

St James's Church of England School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105266
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	324193
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Brine HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1051
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Steph Dnistrianskyj
Headteacher	Mr C Atkinson
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	Lucas Road Farnworth Bolton Lancashire BL4 9RU
Telephone number	01204 333000
Fax number	01204 333201

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St James's Church of England School and Sports College is a larger than average 11–16 mixed voluntary aided comprehensive school. It was awarded specialist sports college status in 2005. It draws pupils from a wide catchment area within and beyond Bolton. The proportion of pupils who receive free school meals is below average. It has a higher than average proportion of pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage with special educational needs is below average. The school has achieved a Sportsmark and the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark. It is also recognised by a number of national sports bodies as competent to deliver their coach education programmes. It is currently seeking a Healthy School 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 a number of outstanding features. Parents and pupils are rightly very supportive and proud of the school.

Under the impressive leadership of its headteacher and senior team, the school has successfully raised standards and ensured that the progress pupils make is consistently good. A major strength of the school is the excellent provision it makes for pupils' personal development and their care, guidance and support. The key issues raised in the previous report have been addressed effectively and the school has a good capacity for sustaining improvement into the future.

Standards in the school are above average and rising. The achievement of all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good and improving. A key factor supporting this rising profile is the commitment to the development of pupils' overall well-being and sense of responsibility. All aspects of personal development are outstanding; pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their excellent attendance and behaviour. Pupils demonstrate maturity both in terms of their learning and in the way they engage with each other in lessons and around the school.

The progress pupils make is also promoted by the good quality of both the teaching and the curriculum and by the excellent care, guidance and support they receive. Teaching has a number of important outstanding features. At their best, lessons generate a genuine sense of excitement and pleasure in learning. The school has very good arrangements in place for tracking pupil progress and identifying and addressing areas of under-achievement. Very occasionally, where progress in lessons is satisfactory rather than good, planning can lack a clear focus and structure. The targeted support provided for pupils with specific learning needs is well managed and effective, and reflects the overall high quality of the care provided for all pupils. However, where this support is not present in lessons, tasks are sometimes not varied sufficiently to take full account of the needs of different groups of pupils. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils, although the school recognises that provision for pupils who are gifted and talented in areas other than sport and physical education (PE) needs further development.

The school's specialist sports status has made an impressive contribution to the pupils' education and to the way the school is working in partnership with the local community. The specialist provision benefits from energetic and committed leadership; the key targets for the specialism have been met. Pupil participation in sport is now very high and examination results in the areas of PE and in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved. The specialism has provided opportunities for all pupils to develop a range of social and leadership skills, and links with the local community and other schools have been strengthened further and are now outstanding.

St James's is a very harmonious school where relationships between the various ethnic and cultural groups are very good. The school's commitments to securing equality of opportunity for all, combating discrimination and promoting community cohesion are all excellent.

The successes of the school reflect the vision and open leadership style of the headteacher who, together with all the staff and governors, know the school very well and have successfully put in place the series of well-considered strategic improvements designed to enrich the quality of the pupils' education and raise standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of planning in the small minority of lessons where learning lacks clear focus and structure.
- Provide a wider range of opportunities for pupils who are gifted and talented.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well at this school. There is a clear focus on raising standards at all levels and issues related to achievement identified during the last inspection have been fully addressed. Pupils enter the school with a pattern of previous attainment just above the national average. They make good progress and by the end of Key Stage 3 the standards reached in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are all above national averages and broadly in line with the school's agreed targets. Good teaching leads to further good progress as pupils move through Years 10 and 11. There is a very positive upward trend in the numbers achieving 5 A*-C grades at GCSE and also in those achieving 5 A*-C grades including English and mathematics.

In 2008, results were well above the national average in most subject areas, demonstrating consistency in pupils' achievement across the curriculum. In the school's specialist subject areas, results were particularly impressive and met the school's targets. Very few pupils leave this school without a qualification. Students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. There is no significant variation in achievement between boys and girls, or between pupils from the different ethnic groups represented in the school. The school uses data well and sets challenging targets. Evidence from the inspection activities confirms the good progress made by pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

All aspects of the personal development and well-being of pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Attendance and behaviour are excellent reflecting the fact that pupils enjoy coming to school and have a very positive attitude towards their learning. They feel safe and free from being bullied. They demonstrate a very good understanding of the benefits of exercise and the importance of being healthy. This is reflected in the high level of participation in sports activities and in their recognition of the importance of healthy eating. Their very positive moral and social development is demonstrated by the very harmonious relations which exist between different groups of pupils and by the mature and responsible attitude they have towards their behaviour. Pupils work exceptionally well together and respond positively to the school's rewards system.

Pupils state that they particularly enjoy their PE lessons and additional after-school sports clubs and coaching. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community at many levels through, for example, involvement in the school's environmental action group. Many older pupils are trained to offer sports coaching to some of their younger peers. There is an active school council that has been instrumental in decision-making within the school. In lessons, there is good evidence to show that all pupils are developing the skills necessary for their future economic well-being and this success is reflected in the very high number of pupils who go on to further education, training or employment after they leave the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is good overall. A number of outstanding features are evident in many lessons and no inadequate teaching was seen. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they communicate with enthusiasm and energy. This, combined with good planning in the majority of lessons and the effective management of behaviour, encourages pupils to develop mature and positive attitudes towards their learning.

At its best, teaching is inspiring, fostering a genuine excitement and pleasure about learning; pupils are challenged by tasks which require them to think for themselves and take responsibility for their progress. Positive relationships within classrooms are prompted by the use of good humour and a sense of mutual enjoyment. Teachers usually explain the purpose of lessons well and use a wide range of engaging activities and resources to help stimulate interest and ensure pupils remain attentive and involved in their learning. Some outstanding use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning. Effective use is made of questions to prompt learning and to check pupils' understanding.

Pupils receive good feedback about how well they are doing and how to improve, although there is some inconsistency in the quality of marking. Occasionally, where lesson planning is less effective, learning can lose its focus and structure. Also where learning support staff are not present, tasks are not always varied sufficiently to take full account of the needs of different groups of pupils. However, when learning support is provided within lessons, this is of high quality and ensures pupils with specific learning needs make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curricular provision is good and all statutory requirements are met. The impact of specialist college status is apparent and all pupils receive an entitlement of two hours PE or sport each week. Pupils benefit from commencing their GCSE religious education course in Year 9; many go on to complete the course in Year 10. Pupils receive good advice and are able to select from a wide range of subjects as they enter Year 10. Opportunities to pursue vocational qualifications are good and are enhanced by off-site courses in specialist areas such as hairdressing, construction and motor vehicle maintenance. These features ensure that the curriculum is effective in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils.

Extra-curricular provision is outstanding. The extensive opportunities to participate in sport are taken up by large numbers of pupils. There is also a wide range of clubs and societies that are appreciated by the pupils. Although there is excellent provision for those pupils who are talented in sport, the school recognises that provision for pupils who are gifted and talented in other areas requires further development, particularly in planning to meet their needs in lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are outstanding. Child protection and other safeguarding procedures are fully compliant with current government guidelines. Vulnerable pupils and those with specific learning needs are well-supported and the school is proactive in liaising with relevant support agencies to meet their needs. Many parents of pupils in the current Year 7 wrote very positively about the arrangements to ensure their children are supported in their move into secondary education. The strong school ethos is underpinned by excellent systems and policies that support pupils in their learning and behaviour. New staff are trained in child protection procedures and all staff receive update training once every two years. The staff handbook is comprehensive and incorporates the full range of policies related to care and guidance.

The school's incident reporting system is innovative and supportive. It helps to track and monitor pupils' personal, social and emotional development both in regard to positive aspects of their progress as well as areas where support is required. The strong pastoral team work well together to provide very effective support systems for all groups of pupils. The school's support staff are skilled and well deployed in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The register of these pupils provides an impressive and extensive overview to ensure their needs are met effectively. There are very good systems in place for using data to track in detail the progress of all pupils, enabling staff to identify and address any areas of underachievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, together with the experienced senior leadership team, provides highly effective and purposeful direction to the work of the school. The school is supported well by its governors. A major strength of leadership is its commitment to raising standards in the context of securing the wider personal development of its pupils and ensuring the provision of care and support is of the highest quality. Both of these aspects are outstanding and are reflected in a palpable sense of community and harmony which pervades school life.

Common goals and high aspirations are pursued equally by staff and pupils and the school provides a very welcoming climate for learning. The school's commitments to securing equality of opportunity for all, combating discrimination and promoting community cohesion are all excellent and effective.

Systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the performance of the school are clearly established and understood by all. Staff share a good understanding of strengths and areas for further development. The academic progress of pupils is carefully analysed. The outcomes of this analysis are translated into well considered strategic initiatives to modify the curriculum to suit the needs of groups of pupils better, with a determined focus on raising standards and achievement.

Targets are challenging and the school is increasingly successful in meeting them. This is also the case for the sports specialism, which is a strength of the school and an exemplar of good practice. More effective monitoring at all levels, including that by subject leaders, has helped the school to resolve the key inconsistencies in pupils' attainment and progress identified at

the previous inspection. Subject and pastoral leadership is also good, although the school has recognised the need to ensure this high quality is consistent across the curriculum.

A wide range of staff at all levels are involved in a variety of well considered initiatives designed to raise further the quality of teaching and learning. Significant improvements have been made, for example, in lesson planning, the use of ICT and the use of assessment. The staff are working to ensure these are fully embedded across the whole school. The school is well staffed, and financial resources are carefully costed and matched to the priorities identified in the comprehensive and well-focused school development plan. Careful attention is paid to succession planning.

Excellent partnerships have been established with the wider community, including other educational institutions, partly as a consequence of the development work carried out as a result of the school's specialist status. The school has made good progress since its previous inspection and has good capacity for further improvement.

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 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/or disabilities make progress	2

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

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	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 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?	1

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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**

Inspection of St James's Church of England School and Sports College, Bolton, BL4 9RU

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us.

St James's is a good school with many outstanding features. We really enjoyed visiting your lessons and were very impressed by your attitudes towards one another and to your learning, and also by your excellent behaviour. You are rightly proud to be a member of the 'family' of St. James's. We appreciated the 'this smile's for you' cards you gave us, which we felt reflected the caring, harmonious nature of your school.

You told us you enjoyed school and your excellent attendance shows that this is so. You also told us that you feel safe and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. We were pleased to see that many of you take advantage of the wide range of excellent after-school activities on offer, particularly sports clubs. These, along with the opportunities you have in lessons, are helping you develop healthy lifestyles.

Your headteacher and the staff are working hard to support you in making good progress and, as a result, examination and test results have improved. Most of you make good progress because of the good teaching you enjoy and those very positive attitudes you have towards school. We have asked the school to continue its good work and make further improvements to make sure all your lessons are always really well planned so that all groups of pupils can make good progress. We have also asked the school to provide a wider range of opportunities for pupils who are gifted and talented.