

Alban City School

7 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 3RR

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher and all members of staff have been highly successful in establishing a school with a strong ethos and drive for improvement. Parents are highly supportive.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. Pupils are eager to learn, resilient, and have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers use information and communication technology very effectively to enliven learning and enthuse pupils in a range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. The teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is a strength and results in pupils' excellent reading skills.
- Pupils make good progress overall in reading, writing, mathematics and in a wide range of other subjects.
- The governing body is well informed, has a good range of skills and experience, and is highly committed to making this an outstanding school.
- The school is well placed to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding. Teachers do not always make sure that pupils are clear about what they have to do and learn, or about what they need to do next.
- Achievement is not high enough across all subjects. Pupils could do better in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in all classes twice. All were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with five members of the governing body, the headteacher and all four teachers.
- The inspector spoke informally to pupils in the dining hall and around the school. He listened to pupils read and talked to them about their books.
- The inspector took account of the 98 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection and spoke to a parent and read letters from parents. The inspector also took account of the 14 staff questionnaires returned.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including information on pupils' achievement, documents relating to safeguarding, reviews of teaching and learning, and external reviews of the school's performance. He also scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Inspection team

Robert Lovett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alban City School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. It opened in September 2012, having registered with the Department for Education as a non-maintained free-school academy to take a maximum of 420 pupils.
- The school currently has pupils in Reception and Year 1. It will accept pupils into Year 2 from September 2014, building by one year group a year until it has classes from Reception to Year 6 by September 2018.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is well below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is well below the national average and represents only a very small number of pupils. The pupil premium is additional funding for specific groups of pupils such as those known to be eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak a first language other than English is above average. Pupils speak 19 different home languages. A small but increasing number are at the early stages of learning English.
- There is on-site pre-school provision. This is not managed by the governing body and was inspected separately in December 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers carefully explain exactly what it is that pupils are expected to do and learn, and what they have to do next
 - where appropriate, demonstrating how to use resources and equipment so that pupils make rapid progress through the whole of the lesson.
- Raise attainment in mathematics so that it is of the same high standard as reading and writing by making sure that pupils learn at a rapid pace right the way through the lesson.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress and attainment in reading and writing is high. It is not high in mathematics and pupils do not make the same rapid progress as in reading and writing. Not all pupils are learning as much as they could in all mathematics lessons.
- Many children enter Reception with levels of skills and knowledge which are below those expected for their age in almost all areas of learning. They make good progress in Reception so that most are at or above expectations for their age by the time they join Year 1. Children do best in respect of their physical, personal and social development. Girls do better than boys in all areas of learning and much better in their understanding of mathematics and in expressive and creative arts. Because they make good progress, almost all pupils enter Year 1 well prepared to begin more formal learning.
- Pupils in Year 1 are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics as teaching builds effectively on their early skills. They are doing best in reading and least well in mathematics. The most able pupils are making similarly good progress to their classmates and attain highly in reading.
- Pupils with disabilities or other special educational needs made good progress because their individual needs are well planned for, and teachers and teaching assistants provide very good, well-targeted support.
- Minority ethnic pupils often make more rapid progress than their classmates so that gaps in attainment in literacy and mathematics and in their understanding of the world are closing rapidly.
- Pupils who speak a home language other than English make good and often excellent progress because their needs are clearly identified and well met. One parent spoken to was effusive in her praise for the quality of teaching her daughter had received and the positive impact this had on her confidence and achievement.
- The small numbers of pupils supported through the pupil premium make good progress and do as well as their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because additional funds are used well to provide extra help and resources.
- All pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They are eager to acquire new skills and knowledge. As a result, the progress they make in lessons is at least good and sometimes excellent. Teachers use information and communication technology such as interactive whiteboards and electronic notebooks extremely well to enliven learning, motivate pupils and accelerate progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good. Pupils make the most rapid progress when teachers explain clearly and carefully exactly what it is they expect them to do and learn. The pace of learning can slow when adults have to explain again to groups of pupils because the first time has lacked clarity and some pupils do not know what to do.

- In all lessons, pupils are eager and enthusiastic learners. They have very positive attitudes to learning because expectations about how pupils should learn and respond to questions are clear and shared.
- The school takes care to analyse exactly what pupils need to learn and provides appropriate support. For example, the school identified that many Reception children lack the coordination required to easily hold a pencil and write letters and numbers. It has introduced a daily session where pupils are able to complete a range of exercises to improve their coordination and ability to control hand and finger movements. As an added bonus it is also great fun!
- Careful scrutiny of pupils' books and other work confirms the good progress observed in lessons. Books are generally neat and well presented, with most pupils forming letters and numbers carefully. The most able pupils attain highly and are able to write stories and accounts which are increasingly detailed and expansive.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength and has a significant impact on pupils' excellent progress in reading. Pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds very well in order to confidently read unfamiliar words. Very able readers have an excellent sight vocabulary, but nonetheless are able to use their phonics skills to sound out unfamiliar names such as 'the evil Grimlock'. Less fluent readers also make good use of letters and sounds, and make use of illustrations and other visual cues well. Pupils enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about their favourite sort of books, with adventure and animal stories proving popular.
- Teachers take care when marking pupils' books and annotating their work, and pupils are good at responding and improving their writing. The 'Learning Journey' books for Reception children form a comprehensive record of children's progress.
- Resources, including information and communication technology, are extremely well used. Equipment is readily available for pupils and in the best lessons teachers carefully explain how resources are to be used. In a particularly strong Reception class mathematics lesson, the teacher had photographed the equipment on each table and explained how to use it using the interactive whiteboard.
- Adults support learning very well. Teachers and teaching assistants are very good at focusing help and encouragement on identified pupils so that those new to English, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and those at risk of falling behind all make good progress.
- Pupils are resourceful and resilient learners. They enjoy being challenged and doing difficult work. They call this being 'grey mice' as opposed to 'white mice', who like an easy life.
- Pupils work together very well. They readily collaborate to complete tasks and discuss their learning. In a Year 1 English lesson where teaching was good, pupils discussed the features of non-fiction texts in a way which encouraged peer support and challenge, and helped pupils think carefully about their answers.
- Classrooms and corridors are bright and attractive with a wide range of subjects featured in displays. Pupils use effectively the displays of numbers and 'tricky words' to help them in mathematics and with their writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The pupils are exceptionally friendly and welcoming.

Behaviour in and around school is consistently at least good and is mostly excellent. Children in Reception eagerly welcome visitors and are keen to share their work, learning journals and outdoor constructions, providing sage advice on how to keep sharks out of swimming pools.

- Year 1 pupils are equally welcoming. They say that the school is a happy and enjoyable place to learn and that everyone gets along well together. They know what bullying is, but say that unpleasantness and name calling are very rare. They are confident that adults in the school will sort out any problems which occur.
- While excellent behaviour is the norm, teachers are able to use a range of strategies to capture the attention of a class. Even when they are enthusiastically engaged in practical learning, pupils quickly respond.
- Whole-school assemblies are a very effective focal point for reinforcing the school's ethos of care for pupils' happiness and well-being. An assembly dealing with world problems of inequality and fairness prompted pupils to think about how best to share things. In among this deep reflection they also managed to sing really well.
- Pupils' view that behaviour is excellent is endorsed by all staff and all parents who responded to Parent View.
- Attendance is broadly average and improving.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Visits from a community police officer and the local fire brigade strengthen the school's links with the community and successfully raise pupils' awareness of how to stay safe.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school has been highly successful in giving all pupils, irrespective of their backgrounds or prior experience, the confidence to become successful learners. The quiet determination and commitment of the headteacher has played a crucial part in the success of the school. She has created an ethos and culture in which pupils flourish and teaching is good.
- Everyone at the school is eager to improve. All teachers have leadership roles. These new responsibilities are establishing well. Subject and other leaders are already knowledgeable about achievement in their areas of responsibility, and some have begun to monitor the quality of teaching. All staff who returned the inspection questionnaire were positive about every aspect of the school's work. There is a strong sense of collegiality, commitment to the school's vision and ethos and a shared desire to improve.
- The school's view of how well it is doing is accurate. Self-evaluation has a sharp focus on pupils' achievement. Some parts of the school improvement plan do not have a sufficiently sharp focus on the intended impact of planned actions on pupils' progress.
- The school has been particularly successful in building an excellent relationship with parents. In Parent View parents were highly supportive of every aspect of the school's work. All say that the school is well led and managed, that their child is happy and everyone would recommend the school to others. There is a real sense that this is 'our school', established to meet a local need. There is a strong commitment to its success.
- The school is determined to improve the quality of teaching so that it is outstanding. As part of

this commitment the school works in partnership with neighbouring schools and the local authority to provide high quality professional development for staff.

- The range of subjects taught is particularly strong. The good focus on improving pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills runs in tandem with a strong commitment to pupils' creative and artistic development. As one parent enthusiastically commented, 'The school develops the whole child'.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors helped set up the school and have an exceptionally strong commitment to its success. They know the school well. They recognise what is already excellent and what needs to be done to improve. They are very well placed to contribute to the process of school improvement.
- Governors have a very good range of skills and experience, many are parents and the governing body has strong links with the local community. They provide high levels of challenge, with a particular focus on pupils' achievement and securing good value for money. They carefully monitor pupils' progress, keeping a careful eye on the progress of those groups most vulnerable to underachievement such as those supported through the pupil premium. Governors have a very good grasp of data about pupils' performance. They make clear links between the quality of teaching and the management of performance for staff. For example, all teachers have a target relating to the progress of pupils with English as an additional language. The governing body ensures that all statutory safeguarding requirements are met and staff training in child protection is up to date.

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	138231
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425157

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Crawley
Headteacher	Janet Goddard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01727 860304
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