

Inspection of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Sandrock Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3PR

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone is welcome at this highly inclusive school. Pupils thrive here because they have positive and successful learning experiences, learning across a broad curriculum. Pupils value being celebrated for their achievements. They enjoy getting their name recorded in the 'Golden Book' or collecting the school's reward 'shells' in recognition of their accomplishments.

Pupils are happy, confident and feel safe. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school site is exemplary because of the high expectations that staff set. Breaktimes are fun-filled occasions. Pupils enjoy playing among the trees on 'the bank' or using the exercise stations. Pupils are kind and respectful to each other. If someone needs a new friend to play with, they sit on the 'Buddy Bench' until others happily include them in their lunchtime games. Pupils say that bullying rarely happens. If it does, they know staff will deal with any issues swiftly and effectively.

Pupils actively participate in the school's extra-curricular activities. They are encouraged to set up and run their own groups, such as the Harry Potter club. Pupils make happy memories on the many educational visits the school provides. Pupils can keenly describe their learning about coastal erosion when visiting Birling Gap.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum. Careful thought is given to what pupils will learn from the early years through to the end of key stage 2. Children get off to a strong start in Reception. They settle very quickly into classroom routines and are looked after well by caring staff. Children enjoy the stories and rhymes that they often hear. The coherently planned early years curriculum ensures children are prepared well for their next steps. For example, children learn about different environments, which helps them with future learning in science.

Pupils typically achieve very well at this school. Teachers introduce new learning confidently, demonstrating strong subject knowledge. They emphasise the use of subject-specific vocabulary, which pupils develop a firm understanding of. The activities provided help pupils to build knowledge and skills over time. Teachers identify the links between new learning and what pupils have studied previously.

The school quickly identifies any barriers to learning that pupils may have, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Planned interventions are implemented well and help pupils to catch up with their peers. Teachers provide additional support and ensure that learning is adjusted to meet the needs of individual pupils. Many teachers use questioning effectively to check what pupils have understood within lessons. However, in some subjects, these processes do not always clearly check what pupils, including pupils with SEND, have learned through the curriculum or inform future planning. The school is aware of this and is

developing how it will assess what pupils know and can do across the wider curriculum.

Reading is prioritised. Pupils read regularly in school and at home. Daily phonics teaching, which starts from children's first days in Reception, helps pupils to learn sounds and words systematically. Previously, leaders recognised the need to strengthen the provision for pupils who find it more difficult to read. Processes are now in place and need to be continued to ensure that these pupils catch up quickly and develop into fluent readers.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. Classrooms are calm and focused. Pupils and children in the early years have warm relationships with staff and show highly positive attitudes towards learning. Attendance is high. The school works closely with families and local agencies to help the small number of pupils who are persistently absent to attend school more regularly.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority. The school value of 'kindness' permeates all aspects of the school. Pupils are very respectful of difference. People from different cultures are frequently invited to visit the school. This helps pupils to develop an appreciation for diversity. The popular forest school extends pupils' understanding of the natural world, building their creativity and imagination.

Leaders have ensured that staff workload is manageable so they can focus on their pupils' needs. Staff appreciate the way that they are listened to. Those responsible for governance know the school's strengths and areas to further improve very well. They provide effective support and challenge. Parents are highly positive about the school's leadership team. Through the Ofsted Parent View survey, many parents sent in comments about the excellent communication they receive and how passionate and supportive the headteacher is.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, teachers do not always check pupils' learning and address gaps in understanding consistently well enough. This means that sometimes pupils are not sufficiently supported to learn as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers are well equipped to identify and address misconceptions so that all pupils can achieve as well as possible.
- Some younger pupils have not yet learned to read as well as they should. This means that they find it difficult to read with fluency and access the wider curriculum. Leaders should continue to ensure that the planned reading catch-up programmes help these pupils to quickly develop into confident readers.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	118725
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296277
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	631
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Stephen Pollard
Headteacher	John Tutt
Website	www.st-james.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 March 2008, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, the school has merged with St James' Church of England Junior school.
- The school is a Church of England primary school within the Diocese of Rochester. The school's religious character was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in February 2018. This was before the school merged with St James' Church of England Junior school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, the leader responsible for pupils with SEND, other teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with governors and had conversations with representatives of the local authority and the Diocese of Rochester.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, physical education and geography. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also reviewed curriculum plans in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils and staff to hear their views.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and to the confidential Ofsted surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Martin Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rosemary Keen	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Toyne	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Hacker	Ofsted Inspector

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