

St James CE Primary School

Hillside Avenue, Farnworth, Bolton, Lancashire, BL4 9QB

Inspection dates

3–4 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- While the school is most definitely improving, the legacy of underachievement is still evident for the oldest pupils. By the end of Year 6, achievement in reading is particularly weak.
- Older pupils are receiving significant support to improve their reading. However, it is too early to tell if this will enable them to make rapid enough progress to reach the expected standards by the time that they leave Year 6. This is the reason why pupil outcomes still require improvement.
- Attendance is below average and too many pupils are persistently absent.
- Despite children’s good progress in the early years, not enough attain a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Pupils’ understanding of different cultures, faiths and relationships, and the associated prejudices, is not as strong as other aspects of their personal development.
- Safeguarding is effective, but the new leader does not have enough opportunities to regularly check on and coordinate this aspect of the school’s work.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong and purposeful leadership has improved the quality of teaching and is securely focused on continuing and cementing the improvements that have occurred to pupils’ achievement.
- Teaching is now consistently good. As a result, most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are learning well and making good progress.
- Standards by the end of Year 2 have shown very good improvement and are now significantly above average. Disadvantaged pupils attain as well as or better than all pupils nationally.
- The youngest children get off to a very good start in the early years classes. They grow in confidence and develop a love of learning.
- Throughout the school, pupils are unfailingly polite and behave well. They say that they feel safe and enjoy school.
- The school knows its pupils very well and takes good care of them. Vulnerable pupils are well supported and included. The importance of good attendance is regularly reinforced.
- Governors are an effective team and play a key part in supporting the school’s improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by the end of Year 6, particularly in reading, so that pupils are better prepared for secondary school.
- Continue to raise achievement in the early years so that by the end of Reception, more children attain a good level of development and are ready for the work in Year 1.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average and that persistent absences are significantly reduced.
- Ensure that the curriculum enables pupils to develop a more secure understanding of the diverse nature of the society in which they live so that they are better prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Further improve the very effective work that the school does to safeguard pupils by ensuring that the new safeguarding lead is able to regularly monitor the effectiveness of the work of the various individuals with different safeguarding responsibilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The strong partnership of the Executive Headteacher and the acting headteacher has ensured a renewed and very clear direction for improvement. The impact is evident in the improvements to teaching and pupils' achievement, the strengthening of other leaders' skills to better contribute to improvement, and the commitment of the whole staff team to providing pupils with the best education and care possible.
- There have been some notable improvements since the school was last inspected. A rigorous performance management system has enabled weak teaching to be eliminated and coaching programmes have helped a number of teachers to up their game. Consequently, teaching is much more consistent and typically good.
- The impact of better teaching is seen in the significantly improved standards by the end of Year 2 and the good progress in pupils' books in both key stages.
- The improvements evident in the reading test results of older pupils in 2014 were not sustained in 2015. These pupils had, historically, experienced weak teaching, and the action to enable pupils to catch up during the period of disruption lacked the necessary focus and direction. The situation is very different now, but the legacy of weak teaching and underachievement is still evident for older pupils currently in the school.
- Leaders have identified the issue as a priority for improvement and are addressing it rigorously. They have ensured that older pupils receive frequent, good quality support, especially to improve their reading, and are monitoring their progress meticulously. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work. Although improvements are evident in pupils' books, the school's assessment information shows that there is still too much variation in progress.
- The very effective link with the Executive Headteacher's school has ensured a much more rigorous system for assessing and tracking pupils' achievement. The system provides leaders with a far clearer and more accurate view of pupils' achievement, which enables them to identify any gaps in learning or variations in the progress of different groups, and address these.
- The systems to check that teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' learning are robust. They are linked to performance management and the identification of appropriate and tailored staff training, which is comprehensive.
- The school makes good use of the additional pupil premium funding. The impact is evident in the much improved outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in the Year 1 phonics check and the end of Key Stage 1 assessments. Although the 2015 end of Key Stage 2 results shows that disadvantaged pupils underachieved, this was part of the wider picture of underachievement for the cohort in general rather than ineffective use of the funding. The funding is being targeted well to boost the progress of current disadvantaged pupils.
- The curriculum is appropriately broad. The development of literacy and numeracy is given a high profile in specific English and mathematics lessons and reinforced in topics. Pupils have good opportunities to be creative and their motivation for learning is enhanced by opportunities to follow their own interests within a range of enquiry-based topics and activities in lessons and interesting homework projects.
- Spanish lessons, science investigations, art, music and sports are popular with pupils. A range of visits and visitors enrich pupils' learning and personal development, as do the various extra-curricular clubs and activities. The additional funding that the school receives to promote physical education and sport is used well. Skilled coaches lead teaching sessions, which have improved pupils' achievement and enjoyment of the subject and enhanced the teaching skills of the school's own staff.
- Displays around the school reflect a strong commitment to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and British and Christian values. These stimulate pupils' interests, for example, in the power of artists, scientists and inventors. A British Values Super Learning Week reinforced these principles. However, while pupils were able to talk in depth about some of these aspects, their understanding of cultural, faith and relationship diversity, and associated prejudices, was more limited.
- Staff know pupils and their families very well. Tackling and breaking down the barriers to learning faced by the many vulnerable pupils are high on the school's agenda and very effective. Absences are rigorously followed up. Penalties and sanctions are implemented and referrals to social services made when attendance does not improve. While persistent absences remain too high, there is some clear evidence of attendance improving in response to the unstinting efforts of the learning mentors.
- The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school and consider that the staff work hard to

help their children learn, enjoy school and stay safe. Parents spoken to said that there is regular communication from the school and good efforts to involve them in their children's learning.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governors are an effective team, with high expectations and commitment to the school's improvement. These qualities were clearly demonstrated in the rigorous selection process for a new headteacher last year. Governors were not satisfied that the candidates were the right ones to move the school forward and decided not to appoint. They have carefully considered the benefits of cementing the successful partnership with the Executive Headteacher's school and are pleased that the application for conversion to multi-academy status has been approved, enabling the improvements that this partnership has brought to continue.
 - Governors provide good support for school leaders and ask probing questions about achievement and the quality of provision. They want to know how the additional pupil premium and sports funding is spent and the effect this has had.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All statutory requirements are met. Teachers' training is up to date and staff know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils' safety, including possible risks of extremism and radicalisation.
- Safeguarding processes are led by a well-established and experienced team of mentors, whose work has a very positive impact on keeping pupils safe. However, the senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding has not had opportunity to monitor or coordinate the work of these individuals or others who have a role in contributing to safeguarding, such as the school's information technology leader.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection. The programme of training and support provided by senior leaders has ensured that teaching is more consistently effective in promoting good learning for all groups of pupils.
- Teaching in the early years is successful in promoting the children's academic and personal development. The children make a good start in learning early reading skills and this continues into Key Stage 1 where the teaching of phonics is highly effective.
- Teachers also provide pupils with lots of opportunity to become familiar with different types of text and undertake activities that develop their understanding of what they read. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 relished the challenge of devising questions that might be answered in information books. Others used dictionaries to find word meaning, while another group identified connections between different types of books.
- This work continues at Key Stage 2, where there is now a greater focus on teaching comprehension skills in varied and meaningful activities to address earlier weakness in the teaching of this aspect of reading.
- The teaching of writing has a high profile across both key stages and pupils' books show that this aspect of pupils' learning is developing well. During the inspection, pupils in Years 3 and 4 made excellent progress in using powerful verbs in sentence openers when describing a setting. They rose to the challenge of including time connectives and similes, accurate punctuation and organising their writing into paragraphs. Pupils' topic work shows that teachers are reinforcing writing skills well across the curriculum.
- Teachers are effective in helping pupils to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar in sessions that are specifically focused on these key skills, as well as when pupils are writing in different subjects.
- The vast majority of teachers have high expectations and match work well to pupils' needs, providing different levels of support and challenge as appropriate. Teachers' good subject knowledge comes through in their explanations and demonstrations of strategies, for example of how to set out mathematical calculations.
- Pupils' mathematics books reflected different levels of challenge. In lessons and most of the books reviewed, it was clear that while all pupils were being taught the same concepts, challenge through greater depth was evident for the more-able pupils, while less-able pupils were supported in understanding new ideas and methods. Opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical reasoning through solving problems are evident in most books.
- Teachers show good commitment to improving pupils' achievement and recognise that they are accountable for pupils' outcomes. They regularly assess how well pupils have learned and use the information to plan further support and challenge for pupils, as needed. Teachers review the impact of

their teaching during pupil progress meetings with senior leaders. These enable the identification of any pupils who are off track to meet the expectations for their age or who are not making the expected progress so that support can be provided.

- To this end, teaching assistants are effectively deployed. These staff are well trained and have a mostly good impact in supporting pupils who need extra help to catch up or consolidate basic literacy and numeracy skills. During the inspection, these staff were observed providing some very good quality teaching of phonics, writing, multiplication methods and fractions.
- Support staff make a good contribution to supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs, who are fully included in lessons.
- There is good consistency in the way that teachers follow the school's marking and feedback policy. In the books analysed, the quality of feedback from teachers balanced praise and points for improvement well, with clear expectations that pupils will respond to these.
- Teachers promote good behaviour well and engender friendly and supportive relationships with pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Right from the start, the school very successfully develops pupils' self-confidence and appreciation of the qualities of being a good learner. Nursery and reception children are helped to make considered decisions about the activities that they want to undertake. Older pupils are encouraged to 'have a go'; one pupil explained 'You shouldn't be frightened of making mistakes because you can learn from them'. School councillors have the confidence to make presentations to governors and answer governors' questions.
- Pupils show good interest in their work, sustain concentration and persevere with tasks. They enjoy checking whether their work meets all of the criteria in the learning objectives, evaluating how well they have done and responding to teachers' comments in their books.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what it means to belong to a community and the responsibilities that this brings. They spoke about the work of the eco-team in recycling and saving energy, lunchtime monitors who help with the younger children and the worship team who have led the food bank collection.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying. They know that this can happen on the internet and are aware of some of the things that they can do to keep themselves safe when using technology. Most said that they would feel confident confiding any worries about bullying to a teacher or other member of staff.
- Pupils know a lot about healthy living. They explained that exercise helps them to stay fit and too much sugar can make them ill and damage their teeth.
- In all discussions with pupils, they emphatically agreed that they like their school. One pupil summed this up saying 'The best thing is the staff, who are good teachers and kind'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are exceptionally polite to adults, greeting them warmly, opening doors for them, and offering to help them find their way around the school.
- Pupils are clear about the school's high expectations of behaviour. They know that they should respect the school environment and resources, and treat each other kindly.
- Relationships between pupils in lessons and at playtimes are friendly and supportive. For instance, when one child fell over in the playground another quickly went to help and took the child to a member of staff.
- Pupils explained that there is some bullying and prejudicial name-calling but most considered that the overall standard of behaviour in lessons and at playtimes is good; all said that they felt safe in school. The vast majority of parents consider behaviour to be good.
- Although attendance is improving, it is still too low and persistent absences are too high.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Historically, pupils' achievement in reading by the end of Key Stage 2 has been below average and consistently weaker than in writing and mathematics. After an improvement in 2014, standards and progress in reading fell and were significantly below average in 2015. While attainment in writing and mathematics was also lower than the previous year, the fall was not as significant. School leaders explained that some pupils' test results in reading were affected by their performance on the day but acknowledge that standards should have been higher.
- Attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally widened in 2015. Disadvantaged pupils were approximately 14 months behind in reading, nine months behind in writing, ten months behind in mathematics and 16 months behind in grammar, punctuation and spelling. In-school gaps were narrower.
- Pupils' work and teachers' assessments of their achievement show that many are making at least the expected progress from their starting points and are on track to attain the standards expected for their age. The exception is older pupils at Key Stage 2, where standards are below expectations and particularly weakly met in reading, notably in comprehension skills.
- The high number of pupils who joined the current Year 6 cohort in Years 5 and 6 have undoubtedly had a negative impact on the overall picture of achievement for this year group. However, the attainment of the pupils who have been at the school for some time is also well below expectations for their age. While the overall progress information for pupils who have been at the school longer is much more positive when viewed as a distinct group, there are variations between individuals. Although some pupils have made rapid progress, for others, progress had been steady or inadequate.
- A number of the pupils for whom progress is insufficient are vulnerable in one way or another, with circumstances that have impacted on their achievement. However, the main reasons for older pupils' poor achievement are the weaknesses in teaching they experienced historically and the delay in addressing these. The disruption to leadership was clearly significant in this and was exacerbated by the fact that the leader of English was the absent deputy headteacher.
- Lots of quality interventions and effective teaching are now being provided to support the current Year 6 pupils and other pupils in upper Key Stage 2 whose achievement has been limited by historically inconsistent teaching. However, it is too early to see the impact of this provision. Pupils' standards and progress remain below average, especially in reading. The school's current assessment information indicates that the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and all pupils nationally will not close significantly this year.
- Elsewhere in the school, pupils are achieving well. Despite beginning Year 1 with reading skills below those expected for their age, most Year 1 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made good progress and attained the expected phonics skills needed to sound out, read and spell words.
- Standards by the end of Year 2 have risen significantly since the last inspection. Attainment in mathematics was well above average in 2015, and in reading and writing it was above average; disadvantaged pupils achieved just as well as all pupils nationally in all of these subjects. Pupils' books show that the vast majority are competent in using their knowledge of letter sounds to help them read and write. Their mathematics work shows that they have good skills and understanding of key mathematical ideas. By the end of this key stage, pupils have made good progress from their attainment on entry to Year 1.
- The improvements that have occurred at Key Stage 1 are now evident in the assessment information for pupils in lower Key Stage 2 and confirmed by the work in their books. The school's rigorous assessment information shows that the majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs, are making at least the expected progress. Most pupils in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 are also on track to meet or exceed age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. This information is consistent with the current good quality of teaching noted in lessons and pupils' books.

Early years provision

is good

- Children get off to a flying start in the early years department. The early years provision is led by a highly qualified and inspirational leader who works continually and successfully to improve the provision and ensure that the children are given the very best start to their education.
- Children's attainment on entry to the nursery has increased this year. Historically, a large proportion of children began nursery with skills and knowledge below what is typical for their age. The children make good progress in nursery, but not all transfer to the school's reception classes; these classes include children from other providers. Attainment on entry to reception is generally below what is typical for children this age. However, from their various starting points, all children make at least good progress.
- Although the proportion of children attaining a good level of development by the end of Reception has increased each year for the past three years, it remains below the national average. Last year, only half the children were ready for the work in Year 1. While the proportion is likely to increase again this year, the school recognises that raising attainment by the end of Reception is a priority.
- All early years staff are well qualified and make a very successful contribution to children's learning. Staff use their very secure understanding of how young children learn to organise the learning environment, activities, and their interventions with the children. This gets the best out of them and ensures that they develop a love of learning. Parents are full of praise for the teaching and value the close relationships their children develop with their key worker, particularly the youngest children in the two-year-old provision and the Nursery.
- In all classes, excellent emphasis is given to promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development, their language and communication skills and physical development.
- The provision for two-year-olds is calm and nurturing. The practitioners play alongside the children, modelling language and how to treat each other. They encourage the children to be creative and they intervene positively when minor differences or upsets happen. Staff are helping the children to develop appropriate skills in independence and self-care, for example when going to the toilet.
- Skills, such as good listening and good looking are constantly reinforced by the staff in all classes. The children learn to consider each other's needs and feelings and there are very few squabbles. Children are taught to take turns in games and understand the need for simple rules so that everyone feels safe and happy. Staff are good role models, treating the children with courtesy and respect.
- The environment is thoughtfully organised with a wealth of opportunities indoors and outside to excite and capture the children's curiosity and natural instinct to learn. Innovative ideas underpin activities to develop the children's large and small coordination skills.
- Early reading and writing skills are developed very well in many contexts. Reading and writing materials are readily available and the children use these spontaneously. During the inspection, nursery children were excitedly looking for minibeads in the outdoor environment and recording their findings. Reception children, enthused by the theme of superheroes, drew pictures and were helped to write captions and simple sentences.
- The children learn to count, recognise numbers and understand the mathematical ideas of addition, subtraction and problem solving through games, songs and activities that become increasingly challenging as they get older.
- Ongoing assessments of children's achievements are made and carefully considered in planning the next steps in their learning. Their achievements are comprehensively recorded in learning journals.
- Building on the good practice of home visits before the children start in the early years, the leader has been very successful in finding new ways to increase engagement with parents.
- Safeguarding arrangements for the early years provision are effective. Risks are managed well and all staff are vigilant. Statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	105208
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10002277

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Waring
Executive Headteacher	Mrs J Pilling
Acting Headteacher	Mrs L Belfield
Telephone number	01204 572587
Website	st-james-farnworth.bolton.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-james-farnworth.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 October 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are slightly above average, but very few pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is high (the pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and who are in the care of the local authority).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is slightly above average.
- The proportion of pupils who join and leave the school other than at the usual times of admission and transfer is higher than nationally.
- The school's early years provision includes provision for two-year-olds, part-time nursery provision, with children attending either for morning or afternoon sessions, and two full-time reception classes.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Changes to the senior leadership team have occurred since the school was last inspected. A period of disruption occurred when the previous headteacher left the school in April 2015 to relocate and this coincided with the maternity leave of the deputy headteacher. The situation has now stabilised. The Executive Headteacher, who provided interim support for the school, continues in this role. She is supported by the deputy headteacher in her new role of acting headteacher.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in each class. They checked pupils' work, listened to them read and reviewed the school's assessment information about their attainment and progress.
- Two joint observations were conducted with senior leaders. A joint scrutiny of pupils' work was also conducted with a senior leader and the leader for reading.
- Inspectors held three formal discussions with pupils and spoke to others informally in lessons and at playtime and lunchtime.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, governors, learning mentors and a representative from the local authority.
- A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's evaluation of its work, safeguarding information, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school's improvement plans and information about teachers' performance
- Too few responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) were available for inspectors to view. However, inspectors took account of three written responses from parents, spoke to a number of parents as they brought their children to school and considered the results of a recent parental survey conducted by the school.
- The views of the two staff who responded to the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Margot D'Arcy, Lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Diane Palin	Ofsted Inspector
Clare McGarey	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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