

St James' CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109614
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324990
Inspection date	9 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	95
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 Kate Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Karen Luscombe
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Main Road Biddenham Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 4BD
Telephone number	01234352721
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the consistency of teaching and progress across the school, particularly in mathematics
- the role played by subject leaders in evaluating standards, teaching and achievement
- pupils' involvement in the school community and their own learning.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, scrutiny of school documentation, assessment, tracking and target setting information and discussions with the headteacher, staff, pupils and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

St James' is a smaller than average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils who need extra help with their learning, including pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is below that found nationally. A higher than average percentage of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds although none are at an early stage of acquiring English. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is provided for children in the Reception class. The school has gained the International School Award for its work on global learning as well as an Activemark for physical activity.

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' is a good school that enables pupils to leave well prepared for the next challenges in their lives. The school has a good track record of improvement and of moving forward at a good pace. This, together with the steely determination of the headteacher, indicates that the school is in safe hands for continued development. Many parents are more than happy with the quality of education the school provides, although a minority would welcome more information about their child's progress or class organisations. A comment from one parent was echoed by many when she said that the school provides, 'A great educational start where my child feels happy and secure.'

Attainment when children start at the school fluctuates between being in line with national expectations and occasionally a little above. By the time pupils leave school standards are well above the picture found nationally, although their problem solving and investigative skills in mathematics are at a lower level. Overall, this represents good progress for all different groups of pupils. However, the picture is a little more complex. In the EYFS and in Years 1 and 2 the consistently good, and at times, better progress results in standards by the end of Year 2 being very high. This flying start is usually built on in Years 3 and 4 and in 2007 standards for Year 4 pupils remained at a very high level, although staffing difficulties at the start of last academic year resulted in a dip in pupil progress. The school tackled the issue with rigour and, although pupil progress accelerated during the year, there was too much lost ground to make up and results for Year 4 pupils were below those expected, particularly in mathematics, although they remained high in reading. However, this accelerated progress has been sustained and the current Year 4 pupils are back on track to achieve their very challenging end of year targets.

How well pupils attain and achieve owes much to the quality of teaching which is consistently good, and at times, better. Teachers go the extra-mile in making lessons interesting and fun, with teaching assistants making a significant contribution. Relationships are a real strength. Work is usually geared well to the differing needs and abilities of all pupils and it certainly keeps them on their toes, although occasionally tasks are not pitched at a challenging enough level for some of the most able pupils. The pace of learning is often brisk and this helps to fuel pupils' motivation. There is little doubt that pupils are enthusiastic learners who want to do well and they readily take on board the constructive and helpful comments that are evident in teachers' marking. Good procedures are in place for assessing pupils' progress and challenging targets are set on a termly basis as to the National Curriculum levels pupils are expected to reach. This is further strengthened by the regular review meetings where teachers are held accountable for the progress of pupils in their class. However, the involvement of pupils in setting and reviewing their own targets is not yet an established feature of academic guidance.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the excellent attendance rates, and discussions with pupils show it is a community they are proud to be a part of. There is a strong sense of racial harmony and pupils demonstrate a genuine respect for the beliefs and traditions of others. They talk readily about their visits to mosques, temples and churches. Their cultural awareness is excellent, helped in no small measure by parents of different faiths who visit the school to talk about their beliefs and the school's impressive work as an International School. Here, links with schools and communities around the world reinforce the concept of pupils' place in a global community. Pupils' behaviour is good, although at times they are more ready to talk than listen to others! They have a good understanding of what is needed to follow healthy and safe lives and have an effective voice in decision making through the school council. They

readily take on responsibilities and participate enthusiastically in local community and fund raising events. They are now more than ready to take a greater lead in initiating and organising activities in the school community and beyond.

The school offers a stimulating and enriching curriculum. A good emphasis is given to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, although the school has rightly identified the need for the more rigorous and systematic development of pupils' problem solving skills in mathematics. The school has strong links with schools and communities in places as diverse as America and Bangladesh, Australia and Dubai and much work is integrated into the curriculum in learning about art, history, music and literacy from around the world. A good array of visits, visitors and participation in local happenings and after-school clubs add much to pupils' enjoyment of school as well as enhancing the sense of 'family and belonging' that wraps around the school. Pupils' enjoyment is further enhanced by the fact that they feel safe and valued and learn in a school where self-confidence and self-esteem is nurtured: a place where the individuality of pupils is both recognised and celebrated. Appropriate procedures are in place for safeguarding and child protection and health and safety procedures are robust. Good links with outside agencies supplement the school's effective internal mechanisms for supporting pupils with learning difficulties and for promoting the importance of excellent attendance.

Good schools usually benefit from good leadership and management and St James' is no exception. The headteacher has been the driving force in moving the school on since the last inspection and has brought staff, pupils and parents with her. A strong sense of team spirit pervades the life of the school. She has a very good grasp of the school's strengths but tackles identified weaknesses swiftly and rigorously through well-embedded systems for evaluating teaching, analysing data and the careful tracking of pupils' progress. Although improving well, the role that other teachers play in monitoring teaching and the performance of the school is not yet robust enough. Governors are very supportive yet challenging and know the school well. They make regular visits to the school and these are formally recorded and shared with the full governing body. Governors are increasingly taking a more proactive role in school development planning, although this is still work in progress.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

All children make good progress in the EYFS because of consistently challenging, supportive and stimulating teaching and a vibrant curriculum that provides a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. By the end of the Reception year children reach the early learning goals expected of five year olds with a number exceeding them. On-going assessment is used well to track children's progress and to plot the next steps in their learning. Staff work very well together. Children thoroughly enjoy their time in the Reception class and settle into school routines with ease and confidence. Provision is well managed because it ensures that strong partnerships are forged with parents. The welfare, health and safety of children is afforded a high priority and there is an accurate understanding of exactly what is needed to improve provision. This includes the necessity to provide a canopy for the outside accommodation to improve the learning environment and to evaluate ways of accelerating children's mathematical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that investigative and problem-solving skills in mathematics are taught in a systematic manner to help improve standards by the time pupils leave school.

- Ensure teachers play an effective and rigorous role in monitoring teaching, learning, standards and achievement and in doing so, help overcome identified weaknesses and to disseminate good practice.

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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	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?	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	2
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	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?	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**

10 September 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St James' CE VA Lower School, Bedford, MK40 4BD

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first like to say thank you for making me feel so welcome. I have told your teachers how polite and helpful you were. Through our discussions, it was good to hear how much you enjoy school and all the different activities you take part in. It was particularly good to see the links that you have with schools and communities around the world and how much you know about so many different places and cultures. It was good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

I found many good things about St James' and I have to say that I agree with you and your headteacher that it is a good school and a fun place to learn! Teachers and other staff make learning interesting and help you to make good progress and achieve well. The curriculum with the links with schools in different parts of the world, visits, visitors and the after school clubs all add to your enjoyment. The school is good at helping you to keep safe and healthy and goes the extra-mile in making sure you are safe and well supported. You have a good headteacher and together with all the teachers, staff and governors they form a strong team who are determined to provide you with a good quality of education.

There is another strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you, the children. You are enthusiastic and well behaved and are keen to do well. You know a lot about keeping healthy and safe and the way you all get on together is really good. Well done!

Even good schools like yours can get better. I have asked your headteacher and the teachers to help you reach even higher standards in mathematics and for all teachers to check more closely on how well you are learning and progressing. I know that your headteacher, the staff and governors want the school to be even more successful, and I know you will play your part by continuing to work hard, behave well and always remember to listen to what others have to say! I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Martin Newell

Lead inspector