

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Ashburton Road, Wallasey, Merseyside, CH44 5XB

Inspection dates 18–19 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This is a warm and welcoming school where pupils, staff and governors have much respect for one another. Pupils are happy to come to school and their attendance is high.
- From starting points on entry to early years that are generally below what is typical for their age, pupils make good progress and reach at least average standards.
- Teaching over time is good. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Teachers know their pupils well and provide activities to motivate them.
- Pupils behave well; they are courteous and incredibly polite to adults and each other. Pupils say they feel very safe in school.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years and soon settle well due to high levels of care.
- Parents are unanimous in their support for the work of the school. They speak of the 'nurturing family ethos' where their children thrive.
- The headteacher's leadership skills are upheld as an exemplary model by the local authority in the coaching of new headteachers. Ably supported by her senior staff and governors, the headteacher has a determined focus to secure continuous improvement. She is keen to get the best for her pupils.
- Governors have a good knowledge of the school's priorities and its strengths. They support and challenge senior leaders to get the best outcomes in this improving school.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are aware of local, national and international issues and make an extremely positive contribution to the parish and the local community.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Sometimes, pupils are not given work that challenges them sufficiently. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to take decisions about how to present their own work.
- In the early years, there are missed opportunities for learning further, and at a faster pace, for the most able children.
- Some middle leaders are not taking full responsibility for the areas they lead. For example, they do not check that staff are following school policy on how to feedback to pupils in their particular subject areas.
- Opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' advice on how to improve are inconsistent across the classes.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching across the school, including two observations that were carried out with senior leaders.
- The inspectors heard pupils reading, looked at pupils' workbooks and observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtimes and break times.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, governors and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also considered the effectiveness of the school website.
- Inspectors took account of the 60 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), of a recent survey of parents' views conducted by the school and of those views gathered verbally during the inspection.
- They looked at a range of documents, including the school's most recent data on pupils' progress, the school's own view of its effectiveness and its plan for improvement, minutes of governors' meetings and information about the checks made on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils and records relating to behaviour and attendance were also considered.

Inspection team

Barbara Flitcroft, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Elaine Maloney	Additional Inspector
Anthony Buckley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average primary school. There are two classes in each year group from Reception to Year 6.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is slightly higher than average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The local authority uses the headteacher's expertise to support those new to headship.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Hold middle leaders more rigorously to account by:
 - ensuring that subject leaders frequently check on the regularity and quality of marking and whether staff are following school policy on feedback to pupils
 - ensuring that subject leaders monitor the levels of challenge in teachers' planning and in the written work of pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching further, and thus raise attainment by:
 - sharing the best quality teaching already in the school and making the most of opportunities in linked schools for the teachers who need support to see outstanding practice
 - avoiding an over-reliance on worksheets in some subjects and encouraging pupils to be more independent in how they present their work
 - ensuring a consistency of purposeful, high-quality marking across the school which tells pupils how to improve their work, and allowing pupils the time to respond to the teachers' comments
 - moving pupils on to more challenging tasks as soon as they are ready
 - providing opportunities in the early years for children to use and apply the new skills they have learned in the adult-directed sessions in their independently chosen activities both indoors and outdoors, and moving children's learning on at a faster pace, especially the most able.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Staff at all levels of responsibility have high expectations and are keen to make sure that pupils do their best. The headteacher and governors set a very clear vision for school improvement. The school improvement plan clearly sets out the priorities for taking the school forward successfully. The school's view of its own performance is mainly accurate.
- The school's priorities, including pupils' progress, are closely linked to the systems of appraisal. Targets set ensure that staff are held to account for the impact of their teaching. The headteacher carefully plans training opportunities to develop the skills of the staff further. Regular assessments are analysed by senior leaders and good-quality support is provided for those pupils in danger of falling behind. This demonstrates the school's strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity.
- Senior leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, pupils supported by this funding make slightly better progress across Key Stage 2 than other pupils. The gap in the attainment of these pupils and that of their peers is closing.
- The quality of middle leadership is inconsistent. While some lead their areas of responsibility very well, a small minority are not yet fully playing their part in school improvement because they do not check that the planned learning in their areas of responsibility is suitably challenging for the different year groups. In addition, they do not check the quality and regularity of marking in their subject areas. Some gather information about learning and progress but do not analyse it thoroughly in order to use it more effectively when planning learning activities.
- The school staff work together very successfully to create a very welcoming ethos in which everyone shows respect for each other in daily school life. The school fosters good relations and tackles discrimination effectively. When pupils come together to worship, they are encouraged to think spiritually and reflect on the topics explored. Pupils learn about and respect other faiths and cultures. They have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. They regularly raise funds for various charities, such as CAFOD, Mission Together and The Catholic Children's Society.
- The school has made a good start in creating a broad and balanced new curriculum which promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Consequently, pupils are very well prepared for their secondary education and for a positive role in modern British society. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They have good attitudes to learning and very much enjoy coming to school. Attendance is high. Pupils and staff treat each other with high levels of respect.
- Parents and grandparents are unanimously supportive and appreciative of the school's work. They speak of its caring and respectful ethos in which pupils thrive. One parent told inspectors, 'It's a fantastic school, nothing is too much trouble.'
- Leaders rigorously check attendance and are excellent role models for the high standards of behaviour they expect from the pupils.
- The primary school sport funding is used well. Specialist sports coaches are employed to deliver a range of lunchtime and after-school activities (that are provided at no cost to the pupils) and some of the physical education curriculum alongside staff, providing in-service training and support. As a result of this additional funding, pupils are engaged and motivated to play a greater part in wider sporting opportunities and in inter-school competitions. Pupils told inspectors that the sports coaches 'are fun'.
- The local authority believes this is a good school with good capacity to improve further, and therefore offers the minimum level of support. It also uses the headteacher's expertise to support those new to headship.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, some of whom have long associations with the school – some even attended this school when they were primary pupils – are determined to secure the best opportunities for the pupils and the community. They devote time to visit the school frequently, and some assist staff in classes. They are well aware of the quality of teaching in the school.
 - Governors are well informed and knowledgeable about the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. They have recently checked their skills to review which committees they can serve best. They are supportive of the school's work but not afraid to challenge leaders to bring about ongoing improvement. Governors are welcomed into the school during the school day to observe and monitor aspects of the school's work.
 - Governors understand how performance in the classroom can affect teachers' pay increases. They carefully monitor progression towards the appraisal targets of the staff and the headteacher.

- The safety of pupils is a high priority. Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils of all ages behave well around the school and they generally behave very well during lessons.
- Pupils are very happy at school and at play. The playground is rather small for the number of pupils but it is well managed and well supervised. Playground rules are clearly displayed. Pupils play together cooperatively.
- They approach their learning tasks with enthusiasm and conscientious attitudes. Pupils are keen to answer teachers' questions and to share ideas about their learning. They acknowledge the improvement in their skills that is brought about by their teachers and support staff, and they understand the need for weekly homework. Occasionally, there are isolated, low-level disruptions in class. However, these are managed very well by teachers and support staff.
- Pupils take their responsibilities seriously and want to be successful in their roles as school councillors, eco warriors, playground pals or members of the fundraising club.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and say, 'Every day we learn something new.' They appreciate the welcome from the headteacher at the main entrance each morning.
- Pupils say there is no bullying at the school and that occasional name calling is quickly dealt with by adults in school.
- The school is colourful, clean and uncluttered. Striking displays and artefacts celebrate pupils' work from the rich curriculum experiences. Pupils' workbooks show high levels of pride in presentation.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils appreciate the opportunity to share any concerns in the 'worry box' near the headteacher's office and they are confident that concerns are quickly sorted out by staff.
- Pupils say they feel very safe in school and parents' views echo this. Pupils understand the different forms bullying can take, including cyber bullying, and some older pupils know what homophobic bullying is.
- The school ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Local police visit to help to deliver these important messages to pupils. Pupils also understand how to make healthy food choices and this has a positive effect on their lifestyles.

The quality of teaching is good

- Over time, teaching throughout the school is good overall; some is outstanding and a small proportion requires improvement.
- Teachers and support staff have very positive relationships with pupils and there is evident mutual respect.
- Good-quality additional support and interventions delivered by dedicated staff assist learning and quicken the pace of progress of those who need additional help with their learning. Support staff who help pupils with special educational needs have a good knowledge of their pupils' capabilities and interests, and show sensitivity to their needs while still trying to foster their independence in learning.
- Pupils take immense pride in the presentation of their work; their books contain some very neat examples. However, in some subjects, there is too much reliance on worksheets so pupils do not have the choice of how best to record their learning.
- Pupils make good and sometimes better progress when the challenge in class is at the best level to move them forward and requires them to reflect more fully on what they have learnt. This was particularly evident in a Year 4 class, when pupils were actively moving around the classroom as they were learning about directions and the names of different types of angles. Strong relationships are based on mutual respect between pupils and adults and between each other so pupils participate very well in lessons, answering questions and offering solutions.
- Children make a positive start in their reading because of the precise teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) in the early years and across Key Stage 1. However, because of the large groups in early years, some children are ready to move on when others still need some more development of their knowledge.
- Reading is promoted well across the school with an attractive library and a selection of fiction and non-

fiction books in every class, as well as bookshelves in various places along the corridors. Pupils who read to inspectors said they enjoyed reading to an adult in school and found their advice very useful in helping them to be better readers.

- The school makes use of its links with other schools to check the assessment of writing. The teaching of writing is good and extends into other areas of the curriculum, especially topic work and religious education.
- One of the priorities for teaching has been to focus on progress in mathematics, following disappointing results for some Year 6 pupils in the national tests. Observations of mathematics teaching and work in pupils' books are showing a picture of good progress in mathematics so far this year.
- Pupils requiring extra help with their learning are supported well by teachers and teaching assistants so they too can learn well and make similar progress to that of their classmates.
- Activities generally engage and motivate pupils. There are also different levels of challenge in the learning activities. However, on occasions, the tasks set are not demanding enough to bring about the best possible progress.
- The marking of pupils' work is regular; however, the quality of the feedback is inconsistent across the school. Pupils respond well to the best quality of feedback from teachers. In some classes, pupils do not get the opportunity to respond and in other classes, there is little comment on how pupils can improve their work further.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' current work, their work from last year and the school's own data on attainment and progress show that achievement is good from their starting points to the end of Year 6.
- Most pupils enter the Reception year with skills and knowledge that are below typical expectations for their age. They make good progress and by the time they enter Year 1, attainment is nearer the national average.
- Pupils build on the good progress and usually reach average attainment by the end of Year 2. However, in Year 2 in 2014, more pupils than usual had additional needs and a smaller-than-usual group were higher attainers so, as the school expected, attainment fell to below average in reading and well below average in writing and mathematics, even though progress remained good. In 2015, Year 2 attainment is on track to rise again.
- By the end of Year 6, attainment is at and sometimes above the national average. This has been a consistent picture over the last few years. It is likely to continue next year with expected outcomes that are higher than 2014 following swift action taken by leaders after some disappointing mathematics results. This represents good achievement across the school.
- The attitudes of pupils to reading are very positive; they enjoy their books. Pupils are confident with strategies they need to read words that are unfamiliar. Older pupils talk with enthusiasm about their favourite authors.
- The most able pupils also make good progress with proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels well above average in mathematics, above average in writing and broadly average in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Pupils' learning is well planned, support is well targeted and pupils want to succeed so they try very hard. All this brings about good progress. However, some pupils do not consistently make the rapid progress needed to reach the standards of which they are capable. This is a result of activities that do not have enough challenge. On occasions, therefore, they continue with work in which they are already very confident.
- Disadvantaged pupils make better progress than others. By the end of Year 6, their attainment in comparison to that of others in the school and nationally is just as high in mathematics; half a term behind in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling and just over a term behind in writing.
- High-quality interventions and one-to-one support ensure pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make the same good progress as their classmates in reading and writing. Their progress in mathematics is weaker.

The early years provision is good

- Children join the early years provision from over twenty different pre-school settings. Children in Reception make a very positive start at school. They benefit from the good arrangements in place to allow them to

spend time in their new class before they start in school. Relationships are very good, with high levels of care, so children settle quickly and happily to school routines and to their learning.

- Children get along very well with one another. They listen and respond quickly to the instructions of the adults. Their behaviour is good and they show consideration for each other. This leads to an excellent promotion of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teaching in the two Reception classes is good. The activities planned allow children to develop their skills in all areas of learning. For example, children are able to make sensible choices about the activities that they engage in and are enthusiastic about their learning and play. They speak excitedly about their 'dinosaur dig'.
- Outcomes for early years children are positive following good progress from their below-typical age-related starting points. Staff work together well to plan activities which match the social, emotional and academic needs of the children. Occasionally, for the most able children, the learning could be moved on at a faster pace.
- Adults are well deployed in supporting children to make good progress. They join in the activities enthusiastically; they know when to help a child and when to step away and encourage independence, preparing them well for their future learning.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection praised staff, commenting on the very warm and welcoming ethos and the range of information received. Many appreciated the opportunities to make visits to the school before their children started in Reception.
- Leadership and management are good. The outdoor learning space is quite confined but staff provide exciting and stimulating learning opportunities. By the end of their Reception year, children transfer smoothly into Year 1.

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	105072
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	448270

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	385
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Long
Headteacher	Catherine Frost
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2010
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