

Alban VA Church of England Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109697
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310068
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	John Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	451
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Keeble
Headteacher	Mrs Lorraine Dougall
Date of previous school inspection	17 November 2003
School address	Silver Street Great Barford Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 3HZ
Telephone number	01234 870735
Fax number	01234 870736

Age group	9-13
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Alban Middle school is an oversubscribed and successful school that caters for children aged nine to 13 from the local community and beyond . A significant number of pupils travel some distance to school. The buildings and grounds are some 30 years old and are maintained in excellent condition. Few pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds and a below average proportion are eligible for free school meals or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Amongst its awards the school has achieved Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Alban Middle school provides excellent value for money. It is a very effective school where leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher is a driving force behind school improvement, ably supported by the governors, the senior leadership team and heads of department. Self-evaluation to inform improvement planning lies at the heart of this school. Very good progress has been made over the last three years and on the issues raised from the previous inspection. The school can demonstrate excellent capacity to improve further.

Standards over three years have risen substantially in mathematics, due in no small part to the leadership of the head of department. Standards in English and in writing in particular have been good during this time, and in science they have been consistently outstanding. Reading, and the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels at the end of Year 6 in mathematics, have been recognised as having room for further improvement. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 8, the standards of their work across the subjects is above or well above average.

Attainment when children begin school is above average. Progress is good which results in overall achievement being good. The school tracks pupils' progress systematically from entry and is effective at setting and monitoring some very challenging individual targets.

The curriculum is outstanding, providing pupils with a rich and varied experience. Teaching is good within a relatively limited range of styles and methods. It meets the needs of all but caters better for the less able when classes are organised by ability. Those pupils with particular gifts and talents are provided for well through a series of activities specially designed to challenge them. Pupils' care, guidance and support and personal development are taken very seriously and are outstanding. Attendance is excellent and pupils clearly enjoy coming to school and their lessons. They have positive attitudes to their work and develop very good relationships with adults and other pupils. They have excellent learning skills and are particularly good at speaking and listening. Their behaviour is outstanding as is their overall response to others. All pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work and there is some exemplary self-assessment and target setting both by teachers and the pupils themselves. Pupils also know well how to stay safe, including when using computers, and how to stay healthy. Parents are rightly proud of a school that delivers a very effective education for their children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden teachers' range of teaching techniques to better target those with a learning need in mixed ability teaching.
- Improve reading and the number of pupils achieving higher levels by the end of Year 6 in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils begin school with standards that are above national averages. The proportion of pupils then achieving the expected levels at age 11 is above average. The school has been successful in boosting the number of pupils achieving the higher levels and recently in improving the percentage of pupils achieving the expected grade in mathematics, but acknowledges there is scope for further improvement in mathematics at the higher levels. By the end of Year 8, most

pupils are reaching or exceeding their targets and standards are above or well above average, though reading is not quite as good. Standards in the foundation subjects are at least good and standards in science have been consistently high for a number of years. Pupils' progress is good and achievement from entry to leaving school is therefore, also good, and outstanding in science.

Pupils are independent and enthusiastic learners who have well developed listening, speaking skills and learning skills. It is whilst working in pairs or groups that their progress is particularly good in lessons. This ability to work cooperatively has a positive effect on the rate at which they progress. The school caters well for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who make good progress, more so when grouped by ability than mixed ability. The gifted and talented also achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. This is because the school puts respect and care for individuals at the heart of its provision. Pupils display excellent attitudes towards learning in all year groups and relationships between themselves and adults are very positive. There is a high degree of racial harmony, attendance is excellent and pupils state that they love coming to school. Behaviour is also excellent; pupils feel safe at school and show great confidence in their teachers' ability to deal effectively with problems, should they arise. Pupils display very positive attitudes towards living healthily. Their spiritual, social, moral and cultural awareness is good. Robust assessment procedures ensure that pupils are provided with very effective personal support and their academic progress in core subjects is monitored closely. Pupils feel that their views are heard effectively through the school council and they make a good contribution to the school through taking on responsibilities such as playground leaders and reading mentors and in the wider community through extensive fundraising activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers consistently make clear the expectations of lessons so that pupils understand their learning outcomes. Pupils particularly enjoy lessons and make good progress where they have the opportunity to work with their peers in pairs or small groups. Teachers have a good knowledge of pupil levels and careful attention is paid to monitoring work to help pupils make progress. Effective classroom management creates highly positive relationships between teachers and pupils.

Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons that are appropriate for all. Where lessons are less good, the delivery of the lesson does not always match the planning, particularly for those pupils who may struggle. Learning environments are attractive with some lovely displays of pupils' work. Resources are mostly good. Where interactive whiteboards are available, teachers use them well but pupils do not have many opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) as a natural part of lessons. Marking has improved and provides pupils with good advice. When it is set, homework is appropriate and helpful.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum. Thorough planning in subject areas leads to a broad, balanced and appropriate learning experience for all pupils. There has been a massive improvement in provision in music and technology since the previous inspection. The latter is now exceptional. The school uses Year 4 data very effectively to modify the curriculum to meet the needs of the youngsters on entry to the school. This has been achieved by effective collaboration with the feeder schools.

The school carefully considers the needs of individuals and strives to offer a personalised learning experience for all. There is a commitment to providing a range of opportunities that enrich the lives of pupils including visits abroad, speakers and theatre groups. Outstanding opportunities to participate in sports activities help pupils to lead healthy lifestyles. Pupils say that they enjoy the clubs and activities on offer to them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. Teachers and support staff provide a very secure and caring environment for all pupils; detailed procedures are in place to ensure their health and safety. Pupils who may be vulnerable are identified early and given good levels of support. Those with learning difficulties have good individual learning plans and are well supported by teaching assistants. Very good procedures are in place to ensure that transition into Year 5 is well managed and this contributes effectively to good progress rates. Pupils are given regular praise, encouragement and a clear behaviour code helps to ensure that learning takes place in a calm, orderly environment. They are well informed about their current standard of work and know what they have to do to improve. In order to prepare pupils well for their future lives, the school has rightly placed an emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Parents are delighted with the exceptional level of care and support their children receive at the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Governance was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection but it is now very good; governors have a well-informed view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The leadership of the headteacher is exemplary and provides a clear vision, strategy and plan for the future linked to careful budget management. With the agreement of the local authority, the school has been running a small deficit budget. It has done so because it wants to provide the pupils with the best opportunities to do well, given the money available.

As a result, standards have risen by allocating resources exactly where they are most needed. Finances have been used particularly well to improve the fabric of the building and the learning environment. Consequently, this school provides excellent value for money. The school has an effective senior leadership team and some outstanding subject leaders who can demonstrate real impact. They produce good quality evaluations and have a comprehensive view about standards in their subject. Throughout the school there is a clear sense of direction that focuses

on improving standards. Long term planning is sharply focussed on raising standards further. The evaluation of teaching and learning is comprehensive and is effective.

Progress from the time of the last inspection has been outstanding in many areas. Many parents recognise the improvement; they say this is due largely to the drive and determination of the headteacher. The analysis of performance data is comprehensive, detailed and effective and the impact of the school's self-evaluation is excellent; it has led to accurate and challenging targets for the coming year. Given the progress to date, the structures and systems currently in place and the sharp identification of future targets, the school demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve further.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

18 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alban Middle School, Great Barford, Bedford. MK44 3HZ

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making Mrs Wright, Mrs Hill and me so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you. You seem to really enjoy coming to school and behave very well.

Alban Middle School is an excellent school in many ways. You all help keep the building looking nice with displays of your work and the staff work very hard to make sure you do your best. Mrs Dougall and the governors are determined that you will do well and all the teachers take excellent care of you. You know how to look after yourselves, how to stay safe and how to be healthy.

We like the way you listen and speak to the teachers and each other. You work hard and achieve good results in your subjects though the school is aware that some of you could do a little better in your reading. More Year 6's will be trying to achieve the highest levels in their mathematics SATs this year!

We enjoyed much of the teaching in the school. We have asked the teachers to look at different ways of helping you learn, especially those of you who find things difficult at times, so that you can achieve even better results.

My best wishes go to all of you for your future success at Alban Middle school.

Yours faithfully

John Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector