

St James Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103450 |
| Local Authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 323830 |
| Inspection date | 14 July 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Joyce Cox |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 199 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Patrick Doyle |
| Headteacher | Janette McMahon |
| Date of previous school inspection | 9 May 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Leach Heath Lane Rednal Birmingham B45 9BN |
| Telephone number | 01214 532638 |
| Fax number | 01214 579354 |

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|--------------------------|--------------|
| Age group | 4–11 |
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Introduction

- The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:
- the effectiveness of the strategies used by senior leaders and staff to ensure more able pupils attain high standards especially in writing at Level 5
- how effectively leaders and managers at all levels are involved in school improvement and in developing assessment
- the effectiveness of the systems in place to sustain consistently high standards and achievement. Evidence was gathered from: senior leaders' self-evaluation; assessment records; observation of the school at work and discussions with staff, pupils, parents and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, are not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St James is a smaller than average sized Catholic primary school serving the parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour on the outskirts of Birmingham. An average proportion of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and an above average number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The main needs are moderate learning difficulties and autism. The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. The school currently has 30 Reception-aged children who are taught in the Early Years Foundation Stage class. School awards include Healthy School Status and the Activemark. St James' School is a member of the 'Border Busters' extended provision cluster. Fourteen schools work closely with local agencies, businesses, and voluntary groups and communities with the aim of improving the lives of children, young people and families living in the cluster area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This school provides its pupils with an outstanding education, both in their academic achievements and in their personal development. Parents overwhelmingly endorse the school's work. One commented, 'There is an excellent balance between academic advancement, personal character building and enjoyment in activities such as drama, music, art and sport.' Inspectors agree with this parent's view. Parents also value and appreciate the many extended services provided by the 'Border Busters' cluster. The school's strong ethos is shown in the outstanding care, guidance and support provided for all pupils. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are rigorous and are effectively applied in supporting all pupils.

The school has improved significantly since its last inspection. Exceptionally high standards at the end of Year 6 have been maintained as all staff continue their relentless pursuit of excellence. Significant strides forward include increased opportunities for pupils to choose how to contribute, discuss, negotiate, plan and perform and present their own work. For instance, Year 6 pupils are currently enthusiastically involved in devising and adapting songs and dances for their imminent end-of-term production of 'Oliver'. In addition, the introduction of a creative curriculum has proved to be extremely popular both with pupils and parents. This exciting curriculum has not only succeeded in raising pupils' achievement in music, art, dance and drama but has also significantly increased pupils' confidence and self-esteem. High staff morale and exceedingly ambitious, challenging and determined leadership indicate an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

One of the main reasons for the school's exceptional success in all areas is that the headteacher's inspirational leadership encourages others to have the highest possible aspirations for themselves and the pupils. Working very closely with her deputy headteacher, she has skillfully developed a staff team who strive constantly for excellence. The leadership team's highly ambitious vision is manifest in the exciting, stimulating and vibrant learning environment. Bright spacious corridors and classrooms filled with high quality displays convey the excellent achievements of all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the high expectations of all staff. For instance, many Year 2 pupils and parents fondly describe a recent high quality cross-curricular topic about Australia. Pupils clearly learnt many interesting new facts about the country and enjoyed a successful Australian day and chances to create Aboriginal art. Pupils say they especially enjoyed a visit from a didgeridoo expert.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a happy start to their school days and make exceptional progress. From a below average point on entry in terms of their language and literacy skills, all children attain above average standards on entry to Year 1. Pupils' achievement is excellent in the rest of the school so that by the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards that have, over many years, been consistently well above average and often exceptionally high. Pupils reach very challenging targets by the end of Year 6 and attain exceptionally high standards in reading, mathematics and science. In 2008, results indicated that the number of Year 6 pupils attaining the higher Level 5, whilst still well above national averages, was very slightly lower in writing than in reading, mathematics and science. Senior leaders immediately noted this and implemented highly effective strategies, such as using exciting curriculum experiences, to encourage all pupils to write and providing increased opportunities for guided reading, which had an immediate impact on raising achievement and standards further.

Another reason why standards are so high is that the quality of teaching is outstanding. This has a considerable impact on pupils' achievement. Relationships and pupils' behaviour are exemplary in all classes and, consequently, pupils are extremely well motivated and learn exceptionally well. Staff ensure that all pupils enjoy their work and feel they can succeed. There are clear strengths in how work is planned, how time is managed and how effectively staff and pupils use computer technology, and in staff's high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. In addition, all pupils are very involved in their own learning and are consulted about topics and actively encouraged to pursue their own lines of enquiry. A team of talented and competent teaching assistants, parents and volunteers provide excellent support to teachers and pupils.

Staff make excellent use of precise assessment information to record and track pupils' progress. Pupils are understandably very proud of their school and their teachers, saying such things as, 'This is a very happy place, we care for each other and we all get along well with our teachers who deal sensitively with our problems.' Pupils' obvious love of school is reflected in their good attendance. They get on extremely well together and enjoy taking on responsibilities through being school councillors, raising considerable amounts of money for charity, being prayer friends and helping younger pupils with their reading. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and is central to the school's work. Special areas for reflection in all classes, regular Masses and weekly prayer assemblies provide pupils with a strong spiritual dimension to their learning .

The school's commitment to achieving community cohesion within school and with the local community is good. This is reflected in the school's inclusive ethos; new pupils and visitors are made to feel very welcome and valued and pupils show very good tolerance and understanding of each other's differences. Pupils also learn about community cohesion through studying activities such as African drumming days, a French day and visits to many different places of worship. Many pupils especially enjoy competing with other pupils all over the world in an online 'mathletics' programme which has considerably improved their attainment in mathematics. Multicultural Week celebrates similarities in faith and cultural beliefs. The relatively weaker areas are pupils' knowledge and understanding of being part of the United Kingdom and wider global communities. Pupils' excellent academic skills and their mature personal skills prepare them exceedingly well for later life and learning. The excellent curriculum enables pupils to make interesting and meaningful cross-curricular links. Consequently, all pupils have memorable learning experiences which they recall with pride and huge enjoyment. There are outstanding opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively in the wide range of exciting clubs and enrichment activities.

Pupils have an excellent awareness of, and commitment to, personal safety and healthy active lifestyles. The highly effective partnership with parents is evident in parents' extremely positive comments about the school. Excellent links with a wide range of outside agencies ensure the best possible support to further all pupils' academic and personal well-being. The well-informed governing body works closely with the school to evaluate its provision rigorously and constantly seeks innovative ways to improve it still further. The school is very popular with parents and rightly deserves its excellent reputation in the local community.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Effective induction arrangements and outstanding partnerships with parents ensure that all children settle quickly, happily and feel safe. Children make excellent progress in all the areas of learning, and especially in their writing skills. By the time they enter Year 1, more able

children can write several sentences unaided. During the inspection, they confidently wrote invitations for their underwater tea party, skilfully using alliterative names such as Leah Lobster and Sally Starfish. By the end of the Reception Year, the vast majority of children are working above the levels expected for their age. Staff ensure that activities are stimulating and maintain children's interest both in class and outside, with an excellent balance between child- selected and adult-directed learning. Children's personal development is excellent and they cheerfully work and play together very well. Effective use is made of the outside area as a natural extension of the classroom, although this needs to be developed still further to increase opportunities for children to investigate and explore. Excellent leadership and management is reflected in the high aspirations of the staff and the excellent progress made by the children. Parents say they are 'delighted with their children's academic and personal progress' and appreciate the excellent care given to their children. Many particularly comment on their children's Year 5 'prayer friends' who care for them so well throughout their first year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of being part of the United Kingdom and wider global communities.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| 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 capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 1 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 1 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| 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

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 1 |
| 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? | 1 |

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 |
| 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**

15 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James Catholic Primary School, Birmingham B45 9BN

We really enjoyed visiting your school and I am writing to thank you for an extremely interesting and happy day. Highlights for us included watching the Year 6 rehearsals for 'Oliver', seeing how much you enjoyed listening to the author Eamonn Reilly who wrote the 'Horrible Harriet' books, and looking at the amazing displays of your work. Thank you to the guides who did a superb job of showing us around the school. We agree completely with you and your parents that you go to an excellent school.

The outstanding teachers make learning fun and enjoyable and you reach high standards in your work. Children in the Reception class get an excellent start to school life. You have an excellent understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and it was good to hear how much you and your parents enjoy your MADD (music, art, drama and dance) activities. You are really well cared for at school and you receive excellent support in your learning and in your personal development. Another strength, is the impressive way in which the headteacher and the deputy headteacher lead the school and makes sure it is a very welcoming, happy and successful place. We feel you, the pupils, are another huge strength, with your excellent behaviour, your hard work, and tremendous contribution to school life, and in the mature way in which Year 5 and 6 pupils care for younger children.

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher and governors have many excellent ideas to make the school even better. We agree with all their plans and also feel it would be helpful if the headteacher and staff could help you learn even more about other pupils' lives in the United Kingdom and abroad.

We send our very best wishes to all of you for the future.

Yours faithfully

Joyce Cox

Lead inspector