

St Albans Road Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118249
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379574
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	301
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Juli Carter
Headteacher	Karen Major
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
School address	St Albans Road Dartford DA1 1TE
Telephone number	01322 223751
Fax number	01322 290621
Email address	office@st-albans.kent.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 18 lessons taught by 10 teachers and held meetings with school leaders and managers, a representative from the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at information from assessment, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, minutes of governing body meetings, records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring and many other documents. They analysed responses from the 66 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 26 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels are driving improvement in pupils' literacy skills, particularly in writing.
- How effectively pupils' social and cultural development and their contribution to the school and wider community are promoted. through the school's links with schools in other countries.
- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels promote improvement in attendance.

Information about the school

St Albans Road is a larger than average infant school. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest ethnic group is White British. A higher than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language, a small minority of whom are at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These mainly relate to moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural needs. The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of a Nursery class and three Reception classes. The school holds the International School Award and the Quality Mark for Primary Schools.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Albans Road is a satisfactory school. Pupils receive individualised care and support from staff who have a thorough understanding of their developmental needs. Parents and carers indicate that they appreciate this approach as it settles their children into school quickly and helps them to overcome difficulties that they experience. For example, one parent wrote, 'Both teachers and teaching assistants treat the children as individuals and support both their learning and emotional needs.'

Attainment is low and pupils make satisfactory progress overall. As a result of the positive impact from recent new appointments to senior and middle leadership positions, pupils' learning is improving securely and quickly. An increasing proportion of pupils are now making good or better progress, particularly in their literacy skills. This is because teachers focus well on helping pupils to improve their understanding of phonics (the links between sounds and letters) and provide small group support to boost progress. These changes have not been in place for sufficient time to have an impact on the school's most recent test results. Pupils' personal development is generally good. Their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is particularly well supported by the wide range of learning activities provided in conjunction with the school's international partners.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. In a minority of lessons, where teaching is good, pupils make good progress because clear objectives are set for learning. In these lessons, pupils engage well with learning activities which are suitably challenging and well paced and their learning moves on swiftly. However, these levels of pace and challenge are not consistently established in all lessons.

Pupils' attendance is low. Systems reward high attendance and provide support for those pupils whose attendance is of concern. In a few cases, this support for individuals has been successful in improving how well they attend school. However, targets for raising pupils' attendance are based at whole school, rather than individual pupil, level.

Senior leaders and the governing body have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school from satisfactory self-evaluation processes. Long-term strategic planning correctly identifies areas for improvement. However, it does not systematically identify specific and measureable outcomes that can be used to gauge the success of actions taken to improve weaker areas. Occasionally, leaders' and managers' views of pupils' progress are too generous because, in the

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past, tracking systems have not been sufficiently rigorous. Better use of progress information is becoming more established. Expectations of pupils' achievement are rising among the cohesive staff team. The progress made in a short period by the restructured leadership team demonstrates that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve the quality and consistency of pupils' progress in lessons by ensuring that:
 - lesson planning sets suitably high expectations of achievement for all pupils
 - establishing clear learning goals that challenge pupils, based on recent and accurate assessment of what they know and can do
 - the pace of learning is accelerated during lessons.
- Improve attendance to at least the national average by:
 - establishing and communicating clear roles for the governing body, senior leaders, class staff, parents and carers in raising attendance levels
 - routinely setting a realistic and achievable short-term target for each pupil which is reviewed regularly through the school year
 - communicating the importance of good attendance.
- Improve the effectiveness of school development planning by ensuring that:
 - priority is given to actions which focus on raising attainment and improving attendance
 - targets for improvement specify clearly how progress and success will be achieved, measured and evaluated
 - progress towards those targets is evaluated regularly through the school year by school leaders and the governing body.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enter the school with levels of development that are generally below age-related expectations, particularly in communication and mathematical skills. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress although, by the end of Year 2, attainment is low, particularly in writing. Successful programmes, which have contributed strongly to accelerated progress for some pupils, have been extended recently to enable more pupils to participate. Consequently, the attainment of an increasing number of pupils is improving quickly in writing.

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In lessons, pupils make at least satisfactory progress. They particularly enjoy being active while learning; for example, when learning to count using the large space available on the playground. In the best lessons, pupils respond enthusiastically to the challenges set for them. Pupils’ literacy skills develop with increasing pace, from very limited starting points, through both the teaching of discrete skills and the use of those skills in other subjects. For example, in a Year 2 lesson about planning the beginning of a story, pupils wrote sentences containing accurately spelt words and correct punctuation. Progress in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. Pupils in Year 1 demonstrate confidence in routinely using computers to practise their subtraction skills. This familiarity supports their satisfactory development of skills which contribute to their future economic well-being.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make progress at similar rates to their peers because they are effectively supported both in the classroom and in small groups that focus on particular needs. Overall, boys do less well than girls, but the differences are similar to those seen nationally.

Pupils feel very safe while at school. Their behaviour in lessons and in the playground is almost always good. Pupils make a strong contribution to the school being a welcoming and harmonious community because they have developed a good understanding of cultural similarities and differences. This has been significantly enhanced through their participation in activities that link them with children of the same age in other countries. Older pupils take positions of responsibility seriously, for example in roles such as playground friends.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	4

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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How effective is the provision?

Teaching in Key Stage 1 classes is frequently characterised by positive relationships between teachers and their pupils. Learning environments are bright, exciting and well resourced. Satisfactory use is made of ICT to engage and motivate pupils. Lessons are planned satisfactorily so that pupils’ learning is structured and takes account of the range of abilities although expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. Where learning and progress are good, assessment of what pupils know and can do is both thorough and accurate. This detailed information is taken well into account in planning and pupils are motivated to learn and progress because the work they do is suitably challenging. Teachers and teaching assistants work collaboratively to ensure that the pace of learning is at least satisfactory. In the more effective lessons, the pace of learning is well maintained by ensuring that activities are well explained and focused on pupils actively participating rather than passively listening.

The curriculum covers all statutory requirements while being sufficiently flexible to take satisfactory account of pupils’ strengths and interests. In some classes, increasing account is taken of topics that pupils have identified as being most interesting. The sense of ownership that is generated promotes good levels of engagement and more rapid progress in learning. The International School Award recognises the impact that a wide variety of learning activities are having on pupils’ academic and personal development. For example, a project entitled Our Feathery Friends involved pupils from across the school. It promoted better reading, numeracy and map skills through activities that were shared with pupils in schools in Iceland, Spain and Norway using video conferencing. ‘Challenge time’ in Year 1 gives pupils good opportunities to develop skills in experimentation and independent working as well as providing purposeful opportunities for writing. Extra-curricular activities are popular and well attended.

Secure and effective systems are in place to ensure pupils’ well-being. There are good levels of supervision around the school and within the playground. Staff take care to ensure that pupils clearly understand the routines and rules that keep them safe so that they are able to talk confidently, for example about what they are expected to do if someone may be hurt. The welcoming and caring ethos of the school and its entire staff ensures that new pupils quickly feel very safe and comfortable. Good arrangements for pupils transferring between year groups or leaving to go to the junior school ensure that there is a smooth transition to a new class. Management systems ensure that pupils who are persistently absent from school are identified and supported and that parents and carers receive information about their children’s attendance rate. However, pupils do not routinely receive realistic, personalised targets to aim for. The importance of good attendance, and how this impacts on pupils’ achievement, are given insufficient prominence around the school. The roles of senior leaders, class staff and the governing body in

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improving attendance are not always communicated clearly enough.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Restructuring at management level over the previous 12 months has been instrumental in instigating a programme of improvement in the school which is already having a marked impact on the quality of provision. The impact of actions taken during this period has been carefully monitored and regular evaluation, while still inconsistent, is becoming more established. Pupils’ writing skills, for example, have improved as a result of the establishment of more focused support in teaching phonics and better coordination of planning at year group level. School improvement planning has not previously given obvious priority to securing better outcomes for pupils. A clear vision, focused upon driving more rapid improvement, has now been successfully communicated to staff.

The quality of teaching and its impact on pupils’ learning and progress are now monitored regularly and accurately following changes made to routines. The governing body provides satisfactory support and challenge to the school. Regular visits are made to classrooms although school staff do not always benefit from feedback after these visits.

Arrangements are satisfactory for ensuring that pupils are adequately safeguarded. Staff are trained regularly and recruitment procedures comply with requirements. The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is good. School leaders have an accurate understanding of pupils’ backgrounds. Pupils have good opportunities to engage with others of similar age from different backgrounds through video conferencing and first-hand experience.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory in all aspects of the school’s work, and it takes suitable steps to tackle discrimination. The progress of the most vulnerable groups of pupils is monitored. Although this information has not been used routinely by the school to make comparisons, no group of pupils performs significantly differently to their peers. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their peers and the school operates harmoniously on a day-to-day basis.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage as a whole. Induction arrangements into the Nursery are very strong. Taster sessions and home visits prepare the children very well for the start of their education and their parents and carers quickly get to know the staff. During the inspection, children arrived with their parents and carers to spend their first hour in the Nursery, quickly adapting to routines and becoming absorbed in the stimulating range of activities in the rich learning environments inside and out of doors. Activities are planned well to meet individual children's needs and interests and clearly identify the next steps in their learning and development. This well-focused provision enables children in the Nursery class to make rapid progress, gaining in confidence and independence.

The satisfactory learning environments in the Reception classes are less stimulating than those in the Nursery. Assessment information is used increasingly effectively to record children's progress but is not used well enough in planning to ensure that children make good gains in their learning from day to day. Currently, planning does not provide for sufficient quality opportunities to enthuse and engage children as writers or to extend these skills sufficiently to enable them to achieve well. Children's progress in developing literacy skills is therefore no better than satisfactory. Staff are working with local authority colleagues to improve and make this aspect of their work more effective and accurate. The nursery teacher has recently been appointed as leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage and has a clear understanding of how to ensure that the Reception provision is of the same high quality as in the Nursery class. Development of the outdoor learning areas, for example, is already under way. This is now starting to provide a richer learning environment, including specific areas and opportunities for children to develop their communication and mathematical skills.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

A lower than average number of parents and carers returned completed questionnaires. This inspection was conducted early in the first term of the school year. Consequently, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly those in the Nursery class, had been part of the school for a very short time. A number of parents and carers commented that this affected their ability to evaluate the school. Parents and carers were generally positive about the work of the school, particularly in terms of the care and support given to their children. The main aspects of concern were connected with communication. School leaders and the governing body are aware of the need to improve communication with parents and carers so that they understand how well their children are doing at school and how they can help at home. Plans are in place to address these issues in the near future.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Albans Road Infant School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 62 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 301 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	50	32	48	0	0	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	28	42	36	55	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	20	30	32	48	7	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	27	37	56	5	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	30	35	53	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	22	33	31	47	7	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	42	34	52	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	31	47	25	38	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	19	29	38	58	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	21	36	55	5	8	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	17	41	62	4	6	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	24	36	31	47	2	3	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	27	41	30	45	3	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Albans Road Infant School, Dartford DA1 1TE

Thank you for welcoming us into your school when we came to visit recently. We were very pleased to see how well you behaved and how much you enjoyed your lessons. You told us how well staff look after you and that this makes you feel very safe.

I am writing to tell you that you go to a satisfactory school. This means there are some good aspects but also some that could be much better. Children who go to your school usually make satisfactory progress. Some of you are making good progress, especially with your writing, because the teachers have made sure that you get extra support.

You all enjoy taking part in projects with children in schools in other countries using the computers and finding out about the different customs and traditions their cultures have. This is helping you to have a good understanding of what it is like to live in different parts of the United Kingdom and around the world.

We have asked your headteacher to concentrate on improving three particular things to help your school get even better.

- To improve how well you all do by the end of Year 2 by giving you more challenging work to do in lessons.
- To improve your attendance at school.
- To make sure their plans to help you get better are very clear and evaluated regularly.

You can all help by coming to school every day and trying your hardest to reach the challenging targets your teachers will set for you.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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