

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School, Blackburn

Trinity Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 5BN

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress from their starting points in reading writing and mathematics, because the quality of teaching is not always good.
- Teachers do not always take opportunities to demonstrate writing skills to younger pupils, so that they can then use the model to improve their own writing.
- Tasks do not always provide enough challenge, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies. Good presentation is not always insisted upon and spellings are not reliably corrected.
- There are times when teachers' advice is not precisely focused on what pupils need to do to improve their work.
- The school's system for tracking pupils' progress does not help school leaders to follow the progress of groups of pupils, or intervene quickly when required.
- The skills of middle leaders are underdeveloped and as a result, not all leaders have a positive impact on standards in their areas of responsibility.
- Targets set for teachers and those set in the school development plan are not closely matched to pupils' progress or measurable enough for leaders to assess how well the school is doing.
- The impact of actions put into place by school leaders, including governors, is not checked well enough and as a result, teaching and pupils' progress are not improving quickly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' progress has started to speed up across the school and more pupils are reaching the standards expected for their age.
- The quality of teaching is improving and some is good.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they are eager to learn.
- Pupils enjoy school. They are happy and feel safe because they know that adults care for them well.
- The headteacher is relentlessly driving school improvement. She deservedly has the full confidence of school staff and the governing body.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in nine lessons and sessions taken by teaching assistants.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at playtime and lunchtime. They met formally with two groups of pupils and listened to pupils reading.
- Meetings were held with staff, senior leaders and managers, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- A range of documents was considered by inspectors, including the school's analysis of how well it is doing, the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings, and records relating to attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors also examined work in pupils' books.
- There were too few responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to generate a report.
- Inspectors spoke informally to a small group of parents at the start of the school day. They also took account of parental and pupil questionnaires recently distributed by the school and evaluated 13 responses to staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Louise Murphy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sharon Lambert

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is similar in size to most primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly below that usually found.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is high.
- Approximately 60% of pupils are from minority ethnic heritages, mainly Pakistani heritage. Over half of the pupil population has English as an additional language.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to raise pupils' progress and attainment by making sure that teachers always:
 - plan tasks that build securely on what pupils already know and can do, so that work is hard enough, especially for the most-able pupils
 - demonstrate writing skills to younger pupils so that they have a model to refer to when they are working on their own
 - insist on high standards of presentation and spelling when marking work in pupils' books and accurately identify what pupils need to do next in order to make their work even better.
- Improve the impact of school leaders by:
 - making sure that the systems for recording pupils' progress are complete and can be analysed and acted upon quickly to speed up progress when necessary
 - sharpening targets set for teachers and those in the school development plan so that they are sufficiently measurable and linked to pupils' progress
 - ensuring that all leaders are fully accountable for pupils' progress in their areas of responsibility and that they regularly check how well agreed actions are carried out.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- There has been weak teaching in the past, leaving a legacy of underachievement for pupils in the school. Although the new headteacher is tackling this vigorously, progress is still uneven across the school. In the 2013 end of Year 6 national tests, too few pupils made the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics and therefore, achievement requires improvement.
- Although year groups vary, most children join the Nursery and Reception classes with skills and knowledge below those typically expected for their age. Children make good progress with their personal, social and physical development. However, overall they make the progress expected of them and when they join Year 1 they are working at a level that is lower than that expected for their age.
- In the 2013 end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 national tests, pupils' attainment was well below the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics and too few pupils reached the higher levels at both key stages. This is changing; an increased number of pupils are now working at levels expected for their age. Moreover, the school predicts that more Year 2 and Year 6 pupils will attain at the nationally expected level in the 2014 tests recently completed, and this was confirmed by work seen in their books.
- School leaders rightly recognised that standards in reading needed to improve. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check in 2013 was lower than that for most other schools. As a result, teaching methods and the resources used to teach pupils to match letters to the sounds that they make were changed. This has had a positive impact, and almost double the proportion of pupils is likely to reach the expected level in the Year 1 reading check this year. Older pupils who read to the inspector agreed that they enjoyed reading. They were pleased with the increased opportunities that they had to read in school, both on their own and with adults.
- At the end of Year 6 in 2013, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding, including those eligible for free school meals, was almost equal to their classmates. Eligible pupils across the school make similar progress to that of their non-eligible peers in reading, writing and mathematics. This confirms the school's commitment to making sure all pupils are given the same opportunities.
- The most-able pupils are starting to make better progress, but overall the level of challenge provided is not always high enough for them. Therefore, they do not achieve as well as they should.
- Given their starting points and abilities, pupils who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over time, pupils have not been equipped to build up their skills and make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Some teaching is good, but this varies between lessons and year groups. Consequently, the progress that pupils are able to make is uneven across school and the quality of teaching requires improvement.
- There has been a drive to improve the teaching of mathematics. For example, staff have participated in training so that assessment information is used more effectively to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Pupils can then take part in highly focused small-group sessions planned to meet their learning needs. However, despite some improvement, these systems have not been in place long enough to have had a full impact on standards.
- There have also been improvements in the way in which writing is taught. Pupils have

opportunities to write in subjects other than English and the class novel is used to provide pupils with ideas for their own writing. However, younger pupils are not always given enough examples of how to form letters and write words, so that they can develop their writing skills.

- School leaders have put systems in place to improve the impact of teachers' marking and some of the marking seen by inspectors in pupils' books was of a good quality. However, teachers do not always correct spellings or insist that pupils' work is presented well. Furthermore, although pupils are regularly given time to read and respond to teachers' comments, the written remarks are not always accurately focused on what the pupils need to do to improve their work.
- Pupils enjoy working together, making suggestions and learning from each other. For example, Year 6 pupils worked in pairs and small groups to design a football stadium. Using their mathematical skills and sharing their ideas really helped them to plan where they would place the equipment needed at the ground. They were also very careful to remind each other to work within budget.
- Good relationships and the use of praise and encouragement are evident across the school. Pupils want to learn and say that their teachers make lessons interesting. Classrooms are pleasant and there is a good selection of prompts available on the walls to help pupils work things out for themselves.
- Effective teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is contributing well to pupils' learning and progress. Teaching assistants provide effective support to pupils who find some learning difficult.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In lessons and around school pupils are polite and considerate, holding doors open for adults and each other. They come to school wanting to learn.
- Pupils enjoy having responsibilities across the school. The school council members gather ideas on how to spend monies raised to buy new sports equipment. Moreover, they are planning to develop the role of 'play buddies' so that everyone is sure that they can have someone to play with. Chaplaincy pupils are responsible for raising money to donate to various charities. The pupils have recently helped in a charity shop and are enthusiastically planning a meditation garden in which pupils can pray and reflect.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils feel safe because they know that adults will keep them safe in school. They also trust that staff will help them resolve any concerns that they have.
- Pupils agree that bullying is rare and school records confirm this. Pupils are aware of a range of prejudices and the importance of treating others kindly and fairly.
- The primary school sport funding is used to pay for sports coaches who work with pupils and staff. Pupils can choose from a range of sporting activities to help them stay healthy and promote well-being. Staff are benefiting from the expertise of the coaches and improving their own skills in teaching sporting activities.
- Pupils' attendance has been below average in recent years. However, school leaders have worked well with pupils and their families to increase attendance which is now at an average level and reflects the pupils' increasing enjoyment of school.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The school is not improving quickly enough because school leaders have not been able to establish consistently good teaching and achievement across all year groups. As a result leadership and management require improvement.
- The relatively new headteacher has a clear view of the direction that she wants the school to take. She has quickly gained the confidence of staff and school governors, so she is now leading a cohesive team determined to do their best to improve standards. The speed with which she

has improved staff morale and the achievement of pupils indicates that the school now has the capacity to improve further.

- Information about pupils' progress is incomplete. Consequently, it is difficult for leaders to assess pupils' progress or to intervene quickly when necessary.
- Middle leaders are not fully involved in checking on the progress of pupils or on actions taken to speed up achievement in their areas of responsibility.
- Targets in the school improvement plan and those set for teachers are not linked closely enough to the achievement of pupils to steer rapid improvement.
- Teachers' performance is regularly checked by the headteacher, who makes sure that staff attend training that matches the school's priorities.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils take part in many after-school activities and appreciate their breakfast club. They have worked with a local artist to produce a wonderful 'reading chair' (reading throne would provide a better description) that is used regularly to promote reading. All of these memorable activities enrich the curriculum and add to pupils' experiences.
- Most parents who spoke with inspectors said that staff are very approachable and that they are particularly happy with the new headteacher.
- The local authority and the diocese provide an adequate level of support to the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly committed to St Alban's and has steered the school through a turbulent time. Governors increasingly ask challenging questions so that they know all about the school and can support it to be as good as it can be. They understand pupils' performance data and attend training to help them fulfil their duties including meeting safeguarding and budgetary requirements. Governors know that the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good and that salary progression must depend on how effective teachers are. They understand how the pupil premium funding is used and the impact that it is having on eligible pupils.

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	119706
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	442392

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 of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Jude Harrison
Headteacher	Claire Speakman
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2012
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