

St James' CofE Primary School, Birch-in-Rusholme

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105508
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	308876
Inspection date	24 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Jim Kidd

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	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Beetham
Headteacher	Vivienne Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2004
School address	Cromwell Range Rusholme-in-Rusholme Manchester M14 6HW
Telephone number	0161 2246173
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the current levels of achievement in the school, the quality of teaching and learning, the impact of leadership and management at all levels and improvements made since the previous inspection. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, nationally published assessment data, the school's own assessment records, relevant policies, observations of the school at work including visits to lessons, and analysis of parents' questionnaires.

Discussions were held with staff, the chair and vice-chair of governors and pupils. 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 the self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This average sized school lies about three miles from the centre of Manchester and serves a mixed area, in which there is wide range of cultural and faith traditions. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Over 70% of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and more than 50% of the school population speaks English as an additional language: there are 22 languages represented in the school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but increasing. St James' is an accredited Healthy School, holds the Eco School Bronze award and achieved Activemark status this year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, where pupils develop well personally and in which there are high levels of respect for different cultures and religions. As a result, racial harmony is very strong and reflects the school's concern to take the lead in fostering community cohesion. The majority of parents are fully supportive of what the school does for their children and comment, 'It has a lovely atmosphere and teachers and other staff pay attention to every child, encouraging them all to learn and to study.'

Children's skills on entry to the Nursery vary from year to year, but are generally below age-related expectations. Even though more pupils are now starting and leaving the school at other than the usual times, achievement across the school is good overall, with particularly impressive progress being made in the upper Key Stage 2 classes. Pupils reach broadly average standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Achievement in reading and science is consistently good and standards in mathematics have risen recently, demonstrating improved progress in this subject. Inspection evidence shows that pupils in the current Year 6 class are on course to reach their challenging targets this year. However, it also shows that insufficient focus across the school on pupils' speaking and listening skills has contributed to standards in writing being a little lower than standards in other subjects.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and their attendance is satisfactory. Pupils are confident, behave well in lessons and around school and are welcoming and courteous to visitors. They relate well to their peers and to the adults who work with them and comment, 'We like all the different cultures in our school, and our teachers and teaching assistants are kind to us.' The school and eco councils are proactive in making suggestions as to how the school can improve even further. They have ensured that playground equipment has been upgraded and that there is an increasing emphasis on care for the environment. Vibrant displays promote the celebration of other cultures and religions and thought-provoking assemblies lead to pupils' keen understanding of their responsibilities as citizens of the global community. As a result, they have an enviable social conscience and support a wide range of charities. They are also fully aware of the importance of healthy eating and of keeping fit. Their good achievements, both personal and academic, mean that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education and for life beyond.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there is some outstanding practice in Key Stage 2. In an excellent literacy lesson in Year 5, for example, pupils took control of their own learning and helped each other with a confidence which belied their years. On occasions, however, teachers direct the activities too much and pupils do not have enough opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Nonetheless, teachers and teaching assistants treat their pupils with the utmost dignity and respect and good relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults are the order of the day. As a result, pupils are generally fully involved in their activities and are more than willing to tell visitors about what they are doing and why.

The school places appropriate emphasis on personal, social, health and citizenship education and the curriculum as a whole has a good impact on pupils' confidence and self-esteem. There are several targeted events, Christian Aid Week and International Mother Language Day, for example, which highlight the school's multi-faith and multicultural community. There are outstanding links with a wide range of schools and institutions which extend pupils' learning.

Visits to the city learning centre do much to develop pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT). There are good opportunities for pupils to hone their skills in art and music. They talk enthusiastically about the tuition available to them in a variety of musical instruments.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those identified as vulnerable and those who are at early stages of learning English, achieve as well as their peers. This is because of the good care and support they receive from teaching assistants, and bilingual and trilingual staff. For example, the progress of pupils new to speaking English is tracked closely. Staff are, therefore, able to intervene at just the right moment to ensure that these pupils can take full advantage of everything the school has to offer. Child protection procedures are in place and meet current guidelines. Academic guidance is good and improving. Marking is regular and offers pupils detailed advice on how they can improve their work. The new assessment strategies are leading to more accurate target setting and pupils are becoming increasingly aware of how well they are doing.

Key staff and governors evaluate the work of the school with more rigour than at the time of the previous inspection. As a result, leaders at all levels have an accurate picture of school performance. The talented headteacher, ably supported by her committed deputy, provides a clear vision for development. Staff speak with one voice about the purpose of the school; the welfare of its pupils lies at the centre of everything it does. Since the previous inspection, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved, there are now more opportunities for pupils to use ICT as a learning tool and the quality of the teaching in the Nursery class is now a strength of the school. St James' Church of England Primary has, therefore, good capacity to improve further and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

On entry to the Nursery, children demonstrate the full range of ability, but there are increasing numbers who speak little or no English. Good leadership and management, which ensure a particularly strong emphasis on improving skills in communication, language and literacy, lead to children making good progress in Nursery and Reception. There is a good balance between teacher-directed activities and those chosen by the children. The Nursery, for example, is a hive of activity and children greet visitors warmly, eager to show them the plants they have grown and the caterpillars they are studying. Children play happily together and share ideas with each other. In Reception, children have to answer a written question the moment they arrive in the morning and they are, therefore, ready to learn very quickly. The Foundation Stage areas are well organised. They contain a range of appealing role-play areas and have good quality resources to encourage children to investigate for themselves and to learn by doing. The quality of teaching is good and teaching assistants also play a key part in giving all children, including those for whom hearing English is a new experience, an effective start to their school careers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Place more emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills in order to give them a firm foundation on which to build their skills in writing.
- Share the outstanding practice in Key Stage 2 across all classes, in order to encourage pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning.

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	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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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 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	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

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

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to you and I am particularly grateful to those of you who came to speak to me in the staffroom at break time. I thought your assembly was marvellous and was pleased that so many of you volunteered to come to the front to help your headteacher with the painting.

St James' is a good school and you are right to be very proud of it. You behave well, work hard and make good progress in your lessons. The teaching you receive is good and you have many opportunities to use computers in class. Those of you who sometimes find the work difficult are supported well by your teaching assistants, who also give a lot of help to the pupils who are new to learning English. You look after each other well too and older pupils like to help the younger ones with their games at break times and lunchtimes. You get on well with each other, have a real awareness of the many cultures represented in your school and enjoy the celebrations of different religions during the year.

Members of the school council ask you for your opinions as to how the school can be even better and they put forward many suggestions for improvement. For example, they have organised competitions and fun days and made sure that the infants were the first to receive the water coolers. The eco council sows seeds and grows plants and makes sure that you know why it is important to look after the environment. You have a good understanding of how to eat healthily and take advantage of the many sports activities to keep yourselves fit.

As you know, nothing is ever perfect! Your teachers are going to try even harder to help you improve your writing and they are also going to make sure that you have more opportunities to learn for yourselves in lessons. You can help them by continuing to work hard and trying your best.