

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School, Blackburn

Trinity Street, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 5BN

Inspection dates

7–8 July 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and other senior leaders provide determined and focused leadership, which has brought about significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils are achieving higher standards than at the time of the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they provide good support for individual pupils because they know their classes very well.
- By the time pupils leave Year 6, they reach above-average standards in mathematics, and broadly average standards in reading and writing. They make good progress from their starting points.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years because provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is good.
- Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language is highly effective. As a result they achieve well.
- Support for disadvantaged pupils is good and they also achieve well.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Pupils get on well together and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and effective, and pupils feel safe in school.
- Governors know the school well and are providing an effective balance of support and challenge to school leaders to secure further improvement.
- The school makes good use of the extra funding it receives to engage pupils in sport and games.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not consistently provide the most able pupils with activities which challenge them to make rapid progress and achieve their potential.
- Teaching in mathematics does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Pupils are sometimes over-reliant on adult support and are not confident enough when working independently.
- Too many pupils are absent for short periods several times a year, and this means that they miss vital learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school in order to raise standards by ensuring that all teachers:
 - give the most able pupils more challenging tasks that rapidly move their learning forward, so that more reach the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics
 - provide more opportunities in mathematics for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills
 - develop pupils' confidence and resilience as learners so that they are able to learn as well when working independently as they do when working with an adult.

- Improve attendance rates by:
 - promoting more effectively among parents the importance of good attendance on their children's achievement
 - following up a pupil's absence more rigorously when a pattern of poor attendance begins to emerge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Determined and focused leadership from the headteacher, other senior leaders and governors has ensured that the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Leaders have been successful in improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, and this has led to pupils making faster progress and a rise in their attainment.
- Senior leaders, including those responsible for English and mathematics, make regular checks on the quality of work in pupils' books and the progress that all groups of pupils are making throughout the year. They have played an important role in improving the quality of teaching and in ensuring that the school's systems for assessing pupils and tracking their progress are effective.
- Rigorous checks are made on teachers' performance. Challenging targets set for staff are linked to whole-school priorities and pupils' progress. Staff benefit from a good range of opportunities to improve their practice through well-targeted professional development and training. Recently teachers have been involved in a lesson study project, which has involved pairs of teachers working together and observing each other teach. These opportunities have encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice and make improvements to their teaching based on supportive feedback. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and is now good.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional help and support for disadvantaged pupils. Additional staff provide specific academic support for pupils who need it, so they catch up with their classmates. Pupils and families also benefit from a range of other well-planned support, including pastoral care and help for parents to support pupils' learning. This is typical of the school's effective commitment to providing all pupils with the same opportunities to succeed.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of interesting learning opportunities, which are enhanced by visitors coming into school and various educational trips, such as a residential trip to the Lake District. There is also a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including sport, cookery and art clubs, which provide pupils with further opportunities to develop new skills.
- Provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils speak enthusiastically about fundraising activities that they have taken part in and the charities that they support, both in Britain and abroad. The school successfully teaches pupils about fundamental British values such as democracy and justice, and pupils understand the importance of tolerance and respect for people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds.
- Leaders make good use of the additional primary physical education (PE) and sport funding. Some of this is used to fund two sports apprentices, who work alongside teachers to support teaching and learning as well as promoting pupils' participation in physical activity. Pupils now enjoy taking part in many more sporting activities within school and in competition with other schools.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school since the previous inspection. Advisers and consultants have worked with school leaders, including governors, to help the school to achieve better improvement planning and subject leadership, and to validate the school's self-evaluation. The school also works closely with a group of local schools to share and develop good practice.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The quality of governance is good. Governors are proud of the school's improvement since the previous inspection and are ambitious for that improvement to continue. The governing body holds senior leaders to account effectively and has a well-informed view of data relating to pupils' attainment and progress and to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
 - The governing body ensures that appraisal is used effectively to set challenging targets for teachers and school leaders. They understand the link between pay and performance and ensure that decisions about pay increases are based on appraisal outcomes and reflect the impact that staff have had on pupils' progress.
 - The governing body has a firm grasp on the school's finances. Working with school leaders, it has been successful in eliminating a previous budget deficit while ensuring that spending decisions have a positive impact on pupils' experiences in school and their achievements.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all necessary policies and procedures are in place and are reviewed as required, and that staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge of safeguarding issues is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Teachers and teaching assistants have benefited from a well-planned programme of professional development and from opportunities to work collaboratively, both of which have developed their skills and helped them to improve their practice.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to plan activities that capture pupils' interest, such as carrying out practical investigations in science. Resources are used effectively to engage pupils enthusiastically and support their learning.
- Teachers know their pupils well and in many cases ensure that the work that they set is well matched to the next steps that they have identified in pupils' learning. This is particularly the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. Here, teachers ensure that they receive additional support to ensure that they are able to make the same progress as other pupils.
- Teachers follow the school's marking policy consistently and use it to help pupils to improve their work. Pupils use 'fix-it' time during the school day to check on their teachers' comments and to make any corrections and improvements suggested.
- Reading is improving as a result of effective teaching, and phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is also taught well. This is helping readers in key stage 1 to read with accuracy and fluency, using appropriate strategies to help themselves when they come across a tricky word. All pupils are expected to read regularly at home, which the large majority now do.
- Good teaching is leading to pupils making faster progress in writing. Teachers develop pupils' writing skills well and pupils write with a wide vocabulary in a range of different styles. Older pupils have become particularly adept at editing and redrafting their work, well supported by helpful comments and suggestions from their teachers. Teachers are now giving pupils throughout the school opportunities to develop their writing skills when in other subjects, such as science and history.
- In mathematics, teachers ensure that pupils learn new concepts well. They use questioning effectively to encourage pupils to explain their mathematical thinking and are quick to tackle any errors that are the result of less-secure prior learning. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities in all year groups for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills in problem-solving contexts.
- Teaching assistants throughout the school work alongside the teachers to provide support and encouragement to pupils, asking clear questions and prompting them to move on in their learning. This high level of support encourages pupils to become over-reliant on adult support and so they are less confident and productive when asked to work independently.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for the most able pupils to deepen their thinking. Activities are sometimes not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils and they do not always achieve the high standards of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy taking on various positions of responsibility and take these roles very seriously. The school has an active pupil council, while the 'GIFT' team makes decisions on charity fundraising for local, national and international charities. This reflects the school's highly effective work to develop pupils' social awareness and ensure that the school listens to and takes account of pupils' views.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school, and can describe activities that have been run in school to raise their awareness of safety issues, such as a visit by the fire brigade to promote fire safety. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and some of the pupils act as e-safety monitors to help other pupils remember their internet safety rules.
- Pupils understand that different forms of bullying exist, such as using racist or homophobic language, but say that incidents of bullying in school are rare. They say that any incidents that occur, such as name-calling, are always quickly dealt with by members of staff, and are confident that staff would be able to help them if they had a problem.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is reflected in their conduct around school, where they consistently display good manners, speaking politely to adults and holding doors open for visitors. Pupils are clearly proud of their school, as can be seen in the way in which they take care of their school environment.

- Pupils play well together on the playground, where older pupils are happy to support and play with younger pupils. In the dining hall, pupils queue sensibly when waiting for their lunch and enjoy sitting and chatting with their friends.
- Pupils say that behaviour in school is good, and that instances of poor behaviour are unusual. They appreciate the way in which good behaviour and hard work are rewarded, for example through certificates and 'worker of the week' awards.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. All staff are familiar with the school's behaviour policy and ensure that it is applied consistently and fairly.
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning and take pride in their work and appearance.
- Attendance is improving but is below the national average. Attendance has a high priority in the school and leaders have worked with parents to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent. Too many pupils, however, miss important learning time because they are absent for one or two days of school several times a year. Leaders have not done sufficient work with parents to ensure that this type of absence is reduced.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress during their time in key stage 1 from starting points that are below those that are typical for their age. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check has risen significantly since the previous inspection. By the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly in line with the national average.
- By the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in reading and writing is typically in line with the average of schools nationally, and in mathematics it is above average. This indicates that most pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The proportions of pupils making at least the expected progress by the end of Year 6 are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. In reading and mathematics the proportions of pupils making more than the expected progress are also above average, while in writing that proportion is broadly average. This represents a strong and improving picture of pupil progress since the previous inspection.
- This good progress is matched by pupils currently in the school. The large majority of pupils read accurately, show good mathematical understanding and are able to write to good effect in a number of different styles and across a range of subjects.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress and any gaps between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school are closing, although there are some variations between different year groups. Disadvantaged pupils who left Year 6 in 2015 were two terms behind other pupils nationally in mathematics and a year behind in reading and writing. Given their starting points, however, this represented good progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because their attainment and progress are carefully tracked by the special educational needs coordinator, who uses this information to ensure that additional support is put in place where it is needed
- The school's very effective support for pupils who speak English as an additional language ensures that the rate of progress for this group of pupils is typically equal to, and sometimes better than, the progress made by their classmates.
- The most able pupils make at least the expected amount of progress across key stages 1 and 2, but too few go on to achieve the highest standard and reach their potential. This is because the activities that they are given do not consistently provide the level of challenge needed to stretch them fully and accelerate their learning.

Early years provision

is good

- Provision in the early years is improving. This is because the leadership and management of the early years are good. The early years leader has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the setting and has ensured that very clear information is kept to allow adults to check carefully on children's achievements and progress.
- Children start in the nursery with knowledge and skills that are lower than is typical for their age in

almost all areas of learning, but particularly so in their personal and social development, and their skills in literacy and mathematics.

- A significant number of children who speak English as an additional language enter the Nursery and Reception classes each year. They are very well supported and make good progress in developing their English skills and understanding.
- Children settle quickly and are keen to learn. Their progress in the Nursery is good because teaching is good. Staff observe and assess children's learning and development carefully and plan activities that build on children's skills and interests. The nursery environment, both indoors and outdoors, is attractive and encourages children to learn and explore new things.
- Good progress is maintained in the Reception Year, where staff place firm emphasis on the teaching of phonics and the development of children's skills and understanding in literacy and mathematics. Children's progress is particularly strong in the activities in which they work alongside an adult because teachers and teaching assistants provide focused support and use questions effectively. However, activities that adults plan for children to choose for themselves in the Reception Year are not as effective at developing children's independence and curiosity as those in the Nursery.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2015 rose significantly compared with previous years. The school's own records of children's performance show another rise this year, to 50%, which represents a further move towards the national average. As a result, an increasing number of children are ready for their move into Year 1.
- Parents are encouraged to engage in various activities and workshops at school, and parents who expressed a view were uniformly positive about the early years provision.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good. There is a harmonious atmosphere in Nursery and Reception classes and relationships between adults and children are warm and positive. All statutory welfare requirements are met and children's safety is given a high priority in the early years.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 119706 |
| Local authority | Blackburn with Darwen |
| Inspection number | 10012196 |

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

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| 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 | 197 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Father Jude Harrison |
| Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge | Claire Speakman |
| Telephone number | 01254 57582 |
| Website | www.stalbansrcprimaryschool.co.uk |
| Email address | office@stalbins.blackburn.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 20–21 May 2014 |

Information about this school

- This is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through pupil premium funding is above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average. About half of the pupils speak English as an additional language, which is above average.
- Children in the early years provision attend the Nursery part time and Reception class on a full-time basis.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school's website meets requirements for the publication of information.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons across different year groups, listened to pupils read and held discussions with pupils from across the school.
- Pupils' work in books, and information about their progress and attainment, were scrutinised with senior leaders.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to generate a report, but inspectors took account of four written comments that were received. Inspectors also looked at the responses to the school's own questionnaire for parents. Responses to the inspection questionnaire completed by 11 members of staff were also considered.
- Meetings were held with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. Meetings were also held with school leaders responsible for a range of subject areas, including provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and for children in the early years.
- Meetings took place with a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents. These included information about pupils' attainment and progress, the school's reviews of its own performance and checks on the quality of teaching, development plans, safeguarding documentation and various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Neil Dixon, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Maria McGarry

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
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