

Inspection of St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery

St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School, Cecil Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire
AL1 5EG

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 12 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their nurturing school. By and large, they love learning and are enthusiastic to share what they know. For example, a well-thought-through music curriculum shows in pupils' understanding of musical terms and their ability to sing in tune. Strengths in the school's curriculum serve to ensure many pupils achieve highly.

Recent changes in the early years mean that children get off to a flying start. Children in the early years admire the adults. They use flashcards, for instance, to act in role as a teacher, correctly explaining to others the sounds that letters make.

Pupils are compassionate. They refer to the positive influence of adults in school and at home. This teaches them to recognise and respect how people differ. For example, pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of 'hidden' disabilities.

Many pupils access the ample extra-curricular clubs. These include languages, sports and drop-in well-being clubs. The well-being clubs allow pupils to mingle and talk about whatever is playing on their mind, under the watchful eye of staff.

Generally, pupils follow the 'golden rules'. They recognise how doing so ensures school is a calm and safe space. Collecting house points to contribute to a team award encourages cooperation.

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

The school's curriculum is well-planned. Leaders are particularly proud of the improvements made to the early years curriculum. These changes are better preparing children for Year 1 and beyond. Leaders continue to review subjects thoroughly. They make small changes to specify the precise concepts, skills and words pupils should learn. There have also been some recent changes to consider the local context. In this way, it encourages pupils to see how what they learn relates to their place in the world. This includes the careful planning of school trips and visitors to complement pupils' learning.

Recently, leaders called upon education research to improve staff's practice. Though it was high-quality, a few staff are not using the training effectively. Sometimes, how they explain concepts or demonstrate skills lacks clarity. This is particularly problematic for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some of these pupils cannot infer meaning as well as their peers. It shows in their attention waning in lessons and them struggling to complete work well.

There is a rigorous phonics programme in place. Having received effective training, staff are suitably skilled. When teaching, they watch pupils closely. As needed, they spring into action. For example, they ensure pupils correctly move their mouths to practise reading the sounds letters make. There is a suite of high-quality catch-up

support in place for those pupils who fall behind. Though in the early stages of implementation, this support is helping those pupils to catch up.

The school carefully caters for pupils with SEND. Staff monitor pupils closely. They liaise with leaders to identify pupils' barriers to learning. They then make simple adjustments to address these. Most parents appreciate how the school makes best use of the resources it has, to provide suitable support. For example, the use of writing slopes to encourage better posture and neater handwriting. There are also bought-in counsellors to teach pupils how to manage their thoughts and feelings.

Pupils, staff and leaders are rightly proud of the school's well-considered personal development programme. There are opportunities to develop pupils' social skills. For example, discos and film nights, as well as opportunities in lessons that develop their ability to voice and discuss ideas. There are a range of responsibilities for pupils. For example, the 'squabble squashers' offer peer mediation; the junior librarians maintain the school libraries; and the eco team educate the school in assemblies and whole-school events like the 'annual green day'.

Since the infant and junior schools amalgamated, there has been frequent change in leadership. It has been unsettling for the school community. Nevertheless, current leaders have steadied the ship. For example, they oversee clear expectations and a workable system that ensures pupils attend school regularly. However, there is still some uncertainty in leadership. Most leaders are in acting roles or are developing in a role they took on recently. There is also no substantive headteacher. Governors understand the need to secure leadership. They know to manage change carefully to ensure the school can go from strength to strength.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, teachers' explanations could be clearer. Leaders have not ensured that staff consistently use their recent training to inform their teaching practice. As a result, pupils continue to overly rely on their background knowledge to infer meaning. Leaders should further support staff to increase the clarity of their explanations so that more pupils can understand and learn new knowledge efficiently.
- Leadership is developing at the school. This has temporarily slowed aspects of school improvement. The governing body should support leaders in establishing a workable leadership structure and ensure they have the guidance needed to effectively fulfil their responsibilities.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	117491
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10268397
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	453
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gerry Dolan
Headteacher	Tess Hackett (Acting Head of School)
Website	www.ssas.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 June 2011 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Alban and St Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery School and Ss Alban & Stephen Catholic Junior School amalgamated in September 2020 to become St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery. The previous inspection grade, outstanding, was awarded to Ss Alban & Stephen Catholic Junior School in June 2011. Prior to the amalgamation, St Alban and St Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery School was also graded outstanding. Both schools were inspected under inspection frameworks used at the time.
- The school is set across two sites. The upper school is the school's registered address and is the location for key stage 2. The address of the lower school is St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery, Vanda Crescent, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 5EX. The lower school is the location for key stage 1 and the early years.
- The school is part of the Archdiocese of Westminster. The school has a religious character, Roman Catholic, and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 27 January 2017. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years of that date.
- At the point of inspection, there was an acting head of school. The governing body were working with the local authority to facilitate an interim executive

headteacher joining the school with the aim to appoint a substantive headteacher in April 2024.

- The school offers before- and after-school childcare for pupils attending the school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders. The school also offers childcare during the school holidays. It is run by a separately registered and inspected childcare provider.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including five governors, the acting head of school, and the assistant headteacher who is also the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator. Inspectors also met with representatives working for the diocese and the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult and observed some pupils receiving catch-up support for phonics.
- To further inspect the curriculum, inspectors reviewed curriculum documentation for science, music and the early years. Inspectors also spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work relating to those aspects of the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; examined safeguarding records; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school policies, the school improvement plan, self-evaluation form, and minutes from meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views by holding discussions with some of them, as well as talking to pupils during lessons and at lunchtime. Inspectors took account of the 316 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times.

- Inspectors gathered parents' views by reviewing the 181 responses, including 124 free-text responses, submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke to several parents at the start of a school day.
- The inspector gathered the views of staff by speaking to several of them and reviewing the 40 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

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