



St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119706
Local Authority Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number 291513
Inspection dates 6–7 March 2007
Reporting inspector Geoffrey Yates

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Trinity Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Blackburn, Lancashire
Age range of pupils	3–11		BB1 5BN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01254 57582
Number on roll (school)	250	Fax number	01254 679102
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Canon Jude Harrison
		Headteacher	Mr Gerard Keane
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Albans Catholic Primary School is an average sized school with its own Nursery. Most families live in housing association or council-owned properties. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Pupils are predominantly from White British families but there are a small number of pupils who are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. Movement within the pupil population is broadly average; although it varies from year to year. The school has a well above average number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. It also has a small number of Traveller children. When children start school, they have skills which are lower than those typical for their age, especially in relation to their language and communication skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides pupils with a satisfactory education. The recently appointed headteacher gives good leadership and provides a clear educational vision for the school. The school's evaluation of itself is accurate. A key strength is the outcomes of the provision made for pupils' personal development. Pupils behave well and show good levels of care for others including those less fortunate than themselves. The vast majority of parents appreciate the work of the school. They are pleased that their children like school and say it is because it treats children as individuals. One parent commented, 'I feel my daughter has learnt good social values and to be confident about herself.' Pupils develop a good understanding of how to keep safe and of the importance of healthy eating and taking exercise and are satisfactorily prepared for their next stage of education.

In previous years, some of the assessments of pupils' attainment have been inaccurate. The headteacher has addressed this issue and current assessments are now accurate. The 2006 national test results were below average at the end of both Years 2 and 6 but, given the low starting point to school, and the high proportion with learning and behavioural difficulties, this represents satisfactory achievement. Children get off to a good start in Nursery after starting with skills that are below expectations. By the end of the Reception year, despite satisfactory progress, standards are below national expectations particularly in language development. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 6. The school has valid evidence that demonstrates that standards are improving and are expected to be broadly average this year. The evidence also shows, however, that although achievement is satisfactory, standards in writing are weaker than in other subjects.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together, in particular to support pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties and pupils at an early stage of speaking English. Throughout the school, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to develop and apply their writing skills. This reduces standards in writing and, in particular, the achievement of more able pupils. While teachers make good use of assessment to inform their planning, marking does not give pupils enough guidance about how to improve their work. The curriculum is satisfactory and enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits. Children in the Foundation Stage however, do not all receive the same experiences, for example, children in the Reception class do not have regular access to outside learning. While the headteacher and deputy headteacher provide good leadership, the impact of management on the school is only satisfactory. This is because the role of subject leaders in monitoring and improving standards is currently underdeveloped. Governance is satisfactory and provides a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Given the current management team and clear educational direction, the school has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing, particularly for the more able pupils.

- Provide consistency in curriculum provision across the Foundation Stage.
- Ensure that marking is used effectively so that pupils are given good understanding of how to improve their work.
- Strengthen the impact of management on standards by developing further the role of subject managers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall with no significant gender differences. They start school with below average skills and make satisfactory progress overall in the Foundation Stage but do not reach the standards expected nationally by the time they enter Year 1. Progress is satisfactory overall in the rest of the school, and the school's own assessment information shows that standards in English and mathematics this year are broadly average by the time pupils leave. However, more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties, and those who are at an early stage of learning to speak English, make satisfactory progress. In 2006, results were lower than in previous years and statistical information shows that the value added for the Year 6 cohort was very low and dropped significantly when compared with the previous two years. However, the school has valid evidence to show that these comparisons need to be treated with great care, as the assessments made in Year 2 were far too generous. The school has taken decisive action to ensure that this will not happen again. The assessment procedures the school now has in place provide an accurate picture. Standards in writing are not as high as in other subjects due to underachievement of more able children and sometimes low expectations of teachers. Assessment data show that higher targets for next year are likely to be met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. By the time pupils leave, they are confident and have a good level of self-esteem, which demonstrates good progress from the time they start school. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and there is a really happy atmosphere in which they thrive. Pupils say they feel that staff are fair with discipline and they understand the school rules and why they are needed. Attendance is satisfactory and the Breakfast Club has improved punctuality. The school has an emphasis on the Healthy schools initiative and as a result pupils clearly understand the need for a balanced diet and exercise. The school council is proud that they initiated the 'Salad Bar' at lunch time. This group of pupils play an important role in school. Pupils respond well to the school's good provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Work to promote environmental awareness, including involvement in a recycling project, has enhanced pupils' understanding of life in the community. Pupils know what is right and wrong, accept responsibility and care sensitively for each other's safety and well-being. Their spiritual development is enhanced by the school's strong Christian ethos. Pupils' cultural

development is not neglected and includes the celebration of festivals of major world religions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good features. Common strengths include secure relationships, effective management of pupils and high levels of care, which successfully underpin all teaching and learning. Teachers use electronic whiteboards creatively to sustain pupils' interest. Some lessons successfully exploit the links between subjects to make learning more relevant for pupils. Another strong feature is the good work of teaching assistants, who include bilingual staff. They are particularly good at supporting pupils with learning difficulties and those acquiring English as an additional language. The best lessons, as exemplified in Year 5, are exciting because teachers make tasks challenging and interesting and provide sufficient time for pupils to complete them. When teaching is satisfactory, this is because teachers do not actively involve pupils enough at the start of the lesson and do not challenge them enough to use their writing skills. Pupils' progress towards each lesson's targets is checked by teachers. However, teachers do not always take this into account when planning the next stages of learning and, as a result, tasks are not always matched well enough to meet the needs of pupils and particularly of the more able. There are some good examples of marking in some classes but this is not consistent across the school and often fails to give effective guidance to pupils about how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits that are popular with pupils. Personal, social and health education and citizenship are of a good quality, ensuring that pupils develop a good understanding of issues related to healthy living and keeping safe. The curriculum is, however, less effective in ensuring pupils' academic progress in developing writing skills especially the needs of the more able. In the Foundation Stage the good provision in all areas of learning found in the Nursery is not mirrored in the Reception class. Curriculum provision is being reviewed in order to develop pupils' creativity fully and to make learning more relevant to pupils' lives. Subject planning has been adjusted to enable the development of the skills of literacy and numeracy in all subjects. Good use is made of a booster group in Year 6 to enable higher attaining pupils to make the progress they should. A programme of enhancing pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) and speaking skills across subjects is starting to raise standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Within the school's Christian ethos, pupils' personal care and support are both good. This is one reason why pupils say that the school is 'a happy place'. Safeguarding procedures, child protection and all other risk assessments are in place. Pupils say they feel safe and secure in school and know there is always an adult to turn to with any worries. Pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory. Academic progress is regularly monitored, which enables teachers to identify where extra support or challenge is needed. While there is evidence of inaccurate monitoring in previous years, this is not now the case. What is not so consistently well done is the setting and use of clear targets for learning to help pupils' understand what they are trying to achieve and how they can improve. Attendance is well monitored and this is helping to reduce the rate of absence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher provides good leadership and management and has been instrumental in ensuring that inaccuracies in the school's assessment of its pupils have been removed. The school now has a very clear picture of standards and how to improve them. The headteacher receives good support from a newly appointed deputy. The positive impact of the new leadership structure can already be seen in the effective strategies established to improve standards and raise achievement. Although more opportunities have been provided for subject leaders to develop their roles, they do not yet have a secure enough overview of their subjects. Governors are supportive and have a reasonable view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and where it needs to improve. The last few years have been very difficult ones for the school and, as a result, progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory rather than good.

Document reference number: HMI 2507 1 September 2006
Inspection Report: St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn, 6–7 March 2007
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School Blackburn

Trinity Street

Blackburn

Lancashire

BB1 5BN

8 March 2007

Dear Children

Thank you for helping me during the inspection. I would like to tell you about my findings. You will not be surprised to know that all the inspectors found you all to be very friendly and helpful. We enjoyed being with you, watching you learn and talking to you. The list below shows some of the things I liked about your school.

- You work hard.
- The school's council members enjoy having a say in what goes on in your school.
- You like your headteacher, teachers and other members of staff.
- Teachers expect you to behave well and work hard. All the adults in school work very hard to care for you.
- You enjoy the breakfast club and the activities you do after school such as the physical education club.

We have asked your teachers to look at a few things to make your work even better.

- To make sure they help you improve further by giving you targets to improve when they mark your work and that they make sure you take notice of them.
- To provide you with more challenging opportunities to use your writing skills to make your work even better.
- To improve the resources in the reception class both indoors and outdoors.
- For staff leading some subjects to keep a closer eye on what goes on so that you all do even better.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey Yates

Lead Inspector