



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Alban's Primary Catholic Academy
Local Authority: Essex

Inspection Date: 03 December 2021

Reporting Inspector: Angela Podmore (Lead Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Academy Trust	School Address:	First Avenue
School Category:	Primary		Harlow
Age range of pupils:	3 -11		Essex
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		CM20 2NP
Number on roll:	195	Tel. No.	01279 425383
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Executive Headteacher:	Mr Ian Kendal
Date of previous inspection:	19 May 2015	Chair of Governors:	Mr George Reynolds

Information about the school

St Alban's Catholic Academy is a one form entry primary school within the Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Multi Academy Trust. The school is located in Harlow and part of the diocese of Brentwood, and serves the parishes of Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of the Assumption. There are currently 195 pupils on roll plus 10 children in the Nursery. The school demographic is culturally diverse and 44% of the children have English as a second language.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Alban's Catholic Academy is a warm, vibrant inclusive community. It provides its pupils with an outstanding Catholic education where every member of the school community is valued and respected as a unique person in the eyes of God.

School leaders and governors have been rigorous in maintaining and building on the strengths and high standards of the previous inspection, thus ensuring that the school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The quality of self-evaluation is very good and there are strategies in place to continually share good practice within the school, across the Trust, as well as with the wider Catholic community. The innovative Caritas curriculum alongside the 'Come and See' programme enables pupils to make connections between their faith and their daily lives.

Staff and pupils are proud to belong to the St Alban's community reporting '...we feel like a family' and 'The school promotes the Catholic ethos very well and I am very proud to be part of it'. Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school, they are warm, friendly and eager to share their experiences of school life and the opportunities offered to them with visitors. Pupils report that they really enjoy school and love belonging to the various groups and clubs. They cheerfully reported to the inspector that there was absolutely nothing they would change about their school.

Governors, well led by a very experienced and committed chair, work closely with senior leaders and have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for future development. They know the school very well. They are kept well informed about the life of the school and visit the school frequently offering support and challenge and are equally ambitious for the school. They report that the school has a real sense of purpose and unity.

What the school should do to improve further:

To continue to increase opportunities for child initiated and planned Collective Worship ensuring it still maintains the high quality.

To ensure that progress to reach Greater Depth in Religious Education (for those pupils whose previous attainment indicates this) is realised to pre Covid levels or beyond.

The Catholic Life at St Alban's is outstanding. The Catholic ethos of the school is tangible as you enter the building and continues as you walk around the school, meeting and talking with children and adults. The school's Mission Statement 'Through God's love we learn together, grow together and achieve together', alongside the school values rooted in a love of God, love of self and a love of others, are an intrinsic part of daily life. All members of the school community uphold both the Mission Statement and values in their relationships with each other and the wider community outside school. A visual representation of the school values takes a prominent position in each classroom and children are proud and honoured to have their name on a leaf on the tree, showing that they have been recognised as living out a particular value in their behaviour or attitude. Every individual is recognised and valued as being unique in the eyes of God.

Each class in the school is named after a saint of the children's choosing with support and guidance from the class teacher. Throughout the year pupils learn more about their saint. A vertically grouped house system, with a patron saint for each house, contributes to the strong sense of community and family within the school. It allows pupils to form friendships with children from different backgrounds and different year groups.

Children are offered a good range of opportunities to serve their school and the wider community. They are very enthusiastic in their roles as Mini Vinnies or serving on the Chaplaincy team or CAFOD club. The role of the Chaplaincy team enables pupils to be involved in planning Acts of Worship and Mass as well as helping with the Rosary group. They enjoy time praying together or visiting the Parish church. They speak with great enthusiasm of writing Christmas cards for the homeless and those in hospital as well as for their parish priest. They also speak fondly of the recent Remembrance Day service of peace. This theme led to the beautiful displays in the school hall. Each class choosing a line from the Christmas Hymn 'Silent Night' and creating an amazing display which is enjoyed and appreciated by their peers. The Mini Vinnies team are dedicated fund raisers. Their latest project raised funds for the 'Streets for Homes' project to buy tents for the homeless as well as contributing to the local foodbank. The CAFOD Club members excel in their role as environmentalists, raising awareness of our effects on our planet and their display outlines the ways we can all help. The 'Share a Prayer' initiative invites children at St Alban's to write a prayer and share it with children in remote schools in Zimbabwe.

The leadership team is outstanding in promoting, monitoring and evaluating the provision for the Catholic Life of the school, and how they can plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils. Leaders, through the unique Caritas Curriculum, and Spiritual Formation are energised and a source of inspiration for the whole school community. They share an excellent understanding of their commitment to the church's mission in education and are deeply committed to their responsibility of continuing to develop the Catholic ethos of the school. Leaders have worked hard to share their vision and expertise with the parish, parents and wider community.

Pupils are rightly proud to belong to St Alban's school and feel that they attend an excellent school and appreciate the many opportunities given to them. Their behaviour in and around school is exemplary, making for an atmosphere conducive to learning and personal growth and development. All adults act as excellent role models which can clearly be seen in the positive relationships observed around the school.

Religious Education at St Alban's is outstanding. Pupils achieve very well and their attainment is in line with that in other core subjects. The school is monitoring very closely the number of pupils working at the highest levels so that is comparable with the numbers pre lockdown. Work in pupils' books clearly suggests that several pupils are in line to do so.

There is clear evidence in books showing pupils are making sustained, very good progress from their starting points. It is also clear that year on year, pupils have the opportunity to build on their knowledge and understanding of the topics covered as they journey through the school. Pupils with Special Educational Needs are very well supported by a well trained and experienced SEN team of Learning Support Assistants. The school ensures that they have all the necessary resources required to support their learning. Pupils working at the higher levels are consistently challenged to deepen their knowledge and understanding as well as develop their skills. This was evident in a year six lesson where pupils were challenged to read, discuss and compare the different accounts of John in the four Gospels. Teachers assess pupils' work robustly and regularly. In order to ensure these assessments are accurate, staff participate in moderations tasks within the academy trust as well, as with colleagues in other Catholic schools within the deanery. Regular monitoring of books by the Religious Education Leader ensures that work is of a high standard, feedback is supporting pupils to extend their learning and that the children are continually developing their religious literacy. Pupils clearly take pride in their work in Religious Education as is clearly evidenced by both the high quality of their work and the excellent presentation of their work.

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, they plan lessons with their colleagues from across the Trust, which enable all children to be successful learners. Children enjoy dynamic, interesting lessons where meditation, role play, art, diary writing and hot seating enhance their experiences and enjoyment of lessons. Pupils report that they really enjoy writing their own prayers and that meditation is a lovely way to start their lessons and helps to focus their minds. St Alban's is fully inclusive school and leaders ensure that all children irrespective of their learning needs are given the tools they need to make progress and achieve well. Teachers' questioning is skilful in allowing pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding and build on their skills. Age appropriate religious vocabulary is introduced and referred to throughout lessons and it is clear from both oral and written responses that pupils are developing this skill well as they journey through the school.

In a recent questionnaire, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the teaching their children receive and their achievement in Religious Education. They said 'Excellent RE lessons. My kids really enjoy this lesson' and 'My child very much enjoys his learning of Religious Education and shows this by sharing his learning with me at home'.

Leaders ensure that Religious Education is a priority for the school as is clear from the generous allocation on the timetable which fully meets the requirement set by the Bishop's Conference, and the extensive continual professional developmental opportunities available for staff. The Religious Education leader is very supportive of her colleagues, providing advice and guidance on planning lessons, assessing pupil's work and the feedback provided, as well as ways of using The Big Question at the end of a topic. One pupil told the inspector that The Big Question is his favourite part of Religious Education because it extended his learning. Leaders continue to work highly effectively to continually develop the curriculum and future planning is ambitious. The newly developed Caritas curriculum and the desire to develop a junior Diocesan Synod are testament to their determination to be always forward thinking.

Collective Worship is intrinsic to the life of the school and is at the heart of every school celebration. Praying together is part of the daily experiences for all pupils and staff. Pupils are at ease when praying in school. Pupil's participation in Collective Worship is outstanding, they sing joyfully and join in community prayer in an age appropriate way. Collective Worship has a high profile in the school and plays a vital role in meeting the spiritual needs of the pupils. The experience of living and working in a supportive praying community has a highly positive impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils.

Pupils have many opportunities to participate in Collective Worship at St Alban's including Gospel Assemblies, classroom liturgies, key stage or house assemblies and celebration assemblies. They also enjoy Mass to celebrate important Feast Days. In preparation for the annual Mass for Our Lady of Fatima each child made a tissue paper colourful flower, these were then collected together and made into a beautiful ceiling cover outside the school hall. The prayer garden, whilst small, is at the heart of the school grounds and children walk past it every day; another prayer garden is also available to the children in the grounds of the parish church.

Parents are highly positive about the opportunities for their children to participate in Collective Worship saying, 'The children participate in regular class worship and are taught the Liturgy through Gospel Assemblies'. Regular newsletters keep parents involved in what is happening in school and how they can support their children.

Leaders and governors are outstanding in promoting the provision for Catholic Worship. They are passionate and committed to delivering meaningful and purposeful worship to bring pupils closer to God. The colourful displays in classrooms and prayer focus areas and communal areas remind the children daily of the importance of worship in their lives. During the inspection, the Head of School, ably assisted by the Chaplaincy team, led an Advent Assembly on 'Being Ready'. The children were focused and attentive throughout and joined in the prayers and singing enthusiastically. At the end they were challenged to go out and be a light to each other throughout the day.

Vibrant links with the parish are clearly a strength of the school. School leaders and other staff are highly supportive of parish programmes including the First Holy Communion and Reconciliation programmes. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor to the school. He leads acts of worship, says Mass and leads assemblies, as well as visiting classes to talk to the children. He comments that staff and children are real witnesses to their faith.