

Inspection of St James Church of England First School

Gaunt's Common, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4JN

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Daniel Lawford. This school is part of the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Mark Lacey, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sian Thornton.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St James Church of England First School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged St James Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in 2014, before it opened as St James Church of England First School as a result of conversion to academy status in 2021. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

St James is a friendly school in the heart of its community. Pupils flourish in its supportive atmosphere. They appreciate the kindness and warmth shown by staff. Pupils uphold the school's values of love, truth and hope in all they say and do. For example, they show 'love' by donating clothes to pupils in a school in South Sudan.

The school strives to achieve high standards for every pupil. This is shown in the strong outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening and Year 4 multiplication tables checks. Pupils also acquire knowledge and skills that extend beyond these academic subjects.

Starting in the Reception Year, children follow the school's routines very well. Typically, learning flows without disruption because pupils choose to do what is right. They strive to earn points as part of the school's behaviour reward system.

The school carefully considers the social and cultural experiences it provides for pupils. For instance, all pupils perform on stage, participate in sporting competitions and learn to play a musical instrument.

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers praise the school's work. A typical comment from a parent was 'my children are inspired, happy and thriving'.

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

The school sees reading as the gateway to all learning. Staff select books to enhance pupils' understanding of diversity. For example, pupils build empathy from the books they read about refugees. 'Love to read' sessions are treasured across the school. Children in the Nursery class listen intently to The Gingerbread Man story and join in with the rhymes. Staff are experts in teaching the phonics programme. They use ongoing checks with rigour to ensure that no pupils fall behind. By the end of Year 1, pupils gain a strong grasp of phonics. Older pupils enjoy the 'WILD reading challenge'. This inspires them to read more at home. Pupils leave the school as confident readers.

The curriculum is ambitious, including for pupils in mixed-age classes. It sets out the knowledge and vocabulary pupils should know and remember. Staff model subject-specific vocabulary and encourage pupils to use new words. For example, children in the Reception Year develop a detailed understanding of weather, igloos and animals in Antarctica when learning about the natural world. Pupils in Year 4 understand why the Vikings invaded Britain and the importance of fertile land for growing crops.

The school chooses a range of approaches to help pupils build their knowledge. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 confidently chant multiplication tables and division facts in mathematics. They use this knowledge well to solve more complex calculations. Most pupils achieve well in their learning. However, in a few subjects that have been more recently revised, pupils' knowledge is not as deep as in others.

Pupils enjoy writing. Children in the Reception Year write simple words and sentences accurately. Across the school, many pupils write with increasing sophistication. However, some staff do not consistently rectify misconceptions in pupils' written work. As a result, some pupils continue to make the same errors in punctuation and letter formation. This affects the quality of their writing.

The school identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) early. Staff use visual prompts and personalised resources so that pupils with SEND can join lessons with their peers. Well-targeted pastoral support helps pupils to overcome any worries. This contributes to pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and behaviour.

The provision for pupils' personal development is a strength. Pupils know it is important to get enough sleep, drink water and socialise to improve their mental health. An impressive range of clubs introduce new interests like gardening, choir and chess. Pupils take on roles across the school as play leaders and school councillors. They make a positive difference to the school, for example by fundraising for new playground markings. Pupils develop a sense of community by singing in the local church and planting poppies to mark Remembrance Day.

Leaders have worked determinedly to improve the school. They have put pupils at the heart of all the decisions that they make. A strong culture of teamwork exists in the school. Staff are positive about the support they receive from the trust to hone their practice. They value how leaders consider their workload. Local governors and trustees work with the school effectively. They check that the school's actions are making a difference.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff do not consistently rectify misconceptions in pupils' written work. As a result, some pupils continue to make the same errors in basic punctuation and letter formation. The trust should ensure that all staff follow its approach to teaching fundamental writing skills so that pupils develop their writing fluency and accuracy.
- A minority of subjects have recently been revised and are at an earlier stage of implementation. In these subjects, pupils' recall and depth of knowledge are less secure than in others. The trust should embed these subjects so that they have a positive impact on pupils' retention of knowledge 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	148300
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10344851
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sian Thornton
CEO of the trust	Mark Lacey
Headteacher	Daniel Lawford
Website	www.stjames.dsat.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy in January 2021. It is part of the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust of primary schools in Dorset and Wiltshire.
- The headteacher and assistant headteacher took up their posts in September 2022.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Salisbury. It received a section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character in May 2023. Its next inspection under section 48 is due within five years of this date.
- In September 2024, the on-site nursery called 'The Cottage' joined the school. It includes provision for two-year-old children.
- 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements

(quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 held discussions with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher and other school staff. The lead inspector met with representatives from the trust board and members of the local academy standards and ethos committee. He also met with the CEO, the deputy CEO and a regional director of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, 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. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- The lead inspector listened to some pupils in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: met the designated safeguarding lead; checked the single central record of adults working in the school; took account of the views of 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 considered a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation documents and minutes of governance meetings.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at lunchtime. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to discuss how the school supports their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors spoke with some parents at the start and end of the school day. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Debbie Tregellas

Ofsted Inspector

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