

St Alban and St Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117450
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	363871
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Halpin
Headteacher	Paula Holden
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 15 lessons taught by seven teachers. Inspectors observed the school's work, and analysed assessment data, scrutinised pupils' work, looked at displays and studied a wide range of school documentation. Meetings were held with staff and members of the governing body. In addition, 165 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised.

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

- Inspectors looked at how well the school supports boys' achievement.
- They investigated how well the school promotes pupils' cultural development.
- The inspectors checked on what teachers do to help pupils understand how well they are doing.
- They looked at how well the school uses data when planning and target setting.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized infant school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The majority of the pupils are White British, although the proportion from other ethnic backgrounds is above average. An above average proportion speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.

The school has Healthy Schools status and the Activemark and silver ECO awards. The governing body runs a breakfast club before school each weekday morning.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. It has built on previous strengths and maintained a picture of exceptionally high standards of attainment over a number of years. This has been done through outstanding leadership by the headteacher, senior staff and governing body, and through consistently high quality teaching. On top of these characteristics the school has maintained its very caring nature. This ensures pupils are safe, confident and developing excellent learning skills for the future. The school is continually assessing its work. This self-evaluation is accurate and honest, recognising evident strengths but also continually looking for further ways to improve and innovate. There is no complacency and because of this the school has an outstanding capacity to maintain this excellence and even build on it further.

Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been exceptionally high for the past two years. This represents excellent progress from starting points that are broadly at the levels expected for their age when they begin school. The children in the Nursery class and those in the Reception classes make outstanding progress and have an excellent start to school life. This is maintained in Years 1 and 2, and pupils develop excellent attitudes towards learning. This is reflected in their outstanding behaviour in lessons and around the school, and in their full engagement in the activities provided for them. The school has worked particularly hard at improving boys' achievement, especially in writing. This has been very successful and boys now achieve much better than boys of the same age nationally. Although the content of much of the work is excellent, there are times when its presentation is let down by the quality of letter and number formation. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make outstanding progress, as do the growing proportion of pupils from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. The school provides high quality support for those at an early stage of learning English and this helps them reach high levels of attainment.

Pupils also develop an outstanding understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They make a tremendous contribution to the school and wider community through a wide range of responsibilities and activities, especially through charity work. Parents and carers support the development of strong learning habits by ensuring pupils' regular attendance and good punctuality. Parents and carers are very positive about the school's work. As one said, 'The school recognises the needs of individual pupils and has given my daughter enough challenges to stimulate her and enable her to reach her full potential.'

The positive outcomes are due to excellent teaching and learning. Teachers work very hard to provide pupils with interesting and exciting activities that challenge them and engage their full attention and interest. They have worked hard and successfully since the last inspection to improve the feedback they give to pupils. Targets set are based on accurate assessments of pupils' learning and wide range of data. Pupils are also aware of

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their next steps and what they have done well. The support for individuals, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is exceptional and indicative of the outstanding care, guidance and support offered. Teachers plan a very creative and imaginative curriculum which is exceptionally well enriched through themes and topics as well as special days and events. The curriculum plays a vital role in the pupils' excellent cultural development.

The governing body has a strong presence in the school through a number of links and roles such as the monthly duty governor. These give its members high levels of information about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They rightly have confidence in the senior leadership but also hold the school firmly to account. Even so, they are yet to fully develop a plan to teach pupils more about how others live elsewhere in this country and across the world. Senior staff do a very effective job in monitoring and evaluating their subjects and spreading good practice, as well as continually looking outside the school for new ideas and other improvements they can make.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the current provision for community cohesion, and develop a plan to promote more fully pupils' understanding of how other people live in different parts of this country and other parts of the world.
- Improve pupils' formation of letters and numbers and the presentation of their recorded work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

The high quality of pupils' work is evident in their books and in lessons observed during the inspection, and supports the published assessment results. In Year 2, for example, an extended piece of creative writing by one pupil kept the inspectors gripped and amused by its imagination, wit and maturity. In lessons in Year 1, pupils showed further imagination in developing ideas for imaginary excuses for not going to school, involving visits to jungles, mountains or seas. In all lessons the engagement of the pupils in the activities provided clearly had a positive impact on their learning and progress. In Year 2, pupils solved challenging number problems involving more than one operation, and talked confidently about what happened if numbers went below zero. The presentation of pupils' work, including their letter and number formation, has not been a recent focus and although they are immensely and rightly proud of their work, this is not always reflected in its presentation. However, they do take fantastic efforts over their art and design and their design and technology projects and this is reflected in some very high quality work, such as the African masks and applique undersea creatures.

The school ensures pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils learn to appreciate the wonder of the natural world and the need to care for it, especially through the contribution they make on the ECO committee. Their excellent behaviour has a very positive impact on their learning. Their learning through the curriculum about other faiths and cultures is good but the other cultural aspects, especially in art and music, are excellent.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

The outstanding learning and the progress made by pupils are largely due to the high quality of the day-to-day teaching they experience. The relationships in classrooms between adults and pupils are friendly and supportive but challenging. Planning is detailed and focused very effectively on pupils' individual needs. Teaching assistants often provide very good support, especially for the pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They often sit with them during whole-class sessions and sometimes work with them in small groups in or out of the classrooms. In a few lessons, the teaching assistants were less effectively involved in the plenary sessions, when learning is often consolidated or moved on. Teachers assess pupils' progress very accurately, sharing this with them and giving them next steps for their learning. This is done particularly effectively by talking to the younger pupils, and through the positive 'tickled pink' and 'green for growth' system for the older pupils. Teachers also model activities very effectively, as happened in two excellent Year 2 lessons teaching pupils to create pictures in the style of the artist Dufy. This included very effective use of technology to illustrate the artist's work and that of the pupils.

The excellent curriculum covers all expected and basic needs for pupils of this age. However, the school enriches and extends this very effectively. During the recent expressive arts weeks, for example, pupils have developed a deep knowledge and understanding about Africa and African wildlife. This has resulted in some excellent quality

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work including writing, art and modelling. Outstanding care, guidance and support is evident in all aspects of the school's work, particularly in supporting the learning of the pupils whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable. Children starting school are particularly well supported in a number of ways. During the inspection, for example, a lively and very enjoyable lunch was held for parents and carers with their nursery age children who will be starting school in September. This helped all involved gain an understanding of the lunchtime routines. Provision for the most gifted and talented pupils is developing well and a number of activities are now provided for them. The breakfast club provides pupils with some interesting activities and a calm start to the day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has created a very successful, hard-working and talented team who have the needs of the pupils at the heart of all they do. This excellent team ethos is evident in the returned staff questionnaires, where 100% strongly agreed that they were proud to be a member of staff. Even so, they are very effectively challenged to continually improve and innovate as well as supported when necessary through training and collaborative working. The leadership of subjects is excellent, with a focus on outstanding outcomes. The members of the governing body have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the school on a day-to-day basis and play a full part in school life. Very successful efforts are made to ensure the school promotes equal opportunities for all and this is evident in the way some very vulnerable children are cared for and helped to access school life. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. For example, while giving due attention to pupils' safety and security, some excellent work is done with a school pond that is very well covered and secured between use, and there are excellent risk assessments for many activities. Partnerships are outstanding and the school has some excellent curricular links with the nearby junior school, as well as partnerships with a school in a nearby village. In addition, external expertise is used when necessary to extend and expand teachers' knowledge. For example, when a child with specific learning needs was admitted, staff brought in an external expert to coach and advise them on the best ways to provide successfully for that child.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Nursery and Reception classes benefit from excellent accommodation indoors and outside. Staff planning ensures that full use is made of these learning areas to maximise their potential. Activities are imaginative and interesting and planned to develop all areas of learning. A particular focus in the Nursery on physical development is clearly having a positive impact on children's early writing and mark-making skills. The teachers and other staff, including parent and carer volunteers, work exceptionally well together and make a very effective team. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding on a regular day-to-day basis. Because of this, children have confidence in their relationships with the adults and willingly follow instructions and take a full part in activities. There is an excellent balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities indoors and in the very well-resourced outdoor areas. Assessment arrangements are outstanding. Detailed observations are carried out and recorded. Some of these are focused on a particular activity or area of learning, while others are of particular 'wow' moments. The children's superb learning journey records provide parents and carers with an in-depth insight into their child's learning, and include records of occasional 'magic moments' at home. The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led and managed and, as is the case throughout the school, is not complacent but always looking to improve and seeking new ideas and innovations for the benefit of the children's learning.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parental questionnaires returned is well above that typically found. The responses are overwhelmingly positive and parents and carers are clearly very happy with their children's experience at the school. All of those who responded strongly agreed that the school teaches their children how to stay healthy. A very large majority agree that the school keeps children safe, and that the school is led and managed well. These positive views are supported by the inspection evidence. A very small minority of parents and carers feel the school does not meet their children's needs or respond to their suggestions and concerns, largely concerning the nature of admission priorities. The inspection evidence shows that all children are very well cared for and their individual needs are very well met. The school is also very willing to meet with and listen to parents and carers whenever concerns arise.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Alban and St Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery 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 165 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	149	90	15	9	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	152	92	12	7	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	122	74	39	24	3	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	135	82	28	17	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	143	87	20	12	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	131	79	31	19	3	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	131	79	34	21	0	0	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)	136	82	27	16	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	123	75	35	21	5	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	127	77	35	21	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	119	72	40	24	6	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	147	89	17	10	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	146	88	17	10	1	1	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



13 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban and St Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery School, St Albans, AL1 5EX

I want to thank you all for the very friendly and helpful way you welcomed us to your school recently. We really enjoyed our visit and sharing with you some of the excellent work you are doing.

You go to an outstanding school. You work very hard and you behave exceptionally well. This helps teachers give you interesting and exciting things to do. You reach very high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. We were very impressed with some of the writing in Year 2, and also with your art and design work, especially about Africa. We were very moved by your singing of the lovely school song.

Your teachers work very hard to help you learn new things. They make up some interesting and fun challenges for you which you all seem to really enjoy. Those of you in the Nursery and Reception classes really play and learn well together. You are very lucky in your lovely new building and outdoor areas.

To help the school get even better we have asked the teachers to plan in more detail how they can teach you more about how others live in other parts of this country and around the world. You can help too, by trying very hard to make your usually excellent work a bit neater and more carefully presented. So we have asked teachers to give you more opportunities to practise writing your letters and numbers.

Thank you again for your help and friendliness. Enjoy your time at SS Alban and Stephen and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead inspector

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