

St James' Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113761
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311363
Inspection date	28 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Rundle HMI

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Honnor
Headteacher	Audrey Kimber
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004
School address	Gaunts Common Wimborne BH21 4JN
Telephone number	01258 840669
Fax number	01258 840669

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the school's strategies to ensure that more able pupils achieve well; confirmation of whether pupils' personal development and well-being are good or outstanding; and how effectively monitoring and evaluation are used to improve provision. Evidence was gathered from national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and pupils, and the parents' questionnaires. 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 this report.

Description of the school

St James' is a smaller than average school. The majority of pupils have favourable social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is below average. The school has attained Activemark and the Healthy Schools Award.

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's is a good school with outstanding features. The Christian ethos and children's spiritual development are prevalent in all its work, fully reflecting the school's aim. All staff know children and their individual needs very well. The inclusion of every child is a real strength of the school's work and the vast majority thrive in this atmosphere. Children have outstanding opportunities for personal development, including taking responsibilities in class and making decisions for the development of the school. All children adhere to the school council rules in the dining room and extra-curricular clubs. Children understand the difference between democratic election of peers to the council and all Year 4 taking turns in the 'friendship force'. The vast majority of children behave very well in class and the playground; they understand that the privilege of golden time can be lost through silly behaviour. They learn to play and move around the school very safely. Children say how much they enjoy coming to school and learning new things; art, science and French are consistent favourites. Children have an outstanding understanding of developing a healthy lifestyle; they are able to talk knowledgeably about different foods and exercise that are good for you. One parent comments: 'Our child has progressed well both in education and citizenship. The school has provided a solid and consistent platform for learning.' Children make good progress in learning throughout their time in the school. They attain standards that are significantly above average by the end of Year 2 and Year 4 because of good teaching. The rise in mathematics attainment over the last two years reflects the focused work in this subject. High standards ensure children are well prepared for their future economic well-being and the next stage of their education. The school has rightly identified that reading and helping more children gain Level 3 by the end of Year 2 are priorities for development. A good range of strategies is already in place and is having a positive effect, particularly on children's enthusiasm to read. Teaching is consistently good. A particular strength is the planning of an outstanding range of activities and resources to meet the needs of mixed age and ability classes. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled at using questioning techniques that help all children understand their work better. They assess progress effectively in lessons and intervene at the just the right time with the whole class or individuals to help them achieve more. For example, Year 4 pupils were reminded of words or phrases they had discussed that added drama and atmosphere when writing about aliens. A good feature in classrooms is the use of the 'have a go' book that creates a culture of children taking a risk in their learning. Children all know their targets for literacy and mathematics and are keen to achieve them. Occasionally the usual good pace of lessons is not maintained in the introductory activity. Early identification is made of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good support, including links with external agencies and parents, is available to help these pupils improve and make progress in their specific area of need. The support for children with gifts and talents is in its infancy. The headteacher and staff use a number of useful assessment methods. However, these are not used systematically to check, track and record pupils' progress over time so that support and challenge can be focused where they are most needed. The curriculum is planned over a two-year period and this helps meet the needs of mixed age classes. Planning covers topics for the two years and literacy and numeracy skills are starting to be used more consistently in other subjects to reinforce the relevancy of learning. However, longer-term planning is not brought together to ensure that links between subjects are fully exploited in building children's skills systematically over time. By contrast, staff are thorough in their lesson planning for the term and each week to ensure that children have a rich and varied diet of experiences. The programme of enrichment is very good with visits, residential experiences,

extra-curricular clubs and a large number of visitors. Good opportunities are planned to develop children's understanding of other cultures through an arts project. The headteacher has a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work, based on secure monitoring procedures. Subject leaders, particularly of literacy and numeracy, also play a significant role in monitoring and evaluating provision in their subjects. The headteacher has set and maintained high expectations for improvements across all aspects of the school's work, with a clear focus on raising standards even further. The headteacher, staff and a group of committed governors ensure children have the best experiences and opportunities during their time at the school. All areas for improvement from the last inspection have been tackled successfully and the school has moved at pace on the use of information and communication technology in teaching and learning opportunities. This indicates good capacity to improve further. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. As one said, 'St James' has given both my children an excellent start to their school life.' The vast majority feel very involved in every aspect of their child's education and the school's work. A few say they would like more frequent information on what their child is learning and how well they are doing. Although the school's website holds useful information, this is not fully utilised for communication with parents.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage from a starting point that is slightly above what is expected nationally for children of this age. They have well planned opportunities to develop a broad range of skills. Children have good opportunities for self-initiated activities that they are able to sustain for extended periods, and for working in both the classroom and the outdoor environment. They communicate effectively within the class and learn to take turns and share resources. When learning about 'more' or 'less' in maths, a good range of resources is used to help them also develop an understanding of the world around them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the procedures for checking and tracking pupils' progress over time to enable more focused support and challenge.
- Ensure long-term curricular planning exploits fully links between subjects.
- Find more ways of sharing information with parents.

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?	2
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	2
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	3
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	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	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	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**

29 January 2008 Dear Children Inspection of St James' Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Wimborne BH21 4JN I am writing to say thank you for making me feel so welcome and for talking to me when I came to visit your school recently. I also want to tell you what I found out about your school. You are very lucky to go to such a good school where staff know you very well and help you to do your best. Most of you behave very well in and around school and you all say how much you enjoy coming to school and learning new things. Lots of you like art and French. Your work has really improved since you have been in the school, especially in maths, and all of you know your targets. I am pleased that you work so hard to achieve your targets and know it means a lot to you when you can 'highlight' your successes. Your teachers record how well you are doing and I think they could use that information to help you improve even more. You can help them to do that by listening and trying hard in every lesson. You have a good range of activities in lessons and you use your literacy and numeracy in other subjects. I think even more links could be made between subjects and some of your parents say they would like to know more about what you are learning and how well you are doing. I have asked the school to find more ways of trying to do that. Lots of you attend extra-curricular clubs and you told me how much you enjoy learning from your visits and visitors, such as the people from the planetarium. The school gives you outstanding opportunities to take responsibility. The school council helps to make important decisions such as your dining hall rules. You tell me how much you appreciate the 'friendship force' at playtimes. I hope that you continue to work hard and keep enjoying school. Thank you once again for telling me so much about your school. Yours sincerely Judith Rundle HMI Lead Inspector

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I hope that you continue to work hard and keep enjoying school. Thank you once again for telling me so much about your school.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle HMI
Lead Inspector