

The John Fisher School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103009
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	308197
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Chris Wood HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1031
Sixth form	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Emerson Samuels
Headteacher	Mr Mark Scully
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Peaks Hill Purley CR8 3YP
Telephone number	020 8660 4555
Fax number	020 8763 1837

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The John Fisher School is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic school for boys, with specialist sports college status. It is average in size. The school's mission statement promotes a Catholic ethos based on good discipline and hard work within a caring, supportive and fair environment.

The school is consistently oversubscribed, many pupils are from more affluent backgrounds and most students remain with the school throughout their secondary education. The majority live outside the local authority. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. There are few students whose first language is not English. The largest groups of students other than White British are White Irish and Black African. The number of students with statements of special educational need is slightly above average while the ratio of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion is higher in Key Stage 3.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The John Fisher School provides a good education for its students. The school's Catholic ethos and strong promotion of Christian values underpins the students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is well led by its headteacher, who values tradition but is also forward-looking and innovative. The senior leadership team is committed to creating a fully inclusive and outward-looking school that values academic success and personal development equally.

The curriculum is good and expanding to meet the needs of students. It prepares them well for their future education and careers. Students also appreciate the opportunities they have to participate in a wide range of sporting and arts-based activities, often reaching levels that are nationally and internationally recognised. The personal and social development of students is a particular strength throughout the school, especially in the sixth form where it is outstanding.

Teaching and learning are good. In many lessons students make rapid progress because of well-planned and challenging activities, precise feedback and marking, and opportunities to participate actively in collaborative learning. However, in a number of lessons students do not make as much progress. This is often because the pace of learning is too slow, the quality of marking and feedback is less effective and students are uncertain about what they need to do to improve. The school is tackling this, but has not been fully successful yet.

Achievement and standards throughout the school are good and improving, as a result of a sharper focus on target-setting for individual students and revision sessions aimed at improving students' learning skills. Students' achievement is particularly strong in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, but lower in the sixth form where their progress, although good, is often less rapid.

Specialist sports status makes a significant contribution to raising achievement and standards in the school. There are high levels of participation and it plays a leading role in the positive promotion of community cohesion.

A large majority of parents who returned questionnaires spoke highly of the school. In particular they appreciated the work that teachers did to promote the all-round development of the students. As one parent commented, 'Staff give unstintingly of their personal time to support the students academically and pastorally and in terms of spiritual activities.' However, a few parents correctly expressed concerns about the level of challenge in some lessons, as well as the setting and marking of homework. Some also indicated that communication between the school and themselves, particularly in relation to receiving feedback on parental surveys, needs to be improved.

The school provides good value for money and there is good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is popular and thriving. The overall attainment on entry is broadly average. The achievement of students is above average, but not as high as that for the school overall. There is some variability in the performance in different subjects, especially at AS level. This is brought about in part by differences in the quality of teaching and learning.

Students feel well supported and find their teachers very approachable. Attendance at lessons is good, but students say they would like more facilities for private study. Students appreciate

the range of subject options on offer and the effort the school makes to accommodate their needs. This is demonstrated by collaborative partnerships with neighbouring schools that have enabled the expansion of the curriculum opportunities.

The personal development of the students in the sixth form is excellent; they exhibit a great deal of maturity and very good interpersonal skills. They relish the opportunities to develop and demonstrate their leadership skills. They are excellent role models throughout the school and make a very positive contribution to the community, particularly through providing sports coaching for pupils in local primary schools.

Students receive good guidance in the sixth form and welcome the interim monitoring sessions when they are able to discuss in depth their progress towards targets. Monitoring of teaching and learning is developing well. Leadership and management are good and this has led to an increase in the number of students applying to join the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of the weaker lessons to that of the best, in particular by increasing the pace and ensuring that students are clear about what they need to do to improve at a faster rate.
- Continue to raise achievement in the sixth form so that it matches consistently that achieved in the school overall.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with above-average levels of attainment. The standards achieved at the end of Year 11 are exceptionally high and students' progress from where they started is good. The school sets and reaches consistently challenging targets up to Year 11.

For a number of years students at the end of Year 9 have attained very high standards, especially in mathematics. This year saw a further improvement in the results achieved in English, which are higher than the other subjects. Results at GCSE in 2008 significantly improved on the previous year. The percentage of students achieving five or more GCSE grades from A* to C including English and mathematics was well above the national average.

In 2008 students did best in English, mathematics, business studies, religious education, geography and physical education (PE). Students performed less well in French and art and design. In the subjects most related to the school's specialist status, namely science, PE and BTEC sport, challenging targets were all exceeded.

Lower-attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally do better than both their peers and similar students nationally. Their progress is very good. The progress of students whose first language is not English is in line with expectation. There has been an increase in the number of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE, but the school recognises that the progress of high attainers is not as rapid as for others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school promotes successfully the good personal development and well-being of its students. This is outstanding in the sixth form. The fostering of links with schools in South Africa, Rwanda and Colombo are examples of how the school promotes strong cultural, moral and social

awareness. Students' awareness of healthy and safe lifestyles is good, with their participation in sports contributing very well to health and fitness. The school provides healthy options at lunchtime, although limited accommodation in the canteen leads to long queue times and some students report having to rush their meals. A good travel plan is having a positive impact and cycling is growing in popularity.

Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school, stemming from the positive and mature attitudes to learning and a real sense of pride in the school community. Students enjoy school and this is reflected in their very good attendance. The students make a good contribution to the school and wider community, and in the sixth form this is exemplary. Many students are strong role models and ambassadors for the school through, for instance, their coaching or mentoring roles in other schools. This contributes well to community cohesion, is beneficial to the pupils and boosts the confidence and self-esteem of the mentors. The school council plays an active role in school initiatives and is generally well supported by staff. However, students felt that they could contribute more with even greater staff support. Good guidance and support and the good curriculum equip students with the personal and learning skills to help them succeed in their future education, employment or training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. However, there are inconsistencies between lessons and subjects and some lessons are not as effective as the majority are. In the best lessons work is challenging, expectations are high and students make good progress. Work is well planned to meet the needs of all students. Good relationships and behaviour allow for effective collaborative and individual learning. Teachers focus precisely on raising achievement through accurate target-setting and students know how to improve the standard of their work. The managed learning environment, a system based on information and communication technology (ICT) that enables students to learn online, is used effectively both in the classroom and at home to facilitate and enrich learning.

In a minority of lessons pace is slow, objectives are unclear and expectations are low, leading to a lack of focus and occasionally to poor behaviour. Teachers tend to dominate these lessons. In a few lessons students do not know what their targets are, or how to meet them, and the work does not sufficiently meet their needs.

The provision for information and communication technology has improved, but in some subject areas it is not used sufficiently by students to enhance their learning. Video is used effectively in PE to show students how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned effectively to meet the students' capabilities and aspirations. School leaders have judiciously broadened the range of subjects available. Applied art, graphics and BTEC sports have been introduced in Key Stage 4 and there is an increasingly wide range of courses and qualifications offered in the sixth form. Links with local primary and secondary schools have enhanced provision in a variety of subjects. Collaboration with local colleges has led to the introduction of courses in motor vehicle engineering and electrical installation.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities contributes enormously to students' enjoyment. These include sport, music, drama and theatre visits. The school choir has been particularly successful in prestigious national competitions and has a well-deserved reputation at home and abroad. Specialist sports status has raised participation and achievement in sport, with a significant number of students taking part at national and international level in rugby, cricket, athletics, football and martial arts. It has also improved provision in mathematics, modern foreign languages, science and ICT through the successful promotion of sports-related projects.

Master classes are used effectively to challenge those identified as gifted and talented, while targeted learning and social programmes are used successfully to support those with learning difficulties. A well-organised work-related learning programme involving work experience and apprenticeships, through the many and varied business links, contributes significantly to the students' understanding of the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the positive comments from students, endorsed by parents, about the very good care and support they receive. This provides a secure foundation for students to thrive and achieve well. The school has effective procedures to manage behaviour and attendance and appropriate procedures for child protection and safe staff recruitment.

Pastoral care for all students is a strength. The high quality support for some more vulnerable students reflects the school's strongly inclusive philosophy. As one parent commented, 'They have turned my shy, hesitant child into a really confident boy.' The appointment of an inclusion coordinator, whose time is dedicated to being a 'champion' for the learners, has strengthened the school's already good provision and effective partnerships with external agencies. Year 7 students settle in well because of carefully planned transition arrangements.

The school has improved its systems to track and monitor students' progress and target its interventions. This helps staff to give good feedback to students that in turn leads to their improved achievement. However, the quality of this is not consistent. The academic guidance given in some lessons and through marking does not enable all students to know how to make progress at a faster rate.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders provide a clear direction and vision that focuses successfully on raising standards and achievement for all students. In particular, they have worked effectively with middle leaders through line management to evaluate better the areas on which they lead. There has been an increased focus on monitoring students' performance. In a few cases, however, the quality of this evaluation by middle leaders is not as rigorous as it should be.

Recognising that the previous meeting structure for subject and year leaders was not sufficiently effective, the school has recently created a number of school development groups for middle leaders. These groups have empowered those middle leaders and have increased their capacity to make improvements across the school, notably in the area of assessment and reporting. More effective use is also being made of assessment data and this has led to the setting of challenging targets and a sharper focus on the progress made by all students.

Senior leaders rightly consider community cohesion as a strength of the school. The recent appointments of a specialist schools coordinator and a partnership development manager have enhanced links with the local community. There are also well-established partnerships with other schools and external agencies. Recent examples of the school's positive work to help students better understand a broad range of needs include the development of Key Stage 3 materials to raise awareness of disability through art and the inaugural hosting of the 'parability challenge'.

The school has positive relationships with most parents and often surveys their opinions. However, parents are not always clear about the impact of any actions that are taken as a result of these questionnaires.

Governors are supportive of the school, offer appropriate challenge and have high aspirations for students.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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**

17 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The John Fisher School, Purley, CR8 3YP

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you for your warm welcome and the help that you provided to us during the inspection. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, looking at your work and taking time to discuss with you what you thought about the school. I should like to take this opportunity to share our findings with you.

The John Fisher School provides you with a good education and values equally your academic, personal and spiritual development. You are rightly proud of the school community to which you belong and it was clear how well you all get on with each other. You also told us how much you appreciated the support of your teachers, and your parents agreed. We were especially impressed by the range of clubs and activities you take part in, as well as the musical and sporting successes you achieve.

Results in 2008 were again very good, particularly those for five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Much of the teaching we saw was of a high quality and this helped you to make rapid progress. However, a few of the lessons were not as challenging as they might have been and you were not always sure what you needed to do to improve. Your headteacher and senior leaders are committed to improving even further and are taking the right actions to do so. There are two main things the school should focus on so that it can be even better in the future:

- improve the quality of those lessons which are not as challenging, in particular by making them more pacy and ensuring that you know what you need to do to improve your work
- continue to raise achievement in the sixth form, so that it matches consistently that achieved in the school overall.

You can help by ensuring that you are fully involved in your lessons, maintain your very good attendance and contribute to the school's continuing improvement through active participation in its many teams, activities and council forums.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Chris Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector