

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Priory Lane, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 3HJ

Inspection dates

4–5 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are relentless in their desire to continually improve. Together they have worked tirelessly to address and eliminate all areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection.
- The headteacher's excellent leadership has galvanised the support of teachers, parents, pupils and colleagues within local schools and has helped the school to make the leap from requiring improvement to outstanding.
- Governors know the school exceptionally well. Their good skills, considerable knowledge and direct involvement in the life of the school have been essential in supporting the school's continuous improvement.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary at all times. They are reflective, eminently sensible and work exceptionally well together. Pupils' highly positive attitudes to learning help to ensure that they progress well and attain highly.
- The school's work with parents is remarkable. Large numbers of parents engage with the school to help improve pupils' reading, and support in their children's development in the early years. They are of the opinion that their children are happy and safe at school.
- The quality of teaching, including in phonics (linking letters to the sounds they make), is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together and have very high expectations of pupils.
- There is excellent practice in marking to support pupils' understanding of how to improve their work, but this is not entirely consistent across the school.
- Teachers are very well trained. They strive to make learning interesting and engaging and continually challenge pupils to investigate and explore learning and to achieve to their very best.
- The dedicated mentoring support offered to newly qualified teachers is of exceptionally high quality and has helped to ensure that teachers new to the school quickly improve their practice and take their place in a highly effective team.
- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014 was outstanding, as it has been for several years. Their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in these subjects was also outstanding, as it was in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- All groups of pupils make at least good, and often outstanding progress across all year groups and in all subjects.
- All aspects of the early years, including leadership, teaching, provision, achievement and work with parents, are outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons in all year groups, as well as the teaching of small groups of pupils, and sessions aimed at helping pupils to learn to read. Some lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher, and members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and held discussions with pupils from across the school. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised during lessons and separately with senior staff.
- Inspectors considered 111 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own surveys of parents' views.
- Telephone conversations took place with a representative from the local authority and the school's education consultant.
- A meeting took place with a National Leader of Education from All Hallows Catholic College who has supported the school in improving the quality of teaching.
- Responses to a questionnaire completed by 23 members of staff were considered.
- A meeting was held with eight governors, including the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.
- A range of school documents was examined. These included the post-Ofsted action plan, data on pupils' progress, records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching, external evaluations of the school's work, the school's review of its own performance, records of pupils' attendance, behaviour records and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maria McGarry

Additional Inspector

Prydwen Elfed-Owens

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is below the national average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is just below average. An average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- All early years provision is full time.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Since the previous inspection the senior leadership team has been reorganised and a new Chair of Governors has been appointed. Several teachers have joined the school, including three newly qualified teachers.
- A before- and after-school service and a pre-school service operate from the site. Both are subject to separate inspections.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers emulate the excellent marking practice already used by most teachers in the school so that all pupils always know exactly what to do to improve their work even further.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is determined to ensure that all pupils achieve to the very best of their ability and that their experience of school is both happy and memorable. Together with her highly effective senior leadership team, staff and governors she has worked tirelessly to ensure that the school has not only met, but surpassed the recommendations from the previous inspection. Senior leaders, including in the early years, are not satisfied merely to rest on their laurels. Instead, they have set highly ambitious targets and aim for current Year 2 and Year 6 pupils to surpass the outstanding achievement of the school's pupils in national tests in 2014.
- Subject leaders responsible for English and mathematics are highly motivated. They work exceptionally well together and have made a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Their work is successful because they are exceptionally well trained and fully involved in assessing the effectiveness of all teaching activities. Their strict half-termly monitoring schedule enables them to hold teachers to account, and support them to ensure that their work enables all pupils make at least good progress.
- Pupils benefit from an outstanding and engaging 'jigsaw' curriculum which is well on its way to being fully implemented. It clearly demonstrates how, for example, extended writing can be promoted in history, science and art, and emphasises the importance of problem-solving and number skills in science and design and technology. Pupils' reading skills are outstanding. Their reading for pleasure and information-gathering is promoted well across all subjects.
- Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they 'loved learning'. In Year 3 and Year 4 they enjoy visiting Chester as part of their work on the Romans, and in Year 1 they enjoy learning about pirates in history. Year 6 pupils said that they were deeply moved to learn about how air-raid shelters in Stockport were used during the Second World War.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding in this harmonious school. They have a highly developed sense of responsibility and were recently moved to create their own cardboard homes, and sleep in them, after a visit from a homeless man who came to school to talk about his experiences. Pupils have many opportunities to play musical instruments, including the guitar, piano and ukulele, participate in the school orchestra and to visit theatres and museums.
- Pupils frequently raise money for various charities, have a good understanding of life in modern Britain and celebrate the cultural diversity within their school.
- The school's work to promote equality of opportunity is highly effective and helps to ensure that no pupil misses out on any aspect of school life due to, for example, home or family circumstances.
- The school's systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, including in the early years, are accurate, robust and highly effective. Teachers are set highly challenging targets as part of their performance management. Excellent systems, relating to training and development for example, are put in place to ensure that they are successful and invariably hit their targets.
- The school has been very receptive to advice from the local authority. Most recently this has been linked to helping the school with its self-evaluation plans. The school's education consultant's work has been very effective in helping the headteacher and governors to tackle the areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection and develop the role and effectiveness of the senior leadership team.
- The school works closely with a National Leader of Education, who has helped senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching, use data on pupil performance more effectively and improve the quality of teachers' marking.
- The school takes care to ensure that it has effective arrangements for safeguarding its pupils and all statutory requirements in this respect are met.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors know their school well. They are well trained, highly skilled and committed to ensuring that the school continually improves. Their effective work with the senior leadership team has helped to ensure that teaching and pupils' achievement are outstanding, and that all areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been successfully addressed.
- Governors know how pupil premium funding is spent; outstanding teaching of activities targeted to specific groups of pupils to improve their calculation, reading and writing skills is very effective in boosting progress. Governors ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their financial circumstances, are

able to participate in all school trips and visits.

- Governors know that the quality of teaching is exceptional because they come into school regularly to see for themselves and receive regular reports on how well pupils are achieving. They are happy to reward teachers for reaching their targets successfully, all of which are linked to improving outcomes for pupils.
- Governors know that the primary school sport fund is used very effectively and that it is helping to improve the health and welfare of pupils. Recently the fund has helped to gain the school local and national recognition for pupils' performance in various sports, including netball, football and tennis. Governors are careful to ensure that teachers' skills in teaching physical education and sporting activities are developed through the training they receive from specialist teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are very courteous and enjoy welcoming visitors into their school. They enjoy talking about their work, collaborate exceptionally well and have a high regard for each other and their teachers. Pupils are eminently sensible and behave well when moving around the school, during lunchtimes, and when at play.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. Pupils are very respectful, appreciate their attractive school grounds and are proud to wear their school uniform. Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities as, for example, eco-council members, safety officers and house captains.
- Pupils' behaviour in class is exemplary and always purposeful. When it is appropriate for them to learn in silence, they do, when they are asked to engage in discussions or practical activities they spring into life with enthusiasm. This makes an outstanding contribution to their excellent achievement.
- Pupils are of the opinion that behaviour is almost always good. The overwhelming majority of parents agree with this, as do all teachers. Inspection evidence, including examining the school's logs of pupils' behaviour, reveals that behaviour is typically outstanding.
- Teachers' exceedingly good management of behaviour helps to ensure that the school is a very orderly and peaceful place for pupils to learn in. Those new to the school, and to teaching, are exceptionally well supported and soon contribute to the school's positive ethos.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Pupils say that they always feel safe in school. Parents are happy that their children are well looked after, and well cared for. Pupils say that bullying rarely, if ever, happens. As one pupil commented 'we used to have a bully stop on the playground, but not anymore because it was never used. We now have a friendship stop for anyone who is feeling lonely'.
- Pupils are aware of various types of discrimination, including that which leads to racism and homophobic bullying, but are adamant that it never happens in school. They insist that everyone follows the rules and gets on well together.
- A well-developed understanding of cyber-bullying, where it can occur and how to avoid it, helps pupils to stay safe when using electronic devices, and when using the Internet. They know never to give personal information out while on line and to always speak to an adult if they are not sure about visiting a website.
- All school staff are careful to ensure that all pupils, and children in the early years, have an exemplary understanding of how to keep themselves safe and secure. Visitors from the police force and fire service help them to understand dangers and risks associated with, for example, talking to strangers, gangs and fire.
- Older pupils are aware of issues relating to child abuse and know how to report any concerns that they may have. They learn about relationships and the dangers of drinking and smoking through their social and emotional aspect of education (SEAL) programme.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teachers have the highest possible expectations of pupils. They plan activities which are exciting and engaging and constantly challenge pupils to achieve to the very best of their ability. Due to this, and teachers' excellent training and mentoring support, the quality of teaching has improved since the

previous inspection and is outstanding.

- All teachers have a consistently effective approach to their work. For example, all classrooms contain 'working walls' and 'interesting adjectives' and banks of words to extend pupils' vocabulary and support them in their outstanding writing activities. Similarly, various charts and tables and information about geometric shapes, for example, help to improve pupils' skills in calculating and solving problems.
- Mathematics teaching is highly effective. Teachers are very thoughtful in their planning and are very inventive in bringing geometry, for example, to life. This was exemplified in an 'outdoor maths' activity where pupils were tasked with finding, identifying and describing the different characteristics of various three- and two-dimensional shapes in the environment around the school. In a mixed class of Years 3 and 4 pupils, this inventiveness was further illustrated as pupils just about contained their excitement as they used marsh mallows and spaghetti to work together to create three-dimensional pyramids, squares and rectangles.
- Memorable visits and stimulating activities in class help to ensure that pupils gain an in-depth knowledge of the topics that they study. This was the case in a Year 6 English class where pupils demonstrated a deep understanding of life during the Second World War, and of what it was like in the North West during the blitz. Their visit to the Stockport air raid shelters and their evacuee role-play activities supported them in the development of their powerful and insightful writing.
- Teachers ensure that pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills are promoted well across all areas of the curriculum. Pupils are well read and are highly skilled at summarising the main points from their class texts and discussing characters, their motivations and their feelings.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together. Teaching assistants are exceptionally well trained, and are careful to ensure that their support is provided at just the right level to enable pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 to find their own strategies for learning, and support children in the early years to talk to each other and solve problems.
- Pupils receive regular homework and enjoy studying various subjects in depth. The school's exceptionally informative website provides them with many opportunities to improve their English, mathematics, science and history through the use of interactive games and study activities. Pupils say that they use the school's website regularly, and that it helps them with their learning.
- Teachers' marking is of a very high standard; this helps to ensure that the vast majority of pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their learning. They know where to find their 'flip targets', in the back of their mathematics books, and studiously consider their teachers' written and verbal comments before improving their writing, and checking their calculations. However, marking is not yet outstanding across the school because the best practice is yet to be fully implemented by all teachers.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Their attainment in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2014 was very high, and was the best that it has been for several years. Pupils' attainment in punctuation, grammar and spelling at the end of Key Stage 2 was also well above average.
- Children enter Reception with different skills and abilities, some below and some above those that are typical at this age. However, all groups of pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils make at least good, and often outstanding progress in all subjects across the school.
- The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who speak English as an additional language is outstanding. Their performance in national tests in 2014 was even better than that of their classmates at the end of both Key Stage 1 and 2, and much better than that of similar groups of pupils nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who made good progress in mathematics by the time they left school at the end of year 6 in 2014 was well above average. The school has compelling evidence to show that the very small minority of pupils whose progress was not quite as good as that of their classmates either started school mid-way through the school year or achieved well from starting points that were below those typically found. The school's own data show that all groups of pupils make at least good progress across all year groups.
- Specifically targeted group teaching and one-to-one support provided for pupils with disabilities, or special educational needs, is second to none. The skill and dedication of teachers responsible for helping pupils with dyslexia to improve their reading and writing is remarkable. This helps to ensure that they acquire knowledge quickly and make excellent progress.

- Pupils' progress in reading in all year groups is good, and often outstanding. A large team of trained parent helpers has been very effective in supporting pupils in developing their reading skills. Together with teachers, they have helped to foster a love of reading in pupils. The teaching of phonics (the link between letters and sounds) is outstanding and provides less-able readers with good strategies for sounding out and reading unfamiliar words.
- There were very few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2014, therefore any performance comparisons have to be treated with caution. In 2014 the overall gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school was about one year, and they were about two terms behind all pupils nationally. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014 was outstanding and their progress across all year groups and in all subjects was at least good, and often outstanding.
- The school's most-able pupils are always challenged and given additional work, including 'extension' activities to ensure that they achieve their very best. In 2014 the proportion of pupils attaining the highest possible level, Level 6, was much higher than average in writing and mathematics.
- Regular pupil progress meetings are very effective in helping to ensure that any gaps between the performance of boys and girls are quickly identified and closed. In 2014 girls' overall performance was better than that of boys. However, the achievement of both groups was outstanding.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- The leadership and management of the early years provision are outstanding. All adults, including parents, work exceptionally well together to ensure that children's learning experience is exciting and memorable, and that they achieve well.
- Children enter Reception with different skills and abilities. The development of small groups of children with special educational needs was significantly below typical for children of this age on entry to Reception in 2014, and children's reading skills were not quite as good as in 2013. However, they get off to an excellent start because they are supported and cared for exceptionally well. Due to this and outstanding teaching, children make excellent progress and a much higher than average number of children enter Year 1 with well-developed skills and abilities in all areas of learning.
- Children learn in very stimulating and well thought-out indoor and outdoor learning areas. All adults, including teachers and teaching assistants, work well together and focus closely on developing children's skills in reading, writing, number recognition and calculation. Children are exceptionally cooperative. They share resources and enjoy working together and discussing their ideas.
- Teachers ensure that learning is always stimulating and engaging and inspire in children a sense of wonder and excitement. This was illustrated well when children came into Reception to find that the 'Naughty Bus' had been in their class during the night and left muddy tyre tracks everywhere. Children enthusiastically discussed how the bus could have got in and immediately made the link between its night time activities and the stories that they had been reading.
- Children are very familiar with daily routines, and prepare for learning and playing outdoors with the minimum of fuss. They are adept at deciding what to learn, but adults are always at hand to support those who are not sure about what to do.
- Adults continuously assess how well children are learning. They work exceedingly well with parents during 'Thumbs up Thursday', regularly engage in dialogue, and share ideas to support children's learning. Parents are very happy with these arrangements and are confident that their children are well taught and progressing well.

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	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. 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.

School details

Unique reference number	111330
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	451357

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	288
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann-Marie Connor
Headteacher	Teresa Cooke
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2013
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