

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108398
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	337066
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Kate Pringle

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided school
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Vincent Cavanagh
Headteacher	Mrs Deborah Fox
Date of previous school inspection	July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent 56% of their time looking at learning visiting 13 lessons and observing all teachers. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' workbooks, assessment information about pupils' progress, records of the school reviews of its actions for improvement, current school development and updates of progress towards meeting priorities. They also considered questionnaire responses from 100 pupils, 14 members of staff and 80 parents.

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

- whether present attainment would secure sustained achievement in 2010
- how well the quality of teaching contributed to the good progress of all groups of pupils
- the progress pupils make in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- the contribution that leaders at all levels made towards pupils' outcomes.

Information about the school

St Alban's is an average-sized primary school with Nursery provision. It serves mainly Roman Catholic families from the eastern area of Gateshead where the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. Although the number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is low, the proportion with special educational needs and/or difficulties is above average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of those who are learning English as an additional language is well below the national average.

The school holds a number of awards including those for: Basic Skills, Healthy Schools, Impetus, Inclusion, Artsmark Gold, Gateshead Anti-Bullying, National Fairtrade School, Activemark, Investors in People and the full International School 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

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Albans is an outstanding school where every child really does matter. The visionary headteacher leads a strong team who ensure pupils receive high levels of care and education. This means that pupils are extremely happy and confident learners. Pupils have exceptional understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. The school ethos of 'Live life to the full' is supported by a wealth of exciting experiences in which pupils engage, extending their knowledge and understanding of the world about them. An overwhelming proportion of parents support the excellent progress their children make.

From entry points well below those typically expected for their age, all groups of pupils make exceptional progress leaving with levels well above national averages. The good start children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage continues and accelerates through the school, building successfully upon previous achievement towards very challenging targets. Teachers have an excellent understanding of pupils' abilities because of the well-established strategies for assessment and evaluation. This enables leaders to pinpoint where weaknesses are and successfully address them, for example, in the recent success in tackling the issue of raising standards in mathematics. At present, however, observations of children's achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not yet fully developed to impact strongly enough upon their next steps in learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, progress as well as their peers as a result of highly effective support. The school ensures that all have excellent opportunities to achieve.

Good teaching and an excellent curriculum enthuse pupils as they access activities which stimulate their attitude to learning through an exciting range of practical experiences. In the Early Years Foundation Stage access to the outside areas is limited and this restricts learning opportunities for children. Throughout the school the very strong Christian ethos actively supports pupils' outstanding personal development and very successfully raises their self-esteem and their respect and understanding of others. Their highly developed academic skills enable them to make exceptional contribution to the school, the local and global communities in addition to preparing them to take the best advantage of their future education.

The purposeful working relationships of the highly effective leaders demonstrate an outstanding commitment to maintain and build upon the child-centred approach

which drives this school. The school evaluates itself very well, quickly and clearly prioritising areas for improvement supported by a range of high quality systems. As a result, areas identified at the last inspection and additional priorities, such as tackling dips in performance of individual cohorts, have been successfully addressed. The high quality engagement with a range of external partners, including communities from other cultures, contributes very successfully to the excellent improvement and outstanding outcomes of the school securing excellent value for money. All of these successes indicate the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To increase opportunities for learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - improving the quality of, and access to, the outdoor learning area
 - using observations of children's achievements to better inform the next steps of learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils/children

1

Excellent relationships and good behaviour create an environment in which pupils are well motivated to learn well and, as a result, they make outstanding progress. Pupils make the best progress in lessons which involve them in identifying their own achievement against individual targets. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language all make excellent progress from their starting points. At Key Stage 2, high standards have been maintained over a three-year period and demonstrate improvement in mathematics which was the weaker of the subjects. After a dip in attainment at Key Stage 1, there has been full recovery with pupils now achieving average standards at the end of Year 2, building on the good progress made in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Personal development is a real strength and is the foundation upon which the school builds success. Pupils' behaviour is good and they are extremely knowledgeable about the importance of keeping safe in school and within the community. Pupils talk knowledgeably about how to keep their minds and bodies healthy. They appreciate the need to eat sensibly, to take regular exercise and how to deal with situations which concern them. Pupils' responses indicate their love of school and the many exciting things on offer. As a result, attendance is above average. Pupils are proud of their contribution to the school through their wide range of roles, such as buddies and school councillors. There are many highly-focused activities through which pupils engage at a variety of levels to take responsibility and lead projects within school and to support those less fortunate throughout the wider community.

Pupils understand the Christian principles which underpin the highly positive respect and consideration for others. This is evident, not only through their interaction with other pupils and staff on a daily basis, but through the strongly identified mission they have to identify and support those around the world less fortunate than themselves. The work the pupils engage in to link with other schools locally and internationally provide excellent opportunities to understand and celebrate many different cultures and beliefs.

These are the grades for pupils'/children's outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good skills and subject knowledge. Pupils behave well within a positive environment and, as a result, they are motivated to learn. Shared learning objectives engage pupils in what is expected of them. This, alongside a newly-developed system of assessing pupils' progress, means that pupils increasingly understand what they have achieved. Teachers are developing the use of information on past achievement to individualise the next steps in pupils' learning. Where pace and expectation slows, pupils' attention can wander and behaviour levels fall. Pupils benefit from the effective use teachers make of interactive whiteboards and other practical activities. They progress best in lessons where there is active participation in learning through problem-solving and creative activities.

The rich curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities to make learning fun and is well supported by a range of visits and visitors. The links established between subjects enable pupils to have a better understanding of how, for example, the influence of weather conditions can impact upon the quality of living conditions. Literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills are used very effectively to support learning in other subjects. There is particular strength in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities which have high attendance levels. The curriculum is further enriched by the opportunities for pupils from Key Stage 2 to take part in residential visits where they experience completely new situations which enable them to reflect upon their personal skills. The work, for example, with Fairtrade and International Schools has considerably enhanced pupils' understanding of different cultures and beliefs.

A highly inclusive ethos ensures that concerns are quickly highlighted and addressed with sensitive support. Every child in this school is recognised as an individual. Comments from pupils indicate that they understand where to find help. Excellent communication with parents and carers ensure that information is shared regularly and parents are involved in their children's learning. Vulnerable pupils, those with

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

special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language are very well supported by excellent programmes, including those from external agencies. As a result, these pupils progress extremely well. Arrangements for transition into and out of the school are outstanding because of the well-established links with parents and with receiving schools. This enables highly effective transfer at all stages with the very minimum of upset to children and older pupils.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The clear vision generated by the headteacher and senior leaders is shared by all leading to a highly motivated team working towards a common purpose. Delegated responsibilities enable leaders to plan for development within a clearly identified framework for improvement, strategically linked to improving pupils' outcomes. As a result, target setting is very challenging and there are increasing levels of outstanding achievement for all groups of pupils ensuring that all have excellent opportunities to achieve. Excellent opportunities for professional development are strongly linked to the needs of the school due to stringent evaluation of outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation demonstrate a significant impact upon many areas of the school's development and the school has an accurate measure of the present quality of teaching and learning. Key to success is the highly effective teamwork to create this highly inclusive school. Staff clearly share their commitment to continued improvement which is founded in the trust and confidence they have in each other.

The wide-ranging expertise of the governing body brings additional skills to the school. They are extremely positive about the work of the school. Their developing understanding of their responsibilities means that governors are increasingly challenging in their approach to the school and to their own roles. Safeguarding arrangements are secure. The effective strategies in place ensure that the school is a healthy and safe environment with regular checks minimising risks.

The strong commitment to community cohesion is very firmly rooted within the Christian principles of the school. The role of pupils to make a difference for themselves and for others is extremely well supported by the highly effective citizenship programme which underpins work within the school, the local community and globally.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter with skills well below those expected for their age. They settle quickly within the positive environment establishing good relationships with their teachers and with other children. This contributes well to their confidence as they play happily together showing increasing levels of respect for others as they share and take turns. Children are encouraged to understand simple rules which contribute to their safety and well-being. The needs of those with special educational needs and/or difficulties, and those with English as an additional language, are extremely well met and they progress well. By the time children are ready to enter Year 1, they have made good progress, although their attainment is still below national averages.

Children enjoy a range of learning opportunities and teachers plan interesting activities within a well-structured programme. Parents take good advantage of opportunities to share in their children's learning and reflect that their children are happy and settle well. Opportunities to access outdoor activities are limited and this restricts children in their choice of how, and where, they engage in all areas of learning. Observations of the progress children make are recorded in their learning files. However, observations are not frequent enough to impact on what children need to learn next. These records are at an early stage of development and their use is not yet helping teachers to plan activities which are closely matched to children's developing abilities.

The newly-developed team works well together to ensure a successful setting where children engage well. The strong emphasis upon children's personal and social skills drives their early learning. Policies and procedures are consistently applied and this contributes to the security of the setting. Children's needs are well met supported by highly effective partnerships with parents and a range of external partners.

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 in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. They hold the headteacher and her staff in very high regard and greatly appreciate the care and consideration given to their children. They are confident that any concerns are listened to carefully and acted upon appropriately. The school received much praise for the efforts it makes to provide a very caring environment in which pupils achieve extremely well. For example, one parent noted, 'The inclusive ethos and high standards of leadership and teaching within St Alban's have given our daughter the best possible start in life.' Of the small numbers of concerns raised, all were fully investigated with the headteacher and there were no serious issues found.

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 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection of which 79 were analysed as found below. In total, there are 227 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	57	72	22	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	58	73	21	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	34	43	42	53	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	52	35	44	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	52	66	25	32	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	56	33	42	2	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	47	41	52	1	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)	36	46	34	43	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	41	52	36	46	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	44	56	30	38	3	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	41	42	53	3	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	49	62	28	35	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	67	24	30	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 all 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>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 pupils' 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 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Gateshead, NE10 0QY

It was lovely to meet all of you when we inspected your school recently. We did enjoy talking to so many of you and we were very impressed with the way in which you care for each other and for your school. We especially liked the opportunities you had to think about others and how you can help them.

Yours is an outstanding school. All of the staff work really well together to make sure that you have lots of exciting experiences and this helps you to enjoy your learning. Your school is a happy place. This is something that you told us and all of your parents agreed.

All of the staff and people who work for you in school make sure that you are very well cared for and this means that you feel safe and confident. Your teachers know you very well and make sure that the work they give you matches what you need to learn and this means that you make exceptional progress.

Although we know your school is excellent, it is our job to help it become even better. Therefore, I have asked your headteacher to make some changes to help the youngest children in Nursery and Reception by:

- improving the quality of the outside areas and giving children more time to play and learn out of doors
- for teachers to record what children show they can do more frequently and use this information to plan what children need to do next.

Well done everyone for contributing to a very special school.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Kate Pringle
Lead inspector

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