

# St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118908
<b>Local Authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	363890
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Metham HMI

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>	Comprehensive
<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>	989
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Clough
<b>Headteacher</b>	Denise Shepherd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 May 2010
<b>School address</b>	Ordnance Street Chatham ME4 6SG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 335757
<b>Fax number</b>	01634 335833
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@st-johnfisher.medway.org.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 27 lessons, observing 27 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. They evaluated students' attainment over three years, schemes of work, policies, the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings and reports from the local authority. They considered 126 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 80 responses to the students' questionnaire and 44 responses from staff.

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

- How accurately leaders and managers evaluate the school's strengths and areas for improvement and how effectively this shapes planning.
- The strategies in place to raise standards in core subjects, particularly mathematics, and their effectiveness.
- How successfully senior leaders and those with subject responsibilities are developing and embedding effective teaching and the use of assessment across all departments.
- The impact of recent curriculum development in each key stage, including the sixth form. The impact of recent curriculum development in each key stage, including the sixth form.

## Information about the school

St John Fisher is an ethnically diverse, Catholic comprehensive school of average size in an area with selective education. Since January 2010, it has been supported by a partner school and its executive principal, who is a national leader of education. Elements of the sixth form provision are shared. The formal partnership will change in September 2011 when a substantive headteacher for St John Fisher takes up her post. In addition to the main site, where students from Year 9 to Year 13 are based, there is separate provision for Years 7 and 8 about a mile away.

Nearly half of the students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest of these groups being White Other, with the remainder mainly of Black or Black African heritages. One in about every four students speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of students joining or leaving the school part way through their education is high. A slightly higher than average proportion of students are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Predominantly these students have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social development needs.

At the previous inspection, the school was given a notice to improve.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The executive principal and senior leaders are vigorously laying down extensive and well-planned foundations for the continuing improvement of this now satisfactory school. Their ambitious and persuasive vision for its evolution into 'a centre of applied excellence' is based on detailed and accurate evaluation of current strengths and areas for development. The governing body represents a very useful range of relevant expertise, which enables it to challenge the school's leaders constructively as well as offer timely support. Decisive action has been taken to tackle weaknesses in teaching and to develop a curriculum that is better attuned to students' abilities and interests. The combination of rigorous monitoring, well-managed staff training and individual coaching is increasing the proportion of good teaching. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

Following at least three years of underachievement, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is still low but there is evidence of students' satisfactory and improving progress. Detailed information about students' attainment and progress is now used more effectively to respond promptly to underachievement or the stalling of progress. Intensive support from the partner school and interventions such as booster and revision classes and the mentoring of individual students are making a positive difference. The impact can be seen in students' recent work and in results gained by those who took GCSE English, mathematics and a number of vocational subjects early in this academic year. Progress in mathematics is still slower than in English. Most students with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress as well as their contemporaries and many of those who speak English as an additional language do better.

The quality of teaching is still uneven but good practice is becoming more widespread. Students commented on the improvement: 'Our education has come up a lot since the start of the year.' Lesson plans set out clearly what students are expected to learn, identify individual needs and incorporate opportunities to check and reinforce students' understanding. In nearly half of the lessons observed, plans were translated into effective teaching and learning. Teachers were knowledgeable and enthusiastic, students worked well together and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities were sensitively and successfully supported by teaching assistants so that they progressed as well as others. On occasion, however, teachers spent too long on explanations, expectations were not high enough to stretch the more able and the time allowed for tasks did not match students' concentration spans or rate of working. Question and answer sessions checked basic levels of recall or understanding but did not always extend students' learning by encouraging independent thinking and creative approaches. While there are examples of good practice, marking does not consistently combine encouragement with guidance on

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how students can improve. There is little evidence that students reflect on and respond to corrections and suggestions.

From Year 9 onwards, students have a choice of vocational and academic pathways. A greater choice of vocational and applied courses, with much of the assessment through practical work and projects, is giving students the confidence and motivation to work towards higher level qualifications. More are choosing to stay on into the sixth form. Attainment at the end of Year 12 has been low, but is improving, and is average in Year 13, as recent A-level results confirm. Students feel well supported by their teachers and tutors, and many go on to higher education or further training. As in the rest of the school, the quality of teaching in the sixth form is uneven. The best is engaging, authoritative and challenging. In less effective lessons, however, students are not prompted to be independent and analytical in their thinking and approach.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Improve students' attainment and accelerate their progress, particularly in mathematics, by:
  - embedding approaches to assessment and marking that consistently help students to identify weaknesses and to develop skills that they can apply confidently in different contexts
  - developing students' ability to interpret questions and work out solutions independently.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
  - ensuring a more consistent matching of expectation and approach to students' needs and learning styles.
- Build on recent improvements in sixth-form attainment and progress by:
  - ensuring that consistently high expectations, effective questioning and challenging tasks prompt students to be more reflective and independent.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

In this area with selective education, the proportion of high-attaining students entering the school is very small and many students arrive with low prior attainment.

Low attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 reflects the legacy of recent underachievement but there are reliable signs of improvement in some subjects. Two thirds of students in Year 11 made the progress in English predicted on the basis of their Year 6 attainments, but fewer than half did so in mathematics. When challenged to question and evaluate ideas, students are very responsive. In a Year 10 philosophy and ethics lesson, for example, there was a buzz of interest as students worked in small groups to construct an argument about the likely attitude of figures such as Aristotle and Kant to the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sport. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to individual tuition and small-group teaching, as do those still in

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the early stages of English acquisition, and many make better progress than their contemporaries. More- able students are benefiting from the partnership with a high-achieving school and opportunities offered by the accelerated curriculum. Overall, students' progress is now satisfactory.

Most students enjoy school. They feel very safe, behave well, treat each other and adults with respect and care, and willingly take on responsibilities in the school and the wider community. They know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Many participate in sport. Attendance for all but a very small number of the most vulnerable students is high. Students develop a useful range of personal skills and qualities, and benefit from opportunities for work-related learning. Limited literacy and numeracy skills, however, currently inhibit their otherwise effective preparation for adult life. The school's pervasive ethos of mutual respect and tolerance underpins students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is reinforced effectively through assemblies, the tutor programme and the curriculum.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</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>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</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

## How effective is the provision?

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of inadequate teaching has reduced significantly. Many teachers now encourage students to play an active part in lessons, through group work, peer review and presentations to the class. This is making a positive difference in areas previously causing concern. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, for

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example, calculations put on the interactive whiteboard by a student stimulated lively and productive discussion, enabling the class as a whole to identify shared misconceptions and explore approaches to the problem being worked on. Students recognise that more is expected of them and feel that they are rising to the challenge; as a Year 8 student remarked, 'The teachers are pushing us hard and we're happy they are.'

The curriculum is steadily evolving to meet the needs of all students. In Key Stage 4, options range from the foundation strand, with an emphasis on functional skills and work-related learning, to the accelerated curriculum that enables able students to take GCSE examinations early. BTEC courses and applied subjects are successfully motivating students less well served by more traditional courses and styles of assessment. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from small group and individual teaching and in-class support. They are successfully encouraged to have high expectations; two thirds of the students on the school action programme, for example, achieved five or more A\* to C GCSE grades. Students appreciate the school's busy and varied programme of extra-curricular activities. Well-attended booster classes and revision sessions reinforce curriculum work.

Greatly improved behaviour and rising attainment reflect the quality of care, guidance and support given. The aptly named Turnaround Centre provides carefully managed support for students at risk of exclusion so that they cope more successfully with school life. Constructive liaison with external agencies complements in-school provision. Pastoral care and academic guidance are well integrated, ensuring that each student's progress is carefully tracked and interventions put in place promptly when needed.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<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>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The readiness of the school's leaders, including governors to respond decisively when something is not working well is a key factor in driving improvement; bringing the sixth form onto the main site and giving Years 7 and 8 their own provision is a case in point. Sixth formers now play a more active role in the school while the youngest students and their families find transition from primary school easier. A comment from a Year 7 parent sums up the prevailing view: 'The staff have given her responsibilities and praise, which has made her very confident and mature within this first year.' Seeing that the curriculum was inhibiting progress, school leaders introduced changes that are now meeting the needs of all groups. The school's values and traditions actively promote equality of opportunity and esteem. While not all groups currently progress at the same rate, steps to close the gaps are having a positive impact. Procedures to ensure students' safety and

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well-being are thorough and implemented well. Expert attention has been paid, for example, to improving site security. Partnerships with local schools and colleges usefully extend students' options.

Although the quality of teaching and assessment is still uneven, challenging expectations, strong line management, systematic monitoring and carefully targeted professional development are embedding good practice more widely. The annual budget is designed to meet curriculum priorities and day-to-day financial management is efficient, ensuring satisfactory value for money. Efforts to engage parents and carers in their children's education are beginning to have an impact; attendance at recent options and induction events has been strong.

The sense of community that runs through this ethnically diverse school presents a very positive model to students of what multicultural Britain can be. Through the curriculum and through the culture and experiences brought by those arriving from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, students develop an appreciation of community cohesion on a global scale.

*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	3
<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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Sixth form

The sixth form has increased in popularity and attendance is good. While results in AS-level examinations are low, the proportion gaining grades A\* to E at A level is broadly average and students' progress is in line with expectations based on their prior attainment. Results for the few who take intermediate level and vocational qualifications are high. By taking on leadership roles and contributing to activities within both the school and the wider community, students develop useful skills and act as positive role models for younger students.



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With strong support from the partner school, new leadership and changes to management are driving improvement. A strong focus on strengthening teaching and learning, based on self-critical review and agreed action, is increasing pace and challenge in lessons but students are not always prompted to develop independent learning skills and to think for themselves. The introduction of more vocational courses is improving students' motivation and attainment. Work to improve the breadth of enrichment activities is underway and the personal, social and health education curriculum covers a wide range of useful topics such as managing finance and making higher education choices.

*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	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

Only a small proportion of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Most of these expressed confidence in the school's leadership and were happy with their children's school experience. Chief concerns were about communication between the school and home and about the lack of continuity and the unevenness in quality in the teaching of some subjects, especially mathematics. Inspection evidence largely supported these views.

## 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 Comprehensive 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 inspectors received 126 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 989 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	25	74	59	15	12	5	4
The school keeps my child safe	30	24	85	67	7	6	3	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	20	16	71	56	28	22	6	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	21	67	53	24	19	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	22	17	77	61	22	17	4	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	17	67	53	27	21	5	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	17	72	57	26	21	4	3
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)	26	21	75	60	15	12	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	18	73	58	25	20	4	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	21	69	55	18	14	11	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	13	72	57	22	17	7	6
The school is led and managed effectively	22	17	82	65	10	8	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	23	71	56	20	16	4	3

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](http://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"><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.**



8 July 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School, Chatham ME4 6SG**

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when the inspection team visited your school recently. We agree with you that the school gives you a satisfactory education and that it is improving.

We found that you are now making satisfactory progress, although levels of attainment are below average. The results gained by those of you who took GCSEs early this year are encouraging. We could see that you are keen to learn, work well together and are happy to share your ideas with others and to accept their assessment of your work. It is good to know that you feel safe and are confident that any difficulties will be quickly and effectively dealt with. Your school has a very strong set of values, which you put into practice. You treat each other with consideration and are happy to take on responsibility for others, both within the school and in the wider community. You are well cared for by teachers, tutors and support staff.

To help your school go from strength to strength, we have asked the executive principal to make sure that:

- everyone who teaches you responds to the different ways in which you learn and challenges you to do better - even those of you who are already doing well are capable of thinking and solving problems more creatively and independently
- your teachers always make it clear how you can improve your work and develop skills, especially in mathematics, that you can then use confidently in a range of situations
- those of you in the sixth form are encouraged to take more responsibility for your own learning through independent enquiry and argument.

You can all help by setting yourself ambitious goals and working hard to reach them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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