

St James' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104820
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	335388
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Clarke

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Rodney Middleton
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Speed
Date of previous school inspection	0 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out at no notice by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with senior leaders, staff, the chair of governors and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, raising attainment plan, governing body minutes, pupils' work and documentation relating to keeping the pupils safe.

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

- the school's data on pupils' progress and provisional task and test results for Years 2 and 6
- the quality of teaching in lessons throughout the school, with particular focus on pupils' progress in lessons and the effectiveness of teachers' use of assessment to support learning
- pupils' behaviour in and around school and their attitudes to their learning
- the leadership's capacity to sustain the progress seen in the fourth monitoring visit in June 2009.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average urban primary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average as is the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The governing body runs a breakfast club for pupils each morning. The school has achieved the Healthy School status. It also achieved the Artsmark award in 2007 and Physical Education Sportsmark in 2008. The school was placed in special measures in February 2008 because it was failing to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

St James' Church of England Primary school is a satisfactory and improving school. Significant improvements have been made since it was placed into special measures. Staff and pupils are justifiably proud of their school. Key to the improvements has been the determination of the headteacher, ably assisted by senior leaders, who has driven the pace of change so that all staff are now securely focused on raising standards. Substantial improvements have been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children's progress is now good. Staff have recognised the need for increased rigour in pupil assessment and are now more accountable for pupils' performance. There has been a strong drive to improve teaching, embraced by all staff, in order to raise standards and, as a consequence, teaching is now good. This has led to improved learning and accelerated progress in lessons and has been a strong contributory factor in helping to eradicate underachievement. The local authority has given the school good support and this has been key in helping to improve teaching and raise attainment. Self-evaluation is accurate and perceptive. All staff are now aware of the areas for improvement and share the concerted drive for improvement evident in the school. The significant improvements seen in the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils demonstrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Provision for the youngest children is good. Children start in the Reception class with skills that are well below the levels expected for their age, and their skills are particularly low in personal, social and communication skills. They make good progress so that, although they remain below the levels expected by the time they reach Year 1, they have nevertheless achieved well. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics reflecting good progress overall, although progress and attainment in writing lag behind somewhat that made in other subjects. By the end of Year 6, standards are now broadly average overall, representing a much improved picture. School data and inspection evidence point to an improving position throughout Key Stage 2 with pupils' underachievement in writing being steadily eradicated. This is especially so in lower Key Stage 2 where the pupils have had less to catch up. However, although writing is improving and the teaching of it is becoming more effective, there remains more to do to improve standards further in this subject.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work have improved tremendously since the last inspection and they now talk enthusiastically about school. They enjoy practical tasks and talk enthusiastically about 'Creative Fridays'. Practical science sessions have led to greater enjoyment in their lessons, for example when Year 6 tested the effects of

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gravity by swinging buckets full of water over their heads. Pupils say they feel safe and staff take good care to ensure that any concerns they might have are dealt with promptly.

Parents and carers of children in the Reception Year group make a good contribution to their children's learning but such contributions have yet to impact on the pupils' learning throughout the rest of the school. The school's commitment to community cohesion is satisfactory, although pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to reflect on or have experience of meeting those who belong to different cultures or faiths. The school community works and plays well together and is a cohesive unit. Pupils care for one another and show each other consideration and respect when working in groups.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and improve progress in writing across the school by:
 - ensuring pupils have more opportunities to write at length
 - ensuring pupils always remember to use their punctuation skills when writing to improve the quality of their work
 - improving pupils' spelling.
- Provide more opportunities for parents to be actively involved in their children's learning.
- Help pupils to develop a wider understanding of communities beyond their own local and school community.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In lessons, pupils are keen to learn and they apply themselves to their tasks with diligence. They particularly enjoy practical sessions and in these they work with undoubted enthusiasm. Pupils' improved behaviour and attitudes to learning contribute to the better progress they are now making in lessons. They acknowledge the help and guidance given to them by staff and say that this helps them to improve their work. The older pupils talk about improving behaviour in and around school and reflect on a clear set of school expectations on appropriate behaviour. Pupils are considerate towards one another and understand that some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities need additional help to enable them to succeed.

Standards by the end of Year 6 have seen a significant improvement. This is because the consistently good teaching now seen in lessons is accelerating pupils' learning and progress throughout the school. Standards in reading, mathematics and science are broadly average, although standards in writing lag behind and in Year 6 remain well below average. However, this picture is not representative of attainment throughout the school, where standards in writing are moving closer to average. This is especially so in

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Years 1, 2, 3 and 4. Good teaching facilitated by very detailed assessments is driving up standards throughout the school. Past underachievement is being eradicated and the pupils' written work shows an increasing pride in presentation. Spelling remains an area for development and pupils do not always remember to use the punctuation skills they have learnt in English lessons in their other writing tasks. Progress overall throughout Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory, taking into account the pupils' starting points. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress through the specific help they have in class.

Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of healthy lifestyles and recognise the importance of sessions of 'Wake up and Shake up' in the morning before school begins. They take on responsibilities and play a constructive role in the life and work of the school. They take responsibility for selling healthy snacks at playtimes and older pupils act as peer mentors helping to settle minor playground arguments.

Attendance has improved and is average, and pupils and parents and carers are now more responsive to the need to attend regularly. Pupils use their information and communication technology skills well in a range of subjects and this is preparing them well for their future economic well-being. However, this aspect remains satisfactory overall because of their weaker writing skills. Pupils' spiritual development is good. Effective links with the church and the church community enable the pupils to develop a clear sense of Christian values and beliefs. Less well developed are the opportunities the pupils have to engage with communities beyond the locality and with peoples from different cultures and beliefs.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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

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	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3 3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Key to the significant improvements seen in teaching is the increased rigour of assessing pupils' progress and the good use of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning. A consequence of this good assessment is consistently good teaching which is helping to eradicate underachievement. All inadequate teaching has been eliminated. Pupils say they know exactly what it is they need to do to improve their work and helpful and accurate marking enables them to be crystal clear about their points for improvement. Teachers plan their lessons carefully and take account of the needs of all the pupils in their class. Support staff are used effectively and an appropriate level of challenge is required from pupils. Plenty of hands-on tasks and good use of the interactive whiteboards mean that pupils are engaged effectively in their learning and keen to get on.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is appropriately matched to pupils' needs. The focus on raising standards in English, mathematics and science has rightly been a priority. Recently, the school has embarked upon a more creative approach to planning the curriculum, which is currently undergoing a thorough review. Pupils are responding very positively to these changes which are enabling them to see how the learning in one subject links with that in others. They report excitedly about the engaging things they have done and speak with pride about the work they have completed. While pupils' writing skills still remain an area for development, the changes to the curriculum are now providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects.

Good care is taken of the pupils and the support and guidance they are given enables them to learn well in lessons. Vulnerable pupils, and those who need additional support, are well provided for and the school provides sensitive pastoral and constructive help to enable pupils overcome any difficulties they may have. Pupils who find it hard to attend regularly or who have emotional and behavioural issues are given good help so that they can make the most of their time in school. The breakfast club provides a welcome start to the day for the pupils who use this facility.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2 2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2
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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has been highly successful in creating an effective senior leadership team to aid her in driving forward school improvement. The skills of senior leaders are being strengthened through focused training and professional development. There is now a stable permanent staff team in place and this is adding to the sense of purpose and unity evident in the school. Teamwork is strong and staff are enthusiastic about their roles and recognise the significant improvements that have been brought about. Target-setting is rigorous. Targets are very demanding and all teachers are held to account for individual pupils' progress through regular meetings with the deputy headteacher to check that pupils are on track to achieve them. The school gains clear information about the different groups of pupils through its effective tracking systems and keeps a careful watch on the progress they make. As a result, achievement for all groups has improved significantly and ensures the school promotes satisfactory equality of opportunity. Increasing accountability and improved assessments alongside staff training have enabled teachers to improve their teaching and as a consequence, outcomes are improving strongly. Alongside this is a genuine desire shown by staff to share expertise and improve performance. It has led to a purposeful and enthusiastic staff team who have a determination to succeed. This has been accomplished through a concerted drive for improvement by the senior leaders who have taken great care that such improvements are thoroughly embedded throughout the school.

The governing body have sought diligently to aid the school in its drive for improvement. The governors discharge their statutory responsibilities and ensure that pupils are safe. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory.

The school has completed an audit for community cohesion and a policy and action plan are in place. The school is effective in ensuring that the school community works and plays together well. However, its strategy to strengthen pupils' understanding of the wider community and beyond is at an early stage of development.

Parents and carers are increasingly involved with their children's learning in Reception but this is less so further up the school. The introduction of fortnightly newsletters and school planners are just two examples of strategies the school has in place to encourage a more productive involvement by parents in their children's learning but more remains to be done in this aspect of its work.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3

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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in Reception are excited by their learning. They are engaged by a vibrant environment which actively promotes enquiry and investigation. Resources are easily accessible and promote independence so that the children are busy and active in their learning. Teaching is consistently good and often outstanding as the children are challenged as they learn. The mix of child-initiated and adult-led tasks is entirely appropriate and the outside area is used well to promote learning. All adults have high expectations of the children and encourage them to do their best. Staff promote good safe routines both indoors and outdoors and the children respond well to the good levels of care and help they are given. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good.

When the children start in Reception their skills are overall well below the levels expected for children of their age. Their communication skills and personal and social skills are particularly low. Careful attention and accurate assessments of exactly where the children need extra help and support mean that by the time they leave Reception, the children have made good progress, although their skills remain below the levels expected for their age.

The individual children's profiles show that parents and carers are fully involved in their children's learning and contribute to their own children's records. Importantly the children are asked about their learning, what they particularly like, find hard and want to learn next. All this information is carefully used to aid the teacher's planning. Parents and carers particularly enjoy working alongside their children, for example in the recent 'Bob the Builder Day', making and building together. Regular detailed systematic assessments are carefully recorded and give staff a very clear picture of exactly where the children are up to so that their learning carefully builds on what has gone before.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless the inspectors have specific reasons for the school to do so. In this inspection parental questionnaires were not sent to parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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.



23 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School, St Helen's, WA11 0NL

I am writing on behalf of the inspectors who recently visited your school to tell you how well we consider it is progressing. You will remember that in February 2008 your school was placed in special measures because you were not receiving an acceptable standard of education. I am happy to say this is no longer the case. Your school is now satisfactory and improving. Your headteacher and all the staff have worked hard together to make sure that things have improved. Now:

- children get off to a good start in Reception
- teaching is good so you all learn well in lessons
- standards in English, mathematics and science are rising
- your behaviour is much improved as is your attendance
- the teachers have a much clearer understanding of exactly where you are up to with your learning and so are able to really help you to improve your work.

As you can see you have much to be proud of and those of you we spoke to were rightly proud of your school. You told us that you particularly liked 'Creative Fridays' and the older pupils were looking forwards to their educational visit to the Museum in Liverpool. We know that the headteacher and all the staff have plans to improve your school even further. The inspectors and all the school staff agree that the school should continue to build on the improvements already in place by:

- making sure that you continue to improve your writing skills
- asking your parents to become more involved with your learning
- making sure that you have more opportunities to learn about the cultures and faiths of people beyond your immediate locality.

We know that you will do your best to help the headteacher and her staff to improve the school even further. You can help by trying to remember to use your punctuation skills each time you write different pieces of work.

Keep working hard, keep yourselves safe and enjoy your time in school.

With best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Judith Clarke

Lead inspector

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