

St Alban's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108515
Local Authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	309717
Inspection dates	11–12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Sleightholme

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	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr M Conaty
Headteacher	Mr Mike Donnelly
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2003
School address	Westbourne Avenue Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE6 4HQ
Telephone number	0191 2625552
Fax number	0000

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size urban school serving an area that includes some aspects of social and economic disadvantage. Most pupils are from a White British background. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average but rising. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational need is below average. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or at an early stage of learning English is low.

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. Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding.

The school is founded on Catholic values. 'The staff are wonderful and make each child special', is a typical comment that reflects parents' high regard for the school. The headteacher, re-appointed four terms ago, has worked with staff and governors to set clear priorities for the school's development. There have been many significant improvements since his return.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are eager to learn, courteous and helpful. Their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils love lessons especially those that give them the chance to investigate and experiment. Their take up of school clubs is high and their attendance above average. Pupils feel safe in school; they understand how to avoid danger and how to access help. They recognise the importance of healthy eating. Pupils make friends easily and show a mature approach when assuming responsibilities. They think deeply about others through fundraising and community events such as the lunch for elderly parishioners. They make good progress in acquiring future life skills.

Until recently, standards had been declining especially at Key Stage 1. This has been reversed. Pupils are making good progress in lessons and standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. In Key Stage 2, standards in mathematics and science are currently above average. Most pupils make good progress in reading; progress in writing, although slower than that in reading, is satisfactory. Standards in English overall are average by the end of Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and at an early stage of learning English make similar progress to other pupils.

Teaching is good. Lessons are taught confidently. Good attention is given to promoting pupils' speaking, listening, reading, investigation and experimental skills. Although planning is mostly good, the Reception children are not provided with sufficient planned use of their designated outdoor facilities. Although the impact of good teaching is clearly evident in improvements in reading, mathematics and science, teaching has not been as successful in raising the quality of pupils' writing. Teachers make good use of the considerable information and communication technology (ICT) facilities that have been steadily improved. They mark pupils' work carefully and use teaching assistants effectively.

The school provides a good curriculum. Extra-curricular provision is good. Pupils' learning is enhanced through good use of visits and visitors. Learning is extended effectively into home settings though the 'virtual teaching and learning environment' (VTLE) that pupils and parents value highly. The care, guidance and support provided to pupils are good. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are benefiting from improved assessment of their needs. Pupils receive good advice on targets to work towards.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, through his inspirational leadership, is skilfully using the talents of staff to make rapid improvements. With ambitious plans for further improvement and excellent education and business links, the school is well placed to make further improvements. Governance is good and the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision is good. Children are admitted to Nursery with levels of development that are frequently below those typical for their age. Some enter with significantly low personal development, communication, language, literacy and number skills. Most make good progress to reach the expected goals at the end of the Reception class.

Teaching is good and children love the activities. Most quickly acquire personal and social skills. After just one term in the Nursery, on hearing one child proudly sound the nursery bell, others promptly tidied up resources and assembled in a line ready to follow their teacher. The experiences provided in Nursery and Reception engage children well and include a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Some Reception children were engrossed in role-play: they performed the Nativity under a canvas canopy on a straw-covered classroom floor. Others enjoyed learning to sound out the letter 'f' and write it correctly. Good facilities exist for outdoor learning and Nursery children readily access them. Reception class children do not use these facilities as often. Care for Foundation Stage children is good and leadership is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing, particularly spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting throughout the school.
- Ensure Reception pupils have more opportunities to access their outdoor provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. By Year 6, standards are above average in mathematics and science. Although pupils make good progress in reading, they do not make similar gains in writing. Consequently, standards in English overall are average by the end of Year 6.

The school's results of assessments in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 show a steady decline to reach a low point in 2007 where they were below average in reading and writing but average in mathematics. Assessments of that Year 2 cohort confirmed those pupils made limited progress during Year 1. The school has successfully addressed the causes and currently in Key Stage 1, pupils are making good progress and achieving standards appropriate for their ages.

The school's results in the 2007 national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 were significantly above average overall. They were particularly high in science where all pupils reached the expected level and most exceeded it. This year, mathematics and reading standards at Key Stage 2 are rising further. This illustrates how good leadership has promoted more rigorous tracking of progress and also curriculum innovation. Standards in writing are currently average; pupils' written work is marred by errors, notably in aspects of grammar and handwriting. Across the school, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and at an early stage of learning English, make similar progress to other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, social, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. They enjoy coming to school, are polite and responsible. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. There have been no exclusions for several years. Pupils are keen to learn, especially when lessons include practical activities. Their enthusiasm for school and the opportunities it provides, especially sport and music, is reflected in their above average attendance.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. They know how to manage risk, for example when using the Internet. Pupils' positive response to the introduction of healthier school meals demonstrates their good awareness of the importance of diet. Pupils are friendly and caring. Reception children benefit each week from the personal support of a Year 6 buddy. School councillors represent pupils' views well. During assemblies, pupils reflect maturely on important issues. Their commitment to recycling shows a mature understanding of ecological issues. Pupils have positive attitudes to differences between people and make a strong contribution to their local community, for example through involvement in parish activities. They show concern for others through fund raising for good causes. Given their achievements in basic skills, they are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Teachers are confident in subject knowledge, classroom organisation and pupil management. Lessons commence promptly because pupils are quickly engaged in lively, appealing tasks. Teachers' skilful questioning and promotion of paired discussions help pupils to become confident speakers and good listeners. Teachers use to advantage the good ICT facilities to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from invaluable support from skilled teaching assistants. Planning is mostly good. There are, however, insufficient planned opportunities for Reception children to access the good facilities of the Foundation Stage outdoor areas.

Teachers' high expectations in mathematics and science have helped ensure pupils reach above average standards in these subjects. This good progress is not yet mirrored in writing where weaknesses are apparent in spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting. Pupils' books show many make elementary errors in these key skills. Pupils' work also shows that the pace of learning in writing is slower than that in mathematics and science. Marking is used regularly to give pupils clear guidance on how to improve. Pupils are encouraged to assess their own learning. Teachers do not, however, ensure pupils carry out sufficient checks of their writing for elementary mistakes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. It is significantly enhanced by good extra-curricular provision, especially sport. A visiting specialist music teacher ensures all junior pupils learn to play a musical instrument. Rapid developments in ICT have led to excellent partnerships with

parents. The VTLE allows teachers to upload work onto the system, pupils to access it at home and parents to be directly involved in their children's learning.

Excellent partnerships with local schools are resulting in the development of an enquiry-based and more creative curriculum. The use of the 'Big Writing' initiative is a positive development towards raising standards in writing. The school knows that there remains scope for raising standards in writing and has recognised this through its development planning. The citizenship curriculum, assemblies and extra-curricular provision contribute significantly to the high quality of pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. Practices reflect the school mission statement well. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and for child protection are robust and used effectively; all staff have been trained in these aspects. Appropriate health and safety measures, including risk assessments, are in place. Procedures for administering regular medication to those pupils for whom this is necessary are exemplary.

Recent improvements to the tracking of pupils' progress provide school leaders and teachers with clear information when they are setting pupils' targets. Pupils receive timely and appropriate guidance. Parents can access to their own child's assessment scores through the VTLE. The arrangements for pupils to move on to the next stage in their education are good. Since the reappointment of the current headteacher, more attention has been paid to the identification of and provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective liaison with a range of appropriate agencies from the local authority has also contributed well to this improving element of care and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The headteacher, through his inspirational leadership ensures that the school promotes its mission statement 'where each individual member can continuously develop their own unique potential'. The headteacher works with a dedicated staff team. Together they successfully promote this as a family school. Actions taken have successfully reversed the decline in standards at Key Stage 1, raised standards at Key Stage 2 and improved attendance and the tracking of pupils' progress. He has also developed the skills of senior leaders and promoting innovative use of ICT.

School leaders are continually striving to promote higher quality of education and to this end they have ambitious plans for further improvement. The headteacher has set a challenging target for all pupils have access to ICT in their homes. Significant progress is being made; currently 40 families use laptop computers to access the school VTLE. The governors, whose good knowledge of the school is also enhanced by using this technology, support the school well and responded appropriately when the need for more staffing was identified.

Effective self-evaluation gives an accurate picture of the school. It has led to appropriate identification of school priorities. Excellent partnerships have been established with other schools, the university, industry and the local football club. These have a positive effect on

pupils' progress and their personal development. With a convincing track record of progress in key areas of school provision, the school has good capacity to improve.

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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?	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1
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

13 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Alban's RC Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE6 4HQ

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. We all enjoyed meeting you and we were impressed by your friendliness, good manners and excellent behaviour. We enjoyed visiting your classrooms, looking at your work and talking to you about your school. We know that everyone in your school wants you to have a say in how your school develops and your school councillors told us how you have helped to improve it.

These are the things we found out about your school. You attend a good school. Some of its work is outstanding. You work hard to reach above average standards in mathematics and science. You make better progress in your reading than your writing and overall you reach average standards in English. Many of you told us how much you enjoy mathematics and science. We know you like the many investigations and experiments that you undertake. Some of you showed us how you use the VTLE to do homework or find information to help you learn more. I saw how much you enjoy music when I listened to the trumpet band practising in the hall. We know that the teachers give you clear information on how you can improve and that you know what it means to work towards reaching targets.

You told us you love school and we know you attend well, feel safe and know how to get help quickly when you need it. You know it is important to be fit and healthy. We know you like helping at school by taking on responsibilities and you have been successful at raising funds for good causes. We know you represent the school well in your local community.

There are some things the school could do better. These are:

- Improve your writing skills.
- Give the Reception children more opportunities to use the outdoor facilities.

Wishing you and all the staff the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Sleightholme Tony Pearson

Lead inspector Team inspector