



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Alban's Catholic Academy

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 19th May 2015

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Catholic Academy Converter
Age range of pupils: 4 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 211
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 10th December 2010

School Address:
First Avenue
Harlow
Essex
CM20 2NP

Tel. No. 01279 425383
Headteacher: Mrs A. M. McCann (Executive Headteacher)
Chair of Governors: Mr G. Reynolds

Information about the school

St Alban's Catholic Academy is a one form entry primary school in Harlow, Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. The school is part of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Multi Academy Trust and is currently sponsoring St Luke's Catholic Academy, also in Harlow. It serves the parish of Our Lady of Fatima, St Thomas More in Harlow and Assumption of Our Lady in Old Harlow. There are currently 211 pupils aged 4-11 on roll. The school is over subscribed. The proportion of Catholic pupils is 93%. There is a number of pupils from minority ethnic groups some of whom speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average and 8 pupils receive the pupil premium.

Grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Alban's is an outstanding school with a Catholic ethos which permeates all areas of its work. Outcomes for pupils are very good as is the provision for Catholic education and the capacity for sustained improvement. There is a firm commitment to maintaining and developing its identity as a diocesan Catholic school under the strong leadership of the headteacher supported by her leadership team and an effective governing body. Opportunities for spiritual and moral development are interwoven through religious education, prayer and an understanding of what it means to be part of a Catholic community. Leaders are excellent role models and have a clear vision for the whole school community which includes the well being of parents and families as well as initiatives linked to the Catholic life of the school. Pastoral care is shared by all members of the school community at every level and supports learning. Relationships within the school are excellent and pupils spoken to say they feel safe and well cared for. Both pupils and parents greatly appreciate the very many opportunities offered to develop a wide range of interests through before and after school clubs and lunch time activities. Parents welcome the Catholicity of the school and the way their children's prayer life is supported and developed. Pupils' standards of attainment are in line with and often exceed diocesan expectations.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement and has put in place systems to ensure its self-evaluation is accurate and links into the School Improvement Plan. The last inspection in 2010 identified no major areas for development other than those already stated by the school in its self evaluation. Since then standards in religious education have risen due to the implementation of the agreed understanding of levels of attainment which have informed lesson planning and assessment. Moderation meetings are held regularly in school and the deanery to share judgements with other Catholic schools. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has very good strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. The headteacher ensures that all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their skills through staff meetings and attendance at diocesan led training. Two teachers hold the CCRS qualification and one more is currently undertaking the course.

The current leadership has an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The experienced headteacher shows outstanding leadership of a Catholic community through her commitment to all aspects of school life. The subject leader for religious education is well placed to support colleagues and new teachers. He, together with the leadership team have a clear focus on prayer and worship in which they are well supported by all staff and the local parish priest. Governors are dedicated, have a

wide range of expertise and are fully involved in the life of the school. Robust systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which lead to good outcomes for all pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of the Liturgy Group to give pupils an enhanced sense of ownership of the collective worship in the school and encourage independence.
- Further develop teachers' knowledge of the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education to ensure no opportunities for learning are missed.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Both attainment and progress in religious education is outstanding. The very good start pupils are given in Early Years ensures that pupils make good progress year on year so that by the time they reach Year 6 attainment reaches and sometimes exceeds diocesan expectations. All lessons observed during the inspection were good and pupils worked with interest and commitment. Pupils spoken to said they like religious education and enjoy a wide variety of activities during the lessons. They work well together whether in groups or pairs. Work is well differentiated to ensure all groups make good progress and pupils with particular learning needs are catered for. Pupils have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and are able to apply religious ideas to their own lives. Workbooks are very well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and indicate excellent progress made by all groups. Pupils are quick to develop their religious literacy and show a high level of understanding of the sacraments, Catholic teaching and Christian living. They are encouraged to reflect on and discuss issues relating to religious education. Pupils behave well and are courteous and thoughtful to adults and each other. They respond well to the many opportunities given to demonstrate care for each other and the wider community.

Pupils contribute extremely well to the Catholic life of the school. The mission statement is reviewed, regularly and well known by all members of the school. Pupils respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. They are keen to take on responsibilities including membership of the School Council and as prefects. Pupils support many charities and in recent years these have included Cafod, Harlow Food Bank and Brentwood Catholic Children's Society. They have a good understanding of the theology underpinning their actions and a well developed sense of service to the wider community. Pupils are encouraged to see themselves as having responsibilities for other people and the environment. They value the sense of community and belonging created within the school. One pupil said, 'Nobody is left out.'

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils respond with reverence and respect in collective worship, assemblies and masses. The recently introduced Liturgy Group is being given additional opportunities to plan and participate fully in acts of worship. The Church's liturgical year with its seasons and celebrations are leading to a good understanding of the sacraments and life of Christ. Each class has an attractive prayer table which is used as a focus for worship as well as a display board which includes religious vocabulary and pupils' work. Pupils are developing the ability to pray in different ways and at different times. They use scripture, the traditional prayers of the church, meditation and their own prayers, many examples of which were seen during the inspection. Older pupils pause for the Angelus at noon and a Rosary club during May and October is well attended and enables pupils to become familiar with traditional Catholic devotions. As they develop, pupils are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives and understand that a sense of service is part of being a member of a Catholic community.

Pastoral care is very good and shared by all members of staff and governors who work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. Pupils feel safe, well cared for and know that all members of staff are there to help if they need support. Pupils value their school and all it offers. They know they are respected, listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents speak very highly of the school, the headteacher and the care given to their children. One parent commented, 'St Alban's is a very special school where in addition to the children's educational development their spiritual development is also taken seriously. This is a school

where God's presence is all around, full of happy, caring children.' Parents praise the excellent quality of education, the support given to their children's prayer life and the commitment and approachability of staff.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

Leadership at all levels is outstanding. The dedicated headteacher and her team demonstrate excellent leadership of the school by the way they promote a clear Catholic vision to the whole community. This is affirmed by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. Catholic ethos informs the mission statement which is lived out each day by giving pupils many opportunities to reflect on their role as members of a Catholic school. The headteacher has ensured that the School Improvement Plan gives priority to Catholic Life and religious education. The current system of self-evaluation is well evidenced, detailed and accurate.

The subject leader has a very good knowledge of areas for development in religious education and is very well placed to support colleagues. As a catechist at Our Lady of Fatima church he is also well placed to support and develop parish links. He, together with other senior staff monitors religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. He also collects and evaluates assessments to ensure accurate levelling of work and reports to the governing body on attainment and progress. The impact of rigorous monitoring results in high standards in religious education. There is currently a strong focus on planning and assessment as the school consolidates the implementation of the 'Come and See' religious education programme and the updated Curriculum Directory. The school has put in place strategies to give challenge to all groups of pupils. Much emphasis is placed on staff development which includes teaching assistants who play a key role in the school.

Governors work closely with senior leadership and have a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. The subject leader works closely with the link governor who visits religious education lessons across the school. Assessment outcomes are shared with the governing body who are very well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report and frequent visits. The link governor is in a good position to challenge and support effectively. An annual 'Governors Day' is used for working on the school improvement plan including budgeting and reviewing religious education self-evaluation. The parish priest from Our Lady of Fatima plays a major role in the life of the school. He visits frequently to plan masses and liturgies and acts as an additional resource in classroom religious education.

Leaders ensure that the school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and pupils are taught to respect other faiths. Aspects of Judaism and other faiths are taught through the 'Come and See' programme and cross-curricular links. Polish speaking pupils are well supported in school by a Polish speaking learning support assistant who also helps parents and families where necessary. There are very good links with other schools, both deanery and local authority run, through sporting and cultural events. The headteacher and subject leader participate in deanery meetings to share good practice which is leading to good outcomes for pupils.

Pupils are given good opportunities to show leadership and develop a sense of service through charitable fund raising and involvement in the local and wider community. Opportunities for spiritual development ensure that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the good level of contact with the school which includes curriculum information evenings and letters which enable them to support their children's education and faith journey. Parish links are excellent. These close links enable pupils, families and parishioners to see school and parish as one community.

Provision

Grade 1

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is excellent. During the inspection all lessons observed were at least good. They are planned carefully with clear learning intentions and a

varied range of activities. The school has made a major investment in resources including up to date technology. New sets of bibles for Key Stage 2 have been purchased although opportunities for pupils to use them are sometimes missed. Pupils benefit from the high profile given throughout the school to religious education lessons. In all classes observed pupils were fully engaged and made very good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and respond well to pupils' comments as they take every opportunity to develop understanding. Higher order questioning was evident in lessons observed. Very good support by teaching assistants enables all groups of pupils to make progress. Marking is positive, interactive and enables pupils to identify next steps in their learning. Very good monitoring, assessment, planning and tracking supports the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The programme 'Come and See' has been in place for two years and is now embedded. The headteacher gives religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the budget devoted to it and the current level of resources. Vibrant religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. The support given to families through a wide range of extra curricular activities gives a strong sense of community to the school. There is every indication that current high standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

Provision for prayer and worship at St Alban's is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are very well planned and contribute greatly to pupils' spiritual development. They often include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. Pupils participate with interest and concentration and are eager to respond to questions. Pupils are involved in collective worship several times a day in their classrooms and are given opportunities for meditation and personal reflection. Each classroom has a very attractive prayer focus with religious artefacts and display boards which include children's work. Pupils attend Mass several times a year as a class or part of a whole school Mass. They prepare for this by composing bidding prayers, reading, offertory and as altar servers. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to masses, other celebrations and attendance is very high. Pupils are given many opportunities to develop their knowledge of Catholic traditions through the Angelus, Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross and Rosary as well as close links with the local parish.

The inspector would like to express her thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.