

St James Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Gaunts Common, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 4JN

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Teaching is outstanding because staff have exceptionally high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers are very innovative and have the knack of introducing new learning in highly effective ways so that pupils make excellent progress.
- The curriculum is especially well designed to promote achievement, interest and engage pupils. It provides highly relevant and exciting activities that make learning very meaningful.
- From Reception to Year 4, pupils achieve exceptionally well. In reading, writing and mathematics attainment is high. Virtually all pupils reach at least the levels expected for their age and a much greater proportion than seen nationally exceed them, albeit more so in English than mathematics.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Consequently, pupils' behaviour and safety awareness is excellent.
- The headteacher is highly ambitious for the school and in her strive for excellence she is exceptionally well supported by staff and governors. Teamwork is excellent so very effective strategies introduced by one teacher are quickly shared across the school.
- These strengths are backed up by highly effective systems for checking on the school's work. Nothing less than excellence satisfies leaders; development planning and support for teaching are extremely effective.
- Governors' exceptionally strong commitment to first-hand monitoring ensures they are very well informed about teaching quality and its impact on pupils' achievement.
- The school has made excellent progress since its previous inspection and is exceptionally well placed to maintain its high-quality provision and pupils' high achievement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed nine lessons or parts of lessons of which seven were joint observations with the headteacher. The inspector heard a sample of pupils read and scrutinised a selection of pupils' written work.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, staff including senior and middle leaders, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 45 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and met with a small number of parents and carers bringing their children to school.
- Responses from the 14 staff questionnaires were analysed.
- The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents including the school's records on current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to planning and monitoring and safeguarding were also looked at.

Inspection team

Diane Wilkinson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St James is a smaller than average-sized first school where pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. It serves a rural area and the number on roll is rising.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported by school action is broadly average, as is the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average although it is rising. Currently, no pupil speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in local authority care, children from service families and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is well below average.
- 'The Cottage' pre-school shares the school site and also provides before- and after-school care for St James' pupils. This is run by a private provider and was not inspected at this time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the teaching of mathematics so that a greater proportion of pupils are able to exceed expected progress and so that achievement in mathematics is as good as it is in English.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- The skills of children on entry to the school are broadly at the levels expected for their age. They receive an excellent start to their education in the Reception class, making outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Their attainment is well above average by the time they are ready to transfer to Year 1.
- Every opportunity is taken to help children acquire reading and writing skills, including through excellent phonics (the sounds letters make in words) activities. Consequently Year 1 pupils did especially well in the phonics screening check last year.
- By the end of Years 2 and 4 attainment in reading is high. The majority of Year 4 pupils reach levels significantly above those expected for this age.
- By Year 2, pupils are enthusiastic readers, all reaching at least the levels expected for their age and the majority exceeding them. All pupils read expressively and enjoy describing characters and the plot in the books they choose.
- By Year 4, pupils read widely using their excellent skills, for example, to research information in non-fiction books or when using computer programs. This benefits their achievement in a wide range of subjects particularly well.
- Attainment in writing is high. From Reception onwards, staff emphasise the need to present written work with pride. Consequently younger pupils' handwriting is very neat and they use a wide range of punctuation such as speech marks and apostrophes. Due to an excellent understanding of phonic awareness their spelling is very accurate.
- Having mastered basic writing skills from an early age, older pupils turn their attention to writing very successfully in a range of formats, using language very effectively to engage the reader. For example, when describing the invasion of Britain from a Roman soldier's point of view. As a result the majority reach attainment levels well above those expected for their age.
- Excellent opportunities to learn and use calculation skills in Reception benefit pupils considerably. Younger pupils have a well-developed understanding of place value and work confidently with 10s and units and simple fractions. Their excellent knowledge of shape and measures is used very effectively in other subjects, for example in designing jewellery boxes in design technology.
- This excellent knowledge of different aspects of mathematics is built on very well in the older classes so that, by Year 4, pupils are exceptionally good at solving mathematical problems.
- The number of pupils receiving pupil premium funding is small, but the school uses this very effectively to meet their individual needs. In particular, the practice of ensuring the teaching assistants who deliver their special programmes also support the pupils in class work helps ensure these pupils make excellent progress. Often their progress is even better than their peers' and consequently, by Year 4, their attainment is just as good.
- The school's very strong commitment to equality of opportunity ensures there is a similar approach to other groups such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, whose achievement is excellent. These pupils consistently reach the levels expected for their age and, in mathematics, often exceed them.
- Lesson observations in other subjects indicate that pupils achieve exceptionally well in subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT) and geography.
- The high level of challenge set for pupils means that the proportion of more-able pupils increases as pupils move from year to year. Their achievement is outstanding and they consistently attain levels significantly above those expected. Attainment in mathematics is high, but the school is not content with this because not as many pupils reach levels well above those expected for their age as do in English. Addressing this is a key priority for the school and inspection evidence indicates the proportion of pupils attaining these levels is improving.

The quality of teaching**is outstanding**

- The key to the school's success is that all who work with pupils are continually looking for ways to improve experiences so that pupils can always do their very best. This is exceptionally well supported by the excellent teamwork among staff and all pupils' high-level motivation and excellent attitudes to learning. All staff are highly reflective and focused on ensuring rapid progress in English and mathematics. For example, the special educational needs coordinator is regularly updated on the progress of the pupils she helps support so their special programmes and in-class support are quickly adjusted to maximise pupil progress.
- Every effort is made to make learning relevant so that pupils recognise where their skills can make a real difference in their future lives. For example, reception children were greatly excited at being able to fire 'arrows' at the archery targets they designed and made, and add the totals of their scores. As a result, they became very competent at adding several numbers as well as being able to hit the bull's eye.
- Pupils' mathematical skills are promoted very effectively, such as in Years 1 and 2 when pupils used their mathematical skills very effectively during a geography lesson when learning how to find information from the globe and atlases. For example, they quickly identified that a hemisphere was half of the globe and therefore half a sphere and used coordinates very well to plot the sites of castles in Britain. In Year 4 'The Shop' is constantly changed to show items of different size, shape, mass, capacity or cost for example, so that pupils become very quick at solving the very challenging problem-solving activities based on this that the teacher sets for them.
- Writing tasks, often linked to topic work, help pupils gain an excellent understanding of their purpose and specific format, whether it be persuasive arguments, reports of information obtained from research or descriptions of what life was like long ago.
- Learning activities are always highly challenging as was observed in a Year 2/3 class where, due to the excellent teaching, pupils were collecting data and then entering them in spreadsheets on the computer. This is one reason why their ICT skills are especially strong.
- Staff monitor learning very effectively so throughout lessons they are always there to help address misconceptions or move pupils on to a new challenge. In this the very skilled teaching assistants play a valuable role, as they do in their support for pupils at risk of underachieving.
- The marking of pupils' work is outstanding. Staff always indicate how well pupils have done and how they can improve, following this up with checking that pupils are rectifying errors and not repeating them. The outstanding practice of joint pupil and teacher evaluations of how well the former have achieved the lesson targets has an excellent effect on pupils' understanding of their learning and their determination to do their very best.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are outstanding**

- In lessons, around the school and in the playground pupils' behaviour is uniformly outstanding. Excellent procedures for promoting good behaviour ensure that pupils who find this difficult improve extremely well over time.
- Bullying or unkind behaviour in any form is rare and always speedily and successfully dealt with. There have been no exclusions or serious incidents for a number of years.
- Pupils' relationships with adults and each other are excellent. Consequently pupils are very happy in school and take great pride in being a pupil there. Attendance levels are above average and poor attendance by any pupil is rare.
- The excellent curriculum and teaching fully engage pupils' interest and the commitment to do their very best. This very effectively supports their achievement because their learning behaviour is outstanding.
- Promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school's work. 'Respect' is the school's core value, and that it is achieved is evident in the courtesy that the youngest to the oldest pupils consistently show towards others including visitors. This helps

support the school's very strong commitment to preventing discrimination and fostering good relationships. It also ensures that paired or group work during lessons is excellent.

- Outstanding assemblies and strong links with the local church help ensure that pupils' ability to reflect on the important things in life is especially good.
- Pupils show a maturity beyond their years and are very thoughtful young people. Their cultural awareness is very good, with pupils showing respect and empathy for pupils from different backgrounds, race or religion. This helps prepare pupils exceptionally well for life in the diverse society of 21st Century Britain.
- The school's work to keep pupils' safe and secure, for example through site security, is outstanding. Pupils help to keep the school a very safe and happy place to be; for example by their monitor roles at playtimes. They are well aware of how to keep themselves and others safe, especially when using the internet.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school benefits considerably from the many and significant strengths of its headteacher. She expects a great deal from the staff, but is also exceptionally good at ensuring they have the very best support and professional development to help them achieve this. Consequently the management of teacher performance is excellent and teaching and learning are uniformly outstanding.
- Checking of the school's work and its impact on pupils' progress is significantly supported by the informal evaluations of their work staff undertake each day that are shared very effectively among each other. This is the key reason why the school can intervene very swiftly when pupils' progress is not as good as staff want.
- This was very evident in the discussions held with staff as the result of the inspector's lesson observations, as they were still looking for ways in which to do even better in what was already high-quality practice.
- More formal monitoring of the impact teaching has on learning, very effectively supported by skilled subject leaders, is backed up by regular sampling of staff, parent, carer and pupil views. This allows leaders and governors to put in place very effective development plans that specifically target areas they want to improve. Consequently, the main priority of raising the proportion of pupils attaining highly in mathematics is already being successfully addressed.
- Curriculum planning is continually revised and adapted to ensure that lesson activities meet pupils' needs and interests especially well. Staff are always looking for new ways to enhance learning and link subjects together so that, for example, a topic lesson can target learning in English, history and design and technology. Extra-curricular activities support learning well, especially in sport, and leaders and governors are effectively using government funding to enhance pupils' physical well-being by increasing the range of sports on offer and teachers' skills in these, for example in golf.
- Safeguarding policy, practice and procedures, including those related to child protection and the vetting of staff, are very robust and fully meet requirements, contributing especially well to pupils feeling safe.
- Most parents and carers are highly appreciative of the school and its staff. The small number of parents and carers who spoke to the inspector were uniform in their praise. Parent View results indicated a few parents and carers were concerned about staff absences in one class. However, this was outside the school's control and managed very effectively.
- Parents and carers support children's learning well, including by helping in school and running a weekend football club. Appropriate homework is set and parents and carers receive good advice to help support their children at home.
- A 'light touch' school for the local authority, leaders and governors value the level of support and challenge they receive, especially in being able to take part in joint lesson monitoring in order to validate the school's view. The local authority's recognition of the significant strengths of St James' headteacher and her staff is seen in their work to support other schools throughout the

authority.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors take all aspects of their role very seriously and are strongly committed to training, for example in analysing data on pupils' progress which they understand well. The work of staff is thoroughly analysed, including through first-hand monitoring, and staff decisions very effectively challenged to ensure that they always promote high achievement. Governors back this up by excellent teamwork with and support of staff. In particular, governors' contribution to assemblies and enhancing pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. Governors very willingly use their expertise in aspects such as safeguarding and personal development to help support the school's work. Their monitoring of financial resources, including that for the current sports initiative, is very effective. Very regular checks on the allocation of pupil premium funding, currently for extra adult support and special programmes or experiences for these pupils, ensure the funding is always used to very good effect and leads to their rapid progress. First-hand monitoring of teaching quality, together with very well-prepared information on performance management, means governors are very well placed to agree staff salary increases only for good performance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	113761
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	433299

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Camping
Headteacher	Jacqueline Booth
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 October 2010
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