

# Alban Church of England Academy

Silver Street, Great Barford, Bedfordshire MK44 3HZ

**Inspection dates** 10–11 December 2015

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher has established a culture of the highest expectations. The needs of each pupil are at the heart of the work and success of the academy.
- Outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils in all year groups make strong progress across very many subjects from their starting points at the academy.
- Leaders have a detailed knowledge of the quality of teaching. Effective action has improved teaching which is good and at times outstanding.
- Teachers make good use of their strong subject knowledge to plan lessons that enthuse and often inspire pupils to learn. This helps pupils to make good, and sometimes better, progress.
- Pupils behave very well in many lessons. Their attendance is good, they are polite, speak with maturity and almost all enjoy their learning.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe at the academy. This sense of security helps them to develop their confidence and to learn well.
- Leaders have created an ethos in which reading is celebrated and central to learning. Pupils read widely, with confidence and enjoy doing so.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are well provided for. As a result, they make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The curriculum is very well matched to the capabilities of pupils. It makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Consequently, pupils are reflective, confident and well prepared for their future education.
- Leaders provide high-quality training for all staff. Consequently, staff are well skilled and perform their roles well.
- The governing body sets a clear strategic direction for the academy and robustly holds leaders at all levels to account for the standard of education that is provided.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders do not frequently review the effectiveness of additional funding that they receive to identify trends in achievement and develop activities that will further accelerate pupils' learning.
- Some teachers in English lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to write at length and so develop their advanced writing skills.
- Teachers in some lessons do not take opportunities to extend the thinking of pupils, many of whom are inquisitive and keen to learn. This prevents these pupils from making even better progress.
- A small minority of pupils do not exhibit the same good behaviour as the overwhelming majority.

## Full report

### What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - developing strategies to extend the thinking of pupils further in lessons and enable them to make even better progress
  - ensuring that teachers in English lessons develop activities that allow pupils to develop further their skills of extended writing.
- Improve leadership and management by reviewing the effectiveness of additional funding that they receive more frequently and developing activities that will accelerate further pupils' learning.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by developing strategies to improve the behaviour of a very small minority of pupils, in particular when on the corridors or travelling to and from the academy.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The highly determined headteacher has established a caring culture with the highest aspirations for pupils in the academy. Staff and pupils have responded very well and together they have created an atmosphere in which learning is able to thrive. As one pupil commented, 'I chose this school as it is friendly and I can learn well'.
- Leaders have a precise understanding of the quality of teaching across the academy. As part of their relentless drive to improve standards even further, they share excellent practice and challenge teaching that is not yet outstanding. Carefully designed training programmes address the needs of individual teachers. Consequently, the quality of teaching is good, often better, and is improving further still. Teachers want to improve their practice and have faith that their leaders will support them effectively in doing so. Similarly, teaching assistants are appreciative of the training opportunities provided for them. The skills that they develop enable them to carry out their role well.
- The headteacher's clear and robust management of teachers' performance is leading to a continual improvement in the quality of teaching. Targets for teachers are closely linked to improving the outcomes for pupils. The headteacher empowers middle leaders to be a driving force within the academy, which ensures that these leaders are given the chance to develop their skills. This is appreciated by the subject leaders who have taken advantage of these opportunities.
- Middle leaders are very effective in their work. They play an important role in improving the quality of education across their subject areas. For example, leaders in English and humanities have worked with senior staff in amending the Key Stage 2 curriculum to match better the capabilities of younger pupils in the academy. These pupils are making faster progress as a consequence.
- The curriculum, which is broad and balanced, enables pupils to make good progress. Leaders carry out effective work to make sure that topics studied in previous schools are not repeated and to ensure equality of opportunity for pupils of all abilities. They have adapted the curriculum to enable pupils to develop greater confidence when using literacy skills across a range of subjects. Pupils have access to a wide range of creative and enriching experiences, many of which take place during 'options' on a Friday afternoon. Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about these opportunities, which include activities such as rowing, sports leadership, swimming, choir and cheerleading.
- Enthusiastic and skilful leadership ensures that the provision for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is very effective. These pupils' individual needs are analysed carefully and activities then designed to enable each pupil to make at least good progress across a range of subjects. For example, pupils who need additional support in their reading have access to one-to-one tuition which leads to rapid development in their reading skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well provided for. A wide range of visits, visitors and activities help to broaden pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural horizons. Pupils are acutely aware of the important part that they play in the life of the local community. Inspectors observed pupils engaging in mature discussions with visitors at the annual 'Senior Citizens Party' and others preparing for charitable activities that they would be leading in the following week. Consequently, pupils are already developing the skills to make a significant contribution to their academy and the wider community.
- Leaders ensure pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain and the risks they may face. Pupils learn about democracy, take part in decision-making processes and have the chance to visit parliament. Careers days, visits to university and presentations from visiting speakers prepare older pupils effectively for the next stage of their education and beyond.
- Reading is exceptionally well promoted across the academy. Pupils read widely and many express a love of reading. They read a range of classic and contemporary texts and make good use of the library, which is a hive of activity at break and lunchtime, to read either alone or in groups. This passion for reading is helping pupils to develop stronger literacy skills and make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders allocate the funding to support individual pupils eligible for the pupil premium effectively. Activities funded include programmes that are designed to improve literacy and numeracy skills. These enable these pupils to make good and sometimes better progress across a range of subjects.
- Additional sports funding is used well, increasing pupils' participation rates in a wide range of sporting activities. Additional training is also provided for adults who teach physical education. Pupils are very appreciative of the additional opportunities afforded to them and make energetic use of the additional sporting facilities, such as the outdoor fitness equipment, that has been provided by the diocese.

- Leaders and managers do not routinely review the effectiveness of additional funding that they receive to identify trends in achievement and develop activities that will accelerate pupils' learning more rapidly.
- **The governance of the academy**
  - The Chair of the Governing Body leads with a conviction which is underpinned by his determination that the academy will provide the very best education for each pupil. Governors supplement the information that they receive from senior leaders with regular visits to the academy. As a result, they are very well informed about the quality of education and the views of pupils, parents and staff.
  - Governors hold leaders, including subject leaders, to account effectively. They receive detailed reports and presentations from leaders at all levels and ask pertinent questions of these leaders and their work.
  - The governing body ensures that the academy's policy and practice on performance management are effectively applied.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The academy's safeguarding provision meets statutory requirements. Records are carefully maintained and training is frequent and carefully monitored. Adults in the academy are well trained. They are clear on how to identify and raise concerns.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** is good

- Leaders have continued to improve the quality of teaching since the last inspection and it is now good across many subjects. Lessons are typified by very high expectations, good planning and a wide variety of activities that interest pupils and lead to them making good or, at times, even better progress.
- Teachers, who have strong subject knowledge, often display a passion for their subjects that inspires pupils in their lessons. On more than one occasion during the inspection, pupils appeared genuinely disappointed that lessons were coming to an end.
- Teachers make good use of precise assessment information to plan lessons that are well matched to the capabilities of pupils. Pupils are enthused by the range of activities that teachers use to help them to learn. For example, Year 7 pupils worked with exceptionally positive attitudes in their geography lesson as they used their newly acquired skills to assess the work of their peers. As a result, they deepened their understanding of the impact of earthquakes upon those affected by them.
- Skilful questioning helps pupils to broaden their knowledge and explore subjects in greater depth. Pupils studying refraction in a Year 7 science lesson were challenged to think more deeply about the properties of light by the probing questions asked of them by their teacher. They responded with vibrant enthusiasm and began to ask and answer challenging questions of their own. They accelerated their progress and developed their analytical skills as a consequence.
- Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to apply the skills and knowledge that they have learned. Pupils are also encouraged to reflect on their learning. Pupils in a Year 5 resistant materials lesson were analysing their own work and that of their classmates skilfully. This enabled them to improve their knowledge of properties of the materials from which they had made their keyrings.
- Teachers have very high expectations of how work should be presented. Pupils' work is often carefully drafted and neatly presented. Inspectors saw very little evidence of work that was careless or unfinished.
- Teachers follow the academy policy when providing feedback and consequently pupils are able to build upon their prior learning. Pupils display resilience and learn quickly from their mistakes as a result of their teachers' perceptive and precise feedback on their work.
- Teaching assistants are well trained and well prepared. When they are working with pupils, teaching assistants offer high-quality support and challenge pupils skilfully, enabling them to make good levels of progress.
- Pupils' literacy skills are well developed in many lessons. Many pupils take advantage of well-crafted tasks to produce detailed and analytical writing. For example, in history, Year 7 pupils were able to write at length about the Battle of Hastings, analysing the possible causes of Harold's defeat. Similarly, pupils in geography wrote using appropriate subject-specific language about the impact of local traffic schemes. Teachers of English do not always make the same demands of pupils and this can restrict the quality of the writing that is produced in these lessons.
- Teachers, on occasion, move on to the next topic too quickly, not taking advantage of the pupils' enthusiasm for learning. This means that chances to develop wider and deeper thinking are not always encouraged and this can prevent pupils, who are interested and inquisitive, from making greater progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The large majority of pupils attend well and enjoy studying in an environment which is warm, welcoming and supportive of learning.
- Pupils' positive behaviour and attitudes are reflections of the high expectations of the headteacher and her staff. Pupils want to learn and speak with pride about their academy and the work that they undertake in lessons.
- The carefully devised personal, social and health education programme equips pupils with the knowledge and skills to become confident members of the community. Pupils lead assemblies on themes such as Advent, speaking with clarity in front of their peers. They also have the opportunity to learn about topics such as personal finance, health, rights and responsibilities and being a role model.
- Pupils value their leadership responsibilities. Year 8 pupils spoke warmly about their work as 'reading buddies'. They proudly described the progress that their Year 5 'buddies' had made in their reading. As one pupil commented, 'it has helped me to see how younger pupils learn'. Pupils were similarly proud of the leadership opportunities provided in the sports leader programme and in the pupil forum. Such activities are helping pupils to become reflective, responsible members of their academy.
- Most parents indicate that their children feel safe at the academy. Pupils agree and they speak confidently about the strategies they have been given to keep safe when using the internet.
- Leaders' work to improve attendance still further is highly effective. As a consequence, attendance is high for all groups of pupils.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave extremely well in almost all lessons and create an ethos in which learning can flourish.
- Pupils arrive at lessons on time and keen to learn having made effective use of tutor time to organise themselves for the day. They respond well to the instructions from their teachers and enter into almost all learning activities with enthusiasm and good humour.
- Pupils' support for each other is a notable feature of the academy. Whether working in pairs or groups, pupils listen to each other's views and are prepared to offer support and challenge to their peers. This helps to develop an atmosphere in which pupils have the confidence to offer freely their views in lessons.
- Disruption to learning is an unusual occurrence and one of which pupils themselves disapprove. Almost all teachers are swift to address the very small amount of low-level disruption that occurs and learning is rarely disrupted in the vast majority of lessons.
- Pupils have a good understanding of bullying and its consequences. They report that it is a rare event at this academy. Records provided by academy leaders confirm this to be the case. Pupils informed inspectors that they had faith that the academy leaders would address any issues of bullying or name-calling swiftly were they to occur. The very large majority of parents agree that this is the case.
- Pupils move about the academy site swiftly and purposefully. They mix well at break and lunchtimes and make energetic use of the wide range of facilities provided for them. There are occasions where behaviour in the corridors can be too exuberant and noisy. Similarly, pupils reported that, on occasion, behaviour on the school buses lacks self-discipline.

## Outcomes for pupils are good

- Pupils enter the academy in Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8. On arrival at the academy, pupils undertake externally marked assessments. The results of these assessments demonstrate that pupils arrive with skills and knowledge that are broadly in line with that of their peers, and, in many cases, lower in mathematics. They make good progress from their individual starting points on entry across the four years that they are at the academy and this is why outcomes are good.
- Historically, attainment at the end of Year 6 has been significantly higher than national averages. While there was a slight dip in the 2015 outcomes, evidence seen on this inspection indicates that pupils are attaining very well in all years across the academy.
- In 2015, by the end of Year 6, pupils made strong progress in mathematics, reading and writing from

their individual starting points in their two years at the academy. This was also the case in many subjects across the curriculum. Academy assessment information, evidence seen in lessons as well as a scrutiny of pupils' work indicates leaders' amendments to the curriculum combined with good or better teaching are ensuring that pupils currently in the academy are making similarly rapid progress.

- Pupils in Key Stage 3 achieve well. Work in lessons and that seen in a scrutiny of their books indicates that many pupils make good or sometimes better progress across very many subjects. Their attainment is similarly strong. This is due to the effective teaching that they receive.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress that is in line with their peers in reading and writing, and stronger progress in mathematics. Academy assessment information, which is externally validated, indicates that they make good or better progress, often in excess of that of their peers, in many subjects across the curriculum. This good progress was also seen in the work of these pupils across very many subjects. In most cases, disadvantaged pupils close the gaps in achievement with their peers by the end of Year 8.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs make good progress across all year groups. This is due to the highly effective teaching and the carefully crafted support that they receive.
- More-able pupils make good progress across many subjects and in each year group. Their progress from their starting points is not as strong in reading, nor is it in geography or ICT.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136550
<b>Local authority</b>	Bedford Borough
<b>Inspection number</b>	10000532

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	532
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Andrew Haworth
<b>Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge</b>	Sue Lourensz
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 870735
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.albanacademy.org">www.albanacademy.org</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:secretary@albanacademy.org">secretary@albanacademy.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14–15 May 2012

## Information about this school

- Alban Church of England Academy is a middle school which is considerably smaller than an average-size secondary school.
- Pupils join the academy at the start of Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, who are eligible for pupil premium, is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The academy does not make use of alternative provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 37 lessons, five tutor sessions, two assemblies and two joint learning walks with the headteacher. They observed the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors held meetings with pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the Diocese of St Albans and the Martyrdom of Alban. Pupils were spoken to informally before the start of the academy day, at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views expressed through one letter received during the inspection, 44 free text responses and 70 survey responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of 43 responses to the staff online questionnaire.
- Examples of pupils' work were scrutinised to gain a view of progress over time.
- The inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the most recent information regarding pupils' progress and attainment across the academy and the academy's own evaluation of its effectiveness together with plans for improvement. The minutes of the governing body and information relating to the checks on the quality of teaching were evaluated.
- The inspectors checked the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the processes and procedures for recruiting staff.

## Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anthony Sharpe	Her Majesty's Inspector
Caroline Drumm	Ofsted Inspector
Pete Sewell	Ofsted Inspector



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