

St John Fisher Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117480
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379427
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2012
Lead inspector	John Worgan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary James
Headteacher	Charles McNerney
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

John Worgan

Additional inspector

Ian Jones

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Ten lessons were observed and nine teachers were seen teaching. In addition, two phonics sessions were observed and inspectors heard pupils read. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's development plan and self-evaluation documents, teachers' records and planning and the school's files of teaching observations. Meetings were held with staff, pupils and representatives of the governing body. Questionnaires from 99 parents and carers were taken into account, along with those completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This slightly below average sized school serves an area north of St Albans. Most pupils come from the immediate vicinity of the school. Three quarters of the pupils are of White British heritage. The others represent a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including Black African, pupils from Traveller families and other White backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has been growing and is close to the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs or with a statement of educational needs is broadly average. The school meets the current floor standard.

Breakfast and holiday clubs on the school site are privately managed and, therefore, inspected separately.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The school provides a good standard of education.
- It is improving well and has addressed the issues for improvement from the previous inspection.
- Pupils’ achievement is good and an effective tracking system enables staff to monitor their progress carefully. Pupils who need additional help are identified and supported well and planning is adapted to meet the needs of individuals and groups. Although most pupils are making good progress from their starting points, some higher ability pupils are not yet reaching the levels of which they are capable.
- Teaching is good. In many lessons, teachers provide interesting and challenging work with a variety of tasks that cater for a range of different learning styles. There are still a few weaker areas of teaching; in these lessons, pupils are not challenged enough to develop their skills and abilities to the full.
- Pupils’ behaviour is good, both in classrooms and around the school. They respond well to being given responsibility. The school is a welcoming and secure place and pupils understand how to keep themselves safe.
- Leadership and management are good, and the headteacher’s strong leadership has a significant impact on the success of the school. Staff and the governing body share an ethos in which raising attainment is paramount, with pupils supported and challenged to achieve well.
- Relationships with parents and carers are strong. One parent stated, ‘We are now communicated with regularly - the weekly newsletters, forum sessions and parent mail, homework guidelines and recommended reading lists all help us to support our children.’
- The school values individuals and supports pupils so that they can achieve well. As one parent said ‘The school’s pastoral care is superb and you cannot put a value on this.’

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - teachers working closely together to plan lessons
 - ensuring that in all lessons, pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn

- teachers observing each other's lessons to share good practice and to improve the match of work to pupils' needs.
- Raise the achievement of all pupils, especially the more able, by providing interesting work that will help them to work independently and reach higher standards.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children join the school with attainment that is broadly in line with national expectations for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, they make good progress because teaching is good, routines are well established and expectations are high. By the end of the Reception year, children's attainment is above average especially in communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development.

Attainment at the end of Year 6 is above average. In English, attainment has been significantly above the national average for the last three years. In mathematics, attainment has improved and data for the current Year 6 show that pupils are on track at least to reach the national average, with girls' progress matching that of boys. Pupils' good progress is clearly evident from work in their books. They are proud of what they have achieved and discussed their progress enthusiastically with inspectors. Year 6 pupils explained how their confidence in mathematics has grown through the year. They showed how targets are set, and explained how they have reached them and then moved on to more challenging ones. Pupils in Year 3 were seen composing a myth and their 'big writing' books showed high standards of extended writing and clear progress since the start of the year.

The attainment of pupils of minority ethnic heritage, including those who are Black African and from other White backgrounds, exceeds that of their counterparts nationally. Traveller pupils perform less well and the school is making efforts to remedy this, addressing issues of attendance and engagement with their parents and carers. Pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are well supported in accessing the curriculum and their achievement is good, considering their starting points. Teaching assistants support pupils with a range of needs well, encouraging them to learn independently whenever possible.

Standards of reading are above average throughout the school and especially in Key Stage 1, where inspectors observed effective and inspiring teaching of phonics (sounds and letters). Pupils read well and lower ability pupils and those with English as an additional language are clearly making good progress. Reading records are thorough and parents and carers read regularly with children. They also help with reading in school.

The vast majority of parents and carers are, rightly, of the view that their children are making good progress. They were complimentary about the ways in which the

school helps their children to achieve. This includes a weekly session for parents and carers in reading and phonics.

Quality of teaching

Although there is some satisfactory teaching, the large majority is good or outstanding. The school places a particular emphasis on the teaching of phonics. The standard of reading is good, especially that of younger pupils. The quality of teaching in mathematics has improved. Current data show that this has been effective in raising standards, particularly for girls and for more-able pupils in Key Stage 1.

In the good and outstanding lessons, pupils are challenged and encouraged to learn independently. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils worked enthusiastically in pairs and in groups. The exercise of describing a dragon inspired pupils to discuss characteristics of good and evil, using sophisticated language and understanding.

The best lessons engage pupils in active learning. In a registration session at the start of the day, children in the Reception class counted numbers in groups in the class and then aggregated them. In a Year 6 class, pupils used handheld mini-computers to practise arithmetic, working independently. They then worked in groups of the same ability, using co-ordinates to map shapes; the most able produced accurate mirror images.

In less successful lessons, the pace is slower and more-able pupils who complete tasks quickly begin to lose interest. In some of these lessons, the standard of pupils' work showed that good teaching had previously taken place; in others, over-use of worksheets and poor presentation indicated that weaker teaching had inhibited progress. In most lessons seen, pupils' speaking and listening were good. A spiritual element was seen in many lessons, including prayer and reflection at the start of morning and afternoon sessions.

Curriculum planning is thorough and plans are held on the school computer system so that teachers can access and modify them easily. The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils said that they enjoy their lessons. Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of extra-curricular activities offered and the majority participate in at least one of these activities.

Pupils say that teaching is good and they appreciate the help that teachers give them in order to improve their work. Marking is thorough and gives clear guidance on the steps which they need to take to reach higher levels. Almost all parents and carers agree that teaching is good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is good and pupils are safe and well cared for. Exclusions, bullying and racist incidents are rare and when they have occurred, they have been dealt with appropriately and effectively. Parents and carers spoke highly of standards of behaviour in the school. The vast majority agreed that behaviour is good and that their children feel safe in school. The parents and carers of older pupils said that behaviour has improved over recent years. The main change that they noted and appreciated is in the level of responsibility given to pupils. The 'buddying' system,

pairing Year 6 pupils with children in Reception, and the school council were offered as examples of this. Pupils report very little bullying and say that incidents of name-calling and friendship upsets are dealt with sympathetically by staff. They have great confidence in the headteacher and many said that they would go to him for help if they had a personal problem.

Behaviour observed in lessons was predominantly good and in some cases outstanding, with pupils actively supporting each other's learning. The few instances of inappropriate behaviour in lessons were linked to lack of challenge in teaching. Pupils say that occasions when their work is disrupted are rare and any incidents are dealt with effectively by teachers. Older pupils demonstrated a clear sense of responsibility and said that they felt that behaviour in the school had improved over the last few years so that it is now good. Both younger and older pupils report that the school is friendly and welcoming and new arrivals are well supported. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They behave safely, around the school and in class. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Attendance is above average and improving. Most pupils are punctual in getting to school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher is appreciated by pupils, parents and carers. He leads by example and has ensured that staff morale is high and that there is a clear focus on raising attainment. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of a deputy headteacher. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader, who is also the special educational needs coordinator, has also played a significant role in raising standards. As one parent stated, 'This current crop of management and staff is the strongest in my experience of the school.' Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and staff are well deployed.

Leaders and managers have supported staff in improving teaching and raising achievement, for instance, in mathematics. This has involved well-targeted professional development, using support from the local authority and sharing expertise within the school. Reflective self-evaluation identifies clear priorities, demonstrating good capacity for further improvement.

The curriculum is good and is well managed by the senior leadership team, ensuring breadth and balance is reflected in medium-term planning, in which all staff are involved. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. There is a strong spiritual ethos which is evident in lessons and pupils' attitudes, as well as in formal acts of worship. Aspects of cultural education such as art and music are strong but multicultural awareness is promoted less well.

The school promotes equality well, including through its inclusive ethos and curriculum, and rare instances of discrimination have been dealt with effectively. Safeguarding arrangements, including safer recruitment, are robust. Governance is good. The governing body has appropriate expertise and provides professional and supportive challenge to the headteacher and staff.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



20 January 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St John Fisher Roman Catholic Primary School, St Albans,
AL4 9RW**

Thank you for the warm welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and took careful note of the positive comments which you and your parents and carers made about the school.

We agree with you that your school is good because the headteacher and the staff care about you and help you to make good progress. Teachers plan interesting lessons and give you enjoyable and exciting things to do. We were very impressed by the way in which you enjoy learning and by the progress which you are making. We liked the ways in which you respect one another and help each other to learn and to succeed. This helps to make your school a pleasant, safe and happy place.

To help your school to improve, we have asked the headteacher and staff to make teaching even better. We have asked teachers to work more closely together in planning their lessons, so that your lessons are as good as the best ones. We want them to make sure that in all lessons, you are clear about what you are meant to learn. To help them in this, we have asked teachers to observe each other's lessons and to share ideas about how to do things. We have also asked your headteacher to make sure that all of you are challenged enough, especially those of you who find some of your learning easy, and to give your interesting and independent work that will help you to reach higher standards.

You can help with this by aiming high and by moving on to more challenging targets.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Worgan
Lead inspector

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