

Inspection of St James' Church of England Primary School

Merestones Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 2RS

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Harford. This school is part of the Diocese and Gloucester Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rachel Howie, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tim Brock.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at St James'. Relationships are warm and welcoming. Reflection is an important part of school life. The school has created a 'Spiritual growth wheel'. This captures what the school wants for all pupils: 'Inspiring and growing for fullness of life'. The school has thoughtfully weaved this vision through its ambitious curriculum. As a result, pupils blossom.

Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils have strong attitudes to their learning. This is because all staff model the behaviours they expect to see. Pupils say, 'We hold doors open for each other here.' This encapsulates the school's culture.

Central to school life are links with the church. Pupils lovingly call the local church 'Pip and Jim's', which shows the strong connections they have to St Philip and St James' church in the local area. The array of opportunities for pupils to widen their experiences are vast. Pupils get to 'find their thing' here. Clubs are well attended. Pupils enjoy taking real ownership of the school, such as through the 'Think tank' group.

The school is aspirational for all. This extends to families and the wider community. For example, there are workshops on offer for parents. Everyone is part of the St James' family.

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

St James' is relentless in its mission for every child to do well. The school has created a bespoke curriculum that exceeds the requirements of the national curriculum in many areas. The precise knowledge the school intends pupils to know at each stage is sequenced towards clear end points. Teachers assess pupils' learning skilfully. They ensure that pupils keep up with their learning. High-quality training is provided to staff. This means teachers deliver learning clearly.

Even so, work in some curriculum areas is newer than others. The school identified that pupils' spelling, handwriting and stamina needed work following the COVID-19 pandemic. This was because pupils did not have as much practice as they normally would have. The school has designed a well-sequenced curriculum to address these areas. As a result, pupils learn to write well. However, this is not yet reflected in published writing outcomes.

Reading is prioritised before children even step into the school. The school hosts parent workshops and sends out 'Reading scoop' bulletins with reading tips. The library is a vibrant space for pupils' imagination to be sparked. All staff are expertly trained. Pupils learn to blend new sounds quickly. Any pupils who struggle are given support to keep up. Books are carefully matched to the sounds pupils know. This helps pupils to read fluently and be motivated to read.

Children in the early years learn from a well-crafted curriculum. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, some children arrive at school with limited knowledge in particular areas. For example, children's personal, social and emotional development needs additional support. The school has refined the curriculum with a sharp focus on vocabulary. This ensures that children learn to communicate and manage their feelings in a respectful way. Resources are used well to promote supportive interactions between staff and children. This, combined with strong building blocks in other areas of learning, means that children are well prepared for Year 1 and beyond.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn the same ambitious curriculum. The school uses outside agencies to ensure that pupils with SEND have appropriate support. This means they learn the curriculum well.

Behaviour is impeccable across the school. The school has built an exceptional culture that stems from its values. Children want to come to school. Leaders are relentless in ensuring that pupils attend well. Pupils take an active interest and responsibility for the environment of the school. This is demonstrated when pupils independently tidy up the wealth of exciting lunchtime play equipment. The playground is full of laughter. It is a happy place to be.

Leaders have placed pupils' wider development at the very heart of the school's work. Fundamental British values are embedded into everything the school does. For example, pupils can compare school rules to laws in the wider world around them. The school goes above and beyond to expose pupils to diverse backgrounds and circumstances. For example, pupils support different charities such as a local homeless shelter. Pupils have tremendous respect for others.

Staff appreciate the many professional development opportunities they have. This helps them to deliver the curriculum with precision. Leaders are rigorous in their approach. Their work is respected by families and the St James' community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In recent years, pupils have had limited time to develop their spelling, handwriting and stamina. This has caused published writing outcomes to dip. The trust should ensure that the new writing curriculum is consistently and securely embedded so that all pupils achieve well over time.

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	144089
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10229014
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	419
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tim Brock
CEO of trust	Rachel Howie
Headteacher	Lisa Harford
Website	www.stjamescofeprimary.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St James' Church of England Primary School converted to become an academy in April 2017. When its predecessor school, St James' Church of England Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- St James' Church of England Primary School is part of the Diocese and Gloucester Academies Trust, a multi-academy trust of primary schools in Gloucestershire.
- The school is designated as having a religious character. The school is in the Diocese of Gloucester. At the most recent section 48 inspection of the school, carried out in February 2019, the school was judged to be excellent.
- The school does not 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, school staff, parents, pupils and representatives from the trust, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, 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 listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 read to a known adult.
- 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.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at lunchtime and breaktimes. In addition, the inspectors met with pupils formally and informally to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also looked at responses to the pupil survey and responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Lakmini Harkus, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Paula Marsh	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Evans	Ofsted Inspector

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