

Saint Albert the Great Catholic Primary School

Acorn Road, Bennetts End, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 8DW

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leaders of the school, including the governing body, have worked successfully with staff to improve teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.
- A good education for all pupils has been established, despite many recent staff changes, and difficulties with the buildings.
- Children now get off to a much better start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They greatly enjoy their play, and learn well indoors and out.
- Throughout the school, the progress of all groups of pupils is good because of good teaching.
- Staff monitor pupils' progress closely and ensure that extra help is given to any who are in danger of falling behind in their learning.
- During lessons, teachers keep a close eye on how everyone is doing, and intervene to help if anyone is confused.
- Pupils behave well and feel safe in school. They enjoy learning and take a pride in their successes. All pupils get on well together, regardless of background, and collaborate extremely effectively in class.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, the pace of learning slows, when some pupils are given tasks that are not sufficiently challenging, or others are initially given work that is too hard for them.
- Although the marking of pupils' work sometimes shows them how to improve, or asks useful supplementary questions, this is not consistent. Pupils do not always have time to respond to their teachers' advice.
- Although most parents are very positive about the school, a small minority have concerns about some aspects of school life, particularly as regards management and pupils' behaviour. Staff have not been able to reassure these parents about their concerns.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed substantial parts of 13 lessons, including two joint observations with the acting headteacher. Shorter visits were made to see how pupils are taught phonics (the way that letters are used to represent sounds in words), the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and to see pupils' participation in games lessons.
- Pupils were observed in assembly, during break and lunchtimes, and around the school generally.
- The team held formal meetings with members of staff, representatives of the governing body, and with groups of pupils from Years 2, 3, 5 and 6. They spoke informally to many other pupils.
- Inspectors spoke to staff whose lessons were observed, about their teaching.
- A telephone discussion about the school was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Pupils from Years 1 and 6 were heard reading. Samples of work in pupils' books were examined.
- A variety of documentation was analysed, particularly that related to safeguarding, to checking pupils' attainment and progress, and to managing teachers' performance. The school's own evaluation of its performance and plans for improvement were examined.
- Inspectors took account of 81 replies to the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as 14 questionnaire returns from staff.

Inspection team

Steven Hill, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christopher Christofides

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school. Pupils attend from a wide area of the town because of the school's religious character.
- The proportion of pupils known to be entitled to extra support from the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium, in this school, is extra funding provided to support pupils who are entitled to free school meals.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average. These pupils have a wide variety of ethnic heritages. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is slightly below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is a little above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school makes part-time provision for 20 children of Nursery age, who attend each morning.
- There have been major changes to staffing in the last two years. During the inspection, the headteacher was absent on maternity leave, and the school was led by the deputy headteacher, in association with the headteacher of another primary school in the diocese.
- The school's current accommodation is subject to subsidence, and will be demolished later this year. A new building is nearing completion on the site, and the school is due to move into it in a few weeks time. In the meantime, the outside area available for pupils to use is restricted.
- The school provides a breakfast club each morning for its own pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement to be outstanding, through making more teaching outstanding, particularly by:
 - making sure that work is always set at the right level of difficulty for different pupils, throughout lessons, so that all have tasks that are challenging but not too difficult
 - extending the good practice, seen in some books, of giving pupils advice to help them improve and giving them extra tasks to extend their learning
 - ensuring that pupils always have time to respond to their teachers' comments, and that teachers mark the results.
- Devise more effective ways of communicating with parents, and obtaining their views, particularly those who have reservations about the school's provision, so that they are reassured about school life.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children usually start in the school with skills that are broadly as expected for their age, or slightly lower. Reception and Nursery-aged children now make good progress, a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- This good progress that pupils now make across the Early Years Foundation Stage and across Key Stage 1 means they reach above-average attainment by the end of Year 2.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 has been above average for several years, but data show that achievement during Key Stage 2, until two years ago, did not compare favourably with that made by pupils nationally. Better teaching since then has helped pupils to make good progress for the last five terms throughout the key stage, in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Boys and girls now make the same good progress, redressing previous weaknesses in boys' progress in English, and that of girls in mathematics. Pupils from different ethnic heritages, including those for whom English is an additional language, make the same good progress as their classmates.
- Pupils who are known to be entitled to support from the pupil premium lag behind their classmates by about two terms in their attainment in mathematics and English. This is an improvement on what it was in the past. During last year, for example, although these pupils made much better progress than such pupils nationally, they did not do as well as their classmates.
- This year, the progress of pupils entitled to support from the pupil premium has risen across the school, and is similar to that of other pupils. This is because of a variety of well-judged extra help given to them.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress in the light of their starting points and their difficulties. The pupils with the highest levels of need get support which is carefully tailored to their particular requirements. Skilled help from extra adults, as well as work at the right level in class, underpins their good achievement.
- Pupils' good skills in reading, writing and mathematics are used well to support their work in other subjects.

The quality of teaching is good

- There is a high level of consistency in the way that teachers manage classes, based on well-understood routines and positive relationships. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and effort, and pupils try hard to fulfil these.
- Teachers motivate pupils well through their own enthusiasm, clear explanations and a focus on actively involving pupils throughout lessons. The extensive use of discussion and work in small teams contributes significantly to pupils' engagement in lessons, their consequent good progress, and their impressive collaborative skills.
- Teaching for Reception and Nursery aged children is good. There is a good balance between

adult-led activities and those children choose for themselves. Adults are skilled at extending children's thinking and vocabulary through joining in children's play, or questioning them carefully about what they are doing. Excellent use is made of incidental opportunities to extend children's mathematical and literacy skills, particularly their understanding of phonics.

- Teachers frequently use the good assessments of pupils' attainment to prepare different work for pupils of different abilities. This is generally successful, so that all can make good progress. Occasionally, more-able pupils are given the same work as the others at the start of sessions, before moving on to work that provides the right level of challenge for them, so their progress is not consistently strong in all parts of the lesson.
- Teachers and other adults continually check on how well pupils are doing, encouraging them to refine their work and providing extra help for those who need it. This means that, on occasions, when the work given to a particular group is too difficult for them and they are struggling, the adults identify the issue quickly, and step in to modify the work, or provide extra help and explanations.
- Teachers mark pupils' work accurately and praise them for success. There are good examples of clear advice to help pupils to improve their work, although this practice is not consistent.
- In the best examples of marking, teachers pose extra questions, challenging pupils to refine their work in writing, or to explain their reasoning. In mathematics, they sometimes challenge those who have been successful to attempt a more difficult example. However, too often pupils are not given the time to respond to their teachers' instructions. When they do, their replies are often not marked.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are very positive about school. They enjoy learning, are keen to do well and show perseverance in the face of difficulties. They cooperate extremely well, and are proud of their good teamwork, which illustrates their very good relationships. They listen attentively, and contribute their ideas thoughtfully.
- Pupils feel very safe in school and can explain why. They have great confidence in the adults to look after them and to deal sympathetically with any problems they have. Older pupils see it as part of their role to make sure that their schoolmates are happy and safe. Pupils socialise together well in the breakfast club, which gets the day off to a good start.
- Pupils take on responsibilities conscientiously. The oldest pupils, in particular, are proud of their role as 'buddies' to younger children, taking a keen interest in their personalities and their progress, and greatly enjoying the time they spend with them.
- Behaviour is good in class and around the school. Pupils are realistic about behaviour, all agreeing that it is generally good. They acknowledge that, occasionally, someone will be silly, or that friends will temporarily 'fall out', but say that any problems are quickly resolved by teachers on those occasions when they cannot sort things out for themselves.
- Pupils have a good understanding of bullying, including cyber-bullying for example, and know the difference between this and other kinds of misbehaviour. In discussion, they said that bullying is very rare in the school, and would be confident in approaching a teacher to sort it out if any incidents did affect them or their schoolmates.

- In the playground, boys and girls of different ages from a wide variety of backgrounds play together happily and safely, showing concern for others, and enjoyment of each other's company. Pupils are polite, cheerful, and friendly.
- Pupils work hard in class and generally concentrate well, although the concentration of a few pupils can wane if they are given work that is a bit too hard or too easy for them.
- Most parents are positive about behaviour, and most aspects of the school and what it does for their children. However, a small minority express concerns about bullying. All the other inspection evidence, including observations of pupils at work and at play, and the views from a range of pupils, supports the positive views of the large majority of parents.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's senior leaders have established a team of staff who share clear priorities and work together well to achieve them. As a result, progress and achievement have improved considerably since the last inspection. The good systems in place have sustained improvements through a period of substantial disruption to staffing and to the school's accommodation.
- The performance of teachers has been managed well, with good provision of extra training to help teachers improve their practice, and suitable links to pay ensuring successful teachers are appropriately rewarded.
- A sustained concentration of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress has underpinned many of the improvements. Any issues in aspects of teaching, or in the progress of groups or individuals, have been addressed well, supported by the good systems to assess and record pupils' attainment.
- Significant inequalities in progress between boys and girls, and between pupils entitled to support from the pupil premium and others, have been eliminated. This demonstrates the school's effective commitment to equality of opportunity and preventing discrimination. The pupil-premium funding has been spent well on a mixture of social and academic support to enable these pupils to take a full part in school life, as well as achieving as well as their classmates.
- The school provides an interesting curriculum that supports pupils' enthusiasm as well as their achievement. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong, reflected particularly in their thoughtful consideration of moral issues, their very good social skills and attitudes, and their respectful attitudes to others and their values.
- The local authority has provided good support to the school. Advice about leadership and management has supported the many improvements made in the last two years. Local authority involvement with subject leaders has helped them to improve teaching and progress in their areas of responsibility, and to be able to maintain this independently.
- The school has good systems in place to inform parents about aspects of school life and their children's achievement. Most parents, like their children, are positive about all aspects of the school. However, a small minority of parents are unhappy about several elements of school life, particularly leadership and management, teaching and learning, and bullying. Evidence during the inspection does not find these concerns to be well founded, but the school has not been successful in reassuring this small minority of parents about this.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have good systems to monitor the school's provision and the outcomes for pupils. They know about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. They have a clear grasp of data that backs this up well, and enables them to challenge as well as support senior staff. They have ensured that money is spent effectively, including pupil-premium funding. They make sure that staff are properly rewarded for good performance, and that support is provided to help teachers improve their practice. They know about the targets that are set for teachers and how well they are doing in meeting them. A strong focus on keeping pupils safe has ensured that safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117471
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	405709

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	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Holyoak
Headteacher	Louise Fleming (Acting headteacher: Sarah Wickens) (Associate headteacher: Robert Mundy)
Date of previous school inspection	5 May 2011
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