

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105072
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	336416
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Judith Straw

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr David Long
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Frost
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 20 lessons taught by 16 teachers. They held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at improvement planning, policy documents, national published assessment data, the school's own data and pupils' work. Inspectors analysed 185 parental, 100 from pupils and 28 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the school's evidence on the progress and attainment of boys in Key Stage 1 , girls in Key Stage 2 and that of higher ability pupils, to determine whether teaching for these groups is challenging enough
- pupils' progress and attainment in English, particularly in writing
- how accurately leaders and managers evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average primary school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils speak a home language other than English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average. The school holds a number of awards including the Basic Skills Mark, Artsmark bronze, Activemark and the Healthy Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Albans is a good school. The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are outstanding. Under the clear direction of the headteacher and with the whole-hearted commitment of all those who work in the school, St Albans has improved nearly every aspect of its work since the last inspection. Attainment overall is average, but rising, and it is above average in science. Pupils' learning and progress are good because teaching is effective and pupils are motivated to do their best. Leaders and managers have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school as a result of accurate self-evaluation. They have acted promptly and effectively to address a weakness in pupils' writing and demonstrate the good impact of their work. This proactive approach has already significantly improved pupils' performance in mathematics and science and is evidence of the capacity to sustain further improvement is good.

The school has worked to good effect to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, while the overall quality of teaching is good, it ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. Good and better teaching is characterised by high expectations, stimulating activities in which pupils are fully engaged and where pupils are challenged through careful questioning to think and manipulate ideas. In these, the majority of lessons, progress is good. On some occasions, pupils work at a slower pace and higher ability pupils find the work easy. The use of assessment in lessons is not always effective and the quality of marking of pupils' work varies from excellent to satisfactory. The good curriculum provides a stimulating learning environment and suits the needs of pupils well. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and the curriculum successfully promotes pupils' personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good but there are fewer opportunities for them to learn about and experience other cultures. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school is aware of the need to further emphasise pupils' cultural development and awareness of the wider community.

The high quality of care, guidance and support ensures that pupils feel safe and enjoy their learning. Pupils say that bullying is almost non-existent and that staff take good care of them. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and this is reflected in the happy and positive learning environment which pervades the school. The governing body is supportive. Governors are active in the monitoring of the school and hold it to account. The school provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Increase the effectiveness of teaching, by:
 - – planning to ensure that the higher ability pupils always receive enough challenge
 - – checking more frequently on progress during lessons
 - – ensuring that the quality of marking consistently provides pupils with both an evaluation of their work and helpful guidance on how to improve.
- Improve the promotion of community cohesion by providing more opportunities for pupils to learn about cultural, ethnic and social diversity in Britain and the wider world.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enjoy school and their learning, especially in lessons where they are actively engaged. Pupils enter school with skills and abilities below the expectations for their age. Attainment at the end of Year 6 has been broadly average for the last three years, but is now rising as the school is dealing successfully with a legacy of underachievement. Inspection evidence shows that progress is accelerating and that nearly all pupils are making good progress. The school has addressed the issue of boys achieving less well in Key Stage 1, by ensuring that work is equally appealing to both girls and boys. In lessons, pupils work with enthusiasm and are attentive, keen to learn and support each other. All pupils know and understand their numeracy and literacy targets. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make equally good progress as their peers. Some make even better progress. This is because there is an excellent range of intervention strategies, implemented by a well informed team of teaching assistants, to support these pupils.

Pupils are polite, articulate and keen to talk about their work with adults. They are very knowledgeable about e-safety and how to keep themselves safe. They put into practice the good advice they receive on healthy living, and understand what constitutes a balanced and healthy diet and the value of regular exercise. They eagerly engage in activities, such as, the recent 'walk to school week' and 'safe cycling' lessons. They make a good contribution to their school by taking on responsibilities such as 'playground pals' and 'road safety officers'. They also make a positive contribution to the local community by taking part in parish events. Their awareness of cultures other than their own is limited. Behaviour is good. Pupils' secure and improving basic skills, their high self-esteem and confidence, and their increasing awareness of the importance of regular attendance and of good punctuality, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are good. Occasionally teaching is outstanding. Features of good teaching include a high degree of subject knowledge, effective questioning techniques and the good use of teaching assistants to support the learning of many pupils. Teachers generally have high expectations and pupils are keen and motivated to learn. Pupils' good behaviour and responsive attitudes makes them equal partners in their learning. Where teaching is less good it is because the pace is slower and sometimes higher ability children could be challenged to do more. Most marking is conscientious and thorough, but this is not evident in all classes. Where there is excellent practice, staff praise what is good, and give advice on how work can be improved to help pupils reach their targets. Some teachers do not offer enough advice to pupils on how to improve their work. Most teachers use well the good systems for tracking pupils' progress to identify where extra support is needed.

The curriculum caters well for the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. A focus on improving writing and mathematics across a range of subjects has been successful in addressing identified weaknesses. Pupils develop good skills in using information and communication technology (ICT) and enjoy the opportunity to learn French and Spanish. Whole-class harp lessons are a highlight of most weeks. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities is a particular strength, and the additional opportunities for sport, visitors, visits to places of interest and residential visits all enhance pupils' interest and enjoyment. Links across the curriculum are well developed through projects, such as the seaside and the recent 'Africa week'.

Very well targeted support ensures that those pupils identified with special educational

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needs and/or disabilities receive prompt and effective attention. Children throughout the school are known as individuals and there is very effective work with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are well met. The school offers excellent emotional support through a range of strategies. Strong links with local high schools ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and are starting to consider career choices.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team is focussed on driving and sustaining improvement. The focus on improving teaching and learning since the last inspection has brought about significant improvement in classroom practice and this has impacted positively on pupils' progress and on raising standards in both key stages. Senior leaders have an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses, and middle leaders now play an active role in monitoring the areas for which they are responsible. All the adults in school share the same vision for continual improvement. To ensure satisfactory equality of opportunity, the school has a rigorous and effective tracking system, so that the individual progress of every pupil is carefully watched and prompt action is taken to help those who appear to be faltering. Governors are loyal and proud of the school, and take their responsibilities seriously. However, their other professional commitments mean that they have a limited time that they can give to supporting the school.

Good links with parents and carers ensure that most feel well informed about their children's progress. Many parents and carers were very positive in their praise for the way in which the school engages with them and for the variety of opportunities they have to come into school, such as the 'family works' sessions. The school has good safeguarding measures in place to ensure pupils' protection and safety. Systems are well developed with good practice evident. A plan is in place to better promote community cohesion. Although links with the local community are strong and effective, and the school has a links with another school in Rwanda, managers are aware that there is more to be done to promote community cohesion nationally and internationally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good because the setting is well led and managed. Most children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points, which are generally below those expected for their age. This is because teaching is well-planned to meet children's needs and interests. Staff provide a wide range of creative activities to motivate children in their learning. Children feel happy and safe, and work and play well together.

Observations and assessments are used well to plan the next steps in learning. They are helpfully recorded in the individual 'learning journey' booklets, with a particular focus on those children requiring specific support, and are an example of excellent practice.

There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities.

The school has a welcoming and interesting learning environment. Good use is made of the limited outdoor space and staff have an action plan for utilising the outside learning space even more effectively. The focus on social and emotional development enables pupils to develop a positive attitude to learning. There are well-established and effective partnerships with parents and carers. These include good induction arrangements, meetings, information booklets, and opportunities to visit the school informally, such as the 'chatterbox coffee mornings'. The Early Years Foundation Stage manager leads an enthusiastic team of staff who work well together and share a common sense of purpose that all children should have the opportunity to learn and develop.

Self-evaluation is accurate.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Just over half of the parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. The great majority were entirely positive in their responses. There was particular praise for the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the commitment and enthusiasm of all the staff, and the involvement of the headteacher in so much that goes on. Parents and carers said their children settle quickly in to school and enjoy it. One parent wrote 'now in Year 6 my son has never had a day when he didn't want to go to school'. Another wrote, quite simply, 'the best school in Wirral. A few parents and carers felt that the school placed too much emphasis on wearing correct uniform and a few felt they would like more information on their children's progress. Inspectors found that most parents and carers were happy that their children are encouraged to be smartly dressed and because the headteacher has an 'open door' policy there are many opportunities for parents to talk to staff about their children's progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Alban's Catholic Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 185 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 369 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	121	65	62	34	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	136	74	44	24	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	111	60	69	37	4	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	108	58	71	38	6	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	115	62	67	36	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	112	61	67	36	6	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	99	54	83	45	2	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	100	54	75	41	4	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	107	58	74	40	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	94	51	81	44	9	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	90	49	87	47	3	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	117	63	66	36	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	121	65	62	34	2	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Wallasey, CH44 5XB

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when we came to inspect your school recently. We very much enjoyed being with you in classrooms, talking with you and reading the work in your books. Listening to Year 4 playing their harps was a delight.

St Albans is a good school. You are now making good progress and test results at the end of Years 2 and 6 are getting better each year. You told us how much you enjoy school and how you feel safe. We were very impressed with your behaviour in lessons and outside. You are taught well and this is why you are doing well in your work. You are keen to learn and enjoy the many interesting activities offered to you. The school takes excellent care of you.

Your school is well led by the headteacher and her team. They are constantly trying to improve the school for you. In order to help them to do this, we have asked the school to make sure that work is always hard enough for you to be really successful, to check on how well you are doing during lessons and to make sure that you always receive advice on how to improve when teachers mark your work. We have also suggested that you have more opportunities to learn about the lives and traditions of people from different backgrounds in Britain and the wider world.

You can play your part by continuing to do your best and telling your teachers if your work is too hard or too easy. You have my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Judith Straw

Lead inspector

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