

Ss Alban & Stephen Catholic Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117491
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	363872
Inspection dates	8–9 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Jane Halpin
Headteacher	Helen Hill
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2008
School address	Cecil Road St Albans AL1 5EG
Telephone number	01727 866668
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 lessons taught by 10 teachers. Inspectors also held meetings with the headteacher, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, pupils, and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including safeguarding documents, improvement plans, progress reports, minutes of governing body meetings, the school's self evaluation and records of pupils' progress. Inspectors analysed questionnaires from 128 parents and carers, 98 pupils and 21 staff.

Information about the school

Ss Alban & Stephen Junior Catholic School is an average sized primary school and is situated near the centre of the city. The percentages of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those for whom English is an additional language are both above the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. Government floor targets have been exceeded during the past three years.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement	1
Teaching	2
Leadership and management	1
Behaviour and safety	1
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school, characterised by pupils' very high standards at the end of Key Stage 2. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress. Through the school's outstanding tracking and support no one gets left behind. Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and governing body the school has made significant improvements since the last inspection.
- The excellent progress pupils make during their time in the school is also attributable to their outstanding attitudes to their learning and good teaching. Pupils have already achieved high standards when they join the school at the start of Year 3 but they make rapid progress in their reading, writing and mathematics so that attainment is well above average by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is good because of teachers' strong subject knowledge, careful planning for the needs of different groups and excellent relationships with pupils. The use of assessment to support learning is particularly effective in English. A small proportion of teaching is satisfactory, when challenge, marking and opportunities for independent working are not as good as in the best lessons.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and get on very well with each other. Pupils almost always enjoy their learning and only rarely do individuals get restless if an activity goes on for too long. Almost all pupils said they feel safe in school and parents overwhelmingly agreed with this. Attendance is good and improving and the level of persistent absence is low. Pupils' social moral spiritual and cultural development is outstanding.
- The headteacher along with senior leaders and governing body are highly effective in bringing improvements to teaching and achievement. The training and development of staff and tracking and monitoring procedures have been significantly developed. Leadership of special educational needs is outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently at least good and often outstanding by ensuring all teachers
 - set work that is always sufficiently challenging for higher attaining pupils
 - give pupils greater opportunities to work independently and make choices about their learning
 - mark work in a way that shows pupils exactly what they have achieved and what is required to reach the next stage in their learning and gives pupils the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments.

Main report

The school has improved since the last inspection because the headteacher and senior leaders have been highly focussed on raising standards by improving teaching through rigorous monitoring and holding teachers and pupils to account for their outcomes. Pupils have risen to the challenge and through their positive attitudes, the very high quality of support they receive and good teaching all do very well. No one slips through the net. There is a strong emphasis in the school on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils. According to one parent who summed up the views of many others, 'This is a happy, safe school, with very caring and supportive staff led by a very genuine and caring headteacher.'

Achievement

All pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, are making at least good and often outstanding progress in most lessons and consequently standards are rising. Pupils' learning in lessons seen is excellent, including that of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Even in the small minority of lessons where teaching is satisfactory pupils still learn well because of their excellent attitudes to learning and the high quality of the additional support they receive. Pupils work at tasks set at different levels of ability although occasionally the work set does not fully stretch higher attaining pupils. Pupils thrive best in those lessons where there are opportunities to discuss their learning with others or mark the work of their peers, which helps them with their own understanding of the work.

Pupils are already above average in reading, writing and mathematics when they join the school in Year 3. They get off to a flying start in reading where additional catch up programmes and a strong focus in literacy in lessons ensures no one is left behind. Pupils make a slower start in mathematics but increasingly as they move up the school their pace of learning accelerates so that by the time they leave at the end of Key Stage 2 progress overall is outstanding. In the current Year 6, pupils have made good progress because of the relatively slower start they had in mathematics in previous years.

Behaviour and safety

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Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Even in the few lessons that go on for too long on the carpet the attention of almost all pupils remains focussed on their learning. They move sensibly and safely around the building; even when there was an unexpected fire alarm at lunchtime on a rainy day pupils moved quietly and in an orderly way to and from the playground. There have been no recent exclusions or reported racist incidents and few reported incidents of bullying. The rare instances of bullying are dealt with effectively and pupils are confident about speaking to teachers if any incident occurs. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and show respect and care for others. Where any disagreements break out in the playground, Year 6 pupils take responsibility as 'squabble squashers' to mediate between disputes.

A very small minority of parents expressed concerns about behaviour and bullying but almost all pupils consider behaviour in school to be good and bullying to be very rare. All pupils who participated in the survey felt that they were safe in school. Reward systems, such as achievement assembly, encourage good behaviour and positive attitudes. The school promotes pupils well-being by helping pupils to develop their self-esteem and confidence, particularly those pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Consequently they behave very well, feel safe and valued and enjoy coming to school. Regular opportunities for reflection and prayer support very well the pupils' spiritual development.

Teaching

The best lessons are characterised by teachers' very good subject knowledge and use of different media, including information and communication technology, which inspire pupils in their learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are consistently good. Teachers usually plan well for the needs of different groups although at times lessons are too teacher controlled. On these occasions, not all pupils have enough choice in taking on more challenging activities which sometimes holds back higher attaining pupils. Most lessons move at a brisk pace with a variety of tasks and activities, and 'talking partners' are used effectively to promote pupils' speaking and listening skills. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and most work is set appropriately based on a good knowledge of individuals' starting points. Additional support is deployed very effectively both in and out of the classroom to ensure no pupils fall behind. Occasionally, though, pupils spend too long on the carpet before moving on to their group tasks or individual work.

Pupils know how well they are doing and how to reach the next step in their learning. Assessment is particularly well developed in literacy where pupils can highlight targets achieved and the next steps in their learning. However, this is not as well established in other subjects where pupils are not always clear how they could improve. Books are marked regularly and give pupils praise and credit for what they have done well. When points for development or written supplementary questions are set by teachers these are not always followed up by pupils.

Leadership and management

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Leaders and managers at all levels are strongly focussed on raising standards and are fully committed to the drive and vision of the headteacher to seek further improvements. The enhanced role of middle leaders combined with their training has led to improvements in monitoring of teaching and rising standards. Senior leaders monitor progress through a rigorous tracking system which enables leaders to identify pupils for further support and to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention and support programmes. Leaders are prepared to make amendments in the light of this analysis. The governing body plays a very strong role in holding the school to account and is rigorous in challenging and questioning leaders about achievement and teaching. Governors get involved in all aspects of school life through analysing data and are involved in observing teaching. Parents are very supportive of all school activities and the school engages very well with them. Partnerships with other schools are strong, particularly for transition arrangements.

The school promotes equal opportunities exceptionally well by ensuring through rigorous monitoring of achievement that no group or individual is left behind. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements because there are clear policies and procedures to ensure the safety of pupils. Training and risk assessments are all up to date. The school meets the requirements to promote community cohesion especially in the local area with other schools and to some extent overseas through European language days and a French trip. National links to acknowledge the diversity within the United Kingdom are less well developed. The school promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development exceptionally well through a wide range of trips and activities and opportunities for older pupils to take responsibilities. Overall the school provides excellent value for money.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ss Alban & Stephen Junior Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 128 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 239 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	89	70	35	27	2	2	1	1
Q2 My child feels safe at school	106	83	19	15	2	2	1	1
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	67	52	47	37	9	7	2	2
Q4 The school meets my child's particular needs	62	48	50	39	9	7	0	0
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	98	77	26	20	3	2	0	0
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	70	55	46	36	7	5	2	2
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	79	62	41	32	3	2	2	2
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	64	50	44	34	11	9	5	4
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	63	49	39	30	7	5	3	2
Q10 The school helps me to support my child's learning	67	52	48	38	9	7	0	0
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	70	55	43	34	11	9	3	2
Q12 The school is well led and managed	84	66	32	25	10	8	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The achievement of all pupils.■ Behaviour and safety.■ The quality of teaching.■ The effectiveness of leadership and management. <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ss Alban & Stephen Junior Catholic School, St Albans, AL1 5EG

You will know that we recently came to inspect your school. Thank you very much to all of you who took time to speak to us or filled in a questionnaire to tell us your views. Thank you also for making us feel so welcome to your school.

I thought you would like to know what we have said in our report. You should be rightly proud of your school which is outstanding and has improved since it was last inspected.

You do very well in reading, writing and mathematics by the time you leave school. You make excellent progress throughout your time in school and none of you is left behind. Your headteacher and other leaders make sure they follow your progress very closely to check you are doing as well as you can and provide additional support to those of you who need help to catch up in your reading when you first join the school.

Your behaviour in lessons and around the school (even during a fire alarm) was exemplary. You and your parents and carers have told us overwhelmingly that behaviour in school is very good. You and your parents and carers feel very strongly that you are safe and well looked after in school and we agree with you.

Your lessons are mostly good although we have asked the school to do a few things that would make teaching even better. We have asked your leaders to make sure that in all your lessons those of you who find learning easy are regularly given work that stretches and challenges you, that you are all given more chances to work on your own and make more choices about the work you are doing, and that teachers' marking of your work always gives you a clear idea how to improve and gives you the chance to respond to their comments.

Thank you again for your hospitality and I wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

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