

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115131
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326130
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	282
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	Father Peter Walker
Headteacher	Mr Jeff Graham
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Guildford Road Colchester Essex CO1 2RA
Telephone number	01206 865747

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2009
Inspection number	326130

Fax number

01206 791589

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized school that serves a very mixed area of central Colchester which includes some deprivation. The roll is rising rapidly. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. An increasing proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, over a third of the roll at present. These pupils, especially those from Eastern Europe, are often learning to speak English for the first time.

The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. When children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in Reception, their attainment varies considerably and, overall, is considerably lower than the levels expected nationally. The numbers of pupils moving in and out of the school are high. A significant number of pupils join part way through their primary schooling; over 60 have been admitted this year alone.

The school holds National Healthy Schools and Activemark awards. There are plans to open a pre-school setting on the site during the next school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Since its last inspection in 2007 the school has continued to improve rapidly. Its overall effectiveness is now good and it fully lives up to its motto of, 'A Christian school, serving the community'. Parents' and pupils' views of provision are very positive. These were summed up by one parent who accurately described the school as, 'A tightly run ship where no child gets left out'. The headteacher has been the very capable captain, steering this ship over the past few years. His commitment, enthusiasm and attention to detail have ensured that leadership and management are good and that standards continue to rise.

Academic achievement and progress are good. Very good systems of assessment in all age groups check and track each individual's progress. This includes pupils who find learning difficult, the considerable number who are learning to speak English for the first time and any who may be vulnerable due to home circumstances. The school also copes extremely well with the pupils who arrive part way through the year and parents testify to how rapidly these new children settle in. By the end of Year 6, pupils' results in national tests have been in line with national averages in recent years. Currently there is an appropriate focus on ensuring that able pupils reach even higher levels in their work. The school has accurately identified that such pupils can reach higher standards in writing which, like the national picture, lag behind reading.

Pupils thrive in their personal development and well-being because they are cared for and supported very well. They enjoy school a great deal. They understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and personal safety and this influences what they do and how they behave. Pupils have a very real voice in the development of their school and this is reflected in the care and pride they show in it.

Better pupil progress is a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum. These are now good. Senior staff, with local authority support, have continued to offer regular professional development to all classroom staff. The school is not complacent and recognises that teaching, while mostly good, still varies between classes. It is right in its ambition to ensure that more lessons are good or outstanding. As part of this, there is a timely initiative to check that pupils with particular gifts or talents are identified and supported more consistently.

The spirit of teamwork among staff is strong. There are highly productive links with the parish and wider community. Staff do all in their power to make parents welcome, including those who are quite hard to reach. Governors are active and experienced and support the school's work well. One referred to the 'buzz' about the school that typifies its warm, purposeful ethos. Staff and governors set challenging targets for further improvement and have good systems for judging how successful their initiatives are. They are somewhat modest in their evaluations of the school's effectiveness but this is a reflection of the high expectations they have of themselves and of the pupils. The school's many achievements in recent years demonstrate its good capacity for the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff work closely with parents and induction is carefully planned so that Reception children get off to a good start. Transition to Year 1 is equally effective. Good quality teaching, and the high priority given to children's welfare, ensures children make good progress in all their learning

because activities closely relate to their starting points and needs. However, because starting points are low, especially in language and communication skills, children's attainment by the end of the Reception year is below the levels expected nationally.

Interesting and imaginative activities strongly emphasise children's independent learning skills. Staff are skilled at encouraging children who have limited understanding of English. Planning is based securely on close assessment and tracking of each individual. Personal development and well-being are promoted effectively. Children enjoy the responsibility of selecting and preparing food for snack times and happily help clear away afterwards. Children sustain concentration well because activities, both inside and out, arouse their excitement, interest and curiosity. Both the indoor and outdoor areas have been enhanced very well in recent years and provide a safe and stimulating environment. Staff work very effectively as a team and senior leaders have a clear overview of standards and provision for this age group. All the staff are reflective and keen to improve their practice further, such as by further extending the links with parents and pre-school settings.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning in all lessons reaches the good standard that is already evident in most.
- Plan more consistently for the needs of able pupils, including for how their writing will be improved, and for pupils with gifts or talents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school's tracking of pupils' individual performance shows that current classes make good academic progress. This is both towards their targets and when compared with their attainment at their starting points in the school. Any who are at risk of underachieving are identified quickly and appropriate support is provided. The small number of pupils with statements of special educational needs do well because their individual learning programmes are planned effectively.

After several years, during which standards in Key Stage 1 remained below average, the school's efforts have now resulted in substantial improvements. The Year 2 assessments this year show that standards in reading, writing and mathematics are in line with the national average. Writing standards remain below those reached in reading but the gap has closed substantially, reflecting the continuing initiatives in this aspect of literacy. Standards in the current Year 6 are close to the most recent national average in science but below average in English and mathematics. There have been numerous changes to the intake in this group during their time in Key Stage 2. Their performance represents good progress for the individuals concerned and the school has met or exceeded all the targets it set for Year 6 this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and permeates every aspect of school life. Uplifting assemblies raise self-esteem. Pupils grow in self-awareness, think in moral terms and reflect upon their feelings and actions. They have positive attitudes to school and are enthusiastic learners, particularly when lessons are interesting and activities relevant. They take pride in their achievements and talk with satisfaction about their progress. They

generally know their targets and regularly judge how well they are doing in relation to the objectives that teachers set for each lesson.

All pupils show respect for one another and the adults who help them. They are courteous and polite. Behaviour in lessons is good and pupils work and play together harmoniously. Through opportunities such as the recent residential visit, they learn about living and working together, while growing more self-confident individually. Attendance is satisfactory and is a continuing focus for improvement. Rigorous school systems have halved the number of persistent absentees this year. Pupils play an active part in the community, singing at festivals and supporting the church and charities. They speak proudly of their contribution to the recent celebrations of the school's 150th birthday. Pupils' good social skills and satisfactory academic standards prepare them soundly for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection because senior staff regularly monitor lessons and pupils' work, and advise on how learning can be developed. Crucial to the improvements has been ensuring that planning more precisely meets the needs of the wide range of abilities in each class. Lessons have become more effective as the systems to assess and track progress have been established and used to support lesson plans. The teachers and teaching assistants liaise well in planning activities. The quality of marking is generally good, though some inconsistencies remain between classes and subjects. Feedback to pupils on their literacy work is often better than on mathematics for instance. Pupils who are identified as needing extra help are well supported. At times, the needs of the most able are not addressed equally well. Activities sometimes lack the level of challenge needed to extend this group or do not exploit their ability to respond to opportunities to solve problems independently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' good personal and academic development. There is a strong emphasis on developing basic skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. Structured teaching of reading and writing and the good use of computers is now paying off, for example in the improved progress seen in Year 2 this year. Increasingly this focus on basic skills is within a framework that includes regular themed events, such as 'Going Global', and encourages the creative use of film and drama to inspire pupils' writing. The most recent of these events, an exciting Pirates' Day, was still successfully motivating pupils during the inspection. The school has rightly identified that there is further scope for extending activities such as these to forge interesting links between subjects and make learning more relevant to pupils' interests.

Pupils' experiences are considerably broadened through the numerous visits and clubs which include sport, music, drama and the arts. A daily breakfast club provides a well-organised and enjoyable start to the day for its members. The school is to be commended on the quality of lunch arrangements that give pupils access to a very well organised, healthy and sociable mealtime.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The staff care for pupils very well. All aspects of safeguarding are carried out rigorously to ensure the health, safety and well-being of pupils. Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that if they have a concern, they can seek and receive help from an adult. Academic guidance is good because pupils know their targets and have a good awareness of what they need to do to improve.

Inclusion of all individuals is central to the school's vision. While the full impact of action to guide more able pupils is yet to be seen, the progress of pupils who need extra support is very closely tracked and their provision monitored to make sure that their needs are met. Where possible, good links with specialist external agencies are made for these pupils. Where such expertise is in short supply, staff provide all they can within the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Staff and governors ensure an inclusive school which has a clear focus on welcoming and supporting every individual. The school promotes community cohesion well and thoroughly evaluates the impact of its practice. Effective partnerships have been formed such as with the church, sports bodies and other local schools. The school promotes aspects of global awareness well, for example through links with the minority ethnic groups in its diverse community. Parents value the school highly and those who responded to the inspection questionnaire were unanimous in their support. The staff team is organised to make best use of available skills. The senior staff maintain a clear brief for overall monitoring and this is done thoroughly. Over the past few years the school has had to concentrate on ensuring that its basic provision improved and the more junior staff have focused on this urgent and important priority. The impact of this has been that, while all staff have been effective in improving classroom practice, relatively few at this stage share the senior team's expertise in analysing school performance. Governors hold the school to account well and contribute to its further development. Together, staff and governors have a clear vision for the future of the school and show the commitment and skills to achieve their aims.

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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?	2
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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

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?	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	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

8 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Colchester CO1 2RA

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and talking to so many of you. We agree with you that yours is a good school.

These are some of the best things about it.

- Children get a good start to school in Reception.
- You are all very welcoming to the new families who join your school.
- You behave well and make good progress with your school work.
- You enjoy school, especially the special events that the staff provide, such as the Pirates' Day.
- The adults teach you well and help you with any problems.
- You make the most of all the activities that keep you healthy, such as your sports clubs.
- The teachers have good systems for checking that you all make good progress and are given some extra adult help if you need it.
- You and your parents like the ways that Mr Graham, the rest of the staff and the governors help your school to keep improving.

We have asked the adults to carry on with a few things to make your school even better. We would like the teachers to make sure that all of your lessons are as good as possible, so that you learn even more. We have also asked them to check that they provide enough activities for those of you who find learning easier, including continuing to improve your writing standards. We would also like those who have a particular talent, maybe in sport, art or music, to have opportunities to extend their skills. We are sure you will all rise to any further challenges the staff set you.

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

Yours faithfully

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector