

St James School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113507
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	325830
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	623
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Back
Headteacher	Helen Salmon
Date of previous school inspection	0 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 22 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents, the virtual learning environment and students' work. They also scrutinised 138 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers and questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Exactly how good is the achievement of students throughout the school and particularly in mathematics?
- Does the provision meet the needs of all students, including those with literacy difficulties and minority groups, to ensure outcomes are equally strong for all students?
- What exactly are the features of teaching, learning and assessment which are promoting enjoyment and helping students make the best progress they can, given their starting points?
- How effective are middle leaders in supporting the senior leaders' drive for improvement?

Information about the school

St James School has specialist status for mathematics and computing and is a National Challenge school. It is smaller than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. It has recently had an increase, to 12%, in the proportion of students speaking English as an additional language. Eighteen languages are now spoken across the school. The main languages are Dari, Polish and Arabic. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above the national average. Included in that number are students who require support with literacy and/or communication, and those with behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. A small number of students are in public care.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St James is a good school. There have been significant improvements in many areas since its last inspection. The school enjoys the overwhelming support of its parents and carers: 93% of those who responded to the questionnaire state that their child enjoys school. Attainment, which was very low four years ago, is now in line with national averages. All groups of students make good progress over their five years at the school. Behaviour is now good and has a big part to play in the positive way students approach their work. Attendance has also improved and is above average. Students' personal development is good and the school has ensured that the students develop outstanding skills for the future. Most students who spoke to inspectors and completed the questionnaire said that they felt particularly well prepared for 'life after St James'.

The school has made radical changes to the curriculum and the way it meets the needs of its students is now outstanding. It is becoming increasingly personalised whilst remaining broad and balanced. The care, guidance and support the school give to its students are also outstanding. The school is totally inclusive in its approach and the first rate support given to all students, including the most vulnerable, helps them learn and develop well. Its procedures for keeping students safe are outstanding.

Teaching is good and promotes learning well. Teachers plan well and are clear what they want their students to achieve in lessons. Not all teachers are, however, planning clearly enough for exactly how different needs could be met. During the inspection, there were some good and outstanding examples seen of students' working independently and of them being involved in their own assessment and that of others. This good practice is not yet consistent across the school.

The senior and middle leaders have a very clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of provision overall and plan well for improvement. The steps taken to improve teaching and learning in particular have been extensive and robust and teachers have involved themselves well in professional dialogue about practice. The extensive range of partnerships with other providers and outside organisations underpins its work and contributes exceptionally well to students' well-being and education as well as to staff development. The school promotes community cohesion well but planning for its development is insufficiently systematic. The school has made significant efforts to improve engagement with parents and carers. These have been successful and are a good basis for parents' and carers' greater involvement in the decision-making process which is not yet in place.

The headteacher's dynamic leadership has been a critical factor in creating a vision that is shared, not just by senior and middle leaders, but by all staff. The progress made

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since the last inspection is testimony to the school's good capacity to improve. The major changes for the better are recognised by staff, parents, carers and students alike as is the role of the senior leaders in those changes. As one teacher wrote, 'The head and deputy lead the school superbly.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve learning and progress in lessons by ensuring that all teachers:
 - develop students more consistently as independent learners
 - plan systematically to meet the needs of all learners
 - involve students fully in assessment of their work.
- Develop a more systematic approach to the promotion of community cohesion.
- Involve parents and carers more in the decision-making processes of the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students apply themselves well in lessons and are acquiring knowledge and making good progress across a range of subjects. They talk well about their learning, and the impact of the Learning for Life programme in Years 7 and 8 is evident in the way students apply skills such as collaborating and researching in other subjects. Students respond well to opportunities to work in groups and independently. They have a good idea of how well they are learning and talk well about what they need to do to improve their work. When lessons are too teacher directed students find it difficult to maintain interest.

Attainment has risen steeply in the last three years. In 2009, 41% of students attained five A* to C grades including English and mathematics as compared to 17% in 2007. Attainment in Year 11 in mathematics was still below average in 2009, but current data and observations of lessons indicate that standards are now satisfactory in the subject. Big improvements have been brought about in English through a combination of targeted intervention and good teaching which is remarked on by students. The school's own analysis shows that students exceeded challenging targets in 2009, making good progress from their starting points in Year 7. Students currently in Years 10 and 11 are also on target to continue the upward trend. There is no disparity in the progress made by different groups. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make as good progress as their peers because of strong support and targeted literacy intervention.

Students told inspectors that they felt safe in school and this is a view strongly endorsed by parents. Students felt that they were listened to and their concerns taken seriously. A small minority of students who completed the questionnaire felt that behaviour was not good. This was not the view of the inspection team nor of the students with whom inspectors spoke. The number of exclusions has rapidly declined in the last two years and the support offered in the behaviour centre has kept students in education who might otherwise have been excluded. Students understand how to keep themselves

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healthy and realise the risks associated with drugs and alcohol. They value their school and many take on responsibility to contribute to the school and the wider community in roles such as prefects, members of the school improvement group, and sports leaders. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and show a high level of acceptance of other cultures. This has helped those students from minority groups and those with English as an additional language to feel integrated and welcomed in the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Relationships in the classroom are good and the vast majority of teachers manage behaviour well. Behaviour only becomes difficult to manage when students are expected to sit too long without actively participating. Teachers encourage students to listen and the best lessons provide creative opportunities for students to talk at some length about their work. Teaching assistants are well used and well briefed. Teachers promote a culture of aspiration by setting challenging targets and showing students how they might achieve those targets. They show a good understanding of data and how it can be used with students for target setting and monitoring of progress. Some good examples

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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of self and peer assessment were seen in art and dance and led to significant improvements in the students' work, but this approach is not consistently used. In the best lessons, teachers are regularly checking on students' understanding and correcting misunderstandings.

The curriculum has played a very important role in raising achievement. Senior leaders have rigorously analysed students' outcomes and planned changes accordingly. The choice of pathways offered in Years 10 and 11, and now being introduced into Year 9, have created a better match to student needs and improved students' engagement with their work. There is a very high level of personalisation on offer; from opportunities for young apprenticeships and outdoor education to early entry at GCSE. The school's specialist status has contributed significantly to the curriculum and to students' outcomes particularly in information and communication technology. Aspirations to further and higher education have been significantly raised and have led to a big reduction in the proportion of students not in education, employment or training when they leave the school. The curriculum is well enhanced by a very wide range of well-supported enrichment activities.

Staff know students very well, and subsequently care, guidance and support are exceptionally well targeted. There is excellent support for potentially vulnerable students and guidance is tailored well to all groups including minority groups. The school's attendance tracking systems are very good and have resulted in a significant increase in attendance. There are very strong links with outside agencies and the school itself provides assertive mentoring support for targeted students in Year 11. Transition into the school is very well managed for both new students and their parents. Equally well managed is transition to the next stage of education or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's ambitious vision for raising achievement is shared throughout the school and there is a real feeling of a concerted drive for improvement. The headteacher and her deputy have been well supported by other senior leaders and, increasingly, by heads of department. There has been a considerable turnover in teaching staff and the headteacher has used this well to appoint the right staff, particularly at middle leader level. Some are newly appointed and have yet to have a consistent impact on students' achievement. There has, however, been an improvement in classroom practice. The

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school leaders are using continuing professional development well to build capacity for the future. Professional development is also well used in the school's rigorous programme of lesson observations to provide targeted support for teachers. The use of data to set challenging targets, to track students' progress and to identify underachievement is very effective. All teachers are involved and held regularly accountable for the progress of their students.

The governing body discharges its statutory responsibilities effectively and provides a good level of challenge to the senior leaders. Governors have been well involved in assuring the quality of safeguarding procedures which are of a high standard.

The school is very outward looking and has forged a wide range of partnerships, such as those with other schools and colleges, businesses and institutions of higher education. These partnerships have extended curriculum opportunities and broadened the outlook of students. The school uses a range of media, including its virtual learning environment, very well to communicate with parents. The school has analysed well what it does to promote community cohesion, and there is an extensive range of activities. It has been less systematic in the manner in which it has planned to improve those areas which are less strong.

The school places equality of opportunity at the core of its work. The sophisticated nature of monitoring and subsequent intervention ensures that there is minimal difference in outcomes for groups.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

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Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority showed high levels of satisfaction with the school. A few parents and carers expressed some concern that the school did not help them to support their child's learning. The inspection team noted their concern but judged links with, and information for, parents to be good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St James School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 138 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 623 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	27	91	66	10	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	55	40	79	57	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	43	63	46	11	8	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	45	33	79	57	9	7	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	45	33	83	60	5	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	28	81	59	14	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	18	93	67	12	9	2	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	51	37	71	51	7	5	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	47	34	78	57	7	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	36	78	57	4	3	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	24	81	59	13	9	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	53	38	68	49	7	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	48	63	46	4	3	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



13 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St James School, Exeter EX4 8NN

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us when we visited your school on the 11 and 12 November. We enjoyed the opportunities to get your views and to watch you learn.

St James is a good school. We think it is well led and can go on improving. Older students told us that it had changed amazingly in the last few years and we agree with them. Standards, which were very low three years ago, are now satisfactory and you all make good progress. We were pleased to see how much your attendance has improved and that you behave well. We think you are very well prepared for the time when you leave to go on to a job or a college or training course.

The curriculum is really well suited to your needs and the way in which the school looks after you is outstanding. The school makes exceptionally good use of all the partnerships it has to help you learn and improve your support. Teaching has improved, as many of you told us, but there are still areas teachers can get even better. You can help by responding well in class and by working hard for all teachers.

We have asked the school to:

- improve teaching by giving you more chances to work alone and to be involved in your assessment and by planning in detail what each of you should learn
- involve parents and carers more in the way decisions are made in the school
- plan more systemically for how St James will link with the community and the wider world.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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