupils' sense of self-esteem and this, along with the Christian nature of the school community with its clear values, ensures that the spiritual and moral development are good. Cultural provision is also good because there is an emphasis within the curriculum for developing the arts and looking at other countries, and cultures. The result is that racist incidents are few and are taken very seriously. Social development is good. Pupils make good progress in developing their social skills, often from a low base and there is good support for the few pupils who find difficulty in managing conflict or making friends. Pupils said that they are mainly kind to one another and that incidents of bullying have significantly reduced. Pupils have a reasonable understanding of how to stay safe and look after themselves. They now have a stronger voice in the school through the school council. There are also some opportunities to take responsibility in the school community with more planned. Year 6 pupils are suitably prepared for the next step in their education and future life. Attendance is just below the national average and improving.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good guidance and support for teachers from the local authority and the headteacher have had a positive impact on bringing about improvements in teaching and learning. Teachers now

make sure pupils know what they will learn and how they will succeed. Careful attention is given in lesson planning to the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. Teaching assistants give good support to individuals and groups of pupils. Activities are now more interesting, motivating and closely matched to pupils' needs. Consistent use is made of the school's behaviour reward system to promote good attitudes to learning. Improvements are still required in ensuring more able pupils are challenged sufficiently and in teachers' use of assessment to set learning targets. Marking, weak at the time of the last inspection, has improved. A new marking scheme is used more consistently to applaud good work and show pupils how they can improve. Homework is now used appropriately to extend learning in each year group. Teachers are beginning to make more effective use of interactive whiteboards and ICT to enhance learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Since the last inspection more emphasis has been placed on pupils acquiring basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. A more creative approach to the curriculum has also been introduced through the 'Shine' activities during the afternoons. These make good use of staff expertise in the creative arts and in sporting activities. A number of additional learning opportunities for individuals and groups are provided to extend reading and writing skills. Pupils making slow progress are now identified and appropriate catch-up activities are introduced in several, but not all, year groups. Enrichment in the curriculum is provided through regular visits out of school into the local community and through an annual residential trip in Year 6. There are a number of after-school clubs for leisure, sporting and musical activities. The curriculum for the Foundation Stage is now good. However, the school recognises the deficiencies in, and has plans to improve, the facilities, equipment and resources to support outdoor play and physical development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good. Staff provide good welfare support and the local clergy give good pastoral guidance to pupils. There are appropriate systems in place for child protection. Regular safeguarding checks are made before staff appointments. Health and safety, including risk assessment procedures, are good. The special educational needs coordinator works well with other agencies and professionals to give good support to pupils with learning difficulties and to their families. Individual education plans are prepared with the full involvement of pupils and parents and useful targets are set to help secure progress. A parenting group helps to support families. Good advice and support from the local authority behaviour support team has sought the views of all pupils about how much they enjoy school; it has also helped to support the needs of pupils with behavioural or emotional difficulties. There are good procedures for tracking the progress and performance of pupils. The school has tried different approaches to setting learning targets to help pupils improve their work. It recognises that further developments are required to establish a workable and useful system.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. An effective partnership between headteacher and deputy headteacher is sharply focussed on improving standards and on ensuring pupils achieve well. The school development plan written following the last inspection clearly sets out priorities for improvement. Changes introduced since the last inspection have resulted in better behaviour amongst pupils and better teamwork from the staff. A rigorous system is in place for assessing learning, tracking progress and analysing data to identify underachievement. Attractive displays prompt pupils' interest in learning and celebrate their achievements. A determined approach to tackling inadequate teaching has ensured that lessons are now never less than satisfactory and often good. The school's special educational needs coordinator manages the support for pupils with learning difficulties well. Improved leadership and management of the Foundation Stage have helped secure better provision for the youngest pupils. Subject leadership and management require further improvement. The responsibility for introducing new approaches to teaching and for monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness requires wider distribution among staff. Governors are working closely with the headteacher receiving detailed and regular reports on developments. The governing body has sharpened its approach to keeping a check on how well the school is doing.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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?	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	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	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	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

1 July 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St James CE VA Primary School

You probably know that I have been coming to your school each term to check on the improvements Mr Graham and the teachers have been making. I'm pleased to say that your school is now doing much better and inspectors won't need to visit as often.

Lots of improvements have been made in the last year. Most of you are making better progress in your reading, writing and mathematics; although we believe you can do even better, especially in your writing. Your behaviour is much better and you told us that Mr Graham and your teachers make sure everyone gets on well together. Your teachers and the other adults who work with you have worked hard to provide you with interesting lessons and to help you improve your work. The laptop learning sessions have helped you develop your mathematics and reading skills and the 'Shine' afternoons give you the chance to be more creative. We were pleased to see some of the good work you have been doing displayed in the classrooms and corridors. We like the idea of having 'star awards' to celebrate your achievements. Mr Graham, the staff and governors have good plans to make your school even better, so I hope you will do all you can to help them achieve their aim.

Before we left we asked Mr Graham to help your teachers keep a close check on what goes on in each of the subjects you are learning. We also asked him to regularly ask your parents what they think of the school. Lastly we asked your teachers to help you achieve higher standards in mathematics, science and English.

You have a lot to look forward to in the years ahead. Make sure you do your best and enjoy every minute.

With best wishes,

Rob McKeown Her Majesty's Inspector