Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Alban's Catholic Academy

First Avenue, Harlow, Essex CM20 2NP

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 October 2024

Outcome

St Alban's Catholic Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The head of school is Anne-Marie Black. This school is part of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Johnson. There is also an executive headteacher, Ian Kendal, who is responsible for this school and two others.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Alban's core values of 'learn together, grow together, and achieve together' foster collaboration and respect for all. Pupils are polite and friendly and engage well in conversations. They warmly welcome visitors and take pride in sharing their achievements in this inclusive school. Pupils thrive in this supportive and nurturing environment.

The school has set high expectations for everyone. Pupils understand the importance of aspiration by working hard, wanting to succeed and attending regularly. Pupils are highly engaged and learn well. Staff encourage pupils to express their feelings and concerns. Adults are available to help with any worries, allowing pupils to develop their confidence and character.

Pupils treat each other and adults with courtesy and kindness. If pupils need support to improve their conduct, they receive it. Pupils feel safe in school. This helps to create a happy and secure environment.

Pupils respect differences, cultures, faiths and values, recognising the importance of equality for all. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, both in their local community and when online. The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities that allow pupils to develop their interests and talents both competitively and for fun.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has implemented an ambitious curriculum, identifying key knowledge in each subject. Starting from the early years, children benefit from a strong foundation through well-planned learning and positive interactions with adults. They develop independence and play cooperatively, listening attentively during adult-led sessions. Adults use effective questioning and model vocabulary well to help extend learning and understanding. Therefore, children are well-prepared for Year 1.

Most pupils remember their current learning well. For example, they use their knowledge of the society in ancient Egypt when making comparisons with democracy in modern-day Britain. Despite this, some pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language and those who join the school at various times during the school year, can struggle to link their previous knowledge to what they are learning now. This prevents them from making as much progress as they could.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately and promptly. Effective support is then provided, including from outside agencies. Learning is adapted where necessary, allowing pupils with SEND to study alongside their peers. The school has broken work into smaller units and appropriate, additional resources have been deployed. Consequently, many pupils with SEND achieve well.

Reading is a focus. Children start learning to read as soon as they start school. Teachers use their training to deliver the phonics programme effectively. Children learn and remember new sounds well. If pupils fall behind, they receive the help and support they need to help them catch up quickly. Children who start in the early years and key stage 1 are often confident and fluent readers by the end of Year 4. Older pupils develop their reading and comprehension skills through high-quality texts. These help them to foster an understanding of diversity and protected characteristics.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum helps pupils to develop an age-appropriate understanding of relationships and concepts such as difference. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. For example, Year 6 pupils receive community safety guidance from the fire service. Leadership opportunities such as the school council, chaplaincy team, reading champions, prefects and 'mini-vinnies' encourage pupils to take on responsibilities and help to improve their school.

The school is a calm and orderly environment where pupils behave well. They readily engage with their learning due to established routines. Pupils happily involve others when they are playing outside and know the importance of friendships. The pupils attend here frequently because they enjoy being at school.

Parents and carers hold the school in high regard, valuing its nurturing, inclusive environment and the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Governors and trustees are well aware of the school's strengths and development areas. They provide appropriate support and challenge. The school prioritises staff workload and well-being. This results in high staff morale and appreciation for the training opportunities afforded to them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils who join the school who speak English as an additional language can struggle to access the planned curriculum. This means that these pupils do not learn important knowledge as teachers are sometimes hindered in building upon what pupils have learned before. The school should ensure that all pupils are able to read with fluency and understanding so that they can access the ambitious curriculum and maximise their potential in all subjects.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in March 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use Ofsted Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137056
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10338970
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	221
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Johnson
Headteacher	Ian Kendal (Executive Headteacher) Anne-Marie Black (Head of School)
Website	www.st-albans.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 February 2019

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The early years includes provision for three-year-old children.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character and is affiliated to the Diocese of Brentwood. The most recent section 48 inspection took place in December 2021. The next one is due in 2026.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector held meetings with a range of

leaders, including the executive headteacher, the head of school, the inclusion coordinator and the attendance administrator. He also met with groups of staff and pupils.

- The inspector met with trustees, a representative of the local governing body and the primary adviser from the diocese.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school, at playtime and lunchtime. The inspector spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour and safety, including when they access outdoor learning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. He also took into consideration Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Ahson Mohammed, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024