

St Alban's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104364
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	308581
Inspection dates	29–30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Chris Kessell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Peake
Headteacher	Ruth Lawrence
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	St Albans Close Ashmore Park Wednesfield Wolverhampton WV11 2PF
Telephone number	01902 558825
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is about average in size. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average. Over the last two years, there has been considerable staff instability as a result of long-term absences.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This friendly school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. 'Forging relationships and developing independence' is the school motto and is reflected in the respect pupils have for one another and their positive approaches to learning. Most parents are happy with the school; 'The school has a great atmosphere' and 'It is so family orientated' are typical comments.

Parents commented positively on the good start that their children get in the Foundation Stage and this is borne out by inspection evidence. Children achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes. In Years 1 to 6, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. By the time pupils leave in Year 6, they reach average standards, having made satisfactory progress. Pupils' achievement through Years 1 to 6 is the result of satisfactory teaching. Pupils are keen to learn and the celebratory fireworks to reward themselves after being successful in their learning are evidence of their enthusiasm. However, there are inconsistencies in teaching that slow pupils' progress despite the positive learning atmosphere found in most classrooms and some good teaching. Assessment information is not always used accurately to ensure that pupils are given work that is appropriately matched to their needs. Teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve are not always high enough and higher-attaining pupils could, at times, be challenged more effectively. Procedures to support pupils with their learning, such as marking and target setting, are developing. Inconsistencies in practice mean that the academic guidance provided for the pupils is not making a significant contribution to improving pupils' achievement and raising standards. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall.

The school's attempts to improve pupils' achievement have been prevented by disruption caused by staff absence. Now staffing has settled and a number of new procedures and systems have been put in place to improve pupils' achievement and the quality of provision. For example, a new approach to developing pupils' literacy skills has been successfully introduced for the younger pupils, which they find interesting and exciting. However, it is too early to judge whether it is improving standards. This goes for many of the new initiatives, but the school is moving in the right direction and concentrating its efforts on the most important issues. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior staff have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have worked hard to ensure that more time is spent looking carefully at the progress of pupils. However, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough. Current practice is not providing an accurate view of what needs to improve to make teaching more effective and enable pupils to make more rapid progress.

Pupils feel safe and well supported. This, and aspects of the school's satisfactory curriculum, ensure that their personal development and well-being are good. Pupils' behaviour is good and identified by the pupils themselves as 'having improved a lot!' Despite attendance levels being average, pupils enjoy coming to school and taking part in its activities. As one parent noted, 'At the weekend, my child cannot wait until Monday.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When they start school, children have skills and abilities that are below the levels expected for their age. They make good progress through Nursery and Reception classes, reaching expected levels by the end of the Foundation Stage. The staff team is well led. They plan effectively

together to deliver a curriculum addressing all the children's needs, with a particular focus on developing their personal, social and emotional skills. Good teaching and ongoing assessments of all children support their good progress. Not enough use is made of available data to raise achievement further as the children move to Year 1. There are clear expectations of behaviour, with those who find some of the routines difficult dealt with sensitively. Every opportunity is taken to develop children's speaking and listening skills. There are strong relationships between the adults and children and amongst the children themselves. Children are encouraged to understand about healthy eating through their activities and talk about fruit and milk being good for them. The organisation of the Foundation Stage enables children from both the Nursery and Reception classes to share resources and space. Good induction procedures allow parents to feel welcome and involved in their child's education. The children settle in quickly and happily.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the good progress started in the Foundation Stage by raising teachers' expectations of what pupils in Years 1 to 6 can achieve.
- Use assessment information accurately so that pupils, particularly the higher attainers, are always given work that is appropriate to their needs.
- Improve procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning so that senior staff have a clear view about practice that is effective and areas for development.
- Ensure that target setting and marking help pupils with their learning.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average and most pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils' achievement in the past has been affected by staff absence. However, now there is more stability the school is ready to move forward and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Greater emphasis is being placed on tracking pupils' progress and academic targets have become more challenging. However, not all higher-attaining pupils are reaching their full potential. This was reflected in the school's most recent national tests and assessments for Year 2 and Year 6 pupils. Individual year groups do not have an equal proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In some year groups, such as the current Year 5, they represent up to a quarter of the pupils. This means that there can be a year-on-year variation in standards. However, pupils with difficulties are supported well in class by teaching assistants. This enables them to make the same progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are encouraged to respond sensitively to spiritual and moral issues and are enabled to develop socially and culturally through visits and interesting visitors coming into school. Pupils understand about healthy lifestyles, make good choices about the food they eat and have chosen to have fitness activities provided for break times. They feel safe in school and behave considerately towards one another in and out of the classroom. Pupils really enjoy their education. This was illustrated well when

Year 6 pupils confidently and maturely explained how they used their small hand-held computers to support work in science. The school council plays a positive role in improving the school community, taking pupils' suggestions out of the 'Ask-it' box. There are good opportunities for pupils to contribute to the wider community through activities such as carol singing and fund raising for various charities. With their satisfactory progress in developing basic skills in English and mathematics, pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Because of this, classes are calm and orderly and there is a positive climate for learning. Pupils settle down to their learning quickly, particularly after 'brain gym'. As one Year 6 pupil said, 'The exercises certainly calm us down after we've been out for break.' Teachers usually match work well to pupils' differing abilities, but there are times when work does not challenge pupils sufficiently and the pace of learning is not rapid enough. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to make learning interesting. Marking is good in some subjects and classes but there is a lack of consistency and many pupils are not provided with clear enough guidance on how to improve and develop their work. Teaching assistants work well in their support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enabling them to make the same progress as their classmates.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is developing its provision for English well through the new initiative for developing literacy skills. The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory as it ensures that the subject is covered in sufficient depth. However, there is an over-reliance on workbooks and the needs of higher-attaining pupils are not always met. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are able to be part of an exciting school initiative that allows them to purchase an educational digital assistant (EDA). This small hand-held computer supports their learning effectively in school and at home. The curriculum is enhanced satisfactorily by after-school clubs, visits out and visitors to school. These activities make a positive contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being. Although the curriculum is planned to cover all subjects, analysis of pupils' work shows that coverage sometimes lacks sufficient depth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents typically comment that the school is caring and most are happy with the school's good pastoral care. Parents of children new to the school are particularly pleased with the quality of support their children receive when settling into school. Pupils feel that they are well cared for as individuals. They say that they know they have someone they can talk to if they have worries or concerns and are appreciative of this. The school operates appropriate procedures to ensure pupils' safety in school and on school trips. Academic guidance is inconsistent and does not always contribute to improving pupils' achievement. Pupils have targets in English and mathematics but many pupils are confused about their usefulness or cannot remember what they are. The wording of targets for the youngest pupils is difficult for them to understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior staff have ensured that pupils' personal development and well-being are good through successful initiatives to improve aspects of school life. For example, pupils are very clear that behaviour has improved significantly and that there is now very little bullying. Leaders and governors have a satisfactory understanding of what the school does well and what needs to improve. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school improvement plan provides a clear focus on improving standards and pupils' achievement. The regular tracking of pupils' progress means that teachers can be held to account for the progress made by pupils. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not monitored effectively enough, which sometimes leads to an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. The increased focus on pupils' progress and recent improvements in literacy provision indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. Governors are developing their role and are more effectively holding the school to account. They are ambitious for the school and have worked hard recently to improve the stability of staffing and resources for the school.

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

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Church of England Primary School, Wolverhampton, WV11 2PF

I would like to start by saying a big thank you to you all for the way you made us so welcome when we visited your school. We were impressed by your good behaviour. Your school is a friendly place. It was a delight to talk with you and I particularly enjoyed my discussions with pupils in Year 6 about their EDAs.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. It is good at helping you develop your personal and social skills and making sure that you feel well looked after. Children get a good start to their education in the Early Years Unit. They make good progress in their learning. Although you leave school with average standards, not all of you make good progress through Years 1 to 6, so we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to improve this. We have also asked them to make sure that those of you who find your work too easy are challenged all of the time.

We enjoyed visiting lessons and looking at your books. We could see that you try hard to do your best. Not all of you are able to remember your learning targets and some of the younger pupils have trouble reading them. Along with the teachers' marking, learning targets are there to help you improve your work. We have asked the school to improve target setting and teachers' marking.

All of the adults in the school are working hard to improve the school. They regularly check your progress but do not monitor lessons regularly enough. We have also asked the school to make sure that lessons are observed more often. You can all help to improve the school by continuing to work hard, doing your best and attending regularly. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Yours sincerely

Chris Kessell Lead inspector

31 January 2008

Dear Pupils

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Wolverhampton, WV11 2PF**

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Yours sincerely

Chris Kessell
Lead inspector