

Inspection of a good school: St James Church of England Primary Academy

High Street, Isle of Grain, Rochester, Kent ME3 0BS

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 May 2023

Outcome

St James Church of England Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

A warm welcome awaits everyone entering this thriving school. Pupils greet adults with a smile, always holding doors open for others. Relationships are kind, polite and respectful. Expectations are high, and pupils are proud to meet them.

Pupils vote for ambassadors who take their roles seriously to improve school life. They sold poppies in a local supermarket to raise money for a charity. Leaders work with local businesses to help improve the school grounds. A recent project led to the creation of a wonderful outdoor music garden. Money awareness sessions from a local charity were enlightening. Pupils learned how to look after finances and manage a budget. The 'farm to fork' programme inspires pupils to plant, grow and understand healthy food.

Teachers plan exciting trips on the minibus to enrich learning and boost aspirations. Highlights have included visits to museums, the Tower of London and a steam boat. Pupils enjoy representing the school at sports events, such as the tag rugby festival. Visitors from the emergency services teach pupils about important roles in the community.

Clubs are diverse, accessible and inclusive. There is something for everyone, including dance, football, cookery and mindfulness. Pupils loved performing in a ukulele concert at a large theatre.

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

Children make a happy start in Nursery, learning early mathematical and reading skills through songs and stories. Phonics lessons are effective. Children recognise sounds and are blending them to read well. Teachers choose books precisely to give children the practice they need to become fluent readers. Phonics achievement was lower than national averages last year, so reading has a high priority to help all pupils achieve well. Teachers use frequent assessments to identify gaps. Small group catch-up sessions are expertly led by well-trained staff. Phonics workshops for parents are well attended and appreciated.

The curriculum is planned with high ambition for all pupils. Every subject is designed with a clear sequence of learning. In history, pupils learn new components and build on them. Year 6 pupils learned about the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Battle of Hastings and the Domesday book to develop their understanding of life in Britain in the early 11th century. They used their developing knowledge to analyse why the Normans built castles and explored the problems William faced after the invasion.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well. Clear communication across the team ensures that teachers share concerns about pupils' misconceptions. Leaders work expertly with teachers, support staff, parents and external agencies to get help for pupils. This can involve speech support, emotional help, adaptations to help pupils with autism spectrum disorder, or resources such as number beads, visual prompts and word mats.

Mathematics teaching is strong across the school. Teachers model the language and methods needed to help pupils succeed. In Reception, children identify properties of 3D shapes and spot patterns. Children are nurtured wonderfully in early years in a language-rich environment. This prepares children well for Year 1. By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve well. Standards are particularly high in mathematics, with pupils achieving significantly above national average. Pupils apply their well-developed calculation skills to solve investigations and take on tricky challenges. Pupils justify and explain their reasoning. Expectations are ambitious and pupils meet them. Frequent recall of skills and knowledge helps pupils to know and remember more.

In some subjects, pupils sometimes find it hard to recall and use the vocabulary they need. Essential language is often shared and displayed. However, pupils need further support to securely understand and use the words they need to explain and develop their learning.

Behaviour is positive. Teachers swiftly address minor distractions to ensure that learning time is never lost. Classroom conduct is focused and purposeful, built on mutual trust. Attendance was harmed by the pandemic. Leaders have taken effective steps to reduce absence for most pupils. However, a small number of pupils continue to be persistently absent. Leaders' efforts must continue to address this.

Pupils show respect for different cultures. They are passionately opposed to prejudice. They understand different family backgrounds and believe everybody deserves equality. Pupils learn to understand the causes of emotions, which helps them to manage their own behaviour. Pupils feel valued and special in this school. Pupils' efforts and achievements are celebrated daily, and showcased in weekly assemblies.

Governors, trustees and leaders share the same vision and values. They make the school nurturing, ambitious and inclusive for all. Leaders are compassionate, reflective and aspirational for every pupil. Teachers are proud, happy and highly supported. Assessment is efficient and sharply focused on helping pupils. There are no concerns from staff about workload or well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know and use safeguarding procedures effectively. Leaders follow up every issue. They keep detailed records and share valuable communication. Leaders are tireless when seeking support for families. They work with a range of agencies such as social care, health and housing services. The home school support worker provides strong pastoral care for pupils through nurture groups and emotional support.

All checks on adults are completed with precision and care. Trustees and governors ensure that the school meets statutory duties with diligence. Everyone plays their part to ensure that safeguarding is prioritised.

Pupils learn about relationships, water safety and online awareness in lessons and assemblies.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The achievement of pupils in phonics was lower than national averages last year, so some pupils are not fully secure in early reading. Leaders and teachers are rightly prioritising this with targeted support for pupils. This action must ensure that pupils achieve success with phonics and reading.
- Pupils do not always know and use the correct vocabulary they need for their learning. As a result, pupils may not be able to understand and explain what they know and remember in all subjects. Teachers should extend their work to ensure that vocabulary is precisely taught and embedded across the curriculum.
- Some pupils have been persistently absent since the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that they are missing out on learning time in school. Leaders' efforts have proved successful to improve attendance, and this work must continue further to ensure high attendance for all pupils.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2018.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138974
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10268889
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gill Mond
Headteacher	Fay Cordingley
Website	www.stjamesisleofgrain.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 and 24 January 2018

Information about this school

- This school joined the Medway Anglican Schools Trust (MAST) in January 2019.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Rochester. The school was rated good in its most recent section 48 inspection, in October 2019.
- The school currently uses no alternative provision.
- The school offers a breakfast club on site, led by school staff.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, history and mathematics. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' work.
- The inspector also visited geography lessons.
- The inspector listened to a range of pupils read. The inspector observed catch-up interventions to learn how staff provide extra support to pupils.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher/special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator (SENDCo), subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The inspector met three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- To evaluate safeguarding, the inspector studied documents and records, including the school's single central record and child protection referrals. The inspector spoke with the designated safeguarding leaders, staff and pupils.
- The inspector considered the responses to the staff survey and spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school.
- The inspector took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and the free-text responses.
- The inspector observed playtime and visited the breakfast club.
- The inspector met with pupils to learn their views about the school.
- The inspector met with the chief executive officer and chair of the trust from Medway Anglican Schools Trust (MAST).
- The inspector spoke by telephone with a representative from the Diocese of Rochester.

Inspection team

Scott Reece, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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