

# St Alban's Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115274
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	338551
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 May 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Graham Preston

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>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	210
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr George Reynolds
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Anne Marie McCann
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	24 April 2007
<b>School address</b>	First Avenue Harlow Essex
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 425383
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 431320
<b>Email address</b>	admin@st-albans.essex.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
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Manchester M2 7LA

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed nine teachers in 23 lessons. Meetings were held with governors, groups of pupils and staff. Different aspects of the school's work were observed and documentation scrutinised, including that relating to safeguarding practices, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, as well as 79 returned parental questionnaires.

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

- the extent to which school data and lesson observations demonstrate that pupils make good progress in Years 3 to 6
- how effective teaching is in ensuring that pupils learn well in their lessons across all years
- the improvement made in developing assessment practice that promotes pupils' progress
- the extent to which the school's strong and supportive Catholic ethos is reflected in its care systems and promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- how well senior leaders and governors have responded to the need to develop more effective monitoring and self-evaluation procedures.

## Information about the school

St Alban's is an average-sized primary school that draws about two thirds of its intake from Roman Catholic families in the mixed housing area of north east Harlow. Most pupils are of White British heritage but there are a growing number from minority ethnic backgrounds and an increasing percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language. This is particularly so in the Reception class. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average and those known to be eligible for free school meals is below average but increasing. The school set up a pre-school on its premises which is registered and inspected separately. The school has Investors in People and National Healthy Schools status and is in the process of gaining the International 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 Alban's is a good school, led by an effective and highly regarded headteacher well supported by other leaders, teachers and support staff who work as a cohesive team. The strong Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of the school and creates a positive and supportive learning environment much valued by parents.

Children start in the Reception class with skills and experiences below average for their ages and make good progress during their time in the school. Pupils' basic knowledge and skills in all aspects of English and mathematics are well developed in Years 1 and 2 where there has been consistently good teaching. Progress in Years 3 to 6 has until recently been more variable because of a few past staffing difficulties, now resolved. Current attainment in mathematics and English at the end of Year 6 is above the national average and reflects good progress. The careful tracking and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that they make similarly good progress.

Pupils like coming to school and have high levels of attendance. The school cares for the safety and well-being of its pupils exceptionally well and they say that they feel very safe. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is consistently good and well demonstrated in assemblies, where pupils are attentive and involved. Most are positive about healthy eating and value the recent improvements to school meals. They enjoy the good physical education lessons and opportunities to get involved in various sports and fitness activities. Many pupils make an active contribution to school and community activities, including the school council and know their ideas and views are given serious consideration at governing body meetings. Prayer and reflection as well as numerous opportunities to explore other cultures and religions are regular features of all lessons and assemblies. All of this, together with pupils' strong personal and social awareness, supports their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school has a strong team of teachers and support staff which works closely and effectively to ensure pupils learn well. Good relationships characterise all lessons. In most lessons, pupils know what they are meant to learn and the activities are suitably varied to meet different abilities and needs. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT), both in presenting stimulating materials and using laptop computers, particularly to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most lessons have good pace though sometimes the enthusiasm of the teacher results in overly long whole class sessions that limit the use of learning support staff. Teachers' marking is regular, positive and often detailed, especially that which helps pupils to improve their writing. However, it is quite variable in helping them improve their work in other areas, for example, in mathematics. Older pupils know their

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progress against National Curriculum levels from the regular and rigorous progress tracking, but the levels are less well used to show them what they need to do to improve further.

The curriculum is good in that it rightly includes a focus on basic skills, much of which is taught in the first part of the day. Learning schemes are considerably enhanced by varied and creative activities that engage pupils' interest and contribute well to their personal and social development. The good specialist provision for ICT, music and physical education, with opportunities to pursue these through the numerous extra-curricular activities and clubs, is a further strength.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and central to the school's inclusive ethos. The impact is reflected in pupils' overall sense of well-being. Parents recognise the considerable effort staff make in order to meet the different needs of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and increasingly others at an early stage of English acquisition.

The headteacher is very well respected for her visibility and approachability as well as her knowledge of every child, sustained through her management of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Morale is high across the school and there is a strong sense of teamwork and shared ownership for school improvement. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development and effective procedures for tracking pupils' progress and targeting necessary support. Governors are actively involved in these developments, with many regularly involved in monitoring and supporting different areas of the school. Most other aspects are similarly good, such as, the partnership links with outside agencies and strategies to engage parents, while procedures for safeguarding of pupils are exemplary. The school successfully ensures that all pupils are equally well supported and able to succeed. It provides well for its pupils, ensures that most achieve well and therefore provides good value for money. The strengths and commitment of the staff and governors underpin the school's good capacity for further improvement.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Develop marking and assessment practice by:
  - extending the constructive guidance used in marking writing to other subject areas including mathematics
  - making greater use for older pupils of National Curriculum levels to show them how they can improve their work.

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

2

Children start Reception with below-average knowledge and skills and a significant percentage of the current intake have English as an additional language. The good Early Years provision is enabling these children to quickly improve their English language skills. The strong focus on basic skills enables pupils throughout the school to make

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sufficiently good progress to reach above-average standards by the end of Year 6. This was evident in all years including an outstanding Year 4 writing lesson where excellent pace, varied challenge and strong learning support enabled pupils to create their own well-constructed stories. Progress in other curriculum areas is also good, notably in ICT, French and physical education where pupils benefit from specialist teaching. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly good progress, particularly those who have had most of their primary education in the school and benefited over time from the careful tracking and effective additional learning support provided. The increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in Reception are progressing well, helped particularly by learning activities that help improve their speaking and listening.

Other outcomes are all positive and reflect the school's commitment to the development of the whole child. Pupils come to school eager to learn and grasp the opportunities to be active learners and play a significant part in the life of the school and community. These include charity fundraising for third world projects and Dr Barnardo's, choir singing in the community and through the active school council. Spiritual development is very strong and pupils readily participate in prayer in lessons, assemblies and at the end of the day. Most are thoughtful and insightful and this was very evident in their contributions in an assembly on love and friendship.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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 of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

**1**

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is consistently good, helped by an effective balance of very experienced staff and the recent recruitment of young and talented teachers. A strong sense of teamwork is reflected in shared approaches to lesson planning and assessment. Teachers make good use of the electronic whiteboards and provide regular and effective use of laptop computers in all years including Reception. The very best teaching wholly engages pupils through imaginative and varied learning activities with effective use of supported group work. Teachers constantly strive to encourage active involvement and response in lessons, for example, by getting pupils to 'have a go' at speaking French in Year 4, working together to find mathematics solutions in Year 6 and using different performance skills in a Year 2 poetry lesson.

The good curriculum has breadth and variety, including French in all years and significant and well-planned specialist provision in music and physical education, which is much appreciated by pupils. Other enhancements include 'gym trail' in the day to help pupils' coordination and imaginative and popular extra-curricular activities such as 'mad science' and karate as well as a range of sports and arts.

That the headteacher has continued in her original role of coordinator for special educational needs and/or disabilities reflects the considerable focus on care and support throughout the school. Parents, governors and pupils all agree that the school provides a safe and caring environment in which staff know the pupils well. There is excellent liaison between the separate pre-school and the Reception class and equally effective transition arrangements for Year 6 pupils, most of whom move on to the Roman Catholic secondary school.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels are committed to school improvement and this is reflected in governors' close involvement in many school activities and a readiness of teachers and others to improve their practice. There are now rigorous tracking systems to evaluate and support pupils' progress. These are used well to help ensure all children have every opportunity and any possible discrimination is addressed. The school

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recognises the importance of this with the changing intake and these analyses were used, for example, to identify boys' past underachievement and develop learning activities that increased their engagement. Similarly, robust self-evaluation has been used to improve teaching and other practice. To support this, good use is made of local consortium links to provide staff training and development. Strong links with parents and carers are maintained through parents' evenings, newsletters, 'parent mail', the school website and a readiness to engage parents in the playground at the start and finish of each day. The school has carefully analysed its generally good links with local, national and global communities and is in the process of developing them further. Rigorous safeguarding procedures are outstanding in their impact in helping create a safe and inclusive school. For example, comprehensive risk assessments are regularly carried out covering all aspects of the school and are very closely monitored by the headteacher and governor responsible for safeguarding.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. There has been a significant change in the profile of children entering Reception. Over half of children originate from different African countries or are from Europe, including Poland, Italy and Portugal. Standards on entry are below average and particularly low in speaking and listening. Children make good progress particularly in their personal, social and emotional, creative and physical development and, by the end of the year, gain knowledge and skills appropriate for their age. Standards in communication, language



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and literacy are below average but this still reflects good progress from low starting points. In lessons, children behave very well and take responsibility for small tasks such as tidying up and looking after resources. Relationships with adults and each other are very positive, evident in the way they play together harmoniously.

Adults have a strong knowledge of the learning and development needs of the children and plan learning activities effectively. The learning areas are well resourced and welcoming both in the classroom and outside. Children are keen to learn and effective planning ensures sufficient challenge and appropriate learning opportunities including through the use of treasure maps, role play facilities, bread making and counting activities. The Reception and pre-school staff share similar Early Years Foundation Stage tracking and assessment procedures which are robust and provide an accurate picture of children's progress. There is a positive and developing relationship with parents and their increasing involvement is helped by learning workshops organised by the school.

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are effective and reflected in good outcomes. Staff regularly review their practices and facilities in order to strengthen provision. This has led, for example, to the recent creation of a much larger and well resourced indoor learning area. All resources are well deployed and child protection and safeguarding concerns are fully addressed.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
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**

Parents and carers are very positive about the school, as revealed by their questionnaire answers including written responses which particularly praise school leadership, the consistently good teaching and the caring context in which children's needs are well recognised and supported. Inspection findings support parents' positive views.

Inspectors noted the very few adverse comments about misbehaviour but found any incidents to be rare and any concerns quickly identified and effectively addressed by the very strong care and support procedures.

## 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 79 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 210 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	75	17	22	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	67	85	11	14	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	73	19	24	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	71	21	27	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	61	77	18	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	57	72	20	25	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	72	21	27	0	0	1	1
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)	55	70	21	27	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	73	18	23	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	55	70	19	24	4	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	51	65	21	27	3	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	57	72	18	23	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	63	80	14	18	1	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



6 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Harlow, CM20 2NP

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St Alban's is a good school where you are making good progress and attaining above-average results by the time you leave at the end of Year 6. We were pleased to see how well behaved you were and how well everyone gets on together. This helps to make your school a happy, friendly place to be. It is especially good to see how you like to take on responsibility and help others.

Very many of your parents told us how much you like school and get on well with your teachers. Like your parents, we were impressed with the consistently good teaching and saw how much you all liked to be actively involved in your lessons and wanted to do well. It was also good to see how much you all enjoy the music, French and physical education lessons where you have the benefit of specialist teachers.

Your teachers plan their lessons well so that learning is interesting and often fun. They also mark your work regularly and often tell you how you can improve your work. This is very important and we have asked them to do more of this so you can make even better progress.

We agree with your parents that the headteacher, the school governors and all the staff run the school very well and are working hard to make it even better. You can all help by maintaining your excellent attendance and continuing to take an active part in school affairs.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful on our visit.

Yours sincerely

Graham Preston

Lead inspector

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