

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111307
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	356889
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Marguerite Murphy HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Bernadette Gorman
Headteacher	Mrs Frances Curless
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2007
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Introduction

When the school was inspected in November 2009 its overall effectiveness was judged inadequate and it was given a notice to improve. This was due to weaknesses identified in aspects of leadership and management, the effectiveness of the governing body and the school's capacity to secure sustained improvement.

A monitoring inspection took place in June 2010 and found that the school's progress in making the improvements required was satisfactory.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Nine lessons were observed taught by seven teachers. The work of teachers and teaching assistants was also seen during other shorter visits to all classrooms across the school. Inspectors held meetings with staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised a range of documentation including: monitoring and assessment information; minutes of governing body and school improvement group meetings; teachers' planning and notes of visits made by local authority advisers and consultants. Responses in 60 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 95 completed by pupils and nine from staff, were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively the school has worked to improve aspects of leadership, including governance, since the last inspection in November 2009.
- The school's capacity to continue to improve without significant support from local authority advisers and consultants.
- The rigour and accuracy of the school's monitoring and self-evaluation processes and how effectively these are driving improvements in teaching and learning.
- The accuracy of the school's analysis of any differences in the rates of progress made by different groups of pupils and the impact of actions taken to narrow the gap.

Information about the school

St. Alban's is a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school. While the large majority of pupils are of White British backgrounds, over 20% of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is just above the national average. Over half of these are of Indian or other Asian heritage, with many of the remaining group being from Eastern European countries. Almost 8% of the total number of pupils on roll is at the early stages of learning English. A lower than average number of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above average. The school has achieved the national Healthy School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. St. Alban's provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and is no longer dependent upon the highest levels of additional support from the local authority. Achievement is satisfactory for all groups of pupils. For those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those who speak English as an additional language, this is achieved partly as a result of effective planning and organisation of resources. This includes the coordination of special needs provision, the input of skilled teaching assistants and the advice of local authority staff.

Most pupils enjoy school and almost all feel safe and well looked after. Relationships are positive and pupils respond well to the good care, guidance and support the school provides. Pupils have a good understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle and know about the important factors that affect this. Pupils of all ages and backgrounds get along well together and are polite and helpful around the school. Inspection evidence supports the view of almost half of the pupils who consider that behaviour is satisfactory rather than good because, in the words of one group, 'it could be better sometimes'. A minority of pupils lack the ability and willingness to take responsibility for their own behaviour, requiring adults instead to prompt them to reinforce good conduct and keep their focus on learning. Overall attendance, currently around 93%, is well below average for primary pupils and more noticeable in some year groups than others. This is despite the school's rigorous monitoring of attendance issues and communication with families to reduce absences.

Teaching and learning and the use of assessment to support these are satisfactory. Although teaching has a number of good features, these are not consistent enough across lessons and year groups to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment to above average levels. Senior leaders regularly observe lessons in order to monitor the quality of teaching and middle leaders are becoming increasingly involved in observing lessons. However, evaluations of teaching have often paid more attention to what the teacher is doing than on its impact upon the quality and depth of pupils' learning and progress.

Standards and provision in science have improved as the pupils enjoy more opportunities for practical investigations and discussion. Staff morale is positive and teamwork is effective. Teachers are committed to improving their skills through professional development. Senior and middle leaders are generally accurate in their self-evaluation of the school's performance, using this and other management information to inform improvement planning. The effectiveness of the governing body has improved significantly and is now good. These developments mean that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school and results in raised attainment and progress for all pupils by:
 - ensuring that expectations for all pupils are high and they are challenged in line with their ability
 - making best use of assessment information to match work more precisely to the learning needs of all groups of pupils in lessons
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work to emphasise the value placed upon it and promote pupils' sense of pride in this
 - ensuring a consistent whole-school approach to marking which gives pupils clear guidance on the next steps to take in order to improve their work
 - creating opportunities for pupils to be more involved in the direction of their learning and take responsibility for their own learning behaviour.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the monitoring of teaching and learning to focus more rigorously on how effectively teachers ensure that all pupils make good or better progress in lessons
 - developing further the skills of middle leaders in monitoring and evaluating provision in order to accelerate pupils' progress over time
 - making fuller use of the school's tracking systems and scrutiny of pupils' work to quickly identify any gaps in their key skills and adjust the curriculum and lesson planning accordingly to remedy these.
- Raise attendance by persevering with the school's already rigorous systems for monitoring and following up pupils' absences and working with families to reduce these.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Most pupils are well motivated and respond particularly well to activities that are practical and interesting, including opportunities to solve problems by working in collaboration with others in pairs or groups. This was evident, for example, in a Year 3 science lesson when pupils organised themselves well and quickly extended their knowledge of materials and understanding of fair tests.

Pupils enjoy school. The majority enter Year 1 with average levels of skill and ability, although this varies from year to year and is sometimes below average. From their starting points, pupils make satisfactory progress to reach broadly average attainment by the time they leave Year 6. Their preparation for the next stage of their education is satisfactory, although for a very few pupils this may be adversely affected by poor attendance, despite the school's best efforts to remedy this.

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The results of the Year 6 national tests in English and mathematics in 2010 were just above average, showing a particular improvement in mathematics when the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 was also above average. This variability in overall attainment within and between subjects is reflected in pupils' work seen during the inspection, indicating that next year's results may not be as strong. However, this still represents satisfactory progress for those pupils, one factor being the effect of changes in the number of pupils joining or leaving the school towards the end of Key Stage 2.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and are well supported should they have any problems. They say that any incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school community, for instance as school councillors and monitors, although it is more common for the oldest pupils to have additional roles of responsibility. All pupils and their families contribute more widely through charitable fund-raising. Pupils can explain which choices contribute to a healthy lifestyle, understanding the impact of exercise on heart rates, muscles and bones. They are aware of why some foods are 'good or bad' and what it means to do things in moderation. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, although stronger in the spiritual and moral dimensions.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Some good teaching was seen during the inspection, but this is not consistent enough over time to ensure that it results in good learning for all pupils. Teachers' use of assessment and marking is satisfactory. Some examples of good practice were seen, for instance in some pupils' self-assessment of their writing followed by good marking that clearly explained the next steps they should take to improve, but this is not consistent. The common positive features of most lessons include good relationships between adults and pupils, effective promotion of pupils' speaking and listening skills and teachers' clear explanations of the activities to be completed. Teachers also ensure that lesson objectives are shared with pupils and most learning tasks are planned appropriately to maintain an effective balance of time on different activities to keep pupils on-task. Teaching assistants are well briefed and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Teaching is less effective when the work planned, despite taking account of different ability levels, is not matched closely enough to pupils' specific needs, due to inconsistent use of the school's tracking system. For example, where there are gaps in some pupils' knowledge and skills that are not being remedied, or where more-able pupils are not being fully challenged. On too many occasions, teachers also fail to reinforce high expectations of the quality of pupils' handwriting or general presentation of work across the curriculum.

The school is aware of the need to now develop its satisfactory curriculum to enhance opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their basic skills across a wider range of subjects and themes. This continues to be done more effectively in English than in mathematics or in information and communication technology.

The school's good care, guidance and support are reflected in the emphasis placed upon developing pupils' confidence, self-esteem and emotional development. This has a particularly strong impact on the pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and helps to remove barriers to learning. It is also a key feature in the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, enabling them to make satisfactory progress along with their peers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and assistant headteacher have worked well together to improve their skills and provide the satisfactory leadership, drive and ambition that had been absent at the time of the previous inspection. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, although

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sometimes it is focused more on the description of the school's actions than on succinct evidence of the impact of these upon pupils' outcomes. Similarly, in evaluating the quality of teaching, senior and middle leaders are aware of the need to focus more on the impact of this on pupils' rates of learning, both in lessons and in their work and understanding over time.

The school tackles discrimination firmly and its promotion of equal opportunity is satisfactory. Work to promote community cohesion is satisfactory and appropriately linked to the school's mission statement and other equality policies. Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. The governing body is much better informed about the school's performance and offers a high level of knowledge and challenge in holding the school to account. It ensures that statutory duties, including those related to safeguarding pupils, are met. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children join the Nursery with a range of skills and understanding. Although many are broadly in line with those expected for their age, this varies and in some years a significant minority of children enter with below expected levels. Children make satisfactory progress towards meeting their early learning goals by the time they start Year 1, although some aspects remain below average. Children, including those who speak English as an additional language, enjoy their learning, are very settled and show good understanding of the routines in the Nursery and Reception classes. Provision is satisfactory and improving, for example in the increased focus on an effective balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning across the two classes. Observations of children and their interests are used to record their progress and increasingly to plan the next steps in their learning. The learning environment is organised appropriately to make

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effective use of both indoor and outdoor areas, and adults constantly look at ways to set up spaces more imaginatively within the available resources. Children get along well together and adults help to promote good attitudes, for example by reinforcing the need to share and take part in tidying up routines. Adults use praise and encouragement well to boost children's confidence and promote their speaking and listening skills. Leadership and management are satisfactory and welfare requirements are met.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed very positive views about the school and the education their child receives. Inspection evidence supports the school's view that its school's engagement with parents and carers is good and supplemented by regular communication between home and school, for example in newsletters and through its website and learning portal. After canvassing the views of parents and carers, the school recognises that there could be more opportunities to involve them in decision making and further develop ways in which they can support their child's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Alban's Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 60 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 214 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	55	24	40	3	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	63	21	35	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	47	29	48	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	35	36	60	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	33	34	57	3	5	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	37	30	50	3	5	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	32	35	58	2	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	35	35	58	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	32	38	63	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	30	38	63	2	3	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	30	36	60	4	7	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	16	27	38	63	4	7	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	40	34	57	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Warrington, WA5 0JS

Thank you for your help during the recent inspection of St. Alban's school. Inspectors enjoyed spending time in lessons and talking to you about your learning. We found that the school has improved since it was given a 'notice to improve' just over a year ago and is now satisfactory overall. Some things are good, too; for example the care, guidance and support you receive, the way in which you all feel that the school keeps you safe, and your understanding of healthy lifestyles. A big improvement has been made in leadership and management, and the governing body is doing a good job too.

In order to improve further, we have talked to school leaders about some key priorities such as making sure that teaching and assessment are good or better so that you all make good or excellent progress in the future. School leaders should continue to develop their skills in checking on how well the school is doing and making sure it carries on improving. Attendance also needs to improve, so you can help by making sure that you come to school every day unless you are ill, so that no learning time is wasted. You can also help by making sure your behaviour is always good and that you take more responsibility for this yourselves, instead of waiting for teachers to remind you. In this way, you will be able to learn new things more quickly and independently.

I wish you lots of success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

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