

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Rothbury Avenue, Pelaw, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear NE10 0QY

Inspection dates

15–16 June 2017

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| 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 |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher sets high expectations that are shared by pupils and staff. Leaders have maintained a positive and purposeful learning environment where children are happy, behave well and make good progress.
- Leaders have successfully addressed dips in performance in 2014, and sustained improvement in outcomes has been achieved over the past two years at both key stage 1 and 2.
- Leaders have developed reliable systems to check on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and, as a result, have an accurate view of standards.
- Strong planning and increasing subject expertise enable the majority of pupils to make good progress.
- Governors are committed to the success of the school and provide robust support and challenge. They have the necessary expertise that they use to hold leaders to account for key aspects of performance.
- The distinctive Catholic ethos of the school promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding that runs through all aspects of the school's work.
- Leaders in the early years have successfully improved provision through stronger planning, and teaching and better use of outside space.
- The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. The headteacher has raised the profile of all aspects of safeguarding this year, reflecting a collective commitment to the welfare and well-being of pupils.
- Levels of absence and persistent absence are below those seen nationally. The vast majority of pupils are happy at school and value their education.
- Middle leaders are becoming more accomplished in monitoring standards and sharing good practice. Subject monitoring of the wider curriculum and assessment of the impact of initiatives is less well developed.
- Differences in progress between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are continuing to diminish. However some differences in attainment persist, and rates of absence for these pupils remain higher than those for other pupils.
- There are signs that increasing proportions of most-able pupils are working at greater depth. Variance remains in writing and in some subjects, including geography and history.
- The majority of parents value the support that the school provides and the progress that their children make. However, a significant number have concerns over some aspects of provision, homework and communication.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the capacity of leadership and management by:
 - further developing the roles of middle leaders in monitoring the wider curriculum and reviewing the impact of initiatives
 - extending subject leadership to ensure that standards and the development of subject specific skills in foundation subjects match those in English, mathematics and religious education
 - listening closely and responding to those parents who have concerns over aspects of communication and provision, such as homework.
- Further accelerate the progress of the most able pupils by:
 - providing increasing proportions with more opportunities to move on in their learning
 - enabling the most able pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding in order to work at greater depth, especially in writing, geography and history.
- Continue to diminish any differences in the progress, attainment and attendance of disadvantaged pupils by:
 - closely tracking their progress
 - matching teaching, additional interventions and resources more closely to their needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and her team have maintained good rates of progress across the school. After some dips in performance in 2014, outcomes have consistently improved as a result of effective teaching and more rigorous monitoring. Class files reveal close monitoring of pupils' progress that enables teachers to respond promptly to address any underachievement and plan interventions that support pupils to make better progress.
- The headteacher and her team have ensured a consistent focus on the ethos of the school. This contributes to the calm and respectful atmosphere of the school where pupils are mindful of the feelings and needs of others.
- Senior leaders, increasingly supported by middle leaders, carry out regular monitoring of the quality of teaching and the standard of work in books. These processes have led to improved standards of work and presentation in English and mathematics for the vast majority of pupils.
- The headteacher oversees all aspects of the performance management process. Arrangements are thorough and closely checked by governors, supported by school improvement partners. Whole-school priorities feed into the targets of teachers and are aligned to the progress that pupils make. Teachers' performance is reviewed against their targets, their teaching and the progress that pupils make.
- Senior leaders are developing the roles of middle leaders to share good practice and monitor standards. Literacy and numeracy coordinators receive regular training and cascade ideas to staff. The early years' team has worked with advisers and consultants to improve the learning environment and address the needs of boys. Although wider leadership is being developed, a large number of responsibilities and tasks remain at the door of the headteacher. Subject leadership and the tracking of pupils' skills in foundation subjects are less well developed.
- The leadership of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that the use of additional funding is effective and supports pupils in making good progress. Leaders know their children well and put appropriate support in place. They track progress carefully and monitor the impact of any additional support. This enabled pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make excellent progress in reading at key stage 2 in 2016, alongside good progress in mathematics. Effective support was evident on a number of occasions during the inspection and current progress information shows that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to make good progress.
- Leaders closely track the impact of the use of pupil premium funding to improve provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This contributed to good progress in reading and mathematics at key stage 2 in 2016 and improved attainment at key stage 1. Despite this, some gaps in attainment remain, although there are signs that these will diminish at key stage 2 in 2017.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. The clear focus on developing pupils' skills and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics is complemented by topics that

extend knowledge in subjects such as science, history and geography, although pupils have fewer opportunities to develop subject-specific skills in these subjects. Pupils can access extra-curricular activities in sport and music and residential experiences, including a religious and geographical residential visit to Holy Island.

- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A cohesive programme aligns key assembly themes to work carried out in class. Pupils explore a range of religions in addition to studying their own faith. They show a respect for equalities, respecting differences of faith, race and different types of families.
- The majority of parents value the support that the school provides, and there is evidence of supportive partnership work with parents in the early years. Parents have led workshops on mental health and presentations on working in the fire service and the theatre. However, a significant minority of parents express concerns about leadership, aspects of provision, progress information and home-school communication that leaders and governors have not fully addressed.
- Physical education (PE) and sport premium for primary schools is being used successfully. The school is part of the school sports partnership and this supports active participation in a range of sports. These have included tennis, gymnastics, golf, dance and hockey. In addition, pupils have taken part in a wide range of competitions, including those involving athletics, football, netball, rugby and Boccia.
- The school receives effective support from a school improvement partner who supports senior leaders in reviewing progress. Additional reviews of performance are provided by education directors from the diocese. The school also works alongside a safeguarding consultant to ensure that practices are rigorous and up to date.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. The governing body has the appropriate expertise to provide high levels of support and challenge. Governors know the school well and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Through support from the school improvement partner and education directors from the diocese, governors receive additional external analysis of school performance that supports them in holding leaders to account.
- Governing body committees provide a regular focus on pupils' progress and curriculum provision. Governors examine the progress of particular groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They ask leaders to account for the impact of additional funding for these pupils. They check the budget carefully with the headteacher. Monitoring has become even more important in a more challenging financial environment.
- Governors are visible in the school and in the parish. They check the impact of particular initiatives. For example, one governor used a recent visit to talk to pupils about the impact of recent actions to strengthen awareness of safeguarding issues.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders take their responsibilities for pupils' welfare very seriously. The headteacher has made increased awareness of safeguarding a key priority this year. All staff meetings begin with a discussion of key safeguarding issues and staff are able to discuss the impact of this heightened training.
- Leaders carry out rigorous checks to ensure the suitability of adults working on site. Concerns over pupils' welfare are pursued thoroughly and the headteacher maintains appropriate records. Additional work has been carried out this year to raise staff's and pupils' awareness of mental health.
- Pupils feel safe in school and the vast majority of their parents agree. The calm and respectful ethos of the school supports pupils' well-being. Pupils believe that bullying is extremely rare and that clear procedures are in place to support them with any concerns they may have. They talk clearly about the actions they can take to stay safe online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan thoroughly and use their subject expertise to set work that is well matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers use questioning effectively to encourage pupils to reflect on their learning and deepen their understanding. Teachers give pupils appropriate time to apply their knowledge and skills in English and mathematics.
- The teaching of reading is a strength. Teachers and teaching assistants successfully develop pupils' phonics skills. Readers across key stages 1 and 2 read with fluency and expression and demonstrated perceptive understanding of the texts that they read.
- Teachers develop pupils' writing skills by enabling them to write in a range of styles and by encouraging high standards of accuracy in spelling and punctuation. Pupils are able to discuss the effects of particular metaphors and similes and use grammatical features to add depth to their writing.
- Leaders and teachers responded to a dip in mathematics outcomes in 2014 by reviewing practice and developing new approaches to mastery. The numeracy coordinator has worked with local cluster groups and external consultants to share good use of mathematical methods and provide access to more challenging problem-solving tasks. This is contributing to good progress across key stages 1 and 2.
- Teachers effectively provide feedback in line with the school's policy that helps pupils to improve. Assessment systems are enabling teachers to track pupils' progress and address underachievement more swiftly. Pupils feel that homework supports their learning, although a number of parents expressed concerns about the relevance of some tasks and the scale of project work.
- Well-planned teaching, supported by specific interventions, enables pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress.
- Teaching in the early years is imaginative and well planned. Children are happy in their learning and their curiosity is stimulated through the many creative opportunities provided.

- Teachers work effectively with the school's small but effective team of teaching assistants. As additional resources are limited, resources and well-tailored interventions are used carefully to meet pupils' needs. This is contributing towards the improving progress for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and lower-ability pupils.
- Although teaching is providing increasing opportunities for pupils to work at greater depth, this challenge is not yet consistent across all subjects and year groups. At its best, there are examples of extremely strong outcomes for the most able, particularly in the writing of most-able girls. However, less significant progress is evident in most-able boys' writing and in the progress of the most able in geography and history.
- Pupils develop good subject knowledge in history and geography but do not always have regular opportunities to apply their skills in order to work at greater depth.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The Catholic ethos of the school promotes values of kindness and understanding. Weekly pastoral sessions across phases address a range of subjects to promote pupils' welfare. Recent initiatives and workshop activities have promoted pupils' emotional and mental health.
- Pupils expressed appreciation of the thoughtfulness shown by their teachers and fellow pupils. In discussion and in responses to questionnaires, pupils said that bullying is extremely rare and they are confident that adults would address any unacceptable behaviour.
- The school has recently received recognition of commitment towards becoming a rights respecting school and pupils said that the school is a supportive environment where pupils are allowed to be different and where equalities are respected. A number of pupils who speak English as an additional language who joined the school have quickly settled as a result of strong support.
- Pupils are able to discuss personal safety and the actions that the school has taken to help them keep safe. Governor safeguarding visits revealed that pupils had a clear awareness of the dangers of exploitation and online grooming. In discussion, pupils demonstrated a good awareness of how to keep safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is very good. They are kind and considerate and show respect to one another and to adults. They show good standards of concentration in lessons. Pupils enjoy their learning and work well, and low-level disruption is rare.
- Behaviour systems encourage positive attitudes to learning and the rare instances of misbehaviour are addressed. Pupils demonstrate a pride in their school and their learning that is reflected in the vast majority of books.

- Rates of absence and persistent absence are below those seen nationally, as pupils value their education and the positive atmosphere that the school provides. Leaders are carrying out a range of actions to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which in some cases has been accentuated by extenuating circumstances. Although improvements have been evident, disadvantaged pupils remain more likely to be absent than their peers.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In key stage 2 in 2016, the majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made above-average progress from their starting points in all subjects. Progress in reading was particularly strong. The proportion of pupils who reached expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above that seen nationally.
- Current pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, across key stages 1 and 2. Increasing proportions are anticipated to reach expected standards and work at greater depth.
- In 2016, outcomes at key stage 1 showed a continued improvement. Pupils' performance had dipped back in 2014 but, through stronger planning and more effective teaching, standards have risen. In 2016, all pupils achieved levels of attainment that were close to or above national figures. External moderation of key stage 1 work has confirmed this picture of stronger progress and attainment, further evidenced through an extensive review of pupils' work by inspectors. This shows that leaders have effectively maintained momentum for improvement.
- Pupils' progress in science, geography and history is not as strong as in English and mathematics, as they do not develop their skills in these subjects as effectively.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 has been above that seen nationally. Pupils achieve good outcomes in reading as they progress through the school and show the ability to infer and deduce meaning.
- As a result of better planning and teaching, children make good progress in the early years and are now achieving good levels of development close to those seen nationally.
- Effective provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities enabled them to make strong progress at key stage 2 in 2016. Their progress in reading was in the top 10% of schools nationally. A thorough review of work revealed that current pupils are continuing to make good rates of progress.
- Differences in progress between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are diminishing in the majority of year groups. Disadvantaged pupils made above-average progress at key stage 2 in 2016, and current pupils are continuing to make good progress. The differences in attainment evident in 2016 are being narrowed, and all disadvantaged pupils who do not have special educational needs are on track to achieve expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017.
- There are signs that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are making better progress, and increasing proportions are expected to reach greater depth in 2017. However, there remain instances when they are not given

sufficiently regular opportunities to work at greater depth.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have improved the setting in recent years. This is through the enhanced use of outdoor spaces and better planning, which has led to tasks that address children's needs and interests more effectively. As a result, children are making good progress and the proportions achieving a good level has increased consistently over a three-year period.
- The early years provides a stimulating environment where children are inquisitive and enthusiastic and show good levels of concentration. For example, they listened respectfully to a daily prayer before eagerly discussing the meaning of a blurb on the back of a book.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use open questions to encourage children to think and solve problems. During the inspection, this was illustrated when children were absorbed in imaginative and physical activities, such as helping one another to fill pipettes to concoct a magic potion.
- Leaders work with local authority advisers to review provision and strengthen planning to meet pupils' needs. Developments to the outdoor spaces and a superhero project have captured the imagination and interest of boys. This contributed to marked improvements in boys' writing and outcomes in 2017 that will see boys outperform girls for the first time.
- Parents and carers are thoroughly involved in their children's learning. Weekly stay and play days enable parents to participate in their children's learning as they make gingerbread men, explore what plants need to survive and become word search detectives. Parents write post-it notes to describe their pride in their children's work. In addition, parents have access to an online app that enables them to see regular examples of their children's work and achievements. In discussion, parents of children in the early years were extremely positive about the school, particularly the quality of care and support.
- Teachers and teaching assistants monitor children's progress closely and record this accurately. They use assessment information to modify their planning to meet children's needs. Outcomes have been moderated by local authority advisers and found to be accurate. Leaders in the early years have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement and work with the whole team to focus on the detail of what each child and key groups of children require.
- A review of children's learning across the early years, known as 'learning journals', shows that children make good progress from their starting points. Teachers have an accurate picture of children's abilities and learning needs and teaching is effectively pitched so that progress is good. This means that children are increasingly well prepared to join Year 1.
- Additional funding is being used effectively to improve progress and attainment for disadvantaged children. As a result, differences between the standards reached by disadvantaged children and their peers are diminishing, and boys are making much

better progress.

- Safeguarding practices in the early years are effective. There are no breaches of statutory welfare requirements; children are safe and well supported. The whole-school focus on strong safeguarding practices evident at key stages 1 and 2 is equally apparent in the early years.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 108398 |
| Local authority | Gateshead |
| Inspection number | 10032131 |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 251 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Barry Coleman |
| Headteacher | Emma Bridon |
| Telephone number | 01914 693251 |
| Website | www.stalbansgateshead.org/ |
| Email address | emmabridon@gateshead.gov.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 14– 15 November 2012 |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- St Alban's is a slightly below average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average.
- The school's 2016 results met the government's floor standards for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

- The school has a number of awards, including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the recognition of commitment towards the Unicef Rights Respecting School award, the International School award and the Artsmark Gold award.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a wide range of lessons, covering all classes in the school. The headteacher accompanied the lead inspector on a number of observations.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders. The lead inspector met the school improvement partner and talked on the telephone to the director of education for the diocese. The lead inspector also met six members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. The lead inspector met a group of pupils at lunchtime on day one of the inspection.
- Inspectors talked to a large number of parents as they picked their children up on day one of the inspection and as they dropped their children off at school on day two of the inspection.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, lunchtimes and playtimes.
- Inspectors listened to groups of pupils reading and talked to them about their reading.
- Inspectors extensively examined the quality of work in a wide range of books. They discussed pupils' work and their learning with them in lessons.
- Inspectors looked at the school's work and considered documents including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, curriculum plans and information relating to pupils' achievement and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took into account 61 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 22 free text responses. They also took into account the 34 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Malcolm Kirtley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie McDowell

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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