

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108398
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	288090
Inspection date	12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Graeme Clarke

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Carroll
Headteacher	Mrs Deborah Marie Fox
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2002
School address	Rothbury Avenue Pelaw Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE10 0QY
Telephone number	0191 4693251
Fax number	0191 4950163

Age group	3-11
Inspection date	12 July 2007
Inspection number	288090

© 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 an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Alban's is a broadly average size primary school with a Nursery. It serves mainly Roman Catholic families from the eastern area of Gateshead, parts of which are deprived. A below average proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals. An above average proportion has learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although the number with statements of special educational need is relatively low. Most pupils are from a White British heritage. The others are from mainly Filipino origins, and many are learning English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Alban's is an outstanding school. In this exceptionally inclusive school, pupils' accomplishments reflect their outstanding achievement and personal development. Under the headteacher's excellent leadership, all staff foster the school's Catholic ethos and a clear philosophy that, here, every child does matter and will be helped through its mission, to 'Live life to the full'. The school's sustained success is clearly appreciated by most parents. One parent's comment sums up their confidence, 'My children have received an excellent foundation in their primary education. The school continuously fosters an open and Christian environment, in which both myself and family feel safe and welcome'.

Children join the Nursery with abilities that are well below those expected for their age. They all make at least good and often outstanding progress throughout the school and their achievement is excellent in relation to their starting points. Standards have improved since the last inspection, and in recent years have been very high by the end of Year 6. Senior leaders rightly identified the need to improve pupils' writing skills and this year, as a result of their attention, have seen a noticeable rise in standards. In terms of their outstanding personal development, children are given an excellent start in the Nursery. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to grow as they move through the school. They conduct themselves safely and considerately. They know the importance of healthy eating and many take part enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities. They love coming to school and enjoy their accomplishments. Many pupils make a very valuable contribution to school life and to the wider community through generous charitable work. The school's successful focus on developing pupils' basic skills, and their confidence to work on their own or collaboratively in teams, prepares them extremely well for the next stage in their education.

Teaching is outstanding because teachers are particularly successful in promoting an enjoyment for school that makes pupils want to learn and to improve their performance. The high quality curriculum is considerably enriched in cultural, sporting and creative activities through very effective partnerships. The Healthy Schools Award, Basic Skills Agency accreditation and the Gold Artsmark all reflect the school's successful provision. Pupils benefit from excellent care and support. Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. Teachers monitor their pupils' progress diligently and make sure each pupil's targets for improvement are up-to-date. The school has a relatively new approach to tracking pupils' academic progress, but this is not yet fully embedded, and inconsistencies in applying the system currently limit its effectiveness. The school's excellent evaluation of its work is accurate, although somewhat modest in judging pupils' achievement and overall effectiveness. Governors are totally committed to high achievement and strive to ensure the best for the school. Together with the headteacher, they have successfully built a very effective staff team, who ensure the highest quality of education from the Foundation Stage to Year 6. The school's track record of rising standards and achievement is a clear indication of excellent value for money and its outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that new systems for tracking pupils' progress are consistently and effectively applied across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve exceptionally well. Standards in English, mathematics, and especially science are very high by the time they leave the school. Children in the Foundation Stage are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Almost all join the Nursery with very low abilities for their age, especially in their communication and language skills. This year Foundation Stage children have made outstanding progress and many reached goals above the national average. Good progress is maintained by the end of Year 2 and standards are above average. Pupils' progress accelerates rapidly in Years 3 to 6. In 2006, the school far exceeded its challenging targets for Year 6. All pupils reached at least the expected level in science, and almost all in English and mathematics. Teaching is particularly successful in supporting the more able pupils to attain the higher levels in all subjects, especially in science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is not their first language, achieved outstandingly well. A strong culture of successful learning is reflected in the senior leadership's determination to improve writing. In the 2007 assessments, boys' writing has improved in Year 2, and in Year 6 there were significant improvements in this area.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their well-being are underpinned by the school's Christian values, a rich curriculum and exceptionally well managed support and provision. Behaviour is impeccable; pupils are courteous and confident and know how to stay safe. They say bullying rarely happens and they know the anti-bullying procedures to follow and feel that their buddy system helps everyone to get on well together. Attendance is above average and many take part in voluntary sporting and other activities after school, which illustrates their positive attitudes towards school and their excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. Relationships are excellent and pupils have a genuine respect for each other and their teachers. Excellent social development is also reflected in the work of the very effectively run school council. It gives pupils first-hand experiences of consultation and democracy, and how to manage their own budget. They gain a strong cultural awareness of the wider world through close links with the church and other schools, visits to local centres for the arts, and importantly through the successful integration of pupils into the school from other countries. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. They are industrious, work very well together, are very confident speakers and very competent in the basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Outstanding teaching, seen throughout the school, leads to pupils making outstanding progress. In the Foundation Stage, very effectively managed activities foster excellent learning and achievement, especially in social development. A positive climate for learning permeates the whole school. Teachers set very high standards and work effectively to help pupils reach them. A great strength is that teachers know pupils very well and keep careful records of their progress. Teachers make excellent use of this information when planning lessons. They choose activities

to suit pupils' abilities well; for example, in helping pupils to find different ways to give structure and clarity to their written work. Importantly, teachers make sure pupils know the purpose of their lessons, and how to recognise when they are learning successfully. Pupils are taught to reflect on what they have learned and what they need to do to improve. These points are reinforced in the diligent and helpful way teachers mark pupils' work. Pupils really value the 'two stars and a wish' arrangement where their teacher recognises the best points of their work and gives them a target for the next steps to take.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

An outstanding curriculum provides the basis for the high standards attained by the end of Year 6. Beginning in the Nursery, the school provides many opportunities to widen pupils' knowledge and experience. In turn, it is very successful in promoting pupils' personal development. Opportunities in collective worship particularly help promote spiritual development; for example where a very well-performed dance by Year 5 pupils helped all others to reflect upon the theme 'take courage and stand firm'.

A comprehensive programme of visitors and visits extensively exploits local facilities. The contributions of local authority services, museums, art galleries, the Sage Music centre and nearby secondary schools capture pupils' interest and make learning enjoyable. The very wide range of after-school clubs include activities in mathematics, art, information and communication technology, sports, gymnastics, dance, and so many pupils participate that most are full to capacity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils benefit from excellent care, guidance and support. Secure procedures, which meet government requirements, safeguard children, and routines for child protection and health and safety are thorough and fully in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is not the language of the home, receive very effective support, which helps them achieve outstandingly well. Very good procedures ensure that children settle quickly into school and parents' comments reflect their appreciation of them. The school works closely with a local secondary school to ensure that pupils are well prepared for a smooth transition when they leave. Of particular note is the very effective way teachers diligently and frequently collect and use information about their pupils' attainments to support their learning; for example, by keeping pupils' targets for improvement up-to-date and planning lesson activities to suit.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides a clear vision and excellent direction, which are notable factors in the improvement in standards and outstanding achievement since the last inspection. She is ably assisted by the whole staff who provide a safe, secure learning environment in which all children thrive. The recently restructured senior management team monitor teaching and learning thoroughly to evaluate school performance. They accurately identify appropriate areas for attention; for example, they very successfully worked with teachers to raise standards in writing. Notable too, is the very high standard of

presentation now seen in pupils' written work. The school is developing its use of centrally held information about pupils' performance. However, grading is not consistent across subjects, and this currently limits the potential of the system.

Governors support the headteacher effectively and from reports, discussion and visits have a good understanding of the school's performance and development planning. Excellent financial management has resulted in very good improvement in the school building and resources, with further development planned. They have played a full part, with the staff, in evaluating the school's work.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

13 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Gateshead, NE10 0QY

I really enjoyed my visit to your school. Thank you for helping me when I came into your classrooms and assembly to see you at work. You were really helpful and very polite. I was very impressed with those of you whom I met and I did enjoy talking to you. It was great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and how you enjoy school life. I know the headteacher and the staff are all very proud of you.

Your school is outstanding in many ways. It is very welcoming and is very well organised. As you move through the school, everyone helps you to do exceptionally well and get really good results. I am pleased that you are safe and happy because your headteacher and all the adults in the school look after you very, very well. I liked the way you work hard, and to see you taking part in activities and having fun. Some of the things you do are very impressive. I really liked hearing you sing as you came into collective worship, and I saw how the dance Year 5 performed, to contribute to your reflection on the theme of 'take courage and stand firm', involved you all. I was also impressed with the way some of you in the Foundation Stage class are learning letters and sounds to spell words, and with your writing in Year 3 and in Year 5. I really like the way your teachers help you know how well you are doing and how to improve when they give you 'two stars and a wish'. I've asked the school to make more use of the information teachers have about how well you are doing.

Some of you will very soon leave to join a new school. All of you have very many opportunities at St Alban's to learn about life and these should stand you in good stead for the future. I hope that you all do really well.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Clarke

Lead Inspector