

St James' CofE Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112297
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325570
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Elton

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.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	134
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	Mrs Dorothy Graham
Headteacher	Mrs Jan Potter
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Whitehaven Cumbria CA28 7PZ
Telephone number	01946 852662
Fax number	01946 696490

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school, where a large majority of pupils are of White British origin. Of those from other ethnic groups, few require support for learning or have English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost half of the school's pupils live outside the school's designated catchment area. The school has an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and manages a Breakfast and After School Club.

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' Church of England Infants is a good school with some outstanding features: the personal development of pupils is excellent; the curriculum is vibrant; pastoral care for pupils is very effective; equality is successfully promoted and contribution to community cohesion is exemplary. By its close links with parents, community, church, and educational partners the school fulfils its mission statement, '...to develop each child to their full potential in a caring Christian environment, which bonds home, school and community.' The school is exceptionally popular with parents, many of whom live outside the area. 'Very impressive,' writes one such parent, 'I am amazed at my child's enjoyment and good manners. Well worth the walk up the hill!' Others comment on 'the very approachable staff', the many efforts to keep parents informed, the good progress pupils make and 'the very enjoyable extra-curricular activities.'

When children enter Reception they generally have skills typical for their age group, with some aspects of language and number slightly lower. By the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. This represents good achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers, as do pupils with English as an additional language. This is due to the school's highly successful inclusion policies. Most pupils enjoy school and feel happy and safe there. This is reflected in their good attendance and excellent behaviour. Pupils have a sound understanding of healthy lifestyles. Awards such as Healthy School Status and Activemark confirm this. Pupils are very confident speakers because the school provides them with a sense of their rights and responsibilities. Evidence of this is seen in their appreciation of gardening, recycling and enterprise activities. Children have a good appreciation of different cultures and creeds because this aspect is prominent in the curriculum and pupils help local people with aid projects abroad.

Teaching and learning are consistently good: staff work well as a team, sharing their expertise and disseminating their knowledge of new initiatives effectively. They establish good relationships with pupils, use time and resources well to maintain pupils' enthusiasm and accurately match work to ability. Clear explanations are always followed by frequent practise to secure learning. The curriculum is outstanding. It has variety, appeals to all learning styles and incorporates and extends the pupils' own interests. It provides pupils with very effective basic skills, excellent personal development, an ability to cooperate with others and much enthusiasm for learning. The school takes great care of its pupils and their individual needs. As a result pupils grow in confidence because they feel safe and experience success. The school works well with outside agencies to ensure pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the appropriate help. Pupils are well supported and are given good guidance to improve their work. Current systems for tracking pupils' progress do not enable all staff to access data easily, and this limits the school's effectiveness in its use of such data. The school's system for tracking progress needs further development to provide easier accessibility. This would enable staff to analyse and interpret data quickly.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school very well in its quest to raise pupil achievement and continuously seeks to improve resources towards this end. Staff and governors share this commitment and all work well together as a team. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and has good capacity to make any necessary improvements. It currently provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the EYFS is good. Children enter from a number of pre-school settings. They settle quickly and make new friendships because great care is taken to ease their transition with good parental communication; in addition, children visit the school prior to starting, and staff visit the pre-school settings. They also benefit from good leadership and management. This ensures effective adult-child ratios, well equipped classrooms and very effective extended school provision, which develops many of the concepts taught in school. Older Reception children enter a mixed class of Year 1 and Reception, younger children a class for Reception children only. Staff in both classes work well together providing a similar range of interesting activities, indoors and out, to secure children's overall development. Teaching and learning are good; basic skills are well consolidated; drama is used successfully to project into the feelings of a character and staff interact effectively with children during independent activities. Occasionally, activities need to be organised into smaller steps, such as word sorting activities prior to sentence making. Children, nevertheless, enjoy a challenge and are very happy in their learning. In both classes a high standard of care with good procedures for behaviour and organisation make children feel safe. Children's personal development is outstanding. Children listen to each other, work extremely well together and show respect to adults. When they enter Reception, their skills are broadly typical of the age group, but language and number are slightly below. Because of good provision a large majority enter Year 1 having reached national expectations, with a minority exceeding them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend and refine the school's tracking system so that information is easily accessible to staff in order to raise achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When pupils enter Year 1 their skills are broadly typical for the age group. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. This is confirmed by test results at the end of Key Stage 1. Similar high standards have been maintained for a number of years, and were exceptionally high in 2006. The school's success is due to consistently good teaching and learning, an excellent curriculum, which motivates pupils to learn and the school's successful involvement of parents in their children's learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do as well as their peers because there is early identification of their needs and appropriate catch-up materials. In reading and writing girls outperform boys, although there is little difference in their mathematics attainment. Staff work hard to bridge the gender gap using materials that capture boys' interests, and timed activities to focus attention.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding, as is spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Most pupils love school, feel safe and are very keen to learn. This enthusiasm is most obvious in lessons, where they listen well and are keen to answer. Their knowledge about health and safety is very secure. Most children enjoy the school's healthy lunches and the energetic Wake and Shake, Huff and Puff exercises, which keep them alert throughout the day.

Information and communication technology (ICT), extra-curricular activities and events, involving church and community are very popular and the pupils speak with pride about raising money for sports equipment, harvest festivals and helping local missionaries in Bangladesh. The variety and enjoyment of their experience gives them the incentive to join community groups, such as drama and dancing. Pupils say that there is very little bullying in school but if it does happen it is quickly resolved. Pupils describe all adults who work in school as 'kind' and willing to help. They respect the school's efforts to keep them secure and are very keen to take on responsibilities at lunchtime, in the yard and during lessons. Most pupils are confident expressing their opinion. Some are even assertive, justifying their viewpoints, vigorously! In group sessions pupils cooperate very well. This, along with their effective basic skills and excellent behaviour well prepare them for junior school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make good role models, especially of spoken English. They accurately adapt resources to pupils' needs and always extend on previous learning. All staff are enthusiastic in lessons and therefore motivate their pupils well. Instructions are always clear and pupils begin their independent work promptly. Phonics and writing are particularly well taught because lessons are tightly focused and skills are well consolidated. Teaching assistants work well with individual pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with small groups during independent activities. Sometimes opportunities to extend language and learning during full class sessions are missed. Some outstanding teaching and learning was seen during the inspection. In such lessons, language was used well across the curriculum and pupils made very good progress. This was largely because they had a clear understanding of how to improve their work and staff challenged them to include all the necessary features. Teachers' marking is very constructive: it praises achievement and indicates how improvements can be made.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum and other activities are outstanding. They ensure pupils' learning is exciting, well balanced and relevant. The school rightly gives prominence to the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and secures them imaginatively across the curriculum. Pupils have plenty of opportunities for practical, investigational work. This improves pupils' skills of observation, fair testing and explanation. It also excites their environmental curiosity. Pupils are keen to explain recycling projects and school grounds improvements. Parents are encouraged to share their interests and musical talents during activity week. Pupils participate in Chinese New Year celebrations, church and school fairs; they are also enthusiastic about special physical events, such as Jump for Heart and disco dancing. Staff plan the curriculum to develop pupils' own interests and to involve them in creative projects with appropriate visits and visitors. Pupils also learn from the community by watching a crane lifting a portacabin into the church yard and by searching the neighbourhood for materials such as wood and metal.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Aspects relating to pastoral care are outstanding. All statutory requirements are in place, health and safety risk assessments are regularly updated and there is a rolling programme for staff training in first aid and child protection. From Reception to Year 2, pupils' personal development is given priority. The school assumes responsibility for school meals and pupils learn about healthy eating by eating nutritious food. In addition, the school's extended school facilities give pupils the opportunity to relax and learn in a very caring and familiar environment, while parents are unavailable.

Most aspects of academic guidance are good. There is early identification and good provision for pupils learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff assess pupils' development regularly and ensure future teaching matches individual needs. They also ensure the curriculum is progressive and that pupils recognise their achievements and know what to do to improve. The school's tracking system for pupils' progress needs further development. Currently, information is not easily accessible and staff do not make full use of the system to accelerate pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has an excellent overview and sets a clear direction for improvement, which she communicates well to governors and staff. A hard-working deputy, who ensures the professional development of all staff, ably assists her. The school is well led and organised; it has a very friendly and supportive atmosphere, where everyone thrives. As a result staff share ideas and help each other. Morale is good and staff are keen to be involved in new initiatives, which they adapt to meet pupils' needs. The appointment of a school bursar has released time for senior managers to focus on raising pupils' achievement. The governors identify strongly with the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Their roles are clearly defined and they ensure their effectiveness by monitoring aspects of the school, working alongside staff and pupils and keeping abreast of new developments. In recent years the staff and governor team have been very successful in enhancing the school's accommodation, grounds, facilities and extended school services. These have had a very positive influence on the quality of care and the curriculum that the school now offers and this in turn has kept achievement high.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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	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	2

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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**

17 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St James' CofE Infant School, Cumbria, CA28 7PZ

Thank you for the welcome you gave me when I inspected your school. You were very helpful to me. I was most impressed with your excellent behaviour and enjoyment of your learning. You attend a good school. Some parts of its work are outstanding. The projects you study are very exciting. I'd love to go on some of your visits and work with some of the artists who visit you. No wonder you speak with such enthusiasm about your learning! The staff take great care of you and make you feel very safe and secure. Most of you know what you have learned well and what you need to do to improve. This is because you receive good support and guidance. Your teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Your teachers are very successful at teaching phonics and writing. They explain things so clearly and you get plenty of practice to make sure you learn well and remember. By the time you go to the Junior School you will have learned some very important skills, know how to cooperate with others and understand the importance of responsibility. I have asked your school to do one thing to help you in your work. Staff have lots of accurate information about your progress but it takes time to get all this information together. I have therefore asked if staff can

- Make a better system so that information about your progress can be found quickly and in a much clearer way. This will be helpful when your teachers make decisions about your future education.

I know that your headteacher, staff and governors will be successful in this as they have been in all other aspects. I hope you continue to enjoy school and to attend regularly. Please thank your parents for their questionnaires. Their comments were most helpful.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Elton

Lead inspector