

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118725
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313064
Inspection date	27 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Peacock
Headteacher	Daniel Turvey
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Sandrock Road Tunbridge Wells TN2 3PR
Telephone number	01892 522301
Fax number	01892 549271

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

the impact of the school's focus on personalised learning, especially on the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and on more able pupils in Year 2

whether the school's use of the 'Building Learning Power' programme leads to improved personal development, particularly in preparing pupils for the next phase of education.

The inspector gathered evidence on the day from discussions with staff, pupils, governors and others. A range of school documentation was examined and first-hand evidence was gathered from observing pupils in lessons and at play. Parents' views were gathered from questionnaires completed prior to the inspection and through talking to some at the start of the day.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's self-evaluation is not accurate, but some of its assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were unduly modest. Therefore, several judgements in this report are higher than the school's own.

Description of the school

The school is located in a relatively advantaged socio-economically area, but serves a wider region. Children start in the Reception class in either September or January. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, or whose home language is other than English, are low, although the number of bilingual speakers has increased recently. The school has the Healthy School award, Active Mark and a Safe School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It well deserves its extremely high reputation. Inspection evidence confirms the views of the overwhelming majority of parents who agree that this 'excellent school nurtures the pupils both academically and socially and has a very strong sense of community', as one commented. Pupils are very happy here, so a characteristic buzz of excitement and enjoyment in learning is evident everywhere around the school.

Pupils of all abilities make excellent progress from expected levels on entry. Outstanding achievement in reading, writing and mathematics leads to standards at the end of Year 2 which have been significantly higher than average for several years and are on track to exceed previous levels this year. The most impressive aspect of the school's success lies in the rich and exciting range of subjects and areas of learning in which pupils achieve so well. From the very start, a well-integrated and creative curriculum leads pupils to understand the links between subjects and ideas unusually well. The recent 'personalised learning' focus has been highly effective in stimulating pupils to 'learn at their own pace' as one parent put it, and in their own way, whilst encouraging and challenging them to move on swiftly once new learning is consolidated. There are many successful small-group or individual programmes, often of short duration, which are flexibly designed to prevent pupils from falling behind, to stretch more able pupils or to improve academic or physical skills. The success of this individually tailored approach is amplified by the success of the 'Building Learning Power' programme. This creatively enables pupils to understand, assess and improve the ways in which they learn. Through this, pupils become unusually advanced at questioning people, and ideas, and noticing things, which leads to excellent progress.

Outstanding teaching creates 'fun and enjoyment' in all aspects of school life, a refrain evident in pupils' comments and in the very high number of parents' responses. With a handful of exceptions, parents appreciate very highly indeed the school's outstanding care and individual support for their children, including the Christian ethos which underpins its successful provision. Children see 'learning as an adventure' as one parent put it. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the fun they have in 'learning stuff' from their 'friendly teachers'. Excellent relationships with parents ensure that they are, and feel, fully involved in their children's learning. The school is unusually successful at involving grandparents and other members of the community in its work, which adds to the massive range of active learning experiences for even the youngest children. Pupils, parents and staff frequently mention their appreciation that the whole school is learning sign language so that a recent entrant can understand everybody better. This is a very good example of the school maximising opportunities to include all pupils in its success. It has fired everyone with interest and enthusiasm for new ways to communicate ideas.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Attendance is high because pupils love coming to school, arriving happy and excited about days where they learn something new and different. They enjoy seeing their outstanding artwork and other displays which contribute significantly to the stimulating appearance of the school; 'cheery and inviting' in the words of a parent. Their outdoor environment is exceptionally good, with further plans to develop a woodland walk the subject of great current enthusiasm. Pupils' own contributions are significant, for instance in planning an outdoor classroom or the school council's new project about energy conservation. Excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding enables these very young pupils to give unusually reflective responses to questions about their learning and to ask sensitively phrased questions to clarify ideas. Pupils understand the significance of exercise

and eating properly to keep them fit and healthy. They are keen to eat the fruit and vegetables provided and to explain why these are important. It is a real pleasure to see pupils enjoying the excellent academic and personal learning which prepares them so well for their future and to read and hear parents' appreciation of all the school provides for their children.

Key to the school's success is the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher. He, in turn, emphasises correctly that this is also attributable to his excellent team of staff. A feature of the school is its concern to avoid complacency. Self-evaluation is regular and very insightful but some assessments are unduly modest. The school properly identifies that there are areas where performance could be even better. For example, they have accurately identified minor areas such as integrating better the assessments between the end of Reception and the start of Year 1, and improving standards in science further. These are pinpointed with characteristic, honest accuracy, followed by swift, forthright identification of ways to improve them. Because of this, the strong position reported at the last inspection, which left the school no issues for improvement, has been consolidated and improved further. Inspection findings show there are no major aspects which the school needs to improve. The school has no statutory targets, but sets itself a demanding agenda for improvement. The excellent governing body supports and challenges the school well, with governors fully involved in all aspects of school life. The school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Reception classes are a fully integrated element of the school, with all comments above relating equally to the Foundation Stage. Teaching is outstanding. Children get an excellent start to their education, with many parents commenting very positively on the speed with which their children settle into learning and the very good progress they make. Standards exceed expectations when they move on. Excellent indoor and outdoor spaces and facilities provide a highly stimulating environment where children cover all areas of learning very successfully. Their understanding of learning is exceptional, with, for instance, the 'noticing' and 'questioning' aspects of awareness beginning here very strongly. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are excellent, having stabilised well after the leader's extended absence last year. The degree of improvement since the last inspection is most marked in the Foundation Stage, particularly in the assessment of standards and accurate recording of progress across all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Integrate the assessments for the end of Reception and Year 1
- Raise standards further in science.

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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?	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

1 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St James' C of E VA Infant School, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 3PR

I am writing to thank you very much for making me so welcome in your school in March and to tell you what I found out about it.

- Yours is an outstanding school where you make excellent progress in all your learning. It was a real pleasure to be there and to see how much you enjoy all the things you do. I was also really pleased to talk to some of you and hear about all the fun you have in lessons and other activities.
- I agree with your parents who say that you are very happy and safe there and are pleased with how much you enjoy your learning. This is because all the adults really help you and you like the teachers a lot. All the staff take excellent care of you and find all sorts of interesting ways for you to learn new things every day.
- You understand your learning really well too, through things like asking sensible questions and noticing things around you. It was really exciting to hear about all the times you go out of class to learn in small groups or by yourselves, often for only ten minutes or so. This really helps your learning. Many other things like judo after school or the movement lessons before school help you too. The visits you make and all the interesting visitors, like the taxi-driver (and even the snake) who came while I was there, keep you even more interested.
- I found your behaviour excellent. Everyone was kind and polite to each other and to me, and this helps you understand other people well. A lot of people told me about the Makaton signing you are all getting so excited about, which is really helping you understand different ways of expressing ideas.
- The headteacher and all the staff do an excellent job in giving you such an exciting start to your education.
- There are no serious things to do to improve your school, but the staff are well aware of some things, like learning in science, which are already improving because of what they are doing, but could be even better. They will always be trying to improve the school and I feel certain you will help them to do that.

Thank you again for your welcome.

Yours sincerely

Janet Simms Lead inspector