



St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105072
Local Authority Wirral
Inspection number 287114
Inspection dates 13–14 February 2007
Reporting inspector Angela Westington HMI

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

| | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Ashburton Road |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Wallasey |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 | | Merseyside CH44 5XB |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 0151 6386373 |
| Number on roll (school) | 360 | Fax number | 0151 6382870 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Rev Fr David Long |
| | | Headteacher | Mrs Catherine Frost |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 July 2002 | | |

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Age group 4–11 | Inspection dates 13–14 February 2007 | Inspection number 287114 |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Alban's Catholic Primary School serves the Roman Catholic parish of St Alban's in Wallasey. It provides for 360 boys and girls aged 4 to 11, the large majority of whom are baptised Catholics. The school dates back to 1872 and has a tradition of educating generations of families from the parish and surrounding areas. The overwhelming majority of pupils are White British: there are two pupils in the early stages of learning English. A lower than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attends the school, a very small number of whom have statements of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Alban's is a welcoming, attractive and well maintained school. Parents overwhelmingly support the school and attest that it fulfils its mission statement, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' It provides satisfactory education for its pupils. Pupils are well cared for and their personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall from Foundation Stage to Year 6, except in reading and writing in Key Stage 1. More able pupils in all age groups could do better.

Children leave the Foundation Stage well prepared to enter Key Stage 1 but their progress in the key skills of reading and writing stalls in Years 1 and 2. Standards in reading have steadily declined since 2002. In writing, standards have fluctuated around the average, while in mathematics they have been above the national average. In both subjects they dropped in 2006.

At Key Stage 2 the trend in national test results was above the average until 2005, when they dipped markedly. However, in 2006 they rose again and are now broadly average.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although it varies widely across the school. There is not enough consistently good teaching to raise standards to the levels that pupils are capable of achieving or that the school wants. The school has already identified the need to improve teachers' skills in assessing pupils' levels of attainment to boost teaching and standards.

The extra-curricular provision on offer is a strength, but the academic curriculum, although satisfactory overall, has some shortcomings. The weekly teaching time allocations for both key stages are below recommended guidelines and there is slippage in the management of time within lessons. In Key Stage 1 the teaching of phonics is inadequate and does not follow recommended guidelines. This is impacting adversely on pupils' progress in reading and writing. In addition, the management and organisation of the teaching of reading is insufficiently robust.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and leadership team are committed to the school and have been successful in raising standards in Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science. The roles of the leadership team and those of subject coordinators have been strengthened. This is having a positive impact, for example on pupils' standards of attainment in foundation subjects, such as art. The monitoring and evaluation of Key Stage 1 are inadequate. In particular the management of reading and phonics in Years 1 and 2, and the declining progress of pupils in this age group in these subjects, are cause for concern. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying this weakness. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

On other fronts, the school has pressed ahead with a range of initiatives. In response to the criticisms levelled at the last inspection, the accommodation has been completely refurbished to a very high standard; standards in science, information and

communication technology (ICT) and design technology have improved; and the governing body now takes a more robust approach in carrying out its duties. A school-wide system for tracking pupils' progress is now established, but there is still work to be done to improve assessment further. Given all this, the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the amount of teaching time in Key Stages 1 and 2 and eliminate time slippage in lessons.
- Ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 1 receive their entitlement to a daily structured phonics session, in line with national recommendations.
- Improve the management of the teaching of reading.
- Improve teachers' skills of assessing pupils' work according to National Curriculum levels.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils enter the school in Foundation Stage 2, from a very wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Overall their attainment on entry is average. They make satisfactory progress and are well prepared for Key Stage 1. Their knowledge of early reading and writing skills is good. However, this solid foundation is not built upon well enough in the following two years and pupils' progress stalls. Phonics, the understanding of letter-sound combinations, is taught sporadically and not well. Teachers do not make use of best practice guidance, so that pupils do not acquire the skills to write and read independently as quickly as they should. An over reliance on worksheets, which limit opportunities to practise writing at length, compounds the issue for all pupils, but especially for the more able. The management of the teaching of reading is not robust enough. For example, in some classes, pupils in the same reading groups have reading books of widely different levels of difficulty and, despite individual parents recording that books are too easy, their children remain on the same level and therefore do not progress quickly enough.

In Key Stage 2, over recent years, the school's results in national tests have fluctuated around the national average, with a dip in 2005, restored upwards in 2006. The school is not complacent and, with the support of the local authority, focused originally on raising standards in mathematics and science. It has now identified pupils' standards in writing as an area for development. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall from Foundation Stage to Year 6, but it could be better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school's mission statement exemplifies the feeling of well-being created by pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their knowledge and appreciation of other cultures is particularly well promoted through the arts. They show enjoyment in all they do, form good relationships with each other and with adults, and behave very well. The strong emphasis placed in the Foundation Stage on personal development means that from an early age pupils are self reliant while at the same time are well aware of how to share a worry, confident that help will be at hand. The school operates in a very orderly manner because pupils readily comply with staff guidance. They are fully involved in the wider community, for example through their very strong links with St Alban's parish and their very generous charitable fund raising. School council members are proud to be chosen to represent their peers and have been involved in improving play facilities in the playground.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with some strengths. However, it varies widely. There is not enough consistent, good or better teaching to raise standards to where the school would wish them to be. Strengths of the teaching include the very good relationships between adults and pupils which allow pupils to feel secure and willing to 'have a go', and the use of interactive white boards through which teachers give clear demonstrations and help to keep pupils' attention. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, dry food ingredients were used very well to engage pupils in solving problems of doubling and halving amounts. This made their learning very purposeful. In other lessons though pupils spend too long listening without the opportunity to engage, for example by using individual white boards to write sounds, or using number fans, or strings of beads to answer mathematical questions.

The use of time needs reviewing because there is slippage within lesson times: this means that in some lessons the pace of learning is too leisurely. Across the school there is an over-reliance on commercial schemes and worksheets so that lessons are not as sharply matched to pupils' needs as they could be. Much has been done to establish a whole school system to track pupils' progress but teachers know that they now need to improve further their skills of assessing pupils' work according to National Curriculum levels.

Teachers have undertaken a considerable amount of subject training, especially for mathematics and science, and the positive impact of this can be seen in the improvement in pupils' Key Stage 2 results last year.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall but it has some shortcomings. It satisfies statutory requirements and is enhanced by the introduction of French into Key Stage 2. The enrichment provision is good: this includes trips out, visitors to school and a wide range of after school activities.

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils adequately but there could be more challenge in lessons, especially for more able pupils. Provision for personal, social and health education and citizenship is satisfactory. Outside agencies are used to inform pupils about substance abuse, sex and relationships and the school is in the process of introducing a programme, additional to its already established practice, to promote further pupils' emotional intelligence.

Teaching time, especially at Key Stage 1, is below the recommended minimum. The school has already identified the need for pupils' learning to be better linked across subjects to promote the use and application of basic skills and knowledge.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents say 'St Alban's is a caring, exciting, safe and fun school' where they always feel very welcome. The school takes good care of all its pupils. They trust staff and know who to turn to if they need help. There is good support for them when they are upset or troubled. Staff put the good, well established procedures to ensure child protection and health and safety into daily practice. The arrangements for settling children into school and their transfer to secondary school are good. The school has worked exceptionally hard to provide safe and healthy facilities for all its pupils during the extensive building work that has taken place.

The support for pupils' academic development is satisfactory. Pupils who find learning difficult receive good, targeted help. In general though, most pupils are unclear about their targets: where they are up to, where they could be and how best to get there. Although group target-setting is established methods for checking on individual progress are not embedded in every class. Not all teachers are skilled enough in picking up pupils' errors and misconceptions and acting upon them quickly, thus moving them on.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher is committed to the school and has successfully led it through a difficult period whilst major building works have taken place. She has the support of governors, staff and parents.

The senior staff who form the leadership team have established a new team structure and revised their roles to ensure a more strategic overview and accountability for

continued improvement. The strengthening role of subject coordinators has ensured that provision in foundation subjects continues to be monitored alongside whole school priorities. With support from the local authority, in the past 18 months, the school has focused on raising standards in mathematics and science and has been successful in bringing standards back to the national average.

However, managers have not identified the decline in standards in reading and writing in Key Stage 1 as an issue, nor acted quickly enough upon guidance given several months ago by a local authority consultant.

The governing body now takes a more robust approach to its role and the chair of governors actively seeks out new members who can bring a wide range of skills and experience to bear. Governors are deeply committed to the school and value the school as being at the heart of their parish community.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
|--|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 3 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

| | |
|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | |
|--|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 4 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, Mrs Kenna, Mr Johnson and I visited your school recently and we would like to thank you for talking to us, telling us about your school and making us feel so welcome. We looked at many of the things you do in school. We talked with your teachers, some of the people who help you, as well as with a few of your parents. We thought that you behaved very well and we could tell that you and your families are very proud of your school. These are some of the things that we really liked.

- Your school buildings are super, aren't they? We know it took a lot of hard work and moving around when the all the building work was going on, but it was worth it wasn't it? The school is beautiful now. You are right to feel very proud of it. We are sure that you will take really good care of it and look after it.
- You behave very well. You are sensible, get on well with each other and look after each other. You enjoy school and you know how to keep yourselves healthy and safe. You care about others. We liked your pictures showing you 'Singing for Sudan'.
- The adults in your school look after you well.

We have asked Mrs Frost and the teachers to look again at how the younger children learn to read and write because we think they could become good readers and writers much more quickly. We have also asked them to check how much time you spend in lessons because we think it may not be enough (Sorry, I bet you don't like that suggestion!!). The teachers will also look at ways of making it very clear just where you are up to in your learning, where you could be and how best to get there. This way you will have a chance of getting even better results.

I am sure that when Mrs Frost and the teachers start working on these things you will help them by continuing to work hard and behaving well.

Thank you again for helping us with this inspection. We wish you every blessing for the future.