

St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118908
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	294595
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Hartland 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1091
6th form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Baker
Headteacher	Jennifer Morris
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	Ordnance Street Chatham ME4 6SG
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John Fisher is an average size Roman Catholic comprehensive school. Although most students are White British an increasing number come from Eastern Europe. There are a significant number of students who have English as an additional language. An average proportion of students come from minority ethnic groups. An average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. A small number of students have statements of special educational need but one third have learning difficulties or disabilities. The school receives students from a wide area and from a large number of different primary schools. The sixth form is located on a different site and is part of a consortium with other local secondary schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

At the last inspection in 2005 the school was given a Notice to Improve because it was performing less well than could reasonably be expected. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

St John Fisher is now a satisfactory school which is getting better all the time. The school is justly proud of its Roman Catholic status. A strong Catholic ethos results in a highly inclusive community where children from different communities and cultures are well integrated and where every child does matter. Care, guidance and support across the school are good. The school has successfully tackled the shortcomings in the sixth form identified at the last inspection. The overall provision in the sixth form is now satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory through the school and standards are broadly average by Year 11. In Years 7 to 11, students are making good progress in an increasing number of subjects. However, the standards students reach and the rate of progress they make remain too varied across subjects. This is because although teaching is satisfactory and improving, not all the teaching is good enough to enable students to make good progress.

The headteacher has worked with considerable resolve and determination in making necessary changes, in the face of the ongoing challenge of a deficit budget which has placed severe constraints on what the school has been able to do to bring about improvements rapidly. Middle management is developing and is not yet fully effective. The behaviour of a minority of students is a cause for concern for the school and for some parents. Although most teachers set high standards, the expectations of some are too low and unacceptable behaviour is not managed well in some classes. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. It has a sound capacity to improve and is steering itself in the right direction towards becoming a good school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education and the school has addressed effectively the issues identified in the last inspection report. Numbers and retention rates are rising. Standards on entry are below the national average but students make satisfactory progress overall. Module results this year indicate improved performance. Curriculum provision is satisfactory. A range of traditional and vocational courses is accessible, either at the school or within the local consortium, to match the aspirations of the current students. Students themselves say that they enjoy the sixth form and are keen to learn. They are enthusiastic about the closer monitoring of their progress and the good individual guidance and support they now receive. They understand what they need to do to meet their predicted grades, as well as the standards of personal responsibility expected of them. Attendance and punctuality have improved and students feel that they are listened to by staff. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but is good where there is a clear structure to lessons and teachers match work to students' previous learning and when there is real pace and challenge. Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory and there is a sound capacity to raise standards.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Raise standards in the curriculum subjects where they are lower.
- Improve the quality of teaching up to the standard of the best so that all students achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure all staff have consistently high expectations of the students' behaviour and develop good skills in managing challenging behaviour.
- Develop the skills of middle leaders in monitoring the provision and outcomes for those areas for which they carry responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. The students start in Year 7 with standards that are below average. By the end of Year 9, standards in national tests remain below average overall but there are signs of improvement and the students achieve average standards in English. In 2006 an average number of students gained five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Although GCSE results have shown a marked improvement over the last two years, there remains too much inconsistency in the standards achieved across subjects. Standards in the sixth form are below average but improving.

The students make good progress in English throughout the school and there are signs they are making better progress in mathematics. Boys continue to do well. However, it is not yet a positive picture of good progress across all subjects and key stages, and so achievement is only satisfactory overall. Students with learning difficulties and those who have English as an additional language make at least satisfactory progress. The students are making better progress in some subjects because there are more effective systems to track how well they are doing and the teaching is improving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Most are enthusiastic learners who attend regularly and arrive punctually each day. They are valued as individuals and, through the school council, are encouraged to express their views on all aspects of school life. Council proposals have significantly improved students' lunchtime dining arrangements.

A minority of parents express concerns about behaviour in the school. During the inspection, behaviour was satisfactory overall, but there were weaknesses in a small number of lessons. It is often boisterous in corridors and open areas. A small minority of pupils are persistently disruptive, and a few are repeatedly excluded for fixed periods. Existing processes to improve individual behaviour are not always consistently applied. However, students in all year groups feel safe and secure on the school site. They confirm that bullying is not a serious problem, and that senior staff respond promptly to reported incidents.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They have adequate involvement with the wider community, and collect generously for local and national charities. They are often individually caring for each other. Students have satisfactory understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They select healthy eating options in the canteen and participate enthusiastically in physical education (PE) lessons, and extra-curricular sporting

activities. Sixth-form students have mature attitudes to school, but their isolation on a site some distance away limits their involvement with the rest of the school. Consequently, their example and guidance do not significantly influence academic and personal development in other year groups.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Subject knowledge is generally strong and learning takes place within a clearly defined structure. Information from assessments is being used increasingly well to inform planning although it is not yet fully applied in all year groups. Checks on learning in lessons occur regularly but are not always effective in identifying when work is not fully understood. Some teaching is particularly effective in challenging students, but the pace and range of activities do not always sufficiently engage and motivate students. Most teachers have high expectations about behaviour but for some it is not always high enough. In some lessons unruly behaviour is not well managed. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in some lessons. Support staff are well used, including when one assistant took on the role of a character being studied in English. Work is marked regularly but marking does not consistently show pupils how to improve.

Teaching in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Planning has improved and the methods used are more effective in meeting students' needs, although on occasions they work less well, for example in the tasks set for group work activities. The pace of learning is now better and work is well structured, for example with specific tasks broken down into bite-size chunks. Subject knowledge is good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum and meets all statutory requirements. There have been improvements in breadth and balance overall since the last inspection. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is enhanced by the opportunity to study drama as well as French and Spanish. Option choices for Years 10 and 11 are being extended and now include applied courses and more subjects such as sociology. There is now a wider range of vocational courses although college links for courses on offer in Years 10 and 11 are less developed. Well established consortium arrangements with other schools and a local college provide a wide range of sixth form courses.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for students to follow higher level academic courses as well as those with a more vocational emphasis. Core PE in the sixth form offers a good range of activities. The curriculum as a whole does not yet provide sufficiently clear pathways that allow students to follow combinations of courses across key stages. There is a satisfactory range of enrichment activities including some good opportunities for gifted and talented pupils. The grouping of students by ability helps to ensure additional educational needs are met. The school has responded well to its changing intake including developing effective provision for new groups with particular learning needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care and support are good, and academic guidance is at least satisfactory. Most students, and particularly the most vulnerable, benefit greatly from the school's caring ethos. However, a small number fail to respond to the wide-ranging efforts to support their learning and personal development. Teaching assistants provide effective help in lessons for students with behavioural or learning difficulties, but their efforts are sometimes hindered by disruptive behaviour elsewhere in the classroom. The school wisely funds a number of off-site places for students undertaking different non-GCSE courses. Many students benefit from the guidance and advice of trained peer-mentors and mediators. Specialist adult linguists, and student language-buddies, provide good support for the increasing number of students who speak English as an additional language.

Students in Years 9 and 11, and their parents, benefit from the good systems that explain examination options. Work experience for Year 10 students, and good careers education, including some input from business speakers, help students make informed choices about their futures. The new system for tracking students' progress and setting improvement targets is not used consistently or carefully monitored. Most students in Years 10 and 11 know their current levels of attainment, and their targets, but are sometimes unclear about how their grades might be improved. The school conforms with the legal requirement to check the status of staff and volunteer helpers, and maintains good procedures for child protection. The school building and site are in satisfactory condition and present no apparent risks to health and safety.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has been tenacious in addressing the issues raised at the last inspection, particularly in the sixth form. She has a clear vision for the school and has created an environment where students feel both safe and valued. The senior leaders work effectively as a team and have a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Recent restructuring of their responsibilities is providing stronger support for middle leaders, who are held accountable for the quality of learning and teaching in their departments. Monitoring procedures are not yet consistently implemented and not all staff are confident in analysing and using information to track students' progress.

The school has listened carefully to the opinions of students, for example, in relation to the layout of the canteen and the quality of the menus. There are good links with outside agencies and advisory services, and the advanced skills teachers have been deployed to good effect. Governors are supportive of the school and of its Catholic ethos. They are beginning to challenge the school with a greater rigour that will allow them to give a stronger direction to school planning and make a sharper evaluation of outcomes. The need to remove a large budget deficit has constrained spending, but substantial improvements have been achieved in building refurbishment and ICT provision. Limited resources have been carefully monitored to achieve

satisfactory value for money and a reduction in staffing has been well managed. The school is well equipped to continue its focus on raising achievement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I am writing following the inspectors recent visit to your school to let you know what we think. Thank you for your help in talking to us so openly about the work you do and what you think about the school. We found that your school is satisfactory overall and that it has a number of strengths.

As a result of the teaching and your hard work, you are increasingly making better progress and achieving higher standards. You do particularly well in English. Most of you make the most of the opportunities the school offers but a small minority are still not giving their best. Most of you behave the way you should but a few of you do not behave well enough in school. We found that relationships between staff and students are good and the staff guide and support you well. You are well cared for and feel safe at school. Many of your parents are happy with the school and with what it provides.

- We think that your headteacher and the senior staff know the ways to make the school better. We have asked the school to:
- ensure teaching improves where it is less strong, to ensure you all do as well as you can
- raise standards in the subjects where they are lower
- make sure all staff expect the best behaviour from you and help some of you improve your behaviour
- help staff with responsibilities to make better checks on their areas of concern.

You too can help by trying always to give your best so that there will be more doors open to you when you leave the school.