

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111392
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	363778
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Sue Sharkey

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Dave Pich
Headteacher	Mrs Marcella Armstrong
Date of previous school inspection	11 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons and the work of nine teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, pupils, representatives of the governing body and staff. The inspectors observed pupils' work and looked at the school's system for tracking their progress, safeguarding documents and key policies. Inspection questionnaires from 119 parents and carers, 13 school staff and 98 pupils were also taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether the school has thorough systems in place to raise attainment and improve achievement in writing in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Whether the curriculum for English and mathematics motivates both girls and boys.
- How teachers plan lessons so that pupils achieving higher levels are challenged.
- The effectiveness of monitoring carried out by leaders on the school's performance.
- Whether planning for the Early Years Foundation Stage enables full use of both the indoor and outdoor environment.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible to free school meals is above the national average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The school has the Artsmark Gold and the International School Award.

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 Catholic Primary School is a good school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is evident in their mature and sensitive approach to supporting one another and their participation in lessons and assemblies. Care, guidance and support for pupils are excellent and create a welcoming and supportive environment where pupils feel extremely safe. Links with a wide range of partners and the community are first class and bring considerable benefits to pupils' learning and personal development. Pupils are very keen to be involved with projects outside school and are proud of the important role they play through the school council in helping to improve the school.

Teaching, learning and the curriculum are of good quality. The school provides a rich learning environment in which pupils from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6 say they enjoy school. Reception children make good progress and this continues throughout the school. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 is above average in English and mathematics, reflecting good achievement. However, writing is not as strong as reading. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly good progress; they benefit from extra support or adaptations to tasks so that their needs are met fully.

Teachers use questions effectively to check pupils' learning and to help them to extend their language and skills. However, the marking of pupils' work, especially in writing, does not consistently help pupils to know what they have to do to improve their work. Pupils make good progress because the staff plan work well for all pupils, but there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills across the curriculum. A strength of the curriculum are the residential visits for Years 2, 5 and 6. These visits help pupils to become independent and to raise their awareness of different people's needs and life experiences. They contribute successfully to pupils' good preparation for their future life. Pupils have the opportunity to work outdoors which has been extremely well developed since the last inspection. The popular gardening club enables pupils to grow and enjoy their own vegetables and contributes to an excellent understanding of a healthy lifestyle.

Accurate self-evaluation based on effective monitoring has led to recent well-focused developments, such as those to the curriculum, which are successfully improving the school. A great sense of teamwork and a desire to continue to do better demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve achievement, particularly in writing, by:

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- ensuring marking and feedback consistently help pupils know how to improve their work
- providing pupils with more opportunities to write across the curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Throughout the school, pupils are enthusiastic learners. They enjoy lessons, behave well, are motivated and engaged. This enjoyment of learning and pupils' positive attitudes are a key factor in their above average attendance and good progress. During a Year 2 lesson, pupils were engrossed in writing words and sentences to describe an enormous fish or an island setting. They each used a thesaurus to seek new words to describe how shells felt in the sand and successfully extended their range of descriptive words. In another lesson, Year 6 pupils were tackling mathematical problems. They calculated the temperatures of different places in the world using negative as well as positive numbers. The teacher successfully extended this work by challenging some pupils to find average temperatures.

Overall, pupils enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are broadly in line with what is expected for their age, although their communication and number skills are often lower. This can vary from year to year. They make good progress so that when pupils leave school in Year 6, their attainment is above average in English and mathematics. There is some variation in the rate of pupils' learning, with progress accelerating in Years 5 and 6. Following a dip in English, particularly in writing, and in mathematics in 2010, the school has put a range of strategies in place to raise attainment and improve pupils' achievement. Recent assessment of pupils' progress indicates that these actions are proving to be successful and standards have returned to their previous level. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers, due to well-tailored support provided by teaching assistants.

Pupils say they feel extremely safe and secure because adults care for them and watch diligently during the day. Pupils' understanding of a healthy lifestyle is first class. From an early age they know how to eat healthily and they appreciate the many opportunities they have to take part in fitness activities. Members of the school council who are in Year 6 consider their role in monitoring healthy packed lunches as very important. Pupils are proud of their school and their involvement in the school and wider community is excellent. They take an active part in helping others, including regular fund raising to support local, national and international charities.

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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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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?

Strengths in teaching lie in the very good relationships staff have with their pupils, which help to ensure that pupils are motivated and have good attitudes to learning. Teachers often talk with pupils about how to improve their work, but do not always make sufficient comments in their books, particularly in writing, to inform pupils how to improve. Teaching is enhanced by welcoming, well-resourced classrooms, which are supportive to learning. Pupils work well together, particularly in pairs, and teachers use this approach well to aid discussion and stimulate learning. The work of teaching assistants is of a good quality. They are deployed effectively and have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

A good curriculum caters well for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Following a recent curriculum review, teachers now successfully thread English and mathematics throughout other subjects, although there remain missed opportunities for pupils to develop their writing across subjects. Visitors and visits to a wide range of localities play an excellent part in enriching the imaginative curriculum for pupils. A wide range of additional activities after school offer pupils the chance to add to their skills and interests.

A major strength of the school is the excellent quality of care, guidance and support it provides. Staff know pupils very well, their commitment to these pupils is first class and is backed up by well-organised systems and procedures. Staff work extremely well with outside agencies to provide help for pupils' social and emotional needs and to ensure that

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those who are potentially vulnerable due to their circumstances receive support tailored to their individual needs. Arrangements when children commence school are admirable and Year 6 pupils say that teachers are helping them well to prepare for secondary school. Pupils are provided with detailed advice and information to help them make wise choices in the future.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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 headteacher has an accurate view of provision in the school and provides good leadership. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher, staff and the governing body who are all fully aware of the schools' strengths and weaknesses. All have a clear vision for the school and support the drive to improve. Subject leaders monitor aspects of teaching and learning and through effective analysis of pupils' progress identify priorities to raise attainment in their subjects. The school successfully promotes equal opportunities and avoids discrimination, ensuring there is no significant underachievement by any group of pupils. The effective governing body is experienced, well-informed and its members are in school regularly, sharing their skills and providing helpful support to staff. The governing body challenges school leaders appropriately and ensures that child protection and safeguarding procedures are good in all aspects of the school's practice.

The school promotes community cohesion effectively because it has good links with other schools locally and with the wider community. Action plans show that the school is aware that it needs to build and extend links for pupils to explore the diverse cultures that characterise contemporary Britain. The school is extremely committed to working in partnership with other schools and organisations. These strong links enable leaders to work closely together for support, as well as providing a wide range of opportunities to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The school has good relationships with parents and carers, who are very appreciative of the school's provision of well-run breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs. It provides good value for money.

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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	1
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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, giving children a commendable start in their personal, social and emotional development. Children quickly settle into the Reception class because of the quality of care and support they receive, as well as the good partnerships with parents and carers and good induction processes. Children soon develop good relationships; they work well together, are industrious and have positive attitudes to learning. As a result of good progress by the start of Year 1 most children have reached the expected levels of knowledge, skills and understanding for their age except in reading, writing and calculations, which are often lower. Children gain good social skills as they interact with one another, behave well and develop increasing levels of independence. Stimulating activities are well chosen and children have a wide range of opportunities to explore the world around them both indoors and outdoors.

Adults present children with problems to solve in practical ways. For example, they enjoy making cakes, whilst having to work out how many are needed for tables of guests at a wedding. Children are proud to show off their cakes for this special occasion. Teaching is good and effective use is made of assessment to identify what children need to do next. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because early assessment highlights their needs and good teaching assistant support is provided. The outdoor area is of a high standard and is used imaginatively to provide a good level of challenge and motivation. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are effective. Careful monitoring ensures that planning and provision reflect an understanding of how young children learn. Welfare is good and there are clear priorities to continue to improve.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Over half of parents and carers returned the questionnaires. All were positive about the way the school cares for and educates their children. They feel that their children enjoy school, are kept safe and are pleased with their children's progress. Some parents and carers took time to add comments to the questionnaire they returned, many to reinforce the strength of their positive views. A very small minority of parents and carers raised concerns and these were looked into during the inspection.

Some parents and carers were concerned about how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and feel that the school does not take account of their suggestions and concerns. The inspectors investigated these during the course of the inspection and found that behaviour is well managed by staff and that pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. The school seeks the views of parents and carers in a variety of ways including through questionnaires sent to them twice a year. As a result of responses, the school has made changes and these are fed back to parents and carers who also have the opportunity to make written comments, in a book kept in the school entrance.

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 Primary 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 119 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 200 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	54	54	45	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	59	50	54	45	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	45	38	69	58	3	3	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	35	69	58	5	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	47	39	64	54	3	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	36	69	58	4	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	38	72	61	1	1	0	0
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)	35	29	71	60	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	31	70	59	3	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	29	61	51	8	7	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	24	67	56	13	11	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	33	28	67	56	4	3	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	46	39	63	53	5	4	1	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



3 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Widnes, WA8 0BW

Thank you for making the inspectors welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and watching you learn in lessons. It was good to learn that you feel very safe and that you have an excellent understanding of keeping healthy. We were very impressed with Year 6 school council members who check to see that packed lunches are healthy. Your behaviour is good and well done for raising money for various charities. All the jobs you do in and around school help the school enormously but we were also impressed with all you do outside school to help others. Your headteacher and teachers are very good at working with other teachers in other schools as well as other groups of people. This helps you to develop lots of skills as you grow up. Overall, we found that your school provides you with a good education and the work that you do in school is good.

There are two things that I have asked the school to do to help to make it better. First, for teachers to mark your work differently so that they add comments to let you know what you need to learn next, particularly in your writing; and second, to make sure you get more opportunities to practise your writing in lots of different subjects.

I was pleased that Year 6 invited me to watch their dance. It is not easy to learn all the steps and move at the right time. You were excellent and I was very impressed with the way you danced so well with your partners. I am not surprised you were asked to perform this in public. We were also impressed with how well you care for each other and we could see in assemblies that you are really pleased when presentations are made to your friends.

Congratulations on all you do to help the school. We were really delighted that you said that you enjoy coming to school. Remember to always do your best and help your teachers. Thank you for helping us and for being so polite.

Best wishes

Sue Sharkey

Lead Inspector

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