

# ST. JAMES' C.E. PRIMARY SCHOOL, COLDWALTHAM

*with Chuckleberries Pre School*



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**Enabling every child to thrive and succeed**

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

## **Change in Ofsted Judgement – St. James' CE Primary School**

On 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July, many of you will be aware that St. James' was inspected by Ofsted; the inspectors carried out a Section 5 Inspection which entailed a two-day visit. This was the first routine inspection since the school's previous Ofsted inspection in 2017 and, also, since the Covid-19 pandemic began. The Ofsted team comprised two inspectors, along with a Quality Assurance inspector.

We are required to distribute a copy of the final report to parents/carers of all children currently attending the school before the report is published publicly on Ofsted's reports website - this will happen on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> September. The final report has been sent to you with this letter.

Within this letter, I would like to:

- give some clarity about the overall judgement;
- provide the context in which this judgement was made;
- emphasise the highly positive aspects that Ofsted noted during their visit; and
- explain how we are addressing the areas for improvement (including Appendix 1).

### **Overall judgement**

You will see from the report that the overall judgement has changed from 'Good' to 'Requires Improvement'. The staff and Full Governing Board of St. James' are highly disappointed with this result and I fully appreciate that, as parents/carers, this outcome will not only be disappointing but may also raise some concerns.

When the lead inspector gave the 'requires improvement' judgement in verbal feedback to me, it was made very clear she could see that leadership, the whole staff team and the Governing Board are highly ambitious and clear in our vision for the high-quality education we want to provide. It was clearly identified that we did have and continue to have a robust School Development Plan in place to achieve the improvements needed to enable the school to be 'Good'. However, time and circumstances have worked against us meaning the school has been inspected before we have been able to fully implement changes and evidence impact which will become clear in the paragraphs below.

### **Context**

For those of you who have been parents/carers at St. James' for a number of years, you will be aware that these have been turbulent times at the school. There have been significant changes in



leadership, which Ofsted alludes to on Page 2 in the report, and we have also been working within a global pandemic from March 2020 until April 2022.

Ofsted made changes to their framework around 2018; the criteria on which schools are judged now are no longer the same as those that the school was previously judged against in 2017. With the appointment of an interim Executive Headteacher in September 2020, the school robustly tackled areas for improvement addressing the changes in criteria and this has continued since I took on the role in September 2021.

As parents/carers, you may question why more rapid progress with these improvements has not occurred since September 2020. In response to this, I have to reference the significant pressure and strict guidelines relating to Covid-19 the school was working under; we experienced school closure, extended periods of absence of both children and staff and, most significantly in the past year, challenges related to operating under outbreak management rules. All of these created an environment in which it was difficult to implement planned actions and measure the impact of them.

Whilst Ofsted maintain that the impact Covid-19 had on the school during the past two years was taken into account in their evaluation of the school, the staff and Governing Board feel strongly that this is not the case and raised this as a challenge to the report. In their response, Ofsted acknowledged the challenge but remained resolute that the judgement and report would remain unaltered. Again, the school is highly disappointed with this response but recognise the focus must now be on implementing the changes and regaining a 'Good' judgement as soon as possible.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

Before I move on to highlighting the many positives in the report, may I first reassure you that your children are safe and well cared for at the school; Ofsted raised no concerns regarding safeguarding or child protection procedures. As you can see on Page 3 of the report, the arrangements for safeguarding are effective with the procedures and processes that are in place viewed as clear and thorough, with an unafraid approach to ensuring children and families receive the support they need.

In interviews with the children, as referenced on Page 2, the inspectors reported that children were clear that bullying does not happen in the school; children trust adults to deal with any concerns they have quickly, consistently and sensitively. In their verbal feedback to me, inspectors also highlighted that this was the view expressed in the Ofsted Parent View; two-thirds of parents/carers in the school responded to the Parent View and we are very grateful and appreciative of the positive feedback you gave the school, not only regarding safeguarding, but in all areas.

### **Positives within the report**

There are a great number of highly positive observations made within the report and the inspectors very much recognised that the school is on a good trajectory; we have built firm foundations on which to enable the setting to regain a 'Good' judgement.

Following discussions with the children, the inspectors clearly heard that children are proud to be at St. James; they develop in confidence and are nurtured well. The children enjoy their surroundings and environment and there are strong relationships between children and adults. In verbal feedback, inspectors noted that the children were respectful, showed pride in their work and could politely and eloquently challenge ideas presented to them, enabling them to become more independent learners.

In 'Behaviour and Attitudes' and 'Personal Development, the school gained resounding 'Good' judgements; inspectors recognised that leadership has created an inclusive environment with high expectations where our school values are promoted and nurtured. Children were seen to have good attitudes to learning with adults providing and maintaining a calm and purposeful environment in which children followed well-embedded routines. The children were observed to work hard and take pride in their work.

Staff were praised for knowing the children well and being committed to caring for and supporting them; the children, in return have confidence in the adults, expressing how being in a small school means that there is a consistency of care across staff.

### **Areas for improvement**

The inspectors suggested areas of improvement for the school; these relate to the quality of education, provision in Early Years and within leadership and management. All of the identified areas were already known to the school and plans had been put in place to address them. As

mentioned, due to the impact of outbreak management in the past academic year, the progress we wished to make in these areas was not as rapid as we were aiming for.

This was discussed extensively with the inspectors and, within verbal feedback, the lead inspector acknowledged that leaders know what needs to be done to improve and already have a defined School Development Plan in place to address these areas. They praised the top-level thoughtful planning of how to make improvements and that there is a clear and ambitious vision for its implementation and impact.

As an attachment to this letter, there is an appendix in which I have shown the four areas for improvement, identified the strengths that were observed to be in place already by inspectors and have made clear the current and future actions in place to further develop. I would urge you to read this for a clear and detailed explanation of how the school will proceed to ensure we regain our 'Good' judgement.

If you have any further questions once you have read the appendix, I am providing two opportunities for parents/carers to be able to attend a drop-in session to raise questions. These will be on:

- **Today (Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September) – 2.45 – 3.15pm**
- **Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September – 9.00 – 9.30am**

### **Moving forward**

At the heart of everything that we do at St. James are the children and families that we are providing for. I am confident that we can achieve great things for your children and Ofsted recognised that this vision is clear and well-articulated. We have a truly fantastic school which is stronger than ever and I am proud to be the Executive Headteacher and feel privileged to be leading it through its journey to improve. Whilst there is obviously disappointment with this judgement, there is also the scope for positive change for the future and I am looking forward to working tirelessly in order to regain our 'Good' judgement.

Kind regards,



Mrs Lizzie Martin  
Executive Headteacher, Arun Villages Federation