

St James' CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109614
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	377951
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Lead inspector	David Radomsky

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Jenkin
Headteacher	Karen Luscombe
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2008
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Radomsky

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Nine lessons taught by five teachers were observed by the inspector. Over 30 minutes were spent listening to pupils read and observing reading activities. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and pupils. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and 48 questionnaires from parents and carers. The inspector also took into account questionnaires completed by six members of staff and 42 pupils. The inspector scrutinised a range of documents including the school self-evaluation form, the school development plan, data showing pupils' attainment and progress, monitoring systems and safeguarding documentation.

Information about the school

St James' CofE VA Lower School is smaller than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very low overall, but is increasing in the lower years. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average and currently there are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average, and a below average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. There are no pupils who are at the early stages of English acquisition. An above-average proportion of pupils leave or join the school in Year 3. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are provided for in a Reception class. The school has a number of accreditations including full International School status and Healthy Schools status. The school runs a daily breakfast club and after-school club. Since the previous inspection there has been a large turnover of staff. A new classroom was built recently and, from September 2011, this has enabled all pupils to be taught in five single-age classes.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. In this inclusive and caring learning environment, all pupils gain in self-confidence because the school promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. The school is not yet outstanding because although pupils make good progress and do particularly well in reading, teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure pupils make outstanding progress, and they do not have enough opportunities across different subjects to develop excellent writing and numeracy skills.
- Achievement is good. By the end of Year 4, attainment is above average in writing and mathematics, and in reading it is significantly above average because of the very effective teaching. There are no significant or consistent differences between the achievements of any groups of pupils.
- Pupils and their parents and carers confirm that pupils feel very safe, behave well and develop very positive attitudes towards learning, as reflected in the good attendance figures.
- Teaching is good. In a minority of lessons, limited opportunities for pupils to learn actively inhibit consistently outstanding progress. Occasionally, marking does not make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work, and pupils do not consistently respond to teachers' comments.
- Good leadership and management have continued to drive improvements since the previous inspection. Leaders develop teachers' skills well through regular and effective monitoring and personalised feedback. Good and regular assessment procedures are well established and the resulting information is used well to ensure that teachers are accountable for the progress of every pupil. The curriculum provides pupils with many enjoyable and stimulating experiences.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, ensure that a higher proportion of pupils make consistently outstanding progress in writing and mathematics by:
 - sharpening planning so that pupils have more opportunities to be active learners for the most part of every lesson
 - improving the quality of marking so that pupils clearly understand what they must do to improve their work, and are given sufficient opportunities and encouragement to respond to their teachers' comments
 - planning additional opportunities across the curriculum for extended writing and practising numeracy skills.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all parents and carers feel that their children make good progress and the inspector agrees. Relatively small numbers in each year group mean that overall attainment on entry fluctuates from year to year. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They enjoy coming to school and being purposefully engaged in the richness of activities available. As one parent, representing the view of many, said, 'We are extremely pleased with the creative approach to learning as every week there is some sort of exciting learning event.' Children show high levels of curiosity, imagination and concentration. They are confident to talk to teachers and other adults. This is because teaching is good and the well-planned curriculum engages their interest effectively. One child was seen making a plastic snake with a 'scary spike'. He told the inspector that its purpose was to attack bad people and to look after good people. Planning identifies key learning for each child and is reviewed regularly. This ensures a very good balance of teacher-led and child-initiated learning that is tailored to the needs and interests of each child.

Attainment at the end of Year 4 has improved since the time of the previous inspection and is now above average in writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in reading is outstanding. Their reading abilities are consistently significantly above the average for their age, and the majority leave Year 4 with reading abilities two years above national expectations. This is because the school effectively uses a systematic programme for the teaching of letters and sounds and pupils are encouraged to read daily at school, including to adults, and at home. Through highly effective support systems, the school ensures that disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language and those that join other than at the usual time, make the same good progress as all others.

Pupils enjoy their learning a great deal and respond well to being challenged. In a Year 3 mathematics lesson on division, pupils were challenged to recall and apply a range of previously learned methodologies to solve division problems. All engaged

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enthusiastically and through the use of mini whiteboards, the teacher was able to monitor the pupils' work and give them immediate and individual feedback, thus effectively reinforcing prior learning. This quickly boosted pupils' confidence to tackle more complex mathematical challenges, involving the use of remainders, in the main part of the lesson. Similarly, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson where pupils were working on extending a given number sequence and identifying the rule, the teacher pointed out any errors without immediately explaining what was wrong. Pupils demonstrated resilience in trying to identify where they had gone wrong and when they remained stuck, other pupils supported them and helped them correct their mistakes. In both lessons, worksheets prepared by the teacher to meet the differing needs of pupils, combined with effective support by the teaching assistants ensured that all groups of pupils made good progress.

Quality of teaching

The inspector's judgement that teaching is good matches those of the pupils and their parents and carers. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and explain clearly to pupils what they will learn and how they will know if they have succeeded. Relationships are strong, with teachers and teaching assistants interacting well with pupils to support them in their learning. When teaching is at its best, teachers plan for the learning needs of all pupils, set a good pace and ensure that pupils are actively engaged in a range of stimulating activities. Lessons observed during the inspection confirmed that, occasionally, pupils are too passive. As a result, their learning and progress are slower than in the more successful lessons. Teachers use well-embedded systems for marking and giving feedback to pupils on their pieces of extended writing, but this quality of marking is not consistently replicated in marking across all other areas of the curriculum.

In a Year 4 lesson based on the theme of explorers, pupils were challenged to research information on the journey that ancient Egyptians made from Thebes to Punt in Somalia, then write, and produce a PowerPoint presentation on their findings. Pupils worked enthusiastically and collaboratively to research information in atlases, as well as through a range of websites. This supported independent learning well and pupils developed their speaking skills as they enjoyed a discussing their findings. For instance, some pupils were interested to discover that the Ancient Egyptians believed that the world was flat, but another found a website that said they believed the world was a sphere. This led to a discussion about the reliability of information found on the internet.

Other planned cross-curricular work is similarly highly effective in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness while, at the same time, contributing well to the development of their literacy, numeracy and information and communication (ICT) skills. A scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed that they experience an extensive range of engaging activities. These include creating artwork inspired by themes such as the circus, looking at children's clothes through the millennia, writing a piece on an imaginary account of the eruption of Vesuvius, and using extended similes when writing about the planets. These writing activities are not systematically

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planned, to link and extend the literacy skills learned in formal English lessons. This lost opportunity inhibits pupils from making outstanding progress in their writing development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The inspector found the pupils to be unfailingly polite and welcoming, emulating the excellent role models of the adults in the school. An overwhelming majority of parents and carers believe that their children are safe and that behaviour is good, both during lessons and as pupils move around the school. Good behaviour was evident in lessons, assembly and playtimes observed during the inspection. The behaviour of pupils and the very positive attitudes they demonstrate in lessons are major reasons why pupils are making progress that is consistently at least good, and sometimes outstanding.

A few parents and carers raised concerns about the way in which the school deals with bullying. Pupils said that they feel safe and know that the teachers and other adults in school will help with any problems if they arise. Pupils are aware that there are different types of bullying such as physical, cyber and prejudiced- based bullying. Although a few felt that rare instances of bullying did take place, they explained that it is never prejudiced-based but more to do with boisterous behaviour during playtime. The school has identified the need to improve the standards of behaviour in the playground as a priority.

Leadership and management

The school benefits from the highly dedicated leadership from the headteacher. All staff and the governing body share a passionate vision to ensure that all pupils are fully supported to reach their full potential. Working together, they have ensured that pupils' needs are addressed on an individual basis and that all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed. There is no evidence of discrimination of any kind. The governing body monitors the work of the school well and provides good support and challenge in helping to drive improvement.

Despite frequent changes in staffing and a proportionately high number of pupils leaving and joining the school in Year 3, attainment at the end of Year 4 has risen since the time of the previous inspection. Attendance remains high and persistent absence is virtually non-existent. The outdoor area of the Reception class has been developed and provides a more stimulating learning environment. Single-age classes in Key Stage 2 are contributing to pupils making even faster progress than previously. These successes demonstrate that the school has a good capacity for future sustained improvement.

The school development plan is comprehensive and targets improvement in all aspects of the school's work, including aspiring towards more outstanding teaching. Leaders support teachers well through a programme of classroom observation and professional development.

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The curriculum is broad and balanced with a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils enjoy many visits such as to working farms, places of worship, an interactive facility replicating the Victorian era, and visiting John Newton's village and singing Amazing Grace where it was written. These visits, together with daily reflections on the weekly 'Values for Living', raising charitable donations and the harmonious relationships evident in the school, ensure that provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and fully meet statutory requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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 March 2012

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave me when I visited your school. I greatly enjoyed talking to many of you, and reading the questionnaires some of you completed, and wish that I had had more time to meet all of you. Yours is a good school and these are some of the reasons why.

- Your headteacher, staff and governing body want to help you achieve your best in all that you do.
- You clearly enjoy school and I was very impressed by how well you all get on with each other and how you are so interested about learning about other people's cultures and faiths.
- You feel safe at school, generally behave well and raise considerable sums of money for many worthy charities.
- The school provides you with many enjoyable and fun learning opportunities, including visiting so many interesting places.
- Your teachers prepare good lessons, and work with you to make your learning exciting.

I have asked the school to do these things to make it even better.

- Make sure teachers give you even more time to learn actively in all your lessons, so that you can make even faster progress.
- Ensure that teachers' marking always tells you how to improve your work, and that they give you enough opportunities to correct your work so that you can learn from your mistakes.
- Make sure the teachers give you even more opportunities for extended writing and practising your mathematical skills when you work in different subjects.

You can help to improve your school by working hard and making sure you always try to do as well as you can.

I wish you all the best for the future and thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

David Radomsky
Lead inspector

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