

Inspection of a good school: Alban City School

7 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 3RR

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 June 2023

Outcome

Alban City School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are excited when they arrive at Alban City School. They greet staff and the school's dog enthusiastically at the school gates. Pupils enjoy the range of opportunities that are available as part of the academic curriculum and beyond. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the variety of trips and visitors to school that support them with their learning. They value the range of clubs and activities that they can join in with.

Pupils learn how to behave and take care of each other. They are polite and respectful to adults and one another. Bullying seldom happens. On the rare occasions that it does, pupils are very confident that teachers will deal with it quickly. Pupils focus during lessons. They take pride in their work and enjoy learning.

Pupils feel happy and are safe at school. They warmly welcome others, including new pupils who join the school from overseas. This helps to create a highly inclusive ethos in the school.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. They appreciate leaders' open communication and, where appropriate, the personalised support that they and their children receive.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have put a broad and ambitious curriculum in place. They have prioritised curriculum development and strengthening teachers' subject knowledge to support effective teaching. Subject leaders have identified the important knowledge and content that they want pupils to know and remember. They map this information in a way that enables pupils to build their knowledge over time. This helps pupils to make strong progress in a range of subjects.

Teachers ensure that classrooms are positive places for pupils to learn. Teachers explain learning clearly. They encourage pupils to develop their use of subject-specific vocabulary.

Teachers link learning to other areas of the curriculum to help pupils make connections between what they have learned in different subjects. For example, when teaching coordinates in mathematics, teachers make links to map work in geography lessons. This helps pupils to learn and remember important knowledge well.

Teachers typically ask lots of questions in lessons to check pupils' understanding. Occasionally, these checks do not consistently identify where there are gaps and misconceptions in pupils' knowledge. As a result, pupils' understanding in these subjects is not as secure as it could be.

Leaders prioritise and instil a love of reading in pupils. Leaders recently introduced a new phonics scheme. Staff have received training to teach phonics with consistency from the start of early years. Teachers regularly check the sounds that pupils know. They quickly identify those pupils who need extra help with their phonic knowledge. Leaders have carefully matched books to pupils' reading stage. This helps pupils to practise the sounds they have learned and to develop as fluent readers.

Leaders identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) promptly. Plans for these pupils outline the strategies that staff can use to support them. For example, teachers make appropriate adaptations to tasks and activities so that pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as others. Knowledgeable adults provide targeted support for individual pupils. These strategies enable pupils with SEND to learn well.

Leaders establish clear routines and expectations from the moment children join the school in Reception. Adults carefully plan a curriculum and activities that help children learn the skills and knowledge they need in different areas of learning. This, along with adults' understanding of how children learn, supports a smooth transition from learning in early years to key stage 1.

Pupils are confident when sharing their opinions. They can talk about different faiths knowledgeably. They are proud of their multi-cultural school, where difference is celebrated. They recognise that this makes the school special. Pupils can develop their talents and interests through many clubs and activities, including sports, music, languages and cooking. Older pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities through roles such as play leaders, technology leaders, reading buddies and library monitors. Elected pupil representatives on the school council and the eco-council help to improve the school and the local community. For example, pupils from the eco-council work in the neighbouring churchyard to improve the environment.

Leaders, including governors, are mindful of staff's workload and well-being. Staff value the support they receive to develop professionally. They are proud to work in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put rigorous systems and training in place so that all staff are confident to identify and report concerns. Leaders follow up concerns appropriately and swiftly.

Records of decisions and actions are detailed. Leaders work with external agencies, as needed, to ensure that pupils get the support they need. Leaders carry out all the required pre-employment checks on staff.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a wide range of contexts. For example, pupils know about water safety following their visit to the fire station. They learn how to stay safe online in computing lessons and assemblies.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, teachers do not always check what all pupils know precisely enough. This means that gaps in pupils' learning are not always identified and addressed. Subject leaders should support teachers to put effective assessment strategies in place in all subjects. This will help teachers to address gaps in pupils' understanding so that pupils know and remember more across the whole curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 138231 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10284257 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 392 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Paula Willoughby |
| Headteacher | Gilly Stray |
| Website | www.albancityschool.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 8 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- There have been a significant number of staffing changes in the school since the previous inspection.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and music. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector examined a range of documents provided by the school, including leaders' school development plans and policies.
- The inspector checked leaders' safeguarding processes. The school's single central record was scrutinised. Records relating to safeguarding were viewed and a meeting

was held with the designated safeguarding leads about how they manage this area within the school.

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, behaviour leaders and the subject leader for personal, social, health and economic education.
- In the absence of an early years leader, a meeting was held with the two early years teachers about the curriculum provision in the early years.
- The inspector met with two early career teachers to discuss the support that they receive.
- The inspector met with eight representatives from the local governing body and one member (trustee) of the school.
- The inspector held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner from the local authority.
- Pupils talked to the inspector about their views on the school. The inspector also observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtimes and in lessons.
- The inspector spoke to parents at the school gate. He considered the 208 responses and 125 free-text responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector also reviewed the 35 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Wayne Jarvis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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