

St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Infant and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117450
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312619
Inspection date	25 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Yates

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Jane Halpin
Headteacher	Mrs Paula Holden
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Vanda Crescent St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 5EX
Telephone number	01727 854643
Fax number	01727 893158

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' personal development and well-being, the quality of care, guidance and support, the impact of leadership and management at all levels and pupils' progress in English, including the progress of different groups of pupils. Evidence was gathered from observing work in classrooms, scrutinising school documentation and records of pupils' achievement and progress, discussions with governors, senior leaders in the school and with pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is a popular school, which is of average size. Pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Movement in and out of the school other than at the usual time is below average. There is a below average proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and who need extra help with their learning. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the numbers of these who have English as an additional language are both higher than those found nationally. A few pupils are from Traveller communities. Children start Nursery with levels of attainment that are broadly typical of children of this age, except in personal, social and communication skills, where their attainment is lower than that typically found.

The school has received the Healthy Schools award, Schools Sports Partnership award, the Investors in People and the University of Hertfordshire training partnership awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, which provides pupils with a good standard of education. There are some outstanding features. Parents are right when they say that the school is particularly successful in creating a warm, welcoming and caring Christian ethos, where all children are highly valued. There are excellent links with other schools, outside agencies, the community and parents to promote the well-being of learners.

There has been a consistent trend of pupils attaining above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2007, standards were slightly lower in writing. All year groups, including current pupils, achieve well from their starting points. Whatever their backgrounds, all pupils, including those who find learning difficult, those who do not have English as their first language, those from ethnic minority groups and pupils from Travellers communities make good progress and most reach the challenging targets set for them.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Attendance is above average and pupils are very punctual. Behaviour is exemplary; there is a buzz around the school as pupils are engrossed in a wide range of activities, which they thoroughly enjoy. They are very respectful towards one another. Bullying and racist incidents are few and are swiftly dealt with. The 'buddy' system is well established and older children are very supportive of younger ones. Pupils make regular contributions to their home community and to charities who work world-wide. They have an excellent understanding for their age of how to lead healthy active lifestyles and of how to keep themselves safe. Their achievements in literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology prepare them well for their future lives.

Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations and plan many tasks in lessons linked to everyday life skills. There is a particularly high emphasis on pupils being able to handle money, to take part in decision-making and to present their view to an audience confidently. The school has implemented a range of strategies to ensure children achieve as well in their writing. Current findings show that these are starting to pay off. Assessment procedures have improved and staff recognise that these should now be linked more closely to regular monitoring of pupils' progress.

The school provides pupils with a good curriculum, which is enhanced by a range of visits and visitors. Attractive displays throughout the school celebrate the diversity of the curriculum and pupils are justly proud of their achievements. The curriculum is adapted well to the varying needs of pupils so that they are all growing in confidence. Good links with secondary schools ensure pupils take part in athletics and enjoy a wide range of sporting activities that promote their agility as recognised by the sports award. Outside specialists regularly visit the school and share their expertise to provide after school classes, for example, in French, short tennis and multi skill games.

Provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is good. It is outstanding for pupils' pastoral development and good for their academic development. Teaching assistants are well trained and, because of their good support, pupils make good progress. Pupils and their parents who do not speak English receive good support from a teaching assistant who speaks several languages. Systems to track the progress pupils make are at an early stage of development. They do not yet give teachers and managers sufficient information to help pupils make even better progress. While teachers mark pupils work regularly, the practice of setting and using

targets to involve pupils in assessment of their own learning is inconsistent. Consequently, pupils do not always have a clear understanding of what it is they need to do to improve. The school fully meets requirements for the protection of children and checks health and safety issues closely.

At the heart of the school's success is the dedication and motivation of the headteacher. She is supported effectively by the senior management team and the governing body. There is a real sense of teamwork, shared by all staff. They all have high aspirations for the school and the pupils. They have been successful in bringing about good improvement since the last inspection. They work extremely closely with the junior school to ensure a smooth transfer for all children. Subject leaders are at an early stage of making the necessary checks in their subjects. While the school knows its strengths and weaknesses well, leaders and managers are aware that the school development plan lacks precise details to show how priorities are to be met. As a result, it is difficult for governors and school leaders to monitor rigorously just how well the school is doing. The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis and there is good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children start school their overall levels of ability are similar to those found typically for their age range. However, there are wide variations in their personal, social, speaking and listening skills, which are often at a lower level. Induction arrangements are good so that staff swiftly get to know the children who settle quickly in a warm and caring environment. Good use is made of the new buildings and the outdoor area where children work and play happily together in an attractive and extremely well resourced environment. Routines are well established, so that children behave well and enjoy their learning. Teaching and learning are good and the very good support from parents ensures all children make good progress. By the time they move into Year 1, most children reach the levels typical for their age in all areas of learning and a few exceed them, especially in mathematical development. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are good. Staff are making more accurate use of assessment information to guide them in the planning of activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the systems to track pupils' progress and involve subject leaders in close analysis of the information, so that school managers have a sharper focus for their monitoring and evaluation.
- Revise the school development plan so that it focuses sharply on measurable targets, which are regularly reviewed and evaluated.
- Ensure pupils have a greater understanding of the targets set for them so that they can be more involved in assessing their own work and know what they need to do to improve.

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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
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	1
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	2
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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 February 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Saint Albans and Saint Stephen Roman Catholic Infant and Nursery, St Albans
AL1 5EX

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. This letter is to let you know what I found out about your school.

First of all, I have to congratulate you on your excellent behaviour and your wonderful attitudes to your work! Your school leaders have worked hard with many other people to make sure that those of you in Nursery and Reception have a first class environment in which to play and work together. You are all doing well in your work and by the end of Year 2, you reach standards that are above average. Well done, please keep it up! Your understanding of how to keep yourselves safe, fit and healthy and how to make the world a better place for everyone is superb. Your parents are very happy with the way the school cares for you. They realise how important it is for you to attend school regularly and to be punctual and you are good at this.

The school is going to help you to be even more successful. Teachers are going to give you all targets so that you can be more involved in making checks on your work and in knowing how to improve for yourselves. Teachers who are in charge of subjects are going to track how well you are doing on a regular timescale. They will record this information in ways that will make it easier for the school's leaders to do their jobs. This will help them to organise a timetable which sets out exactly how further improvements are to be made.

I wish you well for the future.

Kathleen Yates

Lead inspector