

# St John Fisher Catholic College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124461
<b>Local Authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	359677
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 December 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Miller

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	980
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	170
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Olszewski
<b>Headteacher</b>	Fionnuala Hegarty
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	Ashfields New Road Newcastle-Under-Lyme ST5 2SJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 615636
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<b>Email address</b>	office@sjfcc.net

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They visited 41 lessons and 34 teachers were seen. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They looked at pupils' work, and talked with many pupils informally during the inspection. School documents were scrutinised including policies, development planning, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, curriculum and safeguarding documents. Minutes of governing body meetings were examined, as well as the headteacher's reports to governors, local authority reports on the school and information provided for parents and carers. Inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 334 parents and carers, 47 members of staff and 160 Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils.

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

- How well is the school developing its systems for assessing pupils' learning and progress, particularly in lessons and through the use of marking?
- How well are developments to the school's curriculum helping to improve pupils' progress and raise their attainment?
- How effectively do the school's leaders monitor its provision through self-evaluation and improvement planning, in order to improve further pupils' attainment and progress?
- To what extent are the pupils' personal development and preparation for their future lives strengths of the school?

## Information about the school

This is an average-sized secondary school. As a Catholic school it takes its pupils from a wide catchment area; its social and cultural mix is more diverse than is typical for other secondary schools locally. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average, as is the number speaking English as an additional language. An average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average; most have either moderate or specific learning difficulties, or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is well below average. The school has achieved Staffordshire Dyslexia Friendly status, a Geography Quality Mark and the British Safety Council award for commitment to educating young people about safety in the workplace. It has achieved Humanities specialist school status relating to English, religious education and citizenship.

**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

This is a good school. Standards are above average in the main school and achievement is good. In 2010, Year 11 pupils attained average standards in GCSE examinations, but school data show that they made good progress against suitably demanding targets. Learning is good because, whatever their starting points, pupils are challenged well by good teaching. The pupils themselves show excellent attitudes to learning and this contributes in no small measure to their success and the high quality of working relationships seen throughout the school. At the end of Year 11 the majority of pupils continue in education, either in the sixth form or at the neighbouring further education college. There is good partnership between the establishments and a number of shared courses. This enables a balance between the school's more traditional curriculum and vocational courses offered by the college. Students make satisfactory progress in Years 12 and 13 to gain average standards in national examinations.

The key to the school's success lies in its outstanding features. Strengths in partnerships to ensure excellent provision for the care, safety and welfare of the pupils and sixth-form students are reflected in the high quality of their personal development. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly strong not only in terms of pupils' personal values but also in their appreciation of human endeavour and understanding of human frailty. Good teaching ensures the pupils want to learn and become involved actively in lessons; attendance is therefore high. The strong sense of community within the school is reflected in the pupils' good understanding of their responsibility as future citizens in broader national and international contexts. This results from the positive impact of the school's specialist status which includes citizenship. The school has proved successful overall in meeting its specialist status targets. It exceeds these in citizenship, broadly meets them for religious education and is improving in English where the gap between specific specialist targets and outcomes is closing gradually.

Good leadership and management, at all levels, ensure the school is accurate in its self-evaluation. It has a good understanding of what it does well and what needs to be improved further. Its capacity for further improvement is good. Planning is focused well on raising further pupils' standards and achievement, and particularly in the sixth form. Ongoing curriculum review is ensuring the planning necessary to increase breadth and challenge through the range of courses offered at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, this remains to be completed. Furthermore, as the curriculum develops, and the demands of courses change, grouping arrangements, which have served the school well in the past, are becoming insufficiently flexible to meet fully the demands of a number of subjects. Since its last inspection assessment systems have improved and a new marking policy has been introduced. There are examples of the excellent implementation of these approaches in lessons, but there are inconsistencies across the school. The tracking of the individual progress of each pupil with special educational needs and/or disabilities is

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effective and ensures their good progress. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of different groups of such pupils, according to the specific nature of their special needs and/or disabilities, is not undertaken in equal depth. School improvement planning also recognises that middle leaders across the school have insufficient time to meet together, outside their own departmental areas, to explore whole school priorities. While pastoral support for pupils is strong, productive use is not always made of registration time each morning to extend opportunities for both academic and personal development.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on pupils' attainment and achievement by the end of the Year 11, and ensure their learning and progress improves further in the sixth form by:
  - completing the current, ongoing review of its curriculum to ensure increased innovation and challenge in response to individual pupils' needs
  - completing the review of its grouping arrangements to ensure they are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all subjects and key stages.
- Develop fully the school's assessment systems by Summer 2011 to:
  - ensure the school's new marking policy and approaches to the use of assessment in lessons are applied consistently across the school
  - extend the good tracking of the progress of individual pupils with a special educational needs and/or disability to the broader monitoring of specific groups of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Develop the impact of middle leaders and form tutors from January 2011 by:
  - enabling middle leaders more time to plan together to ensure increased opportunities for pupils' learning and the development of their skills which cross subject boundaries
  - formalising and enhancing the role and responsibilities of form tutors in extending pupils' academic and personal development, especially during the morning registration period.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Attainment on entry to Year 7 is around the national average, although school data show this can vary from year to year. Standards in pupils' work and lessons seen are above average by Years 9 and 11, and pupils make good progress. Pupils' attitudes to their work, and attention to their teachers, show an admirable desire for learning. Pupils settle to their studies quickly and sensibly. There are good levels of cooperation and the quality of discussion work often shows a fine depth of maturity. The ways pupils are enabled to develop positive critical and analytical approaches often leads to thoughtful discussion concerning character or the use of language in English, or the interpretation of concepts such as 'neglect' in citizenship. It enables pupils to consider well demanding topics in history relating to the politics of the English Civil War, or issues of crime and punishment in the mediaeval period. It results in fun in learning, as in a science lesson where pupils

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learnt about electrical resistance by marching around a laboratory and noting the varying rate of their progress when faced with physical obstacles.

School tracking confirms the good progress made by individual pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Such pupils are confident and keen to succeed during lessons because they are given appropriate challenge and well-targeted support. Those with special gifts and/or talents also make good progress because staff are aware of their abilities and have suitably high expectations. Such approaches are underpinned by the inclusive nature of the school and its ethos. There is a well-regarded peer mentoring and buddy system through which pupils support each other very effectively. There are excellent examples of Year 11 pupils attracting world-wide attention for their campaign to lower the voting age to 16. This reflects the strength of the school's international links. The school council has been reinvigorated recently, but its influence is not yet embedded fully. Nevertheless, the experience of the democratic process shows the positive influence of the school's humanities specialism. Discussions with pupils show they know very well how to keep safe. This was illustrated well in a design and technology lesson where pupils carried out a choke test on young children's toys. Pupils understand and appreciate the importance of leading healthy lifestyles; pupils are helping the school to make good progress towards achieving healthy school status.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

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

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## How effective is the provision?

Strengths in teachers' subject knowledge and excellent working relationships are evident across the school. In the best lessons planning is careful, appropriately challenging and activities conducted at a brisk pace. Such lessons maintain effectively the pupils' involvement, motivation and interest. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the pupils' progress because they are briefed well and work intensively with specific pupils. There is some excellent assessment practice, but the use of questioning to check pupils' understanding is not used consistently effectively in all lessons or within subjects. The impact of the new marking policy is evident, but there are inconsistencies. In the best examples it is regular, celebrates what has been achieved and gives useful guidance on how to improve. However, some marking remains cursory, with comments and targets which refer to generic matters such as presentation of work, with limited specific advice as to how to improve.

The school has an effective programme for accelerating learning during Years 7 and 8. In Year 9 pupils have good opportunity to make an early start on GCSE work across a range of subjects. The school has developed good vocational provision including Diplomas and national courses which suit a wide range of learning styles because they focus on ongoing assessment. The curriculum supports well the personal and academic development of pupils across the school and a review of the curriculum is being undertaken to improve and integrate further the provision for pupils in Years 9 to 13.

Very effective systems have been developed through roles of the inclusion and well-being coordinators. There is excellent support from the lay chaplain. The school willingly goes that extra mile to ensure pupils do not fall by the wayside. There are outstanding arrangements to ensure the smooth transition from primary school, and the effective management of pupils and students joining the school from other institutions during the course of a year. The overall quality of the school's partnerships with families, outside agencies and providers of work related learning ensure the vast majority of pupils are prepared well for their future lives.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and deputy work together effectively as a team; each bring individual personal skills and qualities which benefit the school well. New assistant headteachers are contributing well to curriculum development, and an experienced assistant headteacher uses data effectively to monitor school performance. With this breadth of skill, the senior

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leadership team has an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. A new approach to support the monitoring of learning and teaching by middle leaders has been established this academic year. Heads of department have a clear understanding of their monitoring roles. Regular meetings between senior and middle leaders are being used effectively to resolve any issues identified from individual subject work scrutiny and lesson observations. Bringing this approach together more effectively to explore common findings, guide whole school development, and verify judgements to ensure accuracy, is the next step. The development of such systematic approaches to improvement is good. Inclusion is at the heart of the school's life and work, but there is more to do to sharpen the analysis of performance for some groups and to broaden the curriculum further to meet both individual pupils' needs and new education initiatives.

The governing body fulfils its role well. Although there are no direct links between governors and subjects, an effective committee structure and comprehensive reports from the headteacher ensure the governing body is well-informed. Governors are also active in the social life of the school in addition to bringing a wide range of personal and professional expertise to their work. They ensure pupils are kept safe, and safeguarding is exemplary. The individual support given to those pupils whose circumstances make them more vulnerable is noteworthy, as is the quality and extent of links with support agencies. The school goes that extra mile in helping to fund family support workers; this benefits not only the school but also its wider community. Such excellent contributions to community cohesion are shown through the school's analysis and actions reflecting its humanities status including citizenship.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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



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## Sixth form

Course retention and completion rates are high. Two thirds of students subsequently apply successfully for university places or other higher education courses; of the rest, almost all find work or apprenticeships. In this, the school plays a very important role in securing the students' future well-being. Care and guidance are excellent and much appreciated by the students. Working relationships are excellent because the students value their teachers and the advice and support they give. While standards at the end of Years 12 and 13 are overall in line with the national average, outcomes in terms of their personal development are strong. This is because students respond so positively to the opportunities provided for them to show initiative and take responsibility. They make a supportive contribution to the life of the school. Students exhibit a strong sense of community, which extends beyond the school gates. Sixth-formers serve as positive role models, display maturity in their behaviour and act responsibly towards younger pupils.

In many lessons good teaching and assessment are used effectively to promote student learning. Guidance is provided as to how students may improve their work and progress further. Nevertheless, while students' progress is monitored carefully, and additional support provided when necessary, progress in the sixth form remains satisfactory. The best teaching is assured, with strong subject knowledge and appropriate challenge. However, there remains an element of inconsistency. A few teachers have a tendency to lecture, which limits the students' active involvement in learning and opportunities for the assessment of their understanding through focused questioning. The essentially academic curriculum suits the aspirations of the majority of students. However, the curriculum does not yet mirror the range of progression routes offered in the main school.

The school is developing an approach to education in the sixth form which reflects the strong ethos that permeates its work. Leadership is good at motivating students and energising tutors, but this has still to have full impact in raising standards above average by Year 13. There is a focus on improving attainment through a new system for the monitoring of achievement and a real determination to develop further the school's provision. The school is undertaking exploratory work to ensure the future provision of Catholic Post-16 education, and working on plans to provide more permanent study, social and support facilities for its sixth form.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

A higher than average proportion of parents and carers returned the questionnaires.

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For most questions, the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing to each question was above average. This reflects overall good levels of satisfaction with the school. A few parents felt the school did not respond to their suggestions or concerns and 10% of responses to this question were left blank. School records show that the suggestions and concerns of parents, carers and pupils are taken seriously, and acted upon. A small minority feel the school does not deal sufficiently effectively with unacceptable behaviour. There are a few pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour consistently well. However, school records show such incidents have declined significantly over recent years. The inspection finds that excellent behaviour and the pupils' mature attitudes make a major contribution to their good learning and progress. A few parents and carers feel the school could do more to promote healthy lifestyles. The school is working actively to gain Healthy School status and to improve further opportunities for physical education and sport.

## 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 College 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 334 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 980 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	117	35	196	59	15	4	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	129	39	197	59	4	1	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	135	40	182	54	11	3	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	150	45	169	51	7	2	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	122	37	198	59	7	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	103	31	192	57	29	9	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	76	23	199	60	45	13	3	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)	102	31	201	60	18	5	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	99	30	212	63	14	4	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	103	31	179	54	32	10	9	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	70	21	201	60	24	7	7	2
The school is led and managed effectively	96	29	195	58	21	6	8	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	140	42	180	54	10	3	1	0

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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



13 December 2010

Dear Pupils and Students

**Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic College, Newcastle-Under-Lyme ST5 2SJ**

A variety of interesting quotations are to be found posted on the walls of the meeting room at your school. One of these is from the 19th Century English author, Samuel Butler: 'Every man's work is always a portrait of himself.' During the inspection you showed us portraits of yourselves which explain why yours is a good school. We thank you for the warmth of your welcome and the mature ways you responded to our questions. These are the things we found are best about your school.

Your school prepares you exceptionally well as future citizens.

Your behaviour and attitudes to your work are excellent.

You cooperate together very well and are prepared to take responsibility.

Attendance is high because you feel safe, want to attend and enjoy learning.

You make good progress during your years at the school.

The adults at your school take excellent care for your safety and welfare.

Your school works well with your families to help you learn.

You make a good contribution to the school and wider community.

You have good teachers who set you a very good example.

Your headteacher, governors and other staff lead your school well.

We have asked your headteacher and the other teachers to do three main things to help all of you make even better progress. First, to complete their review of the curriculum and the grouping arrangements within subjects to ensure they continue to meet your individual needs. Secondly, to ensure that their new approaches to marking and assessment are established consistently across the school. Finally, your teachers will be planning to develop further ways by which you can develop important skills which cross subject boundaries and how you can make improved use of the morning registration period to extend both your academic and personal skills.

There is a second quotation to which I would like to draw your attention. It is from Jonny Wilkinson, the rugby union international: 'If I tell myself I'm doing well, it will help me to do so.' You can help by continually reminding yourselves of this.

Yours sincerely

Michael Miller

Lead inspector

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