

St James The Great RC Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101816
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	307822
Inspection date	2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	482
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Edwin Abreo
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Beck
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Windsor Road Thornton Heath CR7 8HJ
Telephone number	020 8771 3424
Fax number	020 8771 0065

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, pupils' achievement, how well they are taught and how well they are cared for, guided and supported. The inspector met with governors, staff and pupils. Parts of lessons were observed, parents' questionnaires were examined and school information including assessment records and self-evaluation were scrutinised. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

St James the Great is an above average sized primary school where all the pupils are from practising Catholic families. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is high, mainly of other White, Indian and Black British, African or Caribbean heritage. Proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals or with learning difficulties or/and disabilities are below average. Additional needs relate mainly to moderate and severe learning, autism, speech, language and communication, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is above average, although few pupils are at an early stage of learning English.

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 the Great is a good school. Pupils enjoy their education greatly and grow into mature, confident and extremely well behaved young people. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Teaching is effective and the breadth and quality of the curriculum is excellent. Pupils are cared for very well and the academic tracking system enables staff to identify and support well those pupils with the greatest needs. The headteacher, extremely well supported by his deputy and the governors, has generated a positive and reflective Christian ethos where every pupil is valued. Parents have overwhelmingly positive views about the quality of education provided, reflected by the comment, 'What makes his day is knowing that he goes to school.... I am so thankful'.

Pupils' standards on entry, although variable from year to year, are broadly average. By the end of Years 2 and 6, pupils have progressed well, and standards in English, mathematics and science have been significantly above average for many years. The school has been aware, however, that a number of older pupils have underachieved in the past, including in English and mathematics in 2007. Good intervention systems are now resulting in much improved achievement and higher standards for all pupils, no matter what their abilities or backgrounds, and including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' writing, particularly technical aspects such as punctuation, grammar and handwriting, and mathematical problem solving have received a strong and successful focus in the past year and work is continuing in both areas.

Pupils' attendance is excellent and their conduct in the classroom and around the school is exemplary. Extremely polite and considerate, pupils know that they are in a very safe environment where any issues of bullying will be followed through with great rigour. Pupils have adopted very healthy lifestyles, eating high quality food and participating in the many opportunities for sport, including ice-skating. The girls' and boys' football teams thrive; large numbers attend Saturday morning practices run by parents. Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously, for example as 'squabble busters' and 'buddies' in the playground to help make it an enjoyable place to be. Through the work of the school council, fruit - which is provided free of charge for younger children - is also available at breaktimes for older pupils at minimal cost. Pupils raise substantial funds for charities, both local and more distant. The developing link with a school in China is very helpful in extending their appreciation of other cultures. Very well developed speaking and listening, computer and numeracy skills, as well as their self-assurance, show that pupils are extremely well prepared for their secondary schools. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Teaching is good and improving. High quality relationships between staff and pupils, careful preparation, and effective use of information and communication technologies (ICT), create very pleasant classroom environments where effective learning takes place. However, support staff are sometimes not well enough involved in supporting pupils with their learning. Also, the needs of individual pupils are not always identified in lessons, resulting in insufficient challenge for them which restricts what could be achieved. Curriculum planning is thorough, enhancing continuity in learning. A very wide range of popular and extremely successful clubs is provided. Excellent opportunities for visits, and many visitors, greatly enrich the curriculum. For example, pupils have visited an African Drum experience, Croydon Clocktower and a science centre.

All staff are assiduous in their duty of care. During break and lunch periods, staff and senior pupils work to ensure that no pupil is isolated or left to feel unhappy. Pupils are expected to attend school and not to be absent and many achieve this each term. Vulnerable pupils are identified and looked out for and child protection procedures are rigorously followed. Induction into the school and transfer to new schools is carefully planned. Staff regularly review individual pupils' progress. In Years 3 to 6, teacher assessments or tests are used each term to identify the level at which each pupil is working. Senior staff check this data, identify underachievement, and provide support so that pupils catch up. This process is being introduced in Years 1 and 2. Information on the success of different groups is not always clear and the system is still bedding down.

The headteacher and deputy have complementary skills and work extremely well together for the benefit of all pupils. They set an exceptionally clear direction based on the school's aims. Systems are very clear and detailed, and followed with great integrity and humanity. Governors are extremely knowledgeable and dedicated. They hold the school to account for all that takes place. Excellent links with outside agencies and well used resources are of great benefit to pupils. Safeguarding arrangements are entirely as required. In the past, when judgements on the quality of teaching were sometimes too generous, insufficient emphasis was placed on the need to improve classroom practice. Now that the link between teaching, learning and achievement is better understood, appropriate steps are being taken to enable weaknesses to be identified and resolved. Challenging targets for Year 6 in English and mathematics were not met in 2007, but are on track to be exceeded in the current year as a result of the better provision. The school has made satisfactory progress since its last report and is now improving rapidly. It has good capacity to improve further. One parent epitomises the views of many, 'My daughter has been extremely happy here and I feel privileged that she was given a place at the school'.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress through their Nursery and Reception years. The quality of teaching is good and progress is monitored carefully. By the time children transfer to Year 1 nearly all have attained the expected levels and many have exceeded them. Children's personal, social and emotional development is excellent. The outdoor environments are used well and form an integral aspect of the curriculum, though the facilities do not match the good quality of those in the main classrooms. Senior leaders and governors are aware of this and plans are in hand to provide a more exciting environment with more opportunities for constructive, role-play activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that improvements in the quality of teaching focus on meeting the individual learning needs of pupils.
- Extend the academic tracking system to all years, and ensure that data on the success of different groups is used effectively to raise achievement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1
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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James The Great RC Primary and Nursery School, Thornton Heath, CR7 8HJ

Thank you for your very warm welcome and help when I visited your school. I very much enjoyed meeting and speaking to you, and your teachers and governors.

You are attending a really good school. The way it helps you develop as young people is excellent. You behave exceptionally well and look after one another. You get on very well with your teachers and know you are safe in school. You take responsibilities like your membership of the school council very seriously and come up with some great ideas, such as the fruit older pupils can now buy at break time. You do well in your national assessments in Year 6 and your attendance is excellent. The school provides lots of opportunities to learn about living healthily. You take part in loads of sport and try to eat the right type of food - you can now only have chips on a Friday! The staff work hard at helping you to learn and you listen very well indeed. Some of you do not make quite as much progress as you might at times, so I have asked the headteacher to make sure work in lessons suits what each of you need. I have also asked that the progress checking system is used to make sure everyone is doing really well in all years.

All of you that I spoke to said how much you enjoy being at St James the Great, and the many excellent activities and visits you are involved in. Your parents wrote to me and said that you really look forward to coming to school and what a happy place it is. The school cares for you well.

Your headteacher is very good at his job and he gets lots of support from his deputy, the other staff, and the governors. All the adults at the school are doing all they can to help you enjoy being at school and to learn. I know you will all continue to work together to make the school even better.

Yours sincerely

Peter McGregor

Lead Inspector