



# Diocese of Westminster

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## INSPECTION REPORT

Ss Alban & Stephen Catholic Infant School  
Vanda Crescent, Saint Albans, Herts AL1 5EX  
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Df E Number: 919 3362  
URN: 117450

Headteacher: Mrs P Holden  
Chair of Governors: Dr J Halpin

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011  
Date of previous inspection: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mr Sean Flood

## Description of School

St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Infant school is situated in the city of St Albans in South Hertfordshire. It is a generally prosperous commuter city near to London. The school has part-time nursery provision, is two form entry and admits children aged 3 to 7 years. There are currently 238 pupils on roll all of whom are Catholic. The vast majority of the children live in the local parish with a small minority coming from neighbouring parishes. The number of children eligible for free school meals at 9% is below the national average as is the number of children with special educational needs. The proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds at 30% is above the national average. The main ethnic groups represented are Italian, Spanish and Polish. There are 11 teachers in the school 6 of whom are Catholic and 3 of these hold higher qualifications in teaching the Catholic faith. The school is very popular in the community and has been heavily over subscribed for admissions in recent years. The school Mission Statement states that the school is: "Building God's community of Love and Learning"

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Infant school is clearly an outstanding school in almost every aspect of its Catholic life and practice. It is a vibrant and nurturing environment for young children to develop and learn the Catholic faith. The school takes Catholic education very seriously and is exemplary in its involvement with the community and in its provision for prayer and worship. The excellent behaviour of the pupils, the diversity and creativity of the curriculum and the dedication of all staff are noteworthy aspects of this school. There are plentiful opportunities from the very moment children enter nursery for spiritual and moral development and for learning about the teachings of Jesus. Leadership is distributed very well across the whole school and both the head teacher and the religious co-ordinator play a very good role in the success of this school. The school is innovative in its practice, very reflective and is a caring learning environment. The role of the Governing Body is exemplary and a model of good practice. This is an outstanding school and a great asset to the Catholic and the wider community of St Albans. Parents can feel very proud that their children attend such a good Catholic school.

**Grade 1**

## Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last Section 48 inspection in April 2008 the school has clearly made the progress required to move to outstanding. The school has updated and modified the core scheme and done some good work on understanding the new levels of attainment in religious education. Marking is thorough and effective and also is age appropriate. Learning Journeys start from Nursery as soon as children enter the school. Older children are given guidance on "Next Steps" and how to improve their work.

**Grade 1**

## The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school's own self-evaluation is well developed and presents a mostly accurate portrayal of the schools strengths. The school would benefit from more critical reflection on areas for even

further improvement. The whole staff, the governors and parents are committed to seeing the school prosper and thrive. The governors clearly play a key role in this drive for high standards and are very forward thinking in areas such as succession planning at all levels. The school has a strong leadership team and does have the capacity to build on already very good practice and maintaining the good relationship with parents and the wider community. The main challenge facing the school is to maintain the high standards it has set itself and to continue to encourage creativity in learning.

**Grade 1**

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop the plans for outside prayer areas in the school's extensive grounds in order to further enhance the environment and spiritual life of the school
- Review ICT provision in religious education and update software and hardware to provide even further opportunities for creativity, and sharing knowledge and understanding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## **The Catholic Life of the School**

### **Leadership and Management**

There is outstanding leadership and commitment to the Catholic life of this school at all levels. The head teacher has built up a strong leadership team who have done a good job in creating the high standards evident in this school. The religious education co-ordinator is very committed to her role. She gives a good example and gives excellent support for other members of staff. The leadership team strive for the best for all the pupils in the school. Monitoring of standards is developing well and is based on a sharing model with peer observations. Governors are exemplary and provide an outstanding balance of challenge and support. Relationships on all levels in the school are very good. This is reflected in the friendly and purposeful atmosphere around the school. There is excellent communication between the parents and the school and this greatly helps the school prosper and thrive in the community it serves.

**Grade 1**

### **The Prayer Life of the School**

The prayer life of the school is outstanding. Prayer is integral to the life of this school. Assemblies are happy and reverent events to which all parents are invited, they are also invited to attend all school masses and assemblies. Masses are said regularly both in school and also in the local church and some are shared with the local Junior School. The school has a delightful prayer focus in all areas. All children understand that they can ask for personal intentions and can compile and share their own prayers both in class and during assemblies. The school does need to display its Mission Statement in a prominent place, this is not currently evident or visible. During this inspection, which took place during the month of Holy Souls, some lovely Remembrance prayers were offered up by the children in a sensitive way. There is a daily act of worship in every class. Prayers are said in the classroom before and after lunch and before the children go home in the afternoon. Children are encouraged to offer forgiveness and to pray for those who have hurt or upset them. Displays around the school are

of a very high order and also are very creative, especially in art. They equally reflect the wider multi-cultural world we live in and that the children are growing up in. The school has developed its grounds well and they have identified some new outdoor nature areas to be developed as multi-sensory prayer areas to offer a chance for spiritual development for all children including those with special educational needs.

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**Grade 1**

### **How well does the school/college promote community cohesion**

The school is committed to promoting community cohesion and is striving to do so. The school is eager to extend its own good practice to serve the needs of the wider community beyond the school. The school works closely with the Parish Youth Strategy Team who clearly do some excellent and innovative work together. The school supports all ages including support for the Catholic Children's Society, Operation Christmas Child, a local refuge and it also supports the "Help the Aged" Christmas Appeal. Wider links were seen during this inspection with the Shoe Box overseas appeal. Good support was seen in classes for bi-lingual children and a wide variety of languages are being developed in the school including French, Spanish and Mandarin. Links with the parish are being extensively developed to promote even greater community involvement. The school would benefit greatly from exploring ways of linking up with other schools overseas using modern communication and technology that is appropriate for young children

**Grade 1**

## **Religious Education**

### **Achievement and Standards in Religious Education**

Pupils enter the school broadly at age expectation and make very good progress when they leave at the end of Key Stage One. The nursery gives children a quite outstanding start to their school lives and children start to produce beautiful Learning Journey books which are kept throughout their time in the early years and then passed on to parents in Year 1. Standards in the Reception classes were equally high. This results in some exceptional work and learning from very young children. Needs are quickly identified and early intervention programmes planned which usually also involves parents. Teachers and assistants mark and scribe to the learning objective, in line with the school's marking policy, which often includes a next steps comment and this greatly aids pupil progress. A very commendable and creative approach is taken to planning religious education which is taught through a range of activities for example drama, music, and especially art. ICT is used well by the teachers but opportunities are being missed to provide children with up to date software and technology to even further enhance their knowledge, creativity and learning. There are high expectations of all pupils in the school and the school is fully inclusive for all children. Behaviour of the pupils is excellent at all times. The child's personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident through their behaviour and through the respect they show to everyone and also their environment. Children demonstrate good knowledge and understanding in religious education through written and oral contributions. The children produce an extensive range of work in religious education and some fine work was seen using the Parable of the Prodigal Son and also on comparing Psalms. The use of art is particularly good and some outstanding work was seen using a Sieger Kroder painting of The Last Supper. Children are also well taught about other faiths such as Islam and Judaism. Standards are very high indeed in this school and the school has tried hard to use the new religious education Levels of Attainment.

**Grade 1****Teaching and learning in Religious Education**

Teaching was at least good or very good in every lesson seen in the course of this inspection with one outstanding lesson seen in the Nursery. The staff are committed and enthusiastic towards Catholic education which has a positive effect on pupil learning. They have good subject knowledge and are eager to develop further. Planning and assessment are based on the requirements of the 'Here I Am' Programme but are extended creatively where appropriate. Work is assessed and levelled and this informs future planning. The teaching assistants play a mostly effective role in this school in the support and delivery of religious education with teachers providing planned differentiated activities to support the learning needs of the different groups and individual children. Support of children for whom English is an additional language is highly effective and the work of the teaching assistants in this area is crucial to the success in learning. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and are anxious to share their ideas and work with visitors. The School Council plays a useful role in the life of this school. Pupils are well listened to and supported. They all said to this inspector that they felt safe and well cared for. One pupil in a delightful response said that they felt that: "God is always caring for us in this school". Every class has a sign encouraging pupils to talk about problems no matter how small or insignificant. Quality of teaching and learning is evaluated quite accurately by management and the school uses peer monitoring to further develop teaching standards.

**Grade 1****Quality of the Curriculum**

The school uses the "Here I Am" scheme of work. This fulfils all the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is being used appropriately for Religious Education and the school is in full compliance with all diocesan requirements. The curriculum is carefully structured to meet the needs of all pupils including those with special educational needs. It aims to be creative and dynamic making links with other subjects and is very successful in this area. Enrichment of the curriculum is evident in many key areas of school life. The school uses music, drama, and art very well with some beautiful artwork seen and on display. Opportunities for spiritual and moral development are plentiful in the assembly and during all religious education lessons observed. The school is making very good links with the SEAL areas of learning. An appropriate budget is allocated every year to ensure that the subject is well resourced. The school sees itself as being successful at raising the children's self esteem and confidence. Pupils feel very safe and secure and they experience good role models from all the adults they meet throughout the school community. Pupils want to, and feel they are given the chance to achieve well. This inspection validates all these self-assessments and as such judges the quality of the curriculum to be rich and varied and thus outstanding.

**Grade 1****Leadership and management of Religious Education**

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and direction for the Catholic life of the school. She is assisted in this role by an experienced and effective senior management team. Leaders are constantly striving to improve and develop the quality of Religious Education in the school. Very good progress is monitored through classroom observations, scrutiny of books, moderation assessment and planning. This feeds into the school's self-development plan. Children are made aware of the learning objectives of each lesson and older ones are encouraged to self-evaluate. Children are encouraged to be leaders in this school from an early

age. The religious education co-ordinator is an enthusiastic practitioner and provides great support for all staff. The school have done a mostly accurate and comprehensive self-evaluation of the needs of the school. The school does need to identify its own areas for improvement in order to continue developing. This inspection validates the judgements made in the self-evaluation. The governing body provide an outstanding balance of challenge and support. A very experienced chair of governors and an equally experienced religious education governor give exemplary challenge and support to this school. The school makes a great effort to keep parents informed about the religious life of the school. The parish priest is also a governor and is a frequent and always very welcome visitor to the school. Overall leadership and management is outstanding in this school.

**Grade 1**