

Saint Albert the Great Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117471
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	367410
Inspection dates	5–6 May 2011
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Holyoak
Headteacher	Louise Fleming
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2008
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 14 lessons taught by eight different members of staff. Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, and with staff and pupils. They looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, teachers' lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's documentation, which included records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Responses to inspection questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and by 119 parents and carers were also considered.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How rapidly and consistently do pupils make progress across the school, particularly in mathematics?
- How well do staff use assessment information to plan work which challenges all pupils to make good progress, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those identified as gifted or talented?
- How effective is the leadership of the school, looking in particular at the senior leadership team and at the impact of the governing body and subject leaders?

Information about the school

St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School is an average-sized primary school. Pupils are predominantly White British. A small number of pupils come from families of Traveller heritage. Other pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups, but very few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, although several of these have profound needs. Most have specific learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or speech and language issues. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly below average. The school offers a daily breakfast club and pre-school provision on four afternoons per week. Both of these are managed by the governing body and were included in this inspection.

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

This is a satisfactory school. However, despite some instability in leadership in recent years, it is improving steadily. Pupils are making more rapid progress and standards are rising again at Year 6. A key strength is the good provision the school makes for pupils' personal development and for their pastoral support. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well. They feel safe and have confidence in adults. They have a satisfactory understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoy participating in sport. Pupils' contribution to the school in undertaking daily tasks is good, although links with the local community, other than through the church, are limited. Attendance is broadly average.

In many respects children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the pre-school, make a good start and achieve well. However, the outdoor provision is underdeveloped, as are some aspects of assessment so that judgements on children's progress are inconsistent. As no member of staff is sufficiently accountable for the overall outcomes of Early Years Foundation Stage provision, its overall effectiveness is satisfactory rather than good. Pupils' progress and achievement in Years 3 to 6, following underperformance in mathematics last year, is improving. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is now at least average. However, there is further work to do to ensure that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in mathematics and, in all subjects, for the more able and gifted. Although good practice is not consistently embedded, teachers make increasingly effective use of assessment. However, individual targets for pupils are not used effectively to promote better progress, nor does teachers' marking give sufficient guidance as to how pupils could improve their work.

The proportion of good teaching is increasing. However, learning objectives in planning are sometimes imprecise and the pace of lessons does not always support the accelerated progress necessary to raise attainment further. There has been considerable focus on developing the improved curriculum and good opportunities for cross-curricular use of literacy and numeracy skills are promoting better progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher sets a very positive tone, strongly supporting the school's caring and compassionate ethos. Self-evaluation is incisive and current leaders know the school well. Leadership roles are just becoming established and there is no deputy headteacher. Nonetheless, the impact of the inclusion co-ordinator in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of the specialist staff in supporting Traveller pupils has been significant. The good governing body has steered the school through uncertain times and governors are committed to enhancing the school's effectiveness. Its strength as a community, the good support of parents and carers and the effectiveness of its work to reduce underperformance, together with its vision for improvement, all indicate that the school has securely satisfactory capacity for improvement.

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Up to 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the pace and consistency of pupils' learning, particularly those identified as more able and gifted, so that standards are raised further, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that lessons have clear objectives and a brisk pace
 - making more effective use of pupils' individual learning targets
 - more rigorous marking of pupils' work so that they are clear as to what they must do to move their learning on.
- Build upon existing good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - strengthening the sharing of good practice to ensure a cohesive approach across the pre-school, Nursery and Reception classes
 - improving the resourcing of outdoor learning areas
 - reviewing assessment systems and practice to ensure that all staff have a common understanding of the evaluation criteria
 - clarifying and improving overall lines of accountability for day-to-day practice and children's outcomes.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children's skills on joining the school are broadly average. Good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that children enter Year 1 with increasingly secure basic skills, particularly in key areas of reading, writing and calculation.

While outcomes in relation to pupils' personal development have been mostly good, the school's impact on pupils' academic progress has been less consistent. School leaders have focused recently on ensuring that pupils are more actively engaged by, and involved in, their learning. This was evident in a number of successful lessons, including a Year 6 mathematics session where pupils were involved in a series of well-organised practical activities to embed their understanding of the links between fractions, decimals and percentages. Year 1 pupils honed their skills of observation during a practical science session where they tracked changes in the adjacent mature woodland. Year 5 pupils developed systematic approaches to scientific enquiry as they dissected tulip flowers to examine and account for the structure of the flower heads. All of these lessons encouraged the development of speaking skills and clarity of explanations by pupils, giving them confidence in their ability to share information. In general, the increasing use of open-ended tasks provides pupils with opportunities to develop their understanding. Teaching assistants are mostly effectively deployed, so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other vulnerable groups make at least satisfactory progress. However, there has not, over time, been sufficient focus on the learning needs of more able and gifted pupils. The school is now beginning to tackle this issue.

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Pupils' personal development is good. They work well together when given the opportunity. The school council offers pupils some experience of the democratic process. Spiritual, social and moral development is good, although cultural aspects are less systematically developed. Pupils show great respect for each other and for staff and have good interpersonal skills. Average, but improving, basic skills mean that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for future study and later life.

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	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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

While some teaching remains satisfactory, relationships between staff and pupils are consistently positive. However, although improved assessment practice is contributing to more effective learning, teaching does not always take learning forward quickly enough. On occasion, learning objectives are not defined precisely and the pace of learning remains rather slow. Support staff have a positive impact on learning, particularly those who work effectively with individuals and groups of pupils who have specific physical or academic needs. Tracking systems are now robust. However, pupils' individual targets for learning are inconsistently implemented between year groups and this constrains their effectiveness. Marking of pupils' work provides pupils with some guidance as to their next steps in learning. Again, however, this practice is unevenly embedded and this affects pupils' learning.

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The school has worked hard to develop the curriculum in response to pupils' and parents' and carers' expressed needs. It offers imaginative opportunities which, with more effective teaching, are underpinning improving progress, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This includes 'setting' pupils by ability for mathematics in Years 5 and 6. Cross-curricular provision is mainly good and pupils, overall, have a well-balanced range of opportunities. These offer particularly good experiences in religious education, history, geography and science, with the effective use of the rich outdoor environment. There are good opportunities for sport and physical development. Information and communication technology is used increasingly to enhance learning in other subjects. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is carefully planned. External partnerships contribute well to extending pupils' learning. The curriculum is increasingly effective at meeting the needs of all pupils, although enrichment activities to support gifted and talented pupils remain underdeveloped. Extra-curricular provision is good, with some activities initiated and run by pupils.

Staff are very responsive to pupils' needs. Transition arrangements are good in, for example, the pre-school provision and in supporting older pupils identified as potentially vulnerable. The school works effectively with support agencies. Good practice, well managed by the inclusion coordinator, supports the health, social and behavioural needs of pupils in challenging circumstances. The well-managed breakfast club provides a valuable service for pupils and parents and carers, including some pupils who are vulnerable or might otherwise have attendance issues.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff changes and unavoidable absences within the leadership team, including the lack of a deputy headteacher, have limited the capacity of the senior leadership team and constrained the pace of improvement in the last three years. Initiatives, particularly around teaching, assessment and pupils' progress have, as a result, been slow to take hold. However, the current leadership team is committed strongly to seeking further improvement. Rigorous self-evaluation has ensured that senior leaders and the governing body have a focused three-year plan which accurately identifies the way forward. The school continues to build capacity in its senior leadership and this is already supported well by emerging good practice in the leadership and management of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the good provision for Traveller pupils. Subject leadership remains less consistent, although monitoring is mostly accurate and increasingly effective in challenging staff to raise their game. Effective systems are now used to track pupils' progress and assessment. The monitoring of teaching and learning is

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satisfactory. However, classroom practice is improving and an increasing proportion of teaching is at least good. This is now beginning to have an impact on pupils' learning in Years 1 to 6.

The governing body is well-organised, experienced, effective and supportive. Its members take decisive action when circumstances require it and provide both support and challenge for school leaders when major issues arise. They provide an effective bridge between the school and its community and are increasingly involved in the life of the school. They work effectively with school leaders to ensure that links with parents and carers are effective. Governors have taken a lead in developing the current three-year plan for improvement.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection procedures. Discrimination is tackled effectively and the promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The progress of the most-able pupils is starting to improve. The governing body ensures that community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. The school is a harmonious community and pupils get on well together. Staff have, for example, a good understanding of the culture and aspirations of the Traveller community pupils and this has had a significant impact on the attendance and achievement of these potentially vulnerable pupils. The school is beginning to develop further its wider national and international links, building upon the current links with St Joseph's Catholic School in Bethlehem.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	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

Most children who enter Reception have attended the Nursery class. Typically, children's skills and knowledge on entry to Nursery are in line with those expected, with some working at slightly higher levels. Staff feel that those who have attended the pre-school are particularly well-placed to benefit from Nursery provision and consequently make rapid

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progress. From the beginning, children's welfare has a high priority. Good induction arrangements establish an effective bond with parents and carers and ensure that children feel safe. Children build good relationships with adults and with other children and behave well. School data indicates that children make good progress, leading to attainment at the end of Reception which is above the expected level in all areas of learning, with a significant proportion of children attaining at the highest level. Progress is particularly rapid in Nursery, although less so in reading, writing and calculation than in the other areas. However, skills in reading and writing are well supported by an effective programme for teaching sounds and letters and this moves children's attainment on further in Reception.

Focused teaching and support, such as the effective session on letter sounds and formation observed in Reception, ensure that children successfully extend their skills. Staff mostly make good use of opportunities to ask questions and engage children in conversations which help take learning forward. However, while many activities meet children's individual needs across the ability range, opportunities are sometimes missed to extend further the learning of the more-able children. Although teaching mostly ensures a good balance of activities chosen by children and those led by adults, and children have good opportunities to make choices both indoors and out, the pace of learning is variable. While all areas of learning are planned for, planning does not always make clear what children are to learn, especially in the outdoor provision. Although the indoor learning environments are well-resourced, the school rightly recognises that the separate outdoor areas, while well used, are in need of modernisation. Frequent assessments provide detailed information on children's progress. However, staff recognise that systems could be streamlined, with increased external validation to ensure the accuracy of judgements across both year groups. With the Nursery and Reception classes currently operating in separate areas, and the phase leader, though knowledgeable, not directly teaching in either class, it is difficult to ensure a cohesive approach to day-to-day practice. Early Years Foundation Stage staff do not currently have a sufficient overview of the long-term impact of provision and lines of accountability for daily practice and outcomes are blurred.

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	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Of those parents and carers who responded to the survey, almost all are happy with the school and the care it provides for their children. The vast majority feel that the school engages well with parents and carers and that their children enjoy school. One said: 'This is a warm, friendly school with approachable staff and well led by a very competent head.' Inspection findings support parents' and carers' positive views of the school. A small

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number of parents and carers raised concerns about pupils' behaviour. The inspection team examined these during the visit. Taking into account school records and the evidence gained in lessons and around the school, inspectors consider behaviour to be at least good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Albert the Great 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 119 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 222 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	68	57	48	40	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	72	61	45	38	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	47	39	69	58	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	42	64	54	5	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	52	44	63	53	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	42	35	75	63	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	49	41	66	55	2	2	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)	49	41	56	47	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	48	40	65	55	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	39	58	49	9	8	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	37	67	56	5	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	62	52	48	40	6	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	55	48	40	4	3	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 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.



9 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Saint Albert the Great Catholic Primary School, Hemel Hempstead
HP3 8DW**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, hearing your views about the school and spending time in lessons. We found that although yours is a satisfactory school, it is improving steadily. These are the things we liked best.

You have good attitudes to learning and are making better progress.

You feel very safe in school and you behave well.

Children in Nursery and Reception are making good progress.

You undertake various jobs and make a good contribution to the school, although links with the local community are not so strong.

Staff care for you and support you well.

You understand the importance of eating healthily and staying fit.

You experience some interesting topics and enrichment activities.

Those of you who find learning difficult get good support.

The leadership of the school is improving and some aspects of it are good.

To help you do better, we have asked the school to do the following things.

Ensure that you all - particularly those of you who learn quite quickly - make more rapid progress and reach higher standards, especially in mathematics, through more effective use of individual learning targets and more rigorous marking which provides you with clear guidance for improving your work.

Build on the good progress children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage through improving the outdoor learning areas, sharpening the systems for judging how well children are doing and ensuring that the leadership has a really good overview of the progress children are making.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan

Lead inspector

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