

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111307
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	337661
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Denise Shields

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr Richard Ebo
Headteacher	Mrs Frances Curless
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons or part lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documentation including pupils' past and present work, assessment and tracking information, monitoring and evaluation records and evidence of the support provided for vulnerable pupils. Inspectors also looked at whether the school meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. In addition, 52 questionnaires returned by parents and a representative sample of questionnaires returned by pupils and staff were scrutinised.

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

- pupils' attainment and progress in writing in Years 1 and 2 and in mathematics and science in Years 3 to 6
- the quality of learning in all classes to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging in meeting the needs of all pupils, in particular the more able
- the rigour of tracking arrangements and the use of assessment information to promote learning and progress for all groups of pupils
- the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels to drive improvement.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is average and rising. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language: a few are at an early stage in this. Eligibility for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. A Nursery and a Reception class form the school's Early Years Foundation Stage. The school has gained the Healthy Schools and Sports Activemark awards.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, and the school's capacity to secure sustained improvement. St Alban's Catholic Primary school is providing an acceptable standard of education largely because of the widespread additional support it is receiving from the local authority.

By the end of Year 6 pupils' attainment is broadly average in English, mathematics and science. This demonstrates satisfactory achievement. However, fewer pupils than average attain higher levels. Pupils' attainment in English is higher than at the time of the previous inspection because well-targeted strategies have improved pupils' basic literacy skills. The school recognised that attainment in mathematics has fallen in the past and put in place initiatives to boost the progress of identified groups. These had some partial success in most classes. More recently, extensive support and advice provided by the local authority have resulted in improvements to teachers' planning in mathematics. As a consequence, the decline has halted and pupils' attainment is rising rapidly. The decline in pupils' attainment in science has not been addressed.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. There are examples of outstanding practice; however, much teaching is less effective in fully engaging pupils. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always sufficiently high. Assessment does not always make clear to pupils the progress made or the steps required to improve. Most pupils enjoy lessons, but a minority say they get bored. Pupils generally behave well in lessons. However, when teaching fails to capture their attention, or work is not matched to their needs, concentration slips and pupils become restless. Outside at break and lunchtime, their behaviour is occasionally boisterous. Good care, guidance and support ensure most pupils feel safe and happy in school. Secure and friendly relationships exist and pupils are confident there is an adult to turn to if required.

Leaders do not provide a common, clear vision. Many individuals operate in isolation: teamwork is not strong. Monitoring and evaluation lack rigour and robust links to improvement planning. As a result, priorities for improvement are not always correctly identified or vigorously pursued. Actions are insufficiently well evaluated which reduces their impact on pupils' outcomes. The school has not tackled all the improvements required from the previous inspection. A very recent improvement plan includes a

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significant contribution from the local authority. It is robust with clear, measurable success criteria and time scales. Implementation, however, is in the main regularly driven by a range of representatives from the local authority. As a result of the weaknesses in leadership and management, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build the school's capacity to work independently of external support by improving the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels and by ensuring that:
 - all staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and share a commitment to securing the school's capacity for sustained improvement
 - monitoring and evaluation arrangements are rigorous, outcomes are clearly recorded and addressed with clear links made to the implementation of robust improvement planning
 - the governing body regularly reviews and evaluates the school's provision and contributes effectively to setting its strategic direction.
- Raise standards in science by ensuring:
 - there are regular planned opportunities for pupils to take part in practical investigations
 - pupils have plenty of opportunities to discuss their tasks and record their work independently.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons
 - assessment information is consistently used to adjust lesson planning and teaching so that work is precisely tailored to pupils' needs and abilities, in particular the more able
 - all teachers use questioning that challenges pupils to think deeply about their learning.
- Enable pupils to know what progress they have made in their lessons and how
- to improve their work by ensuring that:
 - time is provided for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt
 - there is an agreed system which provides plentiful opportunities for pupils to evaluate their work, either by themselves or with a partner
 - pupils' learning targets are clear, closely matched to their abilities and inform them of the next steps to improve their learning
 - marking consistently matches the quality of the best practice

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Most pupils say they enjoy school, especially the educational visits and the after-school activities. They have a channel to express their opinions through the school council and improvements have been made to the school as a result of their suggestions. Pupils undertake a satisfactory range of responsibilities which they enjoy. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is satisfactory, although their understanding of life in the diverse British society and of global issues is limited. Nearly a third of pupils who returned the questionnaires did not feel that behaviour is good. A significant minority say they get bored at break and lunchtime because they do not have enough equipment with which they can play. As a result, although pupils are well supervised outside, their behaviour is occasionally boisterous. Most pupils say they feel safe at school.

Pupils learn best when activities are practical and new technology is used. Pupils' attention is captured, they become engrossed in learning, apply themselves to their tasks diligently and progress speeds up. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because of the guidance they receive in group work in lessons from the teaching assistants. Pupils who speak English as an additional language or who are at an early stage of learning English also make satisfactory progress. This is due to the good help they get from their friends in lessons and the recent introduction of support in class, from a specialist language team from the local authority.

Pupils' attainment is below average on entry to Year 1 although a minority attain above this. Pupils make satisfactory progress and, by the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average overall. Fewer pupils than average attain the higher levels because they are not always given sufficiently challenging work to enable them to reach their full potential. Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils' learning and progress is strongest in English because of the emphasis placed on improving literacy. In Years 1 and 2, for example, attainment in writing has improved because pupils now have more opportunities to write in other subjects. Progress in mathematics is accelerating and attainment rising because of successful intervention programmes and revised approaches to teaching mathematics. Pupils' attainment in science has fallen since the previous inspection.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3

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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The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons teachers have good expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure the presentation of pupils' work is neat and tidy. They make good use of visual resources to bring learning alive. Questioning is effective and makes pupils think more deeply about their learning. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to talk in pairs: this successfully promotes speaking and listening. These features, however, are not consistent in every class and some teaching fails to fully engage pupils. When teaching assistants work with groups of pupils who find learning difficult, their timely interventions help pupils to understand tasks and have a positive impact on learning. Teachers are starting to make better use of assessment information to identify individuals and groups in danger of falling behind. Lesson planning, however, does not always take sufficient account of this information. As a result, work is not tightly matched to the needs of individual pupils. In the best practice, marking is helpful and provides constructive comments to help pupils improve, but this is not so in all classes. The system for older pupils to reflect on how much they have learnt by highlighting a traffic light code in their books is not consistently used, and some staff accept presentation that is scruffy.

Pupils have good opportunities to practise their literacy skills in other subjects which makes a positive contribution to the standards attained in English. There are, however, too few occasions when pupils can apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. The curriculum is appropriately adjusted to meet the requirements of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are satisfactory arrangements for pupils' personal, social and health education. The range of activities available beyond lessons is generally good, as is the breadth of the visits and visitors to enrich learning.

The school provides good levels of care, guidance and support. Teachers know pupils well. There is good support for individuals and vulnerable groups, which has led to noticeable improvements in their attendance and self-esteem. Arrangements to help pupils move from year group to year group and then on to secondary school are satisfactory.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership has established good pastoral care systems for pupils. However, management systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school are insufficiently rigorous. As a result, there is limited impact on outcomes for pupils. Many staff are unclear about their roles and responsibilities. Leaders and managers at all levels do not work cohesively so there is no clear drive to bring about improvement, for instance to secure improvements in teaching or to tackle weaknesses in science. Best practice is not routinely shared; for example, the good monitoring arrangements used in English have not been transferred to other subjects. The school is not using target setting well enough to raise pupils' achievement. The governing body does not hold the school to account and has too little impact on the work of the school. The local authority is providing widespread support and this leads to an overall satisfactory quality of education for all pupils.

The school complies with current statutory requirements for safeguarding. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination. Community cohesion has strengths in pupils' involvement in the local and parish community but their contribution to the wider and global community is less evident. Satisfactory relationships have been established with parents: their involvement in their children's learning and in the life of the school is growing.

Although outcomes for pupils are satisfactory, the school provides inadequate value for money because the deficit budget, set with the approval of the local authority, limits the purchase of new resources to support the development of the school's priorities for improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. There is a growing and accurate view of what to do next to develop the phase further because advice from the local authority is being successfully implemented. Children enjoy learning and have trusting relationships with adults. Children are safe and well cared for and all welfare procedures are in place. Most planned activities have a good balance between those children can choose for themselves and those led by an adult. Very occasionally, when the activities are overly directed and focus on the activity rather than the ensuing learning, children's progress slows. In the Reception Year, activities are sometimes too formal which inhibits children's opportunity to make choices for themselves and become more independent. The outdoor area is used continuously throughout the day, but the many resources are old and uninspiring. As a result of satisfactory teaching, children make satisfactory progress. Children enter Nursery with skills below those expected for their age. By the time they enter Year 1 a small minority of children is working within the expected levels for their age, but most are below. 'Learning Journeys' are becoming more established so that they provide a useful source of evidence of progress. Satisfactory relationships have been fostered with parents, who say that they feel welcome in the setting.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received questionnaire responses from approximately 24% of parents and carers. Analysis of responses indicates that in the main parents are happy with their

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children's experience at school. Most indicate their children enjoy school and that the school keeps their children safe. Inspectors endorse these views. A few parents expressed concerns that they were not happy with their children's progress and their child's particular needs were not met. Inspectors agree that pupils do not make as much progress as they should in science and that in other lessons work is not closely tailored to individual's needs and abilities. A few also expressed concerns about the effectiveness of leadership and management. Inspectors agree with these views.

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 inspector received 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 218 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	63	13	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	62	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	48	20	38	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	37	23	44	3	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	46	22	42	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	40	22	42	3	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	44	20	38	2	4	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)	20	38	23	44	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	38	22	42	3	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	25	30	58	3	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	29	29	56	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	23	44	20	38	2	4	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	46	21	40	0	0	1	2

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



20 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Warrington, WA5 0JS

Thank you for welcoming me when I came to inspect your school. You told me that you mostly enjoy school, feel safe and can find an adult to talk to if you are sad or troubled. I agree that adults take good care of you.

There are many satisfactory things about your school but its work overall is not good enough. This is because school leaders and the governors do not work very well as a team. They do not check carefully enough what is happening in lessons. This means that they are not able to find out where they need to make improvements. Although people from the local authority come and visit to help the staff, this cannot continue for ever and so the staff have to start to do these things for themselves. Your school needs to improve a good deal so it has been given a 'notice to improve'. Inspectors will visit again to check how well all the staff are working together to make sure that improvements are being made.

A lot of you told me, in the questionnaires you filled in, that behaviour is not good enough. I agree that occasionally behaviour outdoors can be boisterous and that sometimes in lessons some of you get restless. Most of you told me that lessons are 'ok', but quite a few said that you get bored and teaching was not always interesting. Some of you said you are not sure how to improve your work. I agree with you that lessons require improvement, particularly science lessons. I have asked your school to look at ways to improve all your lessons and to find ways to make your learning targets easier for you to understand. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that when they mark your work their comments tell you how you can improve. You can help by continuing to try hard with your work.

Thank you once again for being so helpful.

Yours sincerely

Denise Shields

Lead Inspector

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