

St John Fisher Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106535
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	355969
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	955
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Mallin
Headteacher	Mr Richard Ward
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 35 lessons, each taught by a different teacher, and held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including improvement plans and the school's monitoring data, and read responses to 404 parental/carer questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at the following:

- Are the improvements in GCSE results sustainable, given the progress of current students?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and does the school have an accurate view of them?
- Has underachievement in mathematics been eliminated and are improvements sustainable?
- What aspects of leadership and management have contributed most to improving outcomes for students in 2010?

Information about the school

St John Fisher is a secondary school of average size, serving mainly the Roman Catholic communities of Wigan and the surrounding areas. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is much lower than in most schools. The school has specialist status in performing arts, is a Leading Edge school and holds a number of awards, including a bronze award for Investors in People.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St John Fisher is a good school where students achieve well. Students show excellent standards of personal development and take full advantage of the many extra-curricular opportunities on offer, particularly in sport and the performing arts.

Good teaching and excellent care, guidance and support combine well so that students make good progress in their academic work. Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average and reach levels of attainment at GCSE that are above average. Current students make good progress in lessons and the school's monitoring data show that the improved results in 2010 can be sustained. Within this picture of above-average attainment, results in recent years have varied more than would be expected, both from year to year and between subjects.

The school demonstrates good capacity to improve. In addition to the improved results in 2010, when most subjects met challenging targets, the school met its agreed attendance targets. Self-evaluation at all levels is accurate and the actions taken to address areas of weakness have had a clear impact. Since the last inspection, the use of data to monitor progress and target interventions has improved, as has the quality of support for students who are falling behind. The quality of care, guidance and support has also improved and is now outstanding.

The quality of teaching and learning is good because the teachers know the students well and promote high expectations of all. As a result, the students respect and appreciate their teachers, relationships are very good and behaviour is excellent. The students respond well to the range of learning activities that they face; they offer answers readily and work well whether individually or in groups. In the lessons where progress is satisfactory rather than good, the teachers sometimes take insufficient account of prior knowledge and students of different abilities undertake the same tasks. On other occasions, the teachers miss opportunities to monitor the progress of individuals during lessons or to provide feedback on students' day-to-day work.

Recent changes to the curriculum have addressed the need to provide a broad range of courses throughout the school. For example, the students appreciate the opportunity to study three separate sciences and additional vocational options. The school has clear plans to develop the curriculum further and to evaluate the impact of recent changes, and these plans provide an appropriate focus for improving provision.

The school's specialist status makes a strong contribution to provision and students' outcomes. The students' achievements in the specialist subjects, particularly art and drama, are among the best in the school. The students meet challenging targets in their examinations and increasing numbers are opting to study subjects within the performing arts specialism. The specialism also helps the students to gain considerably in their

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personal development, such as when large numbers contribute to school productions. Joint use of the school's facilities helps to strengthen links with the local community.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and increase progress in all subjects to match those in the best through:
 - - ensuring that teachers monitor students' progress in lessons and the quality of written work more effectively
 - - ensuring that teaching takes full account of students' prior knowledge and the full range of abilities in the class.
- Develop the curriculum further, including consolidating and evaluating recent changes, with a focus on meeting the needs of all.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Attainment has fluctuated rather than risen steadily but, overall, students reach standards that are above national averages. For example, in 2010, unvalidated results indicate that 59% of students gained five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics. The students' achievement is good. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in relation to their starting points. The students progress well in English and science; they make satisfactory progress in mathematics, where attainment is broadly average. The students have positive attitudes to learning and many benefit from opportunities to develop their literacy skills through discussion and analysis of sample texts.

The students have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe in situations of potential risk. They, together with parents and carers, understand and appreciate the measures taken to ensure their safety in school, such as the use of CCTV cameras, visitor badges and site security. The students' behaviour is outstanding, both in lessons and around the school. The students treat each other and the staff with respect and agree that any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. The inspectors' positive judgement on behaviour is supported by parents and carers and the school's data showing low numbers of exclusions in recent years. The students show an impressive understanding of the many factors affecting their health and well-being. Many take advantage of the healthy options available at lunchtime and large numbers participate in extra-curricular activities such as sport, dance and drama. The school's Catholic ethos contributes strongly to the students' excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. For example, the students are able to empathise with other people's feelings and interests and show a strong sense of what is right and wrong.

The students show good skills that prepare them for the world of work. Attendance is consistently above average and punctuality is good. Most students finishing Year 11 continue their studies in college and the proportion of recent leavers not in employment, education or training is very low. Examination results suggest that the students attain good levels of key skills.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The teaching is good. The large majority of lessons seen during the inspection were good or better; all were at least satisfactory. Lessons move at a good pace, the students remain interested and are on task throughout. In the best lessons, the teachers are aware of varying ability levels in the class and plan accordingly; they set work that provides challenge for all and help all students to learn at a good rate. On a few occasions, the pace of learning was slower because the students were all expected to complete the same tasks or the teacher missed opportunities for the students to work independently or in groups. The use of assessment is satisfactory. The teachers monitor effectively the students' progress over time and are able to identify students who are falling behind. However, the quality of in-class monitoring and day-to-day marking is variable, resulting in some poorly-presented work.

The curriculum, which includes a good range of options in science, languages and the arts, caters well for the students' needs. The broadly traditional courses at Key Stage 3 have been enhanced by the introduction of courses promoting personalised learning and thinking skills, together with the opportunity to gain accreditation in dance. In addition, the students are beginning to benefit from a wider range of vocational courses in Key Stage 4. The leaders and managers accept that it is too early to assess fully the impact of these changes. Support for learning is strong. For example, improved revision arrangements last year contributed to a marked improvement in examination

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performance, particularly in mathematics. These classes are now established as part of school practice and have high take-up rates. Enrichment opportunities are many and varied. High take-up figures for activities connected with drama productions, sports teams and a wide variety of interest clubs demonstrate the effectiveness of extra-curricular provision.

The students value very highly the outstanding care, guidance and support that the school offers and thrive in the school's calm and supportive environment. They are taught how to care for each other, how to listen and how to give support to those in need. Strong links with outside agencies help to broaden the guidance and support offered. The leaders' and managers' work in partnership with other schools has successfully provided alternatives to school exclusion and, as a result, exclusion rates are low. The inspectors scrutinised case study evidence that demonstrates how well the school caters for individual needs and particularly the needs of the most needy students. Arrangements for transition into the school and into the next stage of education or training are excellent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leaders and managers have used targets effectively to drive up standards of attainment, with the provisional 2010 results being the highest in the school's history. Actions to address recent underachievement in mathematics, including support from outside the school and closer monitoring of students' progress, have had notable success. The school's records, building on accurate forecasts of the 2010 results, suggest that recent improvements can be sustained, including in mathematics. The teaching staff is well motivated; they support the school and its leaders. The leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school, including the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Processes to monitor teaching and learning and develop teaching skills are strong; processes to monitor the use of assessment are satisfactory. The school promotes equal opportunities effectively. All groups of students are making good progress and the inspectors found no evidence of consistent underachievement by any particular group.

Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's performance in relation to other schools and its key priorities for improvement. Their overview of safeguarding ensures that the school's procedures meet all requirements. The school promotes community cohesion well. For example, the school's Catholic ethos underlies its provision but teachers make clear attempts to promote understanding of other faiths. Links with schools in other parts of the world are helping the students to understand lives in circumstances very different from their own. The school engages with parents and

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carers well and the very large majority feel that their views are taken into account. Regular reports on students' progress and newsletters help those connected to the school to feel well informed. The leaders accept that development of the school website can strengthen the way that information is shared, such as providing access to school policies, offering clearer channels of communication with governors and helping parents and carers to provide better support for learning.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and careers who contributed their views to the inspection team through the questionnaire was higher than average. A very large majority of replies indicate positive views of the school. The views of parents and carers were particularly useful to the inspection team in coming to outstanding judgements for students' safety and behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John Fisher Catholic High 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 404 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 953 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	148	37	233	58	16	4	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	200	49	195	48	6	1	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	169	42	209	52	15	4	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	153	38	218	54	23	6	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	173	43	206	51	16	4	2	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	141	35	227	56	20	5	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	127	31	249	61	19	5	5	1
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)	150	37	223	55	11	3	4	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	154	38	222	55	17	4	5	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	171	42	204	50	20	5	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	121	30	235	58	29	7	2	0
The school is led and managed effectively	172	42	217	54	5	1	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	194	48	191	47	15	4	3	1

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



22 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School, Wigan, WN6 7RN

You will recall that a team of inspectors and I recently inspected your school. Thank you for the way that you made us feel welcome and a particular thank you to those of you who spoke to us at break and lunchtime. This letter is to tell you what we found.

We judged that St John Fisher is a good school where you achieve well. You behave very well and we were impressed by your personal qualities such as courtesy and understanding of others' needs. You take full advantage of the many extra-curricular opportunities on offer, particularly in sport and the performing arts.

Good teaching and excellent care, guidance and support combine well so that you make good progress in your academic work. The teachers know you well and promote high expectations for all. You respond well to the range of learning activities that you face; you offer answers readily and work well whether individually or in a group.

The school has improved in many ways since the last inspection and the school's leaders deserve considerable credit for that. In order to improve further, we have asked the governing body, headteacher and staff to concentrate on two important aspects:

- to ensure that you progress equally well in all subjects through monitoring your work more effectively and ensuring that teachers take account of everyone's ability level
- to develop the curriculum further with a focus on meeting everyone's needs.

You can play your part in making St John Fisher a better school. Maintain your excellent behaviour, your positive attitudes and strive to achieve the very best that you can in all your subjects.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers

Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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