

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119706
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	339511
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Lynne Read

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	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Jude Harrison
Headteacher	Mrs Annie Owens
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons and observed teaching in all classes. They held meetings with governors, managers, staff, groups of pupils and the School Improvement Partner. In observing the school's work they looked at pupils' workbooks, assessment records, the school's policies and its development plans. In total, 86 questionnaires were received from parents and carers, analysed and considered, alongside 98 questionnaires completed by pupils.

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

- the attainment and achievement of all groups of pupils
- the accuracy of assessments of pupils' progress and how effectively these are used in planning work
- the quality of teaching, especially in reading at Key Stage 1 and mathematics at Key Stage 2
- the quality of provision and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in the outdoor areas.

Information about the school

This school is average in size. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is around 40%, which is more than double the national average. An above average number of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Around 40% of pupils belong to minority ethnic groups and a very small minority are in the early stages of learning English. The school also caters for a small number of pupils from Traveller families. Accreditations held by the school include the Healthy Schools status. Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced many changes in staffing and management. At the time of the inspection a new headteacher had been in post for just under one year.

The governors provide extended care sessions on the premises through a breakfast club for all age groups and Early Bird clubs for both the morning and afternoon sessions in the Nursery. Registration with Ofsted was not required at the time of the inspection because sessions lasted less than two hours. Both aspects of extended care were inspected and are reported on within the text.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary is an improving school and provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. Behaviour is good and harmonious relationships exist between the different age, religious and ethnic groups. Under the energetic and determined leadership of the new headteacher, there has been a concerted effort to boost pupils' achievement. Many improvements have been made to provision and the assessment of pupils' progress. Younger children now make more headway before starting Year 1 and, for older pupils, progress in mathematics has improved. Senior leaders keep a close eye on pupils' achievement and are fully aware that standards need to rise further. They share a clear vision and ambition for the future and are making good use of support provided by the local authority. The capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage overall and it is often rapid in the Nursery. The indoor areas provide varied opportunities for children to engage in purposeful play but insufficient use is made of the outdoor area to develop children's skills across the areas of learning. By the time they enter Year 1 pupils' development is close to average except in early writing and number skills. Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 achievement is satisfactory overall and there are pockets of good progress. Standards are broadly average by Year 6 but too few pupils are working at the higher level, especially in mathematics and writing. Teaching is satisfactory with some aspects of good practice. However, managers recognise that the proportion of good teaching needs to rise further if the school is to meet its own challenging targets. The monitoring process is not yet rigorous enough to eliminate some variations in practice. For example, there are some lessons where the more-able pupils are not stretched fully. The small-group sessions for work on letters and sounds provide a good boost to reading skills, but where pupils are organised into large groups for this work progress is satisfactory but slower.

The curriculum meets requirements but there are limited opportunities for pupils to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) and writing skills when studying other subjects. A well-organised programme for personal education ensures that pupils have a sound awareness of moral and social issues and their spiritual development is supported effectively through links with the church. Action planning to promote community cohesion is at an early stage so the school makes little impact beyond its immediate surroundings. Pupils have few experiences to help them develop an awareness of life in other settings and countries around the world.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Improve provision and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing the outdoor curriculum to cover all areas of learning
 - improving teaching and learning in early number and writing work.
- Improve progress and attainment and accelerate the rate of improvement by:
 - extending the successful small-group method for teaching sounds and letters
 - ensuring that the more-able pupils are consistently challenged to the full, especially in writing and mathematics
 - including more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in writing and ICT when studying other subjects
 - improving the consistency in teaching and the proportion of good practice by introducing more rigour into the monitoring process.
- Improve the programme for community cohesion to provide pupils with a greater awareness of life in a variety of situations and countries around the world.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils have good attitudes to their learning and enjoy their lessons. Achievement is satisfactory overall and good in some classes, including that of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

Historically, pupils made satisfactory, but not enough progress through Key Stage 1 to reach average standards in reading and writing. The current Year 1 left Reception with attainment close to average in most areas of learning, except in early writing and number skills. This marks an improvement on previous years. This group are currently making better progress. Staff have placed an additional emphasis on learning about sounds and letters which is helping to improve pupils' reading and writing skills. Too often these sessions are not tailored well enough to meet the range of abilities within the class so that all pupils learn equally well. The current Year 6 pupils are working at a broadly average level which represents a good improvement on the 2009 test results, especially in mathematics. Across Key Stage 2 progress is accelerating and pupils are increasingly meeting the challenging targets that their teachers set. Many pupils are making up for shortfalls in their previous learning and progress for the oldest pupils is often good. Boys and girls show the same interest in their work and progress at equal rates. Too few pupils are working at the higher level in writing and mathematics.

Pupils say they enjoy school and are happy. They are polite and considerate of each other and know the difference between right and wrong. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of healthy living and enjoy plenty of exercise. They assert that they feel safe and that any incidence of bullying is dealt with swiftly. The school caters for pupils from different religious and cultural backgrounds and all groups get on well together.

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Nonetheless, pupils' understanding of life in different countries around the world is more limited. Attendance is in line with the national average and above the average for similar schools. Sound opportunities exist for pupils to experience responsibility. For example, play leaders and prefects contribute much to the day-to-day running of school and the school council contributes satisfactorily to the process of decision making. A sound range of basic skills and good attitudes to learning prepare pupils satisfactorily for future education.

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
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	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teachers make the purpose of lessons clear so that pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Many improvements have been made to the quality of teaching, but not all are consistently embedded. More frequent assessments of learning have been introduced and are used satisfactorily to set work for most pupils of different abilities; there are occasions, however, across the school when the more-able pupils are not extended enough. The very effective small-group sessions for sounds and letters are not available for all. A more active approach to learning is been introduced in classes but

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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there are still some occasions when pupils sit listening to the teacher for too long. Marking is good in writing so that pupils know how they can improve their work. It is not as detailed in mathematics. Teaching assistants provide effective, targeted support for groups and individuals who need extra help.

The curriculum is satisfactory and there are some good features. Pupils enjoy learning events, such as 'one world week' or the 'maths theme day'. Several special groups have been established to help pupils catch up where targets have not been met. They provide a good boost to learning and this provision is an important factor in pupils' improved progress. Links with outside agencies and schools provide added opportunities. For example, pupils enjoy the facilities for physical education at the secondary school and good opportunities to learn a musical instrument are provided from visiting specialists. An interesting selection of after-school clubs and visits extend experiences further. Links between subjects are developing, but there are too few opportunities at present for pupils to write at length or to apply their skills in ICT when studying other subjects.

The school takes satisfactory care of its pupils, and a very large majority agree with the statement, 'Adults in school care about me.' A good system of rewards encourages positive behaviour and effort, while collective worship encourages pupils to be kind and considerate. The buildings and grounds are secure and there is a safe handover of younger pupils to parents and carers at the end of the day. Children have a smooth induction into the Nursery and pupils are well supported in the transition to secondary school. Effective systems to deal with any incident of bullying are established but there is no central record of issues and outcomes. As senior staff and governors have to check several different records, the process of dealing with bullying is more time consuming than it need be. Many pupils take advantage of the breakfast club, which provides a good start to the day. The Early Bird sessions for the Nursery children extend learning in a fun way and help to prepare children for the longer sessions in the Reception class.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides strong direction for the school and both staff and governors share her ambitious agenda for long-term improvement. Plans for raising attainment and for the school's further development set a clear agenda and ensure that all staff know what is required. The rate of improvement this year has not been as swift as leaders hoped, largely because of staffing and training issues. With an informed senior and

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middle management team now established, the school is well placed to embark on an accelerated programme of change. However, the current level of monitoring is not sufficient to ensure that improvements are implemented consistently.

The equality policy ensures that groups of pupils have full and equal access to all activities. The more-able pupils, however, do not consistently have the challenge they need in all lessons. The school is a welcoming place and generates a sense of teamwork and belonging among staff and pupils. Links with the church and groups within the community promote shared values and good relationships. Action planning for community cohesion is at an early stage. At present, pupils' engagement with groups outside the local area and links with communities around the world are limited.

The school provides satisfactory value for money. It is run efficiently on a day-to-day basis and funding is targeted carefully. A recent, thorough review of safeguarding procedures means that staff are well informed and systems are secure.

The governing body includes a good level of expertise to support management. Governors have a secure overview of safeguarding, standards and achievement. They are developing their role in monitoring and evaluating key policies, such as those for community cohesion and equalities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

As they enter the Nursery, children's skills are below those expected for their age. Their progress in the Nursery is good and sometimes outstanding but it is slower in the Reception class. Reception children are reaching typical expectations in most areas of

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learning except in early writing and number skills. Personal and social development is a strength and children's behaviour is good.

Children's progress is assessed frequently and tasks are planned effectively to build on developing knowledge and skills. The Nursery environment is vibrant and exciting. Activities are extremely well organised to inspire children, while encouraging independence and curiosity. In the Reception class planning for early writing and number work lacks rigour and activities do not always build on children's previous learning. Across the Early Years Foundation Stage the outdoor areas provide effective opportunities for physical development but there is insufficient emphasis on purposeful play across the other areas of learning. Leaders have a realistic view of the further developments needed for this age group and the new combined unit, due to open at the start of the next academic year, has been planned to facilitate the sharing of good practice.

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

Parents and carers have a positive view of the school. Most of those who replied to the questionnaire agree that their children's experience of school is a happy one. They feel that their children are safe and are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. Inspectors agree with their views. In their responses and written comments several parents and carers raise issues about the quality of communication between home and school, feel that their views and concerns are not always taken into account and would like more support so they can help their children's learning at home. Inspectors found these areas to be satisfactory. Leaders at the school were informed of the issues raised.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn 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 86 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 246 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	55	31	36	4	5	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	46	53	34	40	3	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	26	30	53	62	5	6	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	33	47	55	6	7	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	29	34	47	55	2	2	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	29	44	51	9	10	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	36	51	59	3	3	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)	23	27	47	55	7	8	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	30	46	53	7	8	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	31	46	53	10	12	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	24	43	50	9	10	4	5
The school is led and managed effectively	25	29	46	53	10	12	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	41	40	47	5	6	2	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

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.



28 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn, Blackburn BB1 5BN

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school. We really enjoyed our time with you and appreciated all the smiles and help you gave us. In return, I would like to tell you what we found out.

St Alban's is a happy school that provides you with a satisfactory education. I would like to say thank you to the pupils who filled in their questionnaire and those who chatted with the inspectors. You enjoy school and inspectors agree with statements such as, 'Teachers keep us safe and look after us,' and, 'You learn a lot.'

You are keen to learn and work hard. There have been a lot of changes this year and you are making better progress now. Well done! I think there is some more work to be done to boost your progress even further. I have, therefore, asked your teachers to: develop learning in the outdoor areas for those of you in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improve learning in early writing and number work

- organise you into smaller groups for your letters and sounds work
- make sure that all of you in Key Stages 1 and 2 have good challenges in lessons
- provide more opportunities for writing and using your ICT skills in different subjects
- carry out checks to make sure that any improvements they make are working and
- provide more opportunities for you to learn about life in different situations from your own and in other countries around the world.

You can help by continuing to try hard and completing your homework. Thank you once again for the interesting conversations we had and for letting us share your work and play. I wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Read

Lead inspector

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