

# St Alban's Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115274
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX
<b>Inspection number</b>	290185
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 April 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Helen Ranger

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	209
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr G Reynolds
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs A M McCann
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 March 2002
<b>School address</b>	First Avenue Harlow Essex CM20 2NP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 425383
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 431320

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

St Alban's is a broadly average size school that draws the great majority of its pupils from Catholic families living on the eastern side of Harlow. This is an area of very mixed housing and includes wards where socio-economic circumstances are below average. About one in eight pupils come from minority ethnic families and about half of these do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities in the school is below average. Pupils generally start Reception with a broadly average spread of skills and abilities. The pupils currently in Reception were admitted, unusually for the school, with attainment above that typically seen in four-year-olds. The headteacher took up her post at the start of this school year.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

During the inspection, a pupil commented that the school's motto 'TEAM - Together Each Achieves More' sums up why this is a good school. Inspection findings agree with this pupil and with the school's view that its overall effectiveness is good.

A clear Christian ethos and high quality relationships pervade all aspects of the school. The spirit of teamwork is indeed strong and pastoral care is of high quality. In this setting, pupils do well academically and demonstrate outstanding personal development. 'We never have a day when my son doesn't want to go to school.' This comment from a parent sums up the views of the vast majority who value the school highly. It also reflects the pupils' feelings about their school.

Pupils achieve well. This starts in Reception where sessions are planned to ensure that activities, whether led by an adult or undertaken independently, mesh well together and cover all areas of learning. As a result, the youngest pupils settle quickly. The Reception teacher has a very clear view of how well each individual is doing. This is providing good quality information on pupils' progress in relation to their starting points, but until recently such information has not been collated well enough to give a really clear measure of the progress pupils have made as they move up the school.

Good teaching across the school, based on a good curriculum, ensures that pupils consistently reach above average academic standards by Year 6. They do well in the basic literacy and numeracy skills that enable them to take advantage of all the opportunities the school offers. Their progress is supported by teachers' effective tracking of individuals that warns of any likely underachievement so that further support can be given, if needed. Pupils are fully aware of their learning targets, but their teachers do not always use the marking of books to keep up a dialogue with individuals about how well they have done and what they need to focus on next.

Pupils develop as mature young people who have a good understanding of personal safety and what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They show respect and tolerance for other people, typified by their conduct in assembly and on the playground. There is a notable lack of any reported bullying or racism. This is because the school's staff offer good care, guidance and support to pupils.

The school has continued to provide well for its pupils since the last inspection and shows a good capacity for the future. Its continuing success is driven by good leadership and management which help to ensure that it provides good value for money. The new headteacher has continued to build on the previous successes and has earned the respect of staff, parents and pupils alike. A revitalised governing body, with an experienced core group at the helm, works closely with staff, parents and the parish to support the school's work. There are good arrangements for the school to check how well it is doing. These result in clear priorities for further improvement that staff and governors communicate well in face-to-face discussions. These priorities are summarised in the main improvement plan, but this written plan does not make sufficiently clear how the various initiatives will be checked to show their direct impact on pupils.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Produce a clear analysis of pupils' starting points in Reception so that progress across the school can be measured more effectively by the school's leaders.

- Ensure that teachers' marking more consistently informs pupils about how well they have done and what to do next.
- Ensure that initiatives for school improvement clearly identify how pupils will benefit from the planned actions.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good. Pupils in Reception have made particularly good progress in their personal and social development and are coping very well with school routines. Pupils who are in Years 1 and 2 at present are also making good progress. The school identified some previous underachievement in these year groups when they were in Reception and has acted successfully to turn this round. The pupils in Year 2 are catching up quickly and some are working at an average level and some working beyond that level. Since the last inspection, the pupils' end-of-Year 2 assessments, performance has almost always been above the national average. Standards in Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science, as they have been in the national tests for the past four years. Pupils in this age group are on track to meet the challenging targets the school has set for them.

The close tracking of individual pupils shows good achievement across the school. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities do well for their capabilities because their particular needs are supported well. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who are learning to speak English also do well. Last year, the school identified that boys did better overall than girls in tests. This does not seem to be a trend in the school as a whole but is being monitored closely.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The school's own surveys and inspection evidence both show that pupils enjoy school excellently. This is obvious in their very good attitudes to learning. They work hard and behave exceptionally well. An initiative to improve attendance has resulted in above average levels for the past three years. Pupils trust staff and know what to do if they need some extra help or advice. One commented, 'Our school is a loving and caring school.' They demonstrate their clear understanding of healthy lifestyles by taking part in a good range of physical activities and by making increasingly healthy diet choices, aided by the improved quality of school meals. Pupils show a commitment to both their school and the wider community through activities such as the school council and charity work. They know that their opinions are sought and valued by the staff. Their strong personal skills, coupled with good academic achievements, mean that they are well placed to take advantage of the next stage of education and well prepared for later life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Good staff teamwork involves teachers and teaching assistants well in supporting pupils. Teachers plan work that caters for the range of abilities and for any special learning needs in each class. A strong feature of the Reception class is how well pupils are involved in helping to choose their own activities, such as at the 'Vet's Surgery' that currently caters for a regular stream of toy animals with medical problems. To aid planning and to provide any necessary

intervention, teachers make good use of a range of assessment procedures. Pupils' work is marked regularly. While there are examples of excellent practice in this area, not all marking is equally effective in helping pupils to understand precisely how well they have done. Nor does it consistently give them advice on what the next stage in their learning should be.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school is embarking on a review of its already good curriculum to incorporate the most recent national guidance and to forge more effective links between subjects, building on the success of events such as its Excellence Weeks. The staff provide an interesting range of activities for the Foundation Stage and have exciting plans to make even more use of the good outdoor space that is available to this class. Across the school, there is justifiable pride in the high levels of resources available to pupils for information and communication technology (ICT). Good links have been forged with other schools and particularly with nearby secondary schools, providing additional activities in areas such as French and mathematics and helping the school to cater for its gifted and talented pupils. All pupils benefit from a good range of clubs, visits and visitors.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils and parents alike testify to the high level of pastoral care provided. The school meets current requirements for safeguarding its pupils. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well. The school's successful partnership with parents promotes a continuity of care between home and school. The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress have led to good target-setting systems which now need to be more closely and consistently linked to the guidance offered in teachers' marking.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management at all levels promote an atmosphere where pupils achieve well, are cared for effectively and where equal opportunities for all pupils have a high priority. The headteacher is successfully establishing her vision for the school and working closely with staff, parents and governors to ensure that all play a part in the school's further development. Following a period where governor recruitment proved difficult, there is now an able team of governors who are led well by an experienced chairman and who contribute well to development planning. Subject leaders monitor their areas of responsibility efficiently. As a result, most initiatives in the school's planning are rooted securely in evidence of pupils' achievements. The main exception is the extent to which a secure and detailed analysis of pupils' attainment on entry to Reception underpins the judgements on how well pupils achieve subsequently. In addition, the criteria for judging the success of current improvement plans are not focussed enough on how the planned action will benefit pupils. As a result of these factors, while monitoring by staff and governors is good, it is not as effective as it could be.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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

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**Annex B**

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

24 April 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Harlow, CM20 2NP

This letter is to say a big 'thank you' for your friendly welcome during my recent visit and special thanks to the children who gave up some extra time to talk to me.

I was extremely impressed with your behaviour and how much you enjoy school. I agree with all those of you who told me that yours is a good school. Many of your parents wrote to me to tell me they are very pleased with your school too. Your teachers care for you well and plan activities that make sure you make good progress in your work. You told me how much you like the clubs and visits in particular. Your school council is working well and has been successful in making your playground a more exciting place.

Mrs McCann and the rest of the teachers are working hard and successfully with the governors to keep improving your school. I have asked them to look at a few areas to make it even better. I have asked the staff to check even more than they do now that all children are making good progress compared with what they could do when they started school. I would like all of your teachers to make sure that, when they mark your books, they give you enough information about how you are getting on. Finally, when they make plans to improve things, the teachers and the governors must be sure how they will check that any changes are helping you to make even better progress.

With best wishes for the future,

Mrs Helen Ranger

Inspector