

St Alban's Catholic Academy

First Avenue, Harlow, CM20 2NP

Inspection dates

17–18 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Early years provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The executive headteacher, well supported by the governing body, provides strong leadership. As a result, achievement across the academy is good and continuing to improve.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils. Pupils make good progress because they are taught well throughout the academy.
- Teaching has improved as a result of strong subject leadership. Some good practice, such as ensuring pupils talk with and learn from each other as well as from the teacher, leads to good overall achievement.
- From their different starting points, children make good progress in the Reception year.
- The work in pupils' books and observations of learning in lessons show that this good progress continues throughout Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to reach above-average standards when they leave, and to achieve better results than those of 2014. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils show excellent attitudes to learning. They are welcoming and courteous. They develop into mature, well-informed, young British citizens as they move through the academy.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils and parents say that the academy is a safe and happy place to be, and pupils enjoy life at the academy. This is reflected in pupils' attendance, which is above average.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of topics and subjects which support their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents value the 'family feeling' which pervades the academy.
- The academy's early years provision is good. Lively and interesting teaching helps children to make good progress, both indoors and in the outdoor area. Leadership of the early years is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although subject leaders have been effective in improving teaching, the very best practice has not been shared widely enough with all teachers.
- While the teaching of mathematics has improved this year, teachers do not always provide work that deepens the understanding of the most-able pupils so that they reach the highest standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 23 lessons, including four jointly observed with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher or the mathematics subject leader. Teachers in all year groups were observed at least once.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in books and on classroom displays. They listened to pupils reading. They attended assemblies.
- Inspectors met with all leaders in the academy and with a group of governors.
- The inspection team met with groups of pupils and talked to them during lessons, in the playground, in the dining hall, and as they moved around the building. Pupils took inspectors on a curriculum 'tour' of the academy.
- The 26 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, and inspectors spoke informally with parents at the start of the day.
- Questionnaire returns completed by 28 members of staff were taken into consideration.
- Many documents were reviewed. These included development plans, policies, records of monitoring, safeguarding and planning records, information for families, and governing body documents.

Inspection team

Ruth Dollner, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bimla Thakur

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Alban's Primary Academy converted to become an academy in 31st August 2012. When its predecessor school, St Alban's Catholic Primary, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The academy is part of the Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Multi Academy Trust and is the sponsor academy to St Luke's Catholic Academy. On becoming part of the trust, the headteacher of St Alban's was appointed as executive headteacher for both academies.
- St Alban's is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Provision in the early years consists of one full-time Reception class.
- Pupils come from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is White British, followed by pupils who are from African and Indian heritages.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported through the pupil premium is well below average. This is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to help more pupils make rapid progress and raise attainment further by ensuring that:
 - teachers share the practice that results in outstanding progress in some lessons and year groups, so that it is developed in all classrooms
 - all teachers set work that deepens the understanding of the most-able pupils, particularly in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The academy is well led by the highly respected executive headteacher, supported effectively by the deputy headteacher, subject and other leaders, and by the governing body. Leaders know the school well and have identified the right priorities for improvement.
- Subject leaders have ensured that the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics has improved throughout the academy since it opened. They are supported in this by the joint work undertaken with the other academy in the trust. These improvements are increasingly bearing fruit for pupils currently at the academy, who are making good progress.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that there is good provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and these pupils make good progress. There is good provision for individuals or groups of pupils who fall behind their classmates in their reading, writing or mathematics. They receive targeted additional support from teaching assistants in lessons and in additional 'catch-up' sessions outside the classroom.
- The early years leader has improved planning and provision for children in the Reception class. As a result, achievement for these children has improved significantly over the past year.
- Leaders and other staff have created a strong climate for learning in the academy based on a culture of very positive behaviour and high expectations. Pupils are encouraged to do well. Pupils of all abilities make good progress and this reflects the academy's commitment to equality of opportunity for all and their determination to tackle discrimination.
- Staff are proud to work at the academy. Teachers and teaching assistants strive to do their best for pupils. They are reflective and keen to improve their teaching skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is successfully fostered through the broad curriculum operating within and beyond the school day. Visitors to the academy, such as 'the Science Alive' team, have a positive impact on pupils' achievement. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. They talk confidently about their understanding of British values such as 'playing fair' and respect how different people 'pray and celebrate their religious festivals'. Pupils in Year 3 recently created a highly engaging assembly and video about 'being British' of which they were clearly very proud.
- The pupil premium funding has been used well to benefit disadvantaged pupils across the academy. Those falling behind receive individual tuition that enables them to catch up quickly with their classmates. The funding ensures that all pupils can attend after-school clubs and go on school trips. Disadvantaged pupils also receive specialist music tuition if they wish. The academy has employed additional teaching assistants with this funding to support pupils in lessons. As a result, disadvantaged pupils across the academy make similar or better progress than their classmates and gaps in attainment are closing.
- The additional primary sport funding has also been used well to develop staff expertise and to ensure that pupils have access to sporting activities they would not otherwise experience. Governors have interviewed pupils about the impact of this on their physical fitness and on their understanding of the importance of having a healthy lifestyle. They received very positive responses.
- Parents are supportive of the work of the academy and say that 'excellent partnerships' exist between parents and teachers. All parents who responded to the online survey Parent View said that they would recommend the academy to another parent.
- Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met. When safeguarding issues are raised with leaders, they respond swiftly and effectively to deal with them.

- Since becoming an academy, St Alban's has maintained positive relationships with the local authority and buys in support and training when required. For example, newly qualified teachers benefit from the professional development events that the local authority provides. This has had a good impact on the quality of teaching in the school and, therefore, on pupils' progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. The governing body challenges and supports the work of the academy effectively. Governors provide a wide range of skills and expertise and benefit from the strong, highly effective leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body.
 - Governors are ambitious for the academy and share the staff's vision to move the academy further forward so that it achieves outstanding outcomes for its pupils. They have an accurate view of the priorities for the academy, wishing to improve the quality of teaching to raise achievement further.
 - Governors seek appropriate advice to support them with the performance management of the executive headteacher and are fully informed about the performance management of teachers. They ensure teachers receive pay increases only when pupils' progress is at least good. They hold the academy to account for spending of the pupil premium and primary sport funding effectively. The governing body checks the impact of this spending through feedback from leaders and by talking to pupils.
 - Governors visit the academy often and are very much part of the life of the school.
 - The governing body ensures that it carries out all its statutory duties effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This has a strong and positive impact on pupils' learning. Attendance is above average and this reflects pupils' and parents' commitment to the academy and to learning.
- Pupils show great resilience in lessons. They try their best and persevere, even on the few occasions when work is not set at the right level for them.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, in the playground and around the building is impeccable. They are always polite and helpful. They are friendly and engaging when they talk to visitors. They are keen to share their experiences of school and proud to talk about their achievements, while not being afraid to share aspects of their work that they struggle with or want to improve. This is a credit to the supportive relationships that exist between pupils and all the adults who work at the school.
- Pupils and parents agree that there is no bullying at St Alban's and that any minor incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils articulate their understanding of 'right' and 'wrong' well and are very clear on the academy's behaviour policy. They value the awards they receive for good learning or behaviour. There have been no exclusions since the academy opened.
- Pupils show great respect for the adults in their school and their community, and for each other. They are interested in and respectful of people who have cultures and beliefs that are different to their own.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Any issues brought to the attention of leaders are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- The academy's site is secure. Pupils feel safe and well cared for and know who to go to if they need help or support.
- Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take and know they need to keep themselves safe when they use the internet.
- Reception children are taught about road safety through carefully planned role-play activities. They told inspectors about the rules of crossing a roundabout, for example.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching, based on thoughtful planning, is increasing the rate at which pupils are making progress. Currently, pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are clear signs from the work in pupils' books and from observations of learning in lessons that increasingly effective teaching is accelerating pupils' progress further in some year groups.
- Well-directed teaching and good-quality extra support results in disadvantaged pupils making progress that is similar to or better than that of their classmates. In a lesson on writing haiku poetry, for example, the teacher's and teaching assistants' skilful questioning challenged pupils in Year 5 to stretch their thinking and improve their work. All pupils made excellent progress within the lesson and talked confidently about how they had improved their writing.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the range of support from which they benefit.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make learning interesting and support pupils to be successful learners. An example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson where pupils in Year 6 were constantly challenged to 'show their thinking' or to explain what they thought they needed to do to be successful. The teacher carefully demonstrated the method he wanted them to use so that pupils understood the 'steps to success' and made strong progress.
- Teachers encourage pupils to talk together about their work, challenge each other's misconceptions and solve problems together. This leads to a deeper understanding that underpins rapid progress. For example, pupils in Year 2 were solving number problems and talking animatedly about their learning in mathematics. The pupils were challenged to achieve highly and their progress was outstanding.
- Outstanding progress resulting from particularly effective teaching was also seen in Year 1 where pupils were shown how their learning of letters and sounds could help them with their writing. They were able to apply what they had learned straight away by writing captions and sentences.
- Teachers use a wide range of themes and subjects to give pupils opportunities to apply their literacy skills in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils write confidently for a range of purposes and audiences. High-quality teaching from the specialist music and sports teachers leads to good progress in these subjects and provides good professional development for teachers.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved recently as a result of the actions taken by the subject leader. Teachers now have stronger subject knowledge and are using their skills to set tasks which challenge all pupils, and particularly the most able. This has had some positive impact on the progress made by all pupils. However, not all teachers are setting work at the right level for the most-able pupils so that they make rapid progress and achieve the highest levels of which they are capable.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Recent marked improvements in the progress made by children in the Reception class mean that they are now better equipped for learning in Key Stage 1 than in the recent past. When they started Year 1 this year, the large majority of children had developed the knowledge and skills necessary to cope with the demands of the curriculum in Key Stage 1.
- Over the last few years, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 has fluctuated between broadly in line with, and above, national averages. The school's own data, observations of pupils' learning in lessons and the good quality work in their books indicates that they are now making good progress and that attainment is rising to become securely above average by the time they leave the school.
- Pupils currently in Year 2 are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The large majority of them are already working securely at expected levels for the end of Year 2. Pupils in Year 6

have made rapid progress in writing and mathematics this year. The proportion of pupils on track to reach the highest levels in mathematics is well above the 2014 figure.

- Reading is taught well across the school and the actions taken by the English subject leader mean that it is improving further. Effective teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in the Reception class and Year 1 ensures that the pupils have a strong foundation for reading. In 2014, the results of the phonics screening check for pupils in Year 1 were above average. Teachers use group-reading activities consistently well across the school. Entries in the pupils' guided-reading journals and in home-school reading records, together with the information the school collects about pupils' progress, show that they are making at least good progress.
- In 2014, there were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 to comment on their attainment without risk of identifying individual pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils across the school are currently making good progress in line with their classmates. Attainment gaps have closed in Key Stage 1 and are closing rapidly in Key Stage 2.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make strong progress because of the good teaching and support they receive. All are making progress which is in line with that of their classmates.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who are of African or Indian heritage make progress that is similar to their classmates and achieve well.
- Last year, the progress of the most-able pupils was not as fast as it should have been. A higher proportion of the most-able pupils in the current Year 6 class are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The school rightly has the attainment of its most-able pupils as a priority on its improvement plans. However, teachers are not yet consistently planning work to stretch the most-able pupils in all year groups to ensure they reach the highest levels of attainment, particularly in mathematics.

The early years provision

is good

- Leadership and management of the early years are good. The early years leader has improved provision and planning since her appointment. As a result, achievement at the end of the Reception year has improved considerably since 2013, when standards were below the national average. In 2014, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was well above the national figure. Assessments were checked and validated by the local authority.
- Last year, children started school with skills that were broadly typical for their age, with slightly weaker skills in literacy and their understanding of the world. They made good progress in the Reception year because of good teaching and they achieved well in all areas of development. Children joining the school this year started with skills which were broadly typical for their age in all areas of development. The information the adults collect and the children's 'learning journeys' show that they are making good progress from their starting points.
- Improvements to provision have ensured that learning in all areas of the early years curriculum is planned inside the classroom and when children are learning outdoors. Children benefit from and enjoy a balance of child-chosen and teacher-led activities. Warm relationships exist between children and adults. As a result, behaviour is good. Children are kept safe and parents say that their children feel secure.
- Parents contribute to the 'learning journeys' of their children. These chart children's good progress in a range of lively and interesting ways. Parents also enjoy attending special events such as 'the tiger's tea party'.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137056
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	448609

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	George Reynolds
Headteacher	Anne Marie McCann (Executive headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01279 425383
Fax number	N/A
Email address	admin@st-albans.essex.sch.uk

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