

Alban Church of England Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136550
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	395352
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Walker

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	504
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Haworth
Headteacher	Lorraine Dougall
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Walker

Additional Inspector

Gillian Scobie

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Richard Glasby

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 40 lessons and observed 22 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the school development plan, the tracking system to monitor pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupils' work. They also analysed questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and 389 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The academy is larger than the average-sized middle school. It serves pupils from the local community and beyond, so a significant number travel some distance to the academy. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs (supported at school action plus or who have a statement) is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. The academy meets the current floor standard which sets the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The school became an academy in April 2011. It is currently oversubscribed and is planning for a five form entry for Year 5 in September 2012. The academy has received the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards and has achieved National Healthy Schools 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school that provides a safe and happy atmosphere. Pupils enjoy their time at school and develop into friendly and considerate individuals. Despite some growing strengths, it is good rather than outstanding because achievement is not as good in English as it is in mathematics and because the way teachers check understanding and mark work is not consistently strong.
- Pupils’ achievement is good. By the time they leave the academy, attainment is consistently high in mathematics and above average in English. Progress is good in most subjects and often outstanding in mathematics, science, art and physical education.
- Pupils’ behaviour is outstanding. They are polite and respectful and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are very aware of how to keep themselves and others safe and feel secure in school. Attendance is well above average and reflects pupils’ real enjoyment of the things they do in the academy.
- Teaching is mainly good, sometimes outstanding and sometimes satisfactory, with the result that the pupils are making good progress overall. There is a positive learning atmosphere in lessons and teachers have high expectations for all pupils. However, not all teachers are encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their learning and the more able are not always fully challenged in English. Pupils do not always have a clear view of how to improve their work.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a precise understanding of the areas for development, including the performance and professional development needs of staff. Senior leaders and subject leaders provide good quality leadership of teaching and learning. The curriculum contributes outstandingly well to the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of pupils throughout the academy so that it is outstanding in English by:
 - challenging the more able pupils so that a greater proportion gain the higher levels in their work
 - improving the effectiveness of the reading programme.
- Raise the overall quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding by making sure that all teachers are:
 - checking the understanding of work and the tasks which are set for the pupils
 - marking work consistently well to show pupils exactly how they can improve their work
 - encouraging pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils enter the academy with standards that are generally above the national average although there is some variation from year to year. Pupils make good progress in Year 5 and 6 in reading, writing and mathematics. By the time pupils leave, attainment is at least above average across the range of subjects. It is consistently high in mathematics and above average in English. Progress has been typically good in English and outstanding in mathematics during Year 7 and 8. Year 8 pupils demonstrated outstanding progress in mathematics in 2011 with over 70% of pupils gaining level 6 standards (level 6 is higher than expected nationally). Progress is good in English although fewer pupils make rapid and sustained progress or gain the higher levels in Year 6 or at the end of Year 8. The academy has been active in supporting the development of writing across the curriculum and there are early signs of more rapid progress in the present year.

Pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3 make good progress in reading and they read regularly in school and at home each day. By the end of both Year 6 and Year 8, standards in reading are above the national average. However, progress in reading is not yet as rapid as that in mathematics and the academy is rightly taking steps to improve the effectiveness of the reading programme.

In lessons, pupils typically learn well. Their attitudes are good and they work well with others, respecting each other's views. They are able to reflect and persevere with challenges. They enjoy taking responsibility for their own learning when given the opportunity, for example through project work. During the inspection, Year 8 pupils used skills and understanding from previous work to support their assignments on the American Indians and their rights to land. However, not all teachers

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encourage pupils to do this sort of independent activity.

The well-developed tracking system and range of intervention strategies are used well to identify and support any pupils who are at risk of underachieving. The academy is presently providing considerable additional support, such as intervention classes in numeracy and literacy for small groups of pupils in most year groups. Most disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers because of effective additional support which helps them overcome barriers to learning and take part in lessons with the other pupils. The very small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds also make good progress overall.

Quality of teaching

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires feel that their children are taught well. Most teachers plan interesting activities and create a positive learning atmosphere in their classes, as pupils confirm. Displays in classrooms provide a stimulating environment for learning and celebrate pupils' work. Most teachers make sure that the activities are well matched to the different abilities of the pupils. However, occasionally opportunities are missed to challenge the more able to reach higher standards, especially in English. Disabled pupils and those who find learning difficult or have special educational needs are well supported and challenged by teaching assistants in class or withdrawn on a regular basis in small groups for extra help in reading, writing and numeracy. Teaching is good in these small group sessions.

A small minority of lessons were judged as satisfactory rather than good when pupils' progress slowed because teachers were not fully checking their understanding of the work or the tasks set for them. Pupils' progress slowed, as a result, because a few misconceptions continued or they were unsure what to do. In general, pupils receive good verbal feedback on how well they are doing and they are aware of their targets. There are some examples of excellent marking of work in some subject areas but marking is not consistently detailed enough to show pupils exactly what they have to do to improve their work.

All pupils have daily periods of literacy and numeracy and this aspect of the curriculum greatly supports the teaching of basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching actively supports pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are encouraged to think about and express their own beliefs and values, as seen in the work in religious education and personal and social education on topics such as different beliefs, racism and stereotyping.

Outstanding teaching was seen when teachers challenged their pupils with high quality questioning and tasks as well as encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. This often led to greater engagement and accelerated progress for pupils. For example, Year 8 pupils made excellent progress in mathematics when they were set the task, in pairs, of analysing the weaknesses of different types of graphs and then explaining their findings to the rest of the class.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of pupils, parents and carers are highly positive about behaviour in the academy. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school and this contributes to a calm and orderly environment. In lessons, pupils consistently meet the academy's expectations and respond very well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour. Pupils are highly skilled in managing their own behaviour in school. For example, pupils could be trusted to sit in classrooms during wet breaks, move around the corridors and go out to play with minimum supervision. Pupils are considerate, polite and courteous to staff and each other and this has a very positive effect on learning. They make every effort to ensure that the other pupils learn and flourish in an atmosphere of respect and dignity.

Although bullying of any kind is extremely rare, pupils, parents and carers say any unkind behaviour, such as teasing and name calling, is dealt with quickly and effectively. All class groups are actively engaged in supporting the academy's anti-bullying policy and pupils are very aware of the different forms of possible bullying such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sexual orientation, gender, race and disability. Every pupil feels valued as an individual even in this large school. Pupils feel very safe in the academy and display an excellent understanding of the issues relating to safety. They talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations such as using the internet, talking to strangers and crossing the road. Attendance is well above average and reflects the pupils' enthusiasm and willingness to engage with school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher communicates a clear vision for improvement in all aspects of the academy and is well supported by senior leaders. Rigorous systems of monitoring teaching and tracking pupils' progress are responsible for the good achievement. The school development plan is a comprehensive working document with clear actions and targets which already have a focus on improving the rate of pupils' progress in English and the quality of teaching. Professional development is a key focus and, as a result, teachers are continually reflecting on their practice in order to improve further the quality of learning in their classes. These things demonstrate that the academy has the capacity to improve further.

Members of the governing body are well informed and are effective in their evaluating and monitoring roles. They have been particularly active in supporting the application for academy status and the planning for the additional pupils in September 2012. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements and underpin its very caring approach. There is a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination. For example, the academy analyses in detail the performance of different groups and ensures that any gaps in attainment are narrowed through intervention and support.

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The academy has developed an imaginative curriculum which is very relevant to pupils' needs and provides an exciting range of enrichment activities. For example, the residential visits for all year groups provide effective enhancement for the curriculum as do Enhancement Days, which greatly increase pupils' enjoyment and experience of school. The reading programme is sound but reading across the curriculum (the learning of reading skills while studying other subjects) is not as well developed as writing. Nevertheless, the broad range of experiences within the curriculum contributes well to pupils' achievements and to their exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the academy is very active in developing pupils' awareness of different cultures through curriculum time and visits such as the Year 7 Multi-Faith Day in Bedford. Pupils gain confidence and self-esteem, develop excellent social skills and a clear sense of right and wrong

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alban Church of England Academy, Bedford, MK44 3HZ

Thank you for making us so welcome and for sharing your views with us during the inspection and through your questionnaires. We greatly enjoyed watching your lessons, looking at your work and seeing you during playtime and lunch. Your school is a good one that continues to make significant improvements. We know that your parents and carers are very supportive of the academy and value the education provided for you. There are many positive things about your school.

- You enjoy school, attend regularly and work hard in your lessons.
- You make at least good progress in all your subjects and excellent progress in mathematics, science, art and physical education.
- You are exceptionally well behaved and feel very safe in the school.
- You are considerate, respectful and courteous to staff and each other.
- Your teachers provide a range of interesting activities through both the lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Your academy is well led.

The headteacher, governing body and staff are always looking at ways to make your academy even better. We have asked your teachers to help and challenge all of you to make even better progress in English so that more of you gain the higher levels in your work. We have also asked them to make sure you always understand what you are doing and to give you more opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning. You can all help by asking the teacher for help when you do not understand the work and trying hard when you are asked to work on your own. Finally, we have asked teachers to make sure marking always tells you exactly how to improve.

We trust that you will continue to work hard and benefit from the range of opportunities in your academy. We wish you every success in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Walker
Lead inspector

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