

## St Alban and St Stephen RC Junior School

### Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117491
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	312633
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Nelson

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>	7-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	230
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Jane Halpin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Helen Hill
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 February 2005
<b>School address</b>	Cecil Road St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 5EG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 866668
<b>Fax number</b>	01727 810710

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. This inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- How the school reversed the dip in English standards and whether the improvement has been sustained.
- What the school is doing about the dip in mathematics and what impact its actions are having on standards and achievement.
- How effectively the links with sports colleges have impacted on standards, achievement and children's enthusiasm for physical education and healthy living.

Evidence was gathered from: observing lessons, lunch time and breaks; talking with pupils, staff and governors; checking the school's record of lesson observations as well as assessment and pupil-progress records; analysing the results of questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail and the inspection 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 this report.

## Description of the school

The school is average in size and serves a geographically broad and diverse area. The number of children eligible for a free school meal is about half that found in most schools. Nearly a third of the children are from a minority ethnic group, mainly a range of White backgrounds, with a small number of children of Asian, mixed backgrounds or from the Traveller community. About half of these children have a language other than English as their first language. The proportion of children identified as needing extra support with their learning is around average. The school holds the Activemark, the Healthy Schools award and Investors in People status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Children think, correctly, that this is a good school because, 'we have nice teachers and we learn a lot'. They also like the 'friendly atmosphere' and the fact that 'everyone is cheerful'. Their parents share these very positive views, with many sending the inspector written commendations about the school's excellent, caring ethos and its real focus on knowing individuals and meeting each child's needs. One parent insisted on coming into school to tell the inspector how pleased she was with the excellent way the school dealt with her child's particular needs. This typifies the overwhelmingly positive views of the many parents who returned inspection questionnaires. Although a handful suggest that the school does not take account of their views, many more say how approachable and responsive staff are. For example, one wrote, 'the staff and headteacher are approachable and make time to discuss problems or concerns'. The governors also send out their own parental questionnaires and fed back the results to parents.

Children's great enjoyment of school is a result, not only of the excellent pastoral care they receive, but also of the outstanding range of interesting and stimulating activities teachers give them. Children particularly enjoy the practical activities like drama and debating and the visits that help to bring learning to life. For instance, their history topics are enlivened by visits to Tudor or Victorian classrooms and a group visited the Tutankhamun exhibition to add interest to their work on Egyptians. The school has developed excellent links with neighbouring secondary schools with specialist status in sport as well as with local sports coaches in order to enhance the provision for physical education. The result is that children love sport and many take up the opportunities to join after school activities and represent the school at sporting competitions. The fully packed trophy cabinet is testament to the success the school enjoys and the high standards reached because of these excellent links. The close partnership with the infant school, which shares governors with this school, means that the transfer from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is smooth and children settle easily into the school's routines.

Because the children feel secure and well looked after, their personal development is excellent. They have ample opportunities for personal reflection and the school's focus on developing personal responsibility helps them to develop into mature and thoughtful young people. The behaviour of the vast majority is excellent. A small number find it hard to behave well all the time and the school manages these children very well. Children involved in a playground incident are expected to reflect on their behaviour and record on a 'time out' sheet what happened, what decisions they made, what decisions they could have made and how they could make amends. Such strategies help children to learn to consider the needs of others within and beyond the school community, leading in part to their keen interest in raising funds for those who are less fortunate.

Alongside their excellent personal development, children make consistently good progress in their learning. At times, their achievement is outstanding, resulting in exceptionally high standards, but this pattern is not consistent yet. For example, children did very well in English in the 2007 national tests and gained exceptionally high standards but the previous year achievement had been only satisfactory. The school's very effective leadership and management soon identified the reasons for that dip, which was the result of weaknesses in children's extended writing, and put in place strategies to rectify this. This included restructuring the literacy hour to give more writing time and creating more opportunities for children to write in other subjects. The success of these strategies is shown by the 2007 rise in achievement and

standards that has been sustained in the current Year 6. Achievement in mathematics was particularly good in 2006 but dipped a little in 2007. Again, the school analysed thoroughly the reasons and put strategies in place to remedy this. Children's current work shows they have been successful. Standards overall have been well above average consistently over the last five years and at times exceptionally high. This represents good achievement from the children's above average standards on entry to Year 3. Although the school has a strong focus on English, mathematics and science it also ensures good standards in other subjects like, art, physical education, history and information and communication technology which is used to good effect across all subjects. Children's good achievement arises from consistently good teaching. Excellent relationships between teachers and children ensure that lessons are well paced and children enthusiastic to learn. Teachers explain to children precisely what they are expected to learn and provide different tasks and levels of support for different ability groups. While teachers always mark children's work, they do not always make clear what children need to do next to take their learning forward and this is something senior staff have identified as an issue for improvement.

At the heart of the school's success are good leadership and management. Many parents wrote personal tributes about the headteacher including, 'Mrs Hill is a fantastic headteacher and truly devoted', and 'Mrs Hill is an exceptionally calm, kind and understanding head'. She has built a very effective staff team that shares her vision for the school and has led to 'a caring and nurturing environment for all children' as one parent put it. The governors also share the headteacher's vision and play a significant role in ensuring the school's success. They recognise the success of the school's caring ethos and personal guidance to children and that they now need to replicate this level of excellence in the school's academic guidance to smooth out the 'ups and downs' in standards and achievement. The school's response to the dips in English and mathematics and improvements since the last inspection, particularly in attendance, place it in a good position to carry on improving.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure the marking of children's work tells them clearly what they need to do next to improve their learning.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	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

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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	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 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**

14 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Alban and St Stephen RC Junior School, St Albans, AL1 5EG

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. I enjoyed meeting the school council and talking with some of you in lessons. This letter is to tell you what I found out about your school.

Your school council told me that this is a good school and I agree. You told me that you enjoy school because it is a friendly place. You work hard in lessons because teachers make them interesting and help you when you are stuck. This helps you to reach good standards in your work. You told me that you really enjoy physical education and sport and that your sports coaches are really helpful and good to work with. No wonder you do so well and have so many sports trophies in the cabinet.

You told me that teachers are nice and look after you well. Your parents also said that, and they told me how pleased they are with the school. Some of them wrote particularly nice things about your headteacher and teachers.

You go to a good school and do well in your SATs at Year 6. However, the governors, headteacher, senior staff and I think the school could be even better if teachers' marking told you more clearly what you need to do next to improve your learning.

You can help the school get even better by continuing to behave and work to the best of your ability. I wish you all well for the future.

Ian Nelson

Lead inspector