

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110841
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Inspection number	288792
Inspection date	12 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Broadbent
Headteacher	Mr Joseph McCrossan
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	Lensfield Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB2 1LS
Telephone number	01223 712147
Fax number	01223 461286

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector in one day.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school situated in the city centre which serves three Roman Catholic parishes in the city and its outlying areas. The school takes pupils from a varied and diverse area and a significant number are from socially advantaged backgrounds. Children start here with levels of knowledge and skills which are above those expected nationally. A lower than average number has learning difficulties or disabilities or a statement of special educational needs. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national average with 26 different nationalities being represented in the school. Most pupils speak their own language and English fluently. The number of pupils joining and leaving the school at other than the usual times is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school's evaluation that this is a good school. It has the feel of a family because everyone looks out for each other and pupils are valued for themselves, reflecting the Christian ethos that is the basis of all of its work. It is a school where personal development is good. Pupils are happy and enjoy school. From the Foundation Stage, children thrive on the high expectations that the school has of them. This is demonstrated in their enthusiasm to take responsibility and to act, for example, on the knowledge that they have to adopt healthy lifestyles. This firm foundation for learning is strengthened by the good systems in place to ensure pupils' safety and protection. Well understood procedures ensure pupils know where to go to if they have worries or problems. This results in good pastoral guidance. Academic guidance however is presently satisfactory because the good plans the headteacher has to extend target setting are not yet in place and pupils are not critically reviewing their own work. Parents support the work of the school and are delighted with the improved communication which strengthens their understanding of the school's work. This is due to the actions of the new headteacher. Recently appointed, he is demonstrating strong leadership and giving a clear direction to the work of the school. He has identified the priority areas for development and has taken swift action. His empowering of the staff in giving them greater responsibility, ownership and accountability is helping the school to move forward. The increasing effectiveness of middle managers and the firm lead of the governing body mean that leadership and management are good and there is good capacity to improve. The school is providing good value for money.

Pupils make good progress through the school. The standards that they reach by the end of Year 6 are well above average because teaching is consistently good and expectations of them are high. This is the case from the Foundation Stage where children settle to learning quickly because of the careful preparations that are made for them. Good progress continues through Key Stage 1 and learning is consolidated in Key Stage 2. Standards are exceptionally high in English by the end of Year 6. Science results at the end of Year 6 in 2006 were only average because the school has successfully focused on raising standards in English and mathematics rather than science. Pupils are reaching challenging targets and more pupils than nationally are attaining higher levels. Standards are above average because teaching is good. Planning is a strength as it is detailed and focuses on individual learning needs. The purpose of lessons is made clear. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and work well with teaching assistants who provide good support for pupils with particular needs. All of this contributes to pupils' good attitudes to learning. Marking, however, whilst encouraging, does not often tell pupils how to improve. A major factor in progress is the good curriculum which is increasingly creative, leading to a greater variety of learning methods. This extends to out of school clubs which provide activities which allow pupils to discover new talents and develop new skills. An imaginatively presented personal, social and health education programme provides important knowledge about life style issues. Teachers work hard to provide learning activities which match pupils' needs and which engage them. This includes the Foundation Stage where children gain great benefit by tasks which relate to their personal experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science by giving it the same importance as the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

- Review the systems of assessment for pupils so that they have meaningful individual targets, know how to achieve them and are clear about how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From the time that they start school, children make good progress from their above average starting points, developing a range of skills in the Foundation Stage where teaching is outstanding. The standards that pupils attain by the end of Year 6 are well above average in mathematics and are exceptionally high in English. This builds on the exceptionally high results in reading at Key Stage 1 and the well above average results in writing and mathematics. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress through the school. Most pupils reach and often exceed challenging targets with the school predicting further improvement next year. Standards in science are satisfactory at the end of Key Stage 2 and show inconsistency from year to year because the school has not focused sufficiently on this subject until recently.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. They are happy here, as reflected in their very good attendance and they behave well. They show a determination to succeed in lessons and in the opportunities that the school offers them to develop broader skills for the next stage of their education. The youngest children feel very proud about being entrusted with responsibilities such as leading prayers. The school council has a meaningful role, including the much needed development of the Key Stage 2 playground. Pupils are inquisitive and the school promotes their independence within a secure learning environment in which they all feel that they are valued. Pupils are very clear about how to stay safe. They are successfully encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles by a good programme of personal, social and health education. Their spiritual development is outstanding because the school models Christian values as the basis for all of its actions, encouraging understanding and respect for all. Cultural development is satisfactory. The school is providing a wonderful opportunity to help pupils understand the reality of living in a multi cultural society through its diverse intake.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good. It is outstanding in the Foundation Stage where teachers manage and motivate children very well because learning is relevant and often exciting. Vibrant and colourful displays of pupils' work encourage a good climate for learning in classrooms. Lessons generally move at a fast pace and often involve pupils fully, so that they learn by doing. They enjoy learning by the use of interactive white boards and benefit from working in pairs. They are keen to learn and often skilful questioning by teachers encourages them to think more deeply. Teachers know their subjects well and pupils are regularly challenged because teachers' expectations are high. Planning is detailed so lessons have clear aims and work is usually at the correct levels to meet pupils' learning needs. However, marking is variable and does not often tell pupils how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is planned very carefully and is constantly developing and changing to meet the needs of pupils. It is now very creative and pupils enjoy and benefit from the increasing opportunities to express themselves in practical ways and to link learning across subjects. Literacy and numeracy are the basis of all learning here. The provision for information and communications technology (ICT) has developed soundly since the last inspection. Provision for those with learning difficulties or disabilities is good and there is a register for the gifted and talented, which is increasingly resulting in activities which meet their individual needs. Growing partnerships with other schools enable broader learning in humanities and in personal, social and health education. A varied range of clubs enhance learning, with pupils saying how much they enjoy opportunities to learn and practise skills in activities such as chess, sport, French and music. Exciting visits ensure that learning stays alive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Pastoral support is good and is strengthened by links with outside agencies. Staff know pupils well and good procedures are in place to ensure their safety and well being. Very helpful transition arrangements are in place to enable them to settle to learning very quickly when they start here. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Although systems are in place for tracking progress, targets are not used often enough to guide pupils in their learning and are not an integral part of lessons. Neither are they reviewing their own work, which would develop their critical thinking. Those with learning difficulties and the more able receive helpful support in lessons. Communication with parents has improved substantially so that they feel genuine partners in their child's education and are able to support their child's learning more meaningfully.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. Although the headteacher has only been in post for ten weeks he is demonstrating strong leadership and a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement. He is acting quickly to move these areas forward and to ensure continuity. This includes good staffing appointments and the empowering of staff to develop subjects further in order to maintain and build on pupils' good progress. The science week, for example is a first step in addressing the need to raise standards in science. Other middle managers are contributing strongly to the school's good capacity to improve. The headteacher has been well supported by the deputy head during the period of transition. Governors are effective because they provide strong leadership by their active involvement. They rightly support the role of the community in planning the work of the school. The improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall, with some good improvement since the recent appointment of the new headteacher.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	2
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 March 2007

Dear Pupils

St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, CB2 1LS

I am writing to thank you very much for all the help that you gave me when I visited your school recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you, watching you at work and play and hearing from you about your school. I do hope that those of you who went on visits on that day had a great time. It was good to visit during science week and see the ways you are trying to find out more about the world around you.

Your school is a good school. You are reaching above average standards and making good progress. One of the reasons that you do well here is because you have grown-up attitudes to learning and behave well. You all try hard and want to produce the very best work that you can. You enjoy lessons. You especially like those where you can find out things for yourself. We are pleased that the staff expect you to be responsible and look out for each other. Your school is like a family where everyone wants the best for each other. I saw this when the older pupils were being monitors to the younger ones.

There are ways in which your school can be even better. Standards in science need to be higher and your teachers are going to help you to make more progress in this subject. I have asked Mr McCrossan and your teachers to make sure that you have your own targets in lessons and that you know what you have to do to reach them. They will also make sure that marking of your work always tells you what you need to do to improve it.

I send you my best wishes for the future.

Lynne Blakelock

Lead Inspector