

St Albert the Great Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117471
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312627
Inspection date	29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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 on roll	
School	248
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lee Jevon
Headteacher	Mrs Renata Cooke
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Acorn Road Bennetts End Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP3 8DW
Telephone number	01442 264835
Fax number	01442 264418

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: current trends in standards and achievement; the overall effectiveness of the Foundation Stage; aspects of pupils' personal development, especially their behaviour, their awareness of the progress they are making and their understanding of cultures other than their own. The quality of subject leadership and the impact of the governing body were also investigated. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and pupils' work, parents' questionnaires, interviews with staff, pupils and the chair of governors and extensive school documentation, including its self-evaluation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no reason to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is average in size and serves pupils from the south and centre of Hemel Hempstead. A significant majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with about 20% from a range of minority ethnic groups. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. On balance, pupils are not economically disadvantaged but fewer than average come from homes with experience of higher education. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Recently the school has experienced a high turnover of senior staff and at the time of the inspection there is an acting headteacher in post, pending a permanent appointment.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school and elements of its work are excellent. This matches the school's self-evaluation closely and reflects good leadership and management. Parents rightly show remarkably strong support for the school, while still showing some anxiety at the absence of a permanent headteacher.

Positive leadership is provided by the acting headteacher. She has been very successful in gaining strong support from senior colleagues. By encouraging them to play to their individual strengths, she has enabled them to make a big contribution to raising standards and improving teaching. Good governance has successfully provided the strategic guidance and day-to-day support needed to help the school sustain improvement, especially during the recent challenging phase. The capacity to improve further is good because the strategies already lifting performance in both key stages are now fully established. Improvements are driven forward by the staff as a whole and not dependent on individual leaders.

Pupils' achievement is good. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are above average and rising. In relation to pupils' starting points, this represents good progress. Standards in English have been well above average for some time and recent action by the school has led to improved provision in mathematics and science. While standards in both subjects are already above average, staff now have clearer guidance about the requirements for even high standards. The curriculum is rightly more practical and attractive to pupils now. For example, in science, there is greater emphasis on investigative work than in previous years. As a result, current data show that many more pupils are already exceeding expectations by reaching the higher Level 5 standard in both science and mathematics or are on track to do so in 2008 tests. Standards at Key Stage 1 are broadly average, though current work in Year 2 is of a higher standard than at the same time last year. This is particularly so in writing, where pupils have responded well to new strategies for promoting accurate spelling and better sentence construction. Significantly, more pupils are on track to reach the higher Level 3 standard than previously.

Good leadership sustains a positive ethos and pupils' personal development is good as a result. The contribution pupils make to the community is outstanding. It is evident in way that the school council acts so effectively to improve the school. For instance, in helping to expand play facilities and install bike sheds. Pupils' willingness to help people is demonstrated clearly by their role in providing harvest gifts to elderly people and singing at local events. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is good and their attendance is above average. Pupils show a good understanding of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. Their attainment in basic skills and love of learning prepares them well for their later economic well-being. Pupils enjoy school, partly because they feel very safe and partly because the lessons and other activities offered to them are attractive. Spiritual moral social and cultural development is good. Pupils are particularly reflective for their age. Valuable cultural events and activities take place, but there is insufficient emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of the cultures of minority ethnic communities within the UK.

Good teaching underpins effective personal development and promotes a trend of improving standards. The effective monitoring of teaching and learning has successfully identified and eliminated the small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and learning noted in earlier records. In the main, lessons are well organised, benefit from good relationships and are increasingly promoting rapid progress. Teacher's good subject knowledge is another constant factor. Pupils

contribute with enthusiasm and teachers are quick to give praise where it is due. A significant minority of lessons is outstanding. The quality of questioning by teachers is particularly effective. A clear route to high standards is promoted successfully by the use of challenging tasks and robust assessment procedures. Pupils listen intently to instructions and give clear, well expressed, extensive answers to questions. However, there is a small but significant proportion of teaching which does not come up to this high standard. These lessons sometimes do not engage pupils fully for the whole time. As a result, their attention sometimes wanders, behaviour slips and they are unsure about what to do to make progress.

The school provides pupils with a good academic curriculum and adds to this a very good range of musical, sporting and other extra curricular activities. Care guidance and support are good. The school offers very clear instruction and guidance on how to act, how to get the best out of school and what to do in the face of problems. This leads to good personal development. Imaginative assemblies are just one way in which the school helps pupils see, understand and act on the catholic principles that guide it. In one example, pupils showed a particularly good grasp of the message of the 'Good Samaritan' because of the clear retelling of the story and persistent questioning by the assembly leader. Safeguarding requirements are met fully. The school's system for monitoring pupils' academic progress is extensive and this is helping to raise standards. Some, but not all, older pupils know which level they have reached, what to aim for next and how to reach it. There is scope to use target-setting even more effectively to help all pupils, but especially older ones, know precisely where they are and how they can improve their work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Foundation stage standards are above expectations, reflecting good leadership and teaching. Children enter the nursery with a very wide range of initial skills and prior attainment. Staff are good at assessing these and the curriculum reflects this analysis, offering great variety and stimulation across all the areas of activity. Children in one session really enjoyed being independent as they looked for their names and chose activities at the start of the day. They concentrated well. The nursery's links with parents are also very strong, reflecting the particularly accessible style of leadership. Attainment on entry is broadly average, despite ranging widely. In most previous years, children have left the nursery with broadly average standards, but recent improvements in leadership and teaching mean that they are learning more effectively and make good progress. The attainment of the current year group is a little above that expected nationally. In reception, children consolidate their prior learning effectively. There is a good curriculum and satisfactory teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more teaching has the perceptive questioning, strong pace and active involvement of pupils seen in the best lessons.
- Ensure pupils are much more aware of the level at which they are currently working and precisely what they can do to improve.
- Help pupils to appreciate more fully the cultural diversity that exists locally and throughout the UK.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 February 2008

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you for making me very welcome when I visited your school last week. Some of you also gave up part of lunch time to meet and talk with me. You are lucky to be in such a good school.

I was especially pleased to see that:

- Your behaviour and attitudes are good and sometimes excellent
- The school is well led by the headteacher and her senior colleagues
- The standards you attain are above average and are rising
- Teaching is good and in some lessons it is outstanding
- You are extremely good at looking out for each other, being helpful in school and caring about others outside school

If the school is going to become even more successful it needs to make sure that:

- Even more lessons have the clever questioning, lively approach and scope for you to join in that I saw in the best lessons
- More of you, especially in Year 5 and 6, are clear about the levels you are working at and how to reach even higher standards;
- You learn more about the different cultures in the UK as well as those in distant countries

Best wishes for the remainder of your time at St Albert's,

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew

Lead inspector