

St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School

Ordnance Street, Chatham, ME4 6SG

Inspection dates

19–20 March 2013

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3 |
| | This inspection: | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and the leadership team are passionate about driving up standards at the school. They work hard to bring about rapid and sustainable improvements that benefit students. They have high expectations of themselves and others and lead by example.
- The governing body provides impressive levels of support and challenge to leaders. Together with the Principal of St Paul's Academy, it has supported the school's leadership team to make significant improvements since the last inspection.
- All groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language and those who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding), make good progress.
- Systems for supporting students who need more help are of a high quality.
- Students increasingly make good progress from low starting points. Their GCSE results at the end of Year 11 have improved every year since 2010. The gap between the school's examination results and those of all other schools is closing rapidly.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve good results in a variety of subjects. More students are choosing to stay at the school to study in the sixth form.
- Most teaching and learning are good and improving rapidly across the school. Teachers have benefited from a planned programme of support, professional feedback and training opportunities.
- Behaviour in and out of lessons is good. Students attend regularly. They are proud of their own achievements and appreciate the improvements that have been made.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While some students, both within groups and across subjects, make outstanding progress, this proportion is not high enough.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- More-able students are not always challenged to extend their learning in some lessons.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons or part lessons taught by 34 teachers. Fifteen of these observations were conducted jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Principal of the partner school, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 32 responses to the on-line Parent View survey received during the inspection. Responses to the school’s surveys of parental opinion were also taken into consideration.
- Inspectors reviewed the 56 staff questionnaires returned during the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, scrutinised information about students’ achievement, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school’s work.

Inspection team

Lesley Cox, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

George Rayner

Additional Inspector

Tracy Luke

Additional Inspector

David Wolfson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St John Fisher is a Catholic comprehensive school with a sixth form. It is of average size in an area with selective education.
- The current headteacher took up her post in September 2011.
- The school works closely with St Paul's Academy, Greenwich, London. Its Principal works at St John Fisher for one and a half days a week. This is part of a long-standing agreement between the two governing bodies and the Diocese of Southwark.
- The school is based at two sites. Students from Year 9 to Year 13 are based at the main site. There is a separate provision for Years 7 and 8 a short distance away.
- Nearly half of the students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest of these groups being from Eastern European and Black African heritages. This proportion is double the national average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs and supported through school action is higher than average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above average.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Three students in Key Stage 4 currently attend courses offered by Octopus Opportunities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve in lessons, including the more able
 - challenge all students to raise the level of their thinking by asking questions that require them to think more deeply and investigate in more detail
 - provide feedback to students throughout lessons about how well they are doing and what the next steps are for improvement
 - provide written comments that encourage students to review and improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students arrive in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are significantly below those seen in most secondary schools. Throughout their time at the school, students' academic progress improves quickly. In 2011 and 2012, the proportion of students who attained five A* to C grades in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, at the end of Year 11 was still below those of other schools nationally but the gap is closing. Predicted outcomes for current Year 11 students indicate that they will be broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of students who attained five GCSEs of grade C or above was higher and students are making progress at a much faster rate than that seen nationally.
- Early entry for all students in the GCSE examinations in English and mathematics has proved to be successful in raising achievement. Students' levels of engagement improve and teachers provide targeted support for students who retake the examinations in the summer term.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs and students who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to others. This is due to careful tracking that ensures they are making sufficient progress, together with the high level of support they receive within lessons.
- Students benefit from a school-wide focus on improving students' literacy and numeracy standards. This can be seen in the rapidly improving reading, writing and communication skills in Years 7 and 8. The school has established a 'global classroom' with specialist staff and resources within the lower school to ensure that high levels of literacy and language support can be offered. Students in Year 7, who are part of the catch-up programme for improving literacy and numeracy skills, are making accelerated rates of progress.
- Students supported by the pupil premium make good progress from their starting points. The gap between their performance in GCSE examinations in English and mathematics and the attainment of other students is small and reducing. In 2012, the gap in mathematics was less than a quarter of a GCSE grade, while in English it was half of a GCSE grade.
- The progress of the very small number of students who attend alternative provision away from the school is monitored carefully. They are offered a full timetable of activities that promote their engagement.
- Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average for AS- and A-level courses. Students make good progress from their starting points and standards and success rates have risen since the last inspection. Students' achievement compares favourably with national performance indicators. Progress in applied learning courses is particularly strong and a higher number of students are achieving the top grades. Students are less successful in AS-level courses compared with A-level courses and there are still some inconsistencies in achievement across different subjects. The school has correctly targeted these areas for improvement.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most subjects and in the sixth form is typically good and in a few cases outstanding. However, there are still variations and not all teaching is at the level of the very best.
- Most lessons are planned well and take account of students' different learning and support needs. Teachers set ambitious targets and help students to understand what they need to do next to improve. They have high expectations and their enthusiasm for their subject means that students remain engaged, making good levels of progress over time. Rates of progress are carefully monitored and teachers use this information well to plan further learning opportunities.
- In some less effective lessons, more-able students are not fully challenged because teaching activities limit opportunities for wider discussions and the development of higher-level questioning skills.
- The quality of marking and feedback is variable and teachers sometimes offer encouragement

without providing specific guidance on how to improve.

- Teachers support the progress of students who require additional help through targeted interventions from learning support assistants in lessons. This ensures that disabled students and those with special educational needs make the full amount of progress they are capable of.
- Some students, who speak little or no English on arrival at the school, go on to make rapid progress and quickly make up any gaps in their learning. This is due to the effective support they receive from specialist staff employed by the school.
- A strong whole-school focus on improving students' literacy and numeracy levels has led to all teachers providing opportunities for improving speaking and listening, reading, writing and calculation skills in their lessons. In some Years 7 and 8 lessons, this includes teaching letters and sounds (phonics) to help students learn to read more fluently.
- Teachers appreciate the support they have been given by visiting staff from St Paul's Academy. Some have used the coaching and modelling opportunities provided to improve their own skills. Teachers are now confident that they are assessing students' work accurately and can correctly predict levels of attainment and progress over time.
- Parents consider that teaching standards are mostly good and students recognise that improvements in teaching mean that they are now learning more in their lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students generally have positive attitudes to learning and disruptions to lessons are rare. This is because they treat each other and adults with cheerful courtesy and respect. Students are keen to do well and for the school to be seen in a more positive light by the local community. They say that behaviour across the school is 'much better now'.
- The school has clear expectations of students' behaviour, which are consistently applied by all staff. For the most part, students abide by these and have enthusiastically engaged with the new rewards and incentive scheme recently introduced. New systems for monitoring the behaviour of every student have enabled tutors and year leaders to recognise improvements in behaviour and plan further intervention strategies more quickly.
- The school provides support for students with more challenging behaviours in the 'Turnaround' room. This provides them with a safe place and skilled staff who address their concerns and quickly re-engage them with their learning. Students value this support and it has made a significant difference to the way that some are now achieving at the school.
- Exclusions are high compared with other schools but are reducing as the new support systems and the rewards scheme have an effect. Attendance for all year groups, including the sixth form, is above the national average. An increasing number of students are coming to school earlier and staying later to take advantage of the extended day.
- Students understand about different types of bullying. They say that incidents of bullying or racist abuse are rare and when they do happen, they are fully investigated. They feel safe and know where to go for support should they need it.
- The school promotes opportunities for students to take on leadership responsibilities whenever possible. Designated roles, such as peer learning mentors, allow older students to make a significant contribution in supporting the academic and emotional well-being of younger students at the school.
- Most parents justifiably feel that behaviour is well managed.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has a strong senior leadership team, which shares a commitment to drive up standards and raise students' aspirations. It has an accurate view of what the school's strengths and weaknesses are and plans for improvement correctly identify the work that still needs to be

completed.

- Rigorous monitoring of teachers' performance links closely to support and further training opportunities. Teachers are held to account in line with the national standards and more formal procedures are used if they fail to improve. Teachers are supported and encouraged by members of the wider leadership team who are themselves good teachers. The impact of this support can be seen in the increasing amount of teaching that is good or better.
 - The school actively promotes the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through the numerous enrichment activities offered at the start and end of each school day and the ethos that underpins the whole school. Although provision is good across the school, teachers do not always plan for this in lessons.
 - Systems for tracking students' achievement and assessments are now well established and accessible to all staff. Leaders and managers quickly identify when students are not making the levels of progress they should be and plan additional support. Gaps in the standards reached and progress made by different groups are small and students' achievement is steadily improving.
 - The effective use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funds are helping to accelerate the progress of more vulnerable students. This is through the provision of smaller class sizes, specialist teaching and support staff, the provision of breakfast and a longer school day.
 - The curriculum provides an appropriate balance of academic, practical and vocational subjects that match the needs and abilities of students. Students and their parents receive clear information, advice and guidance to help them with their choice of curriculum pathway. This supports their improving rates of achievement and progression routes into the sixth form. In 2012 all students had an education, employment or training placement when they left the school. The majority of students who leave the sixth form go on to further study at university.
 - Arrangements for keeping students safe are good. The school uses safer recruitment procedures, provides child protection training and carries out appropriate health and safety checks.
 - The headteacher has successfully improved links with parents and the wider school community, as shown by the positive views expressed by parents and staff. They feel that the school is well led.
 - The local authority, together with St Paul's Academy, has worked alongside school leaders to support their ambitious plans for improvement.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed, knows what is happening in the school and how well it is doing compared with other schools. Members of the governing body have successfully steered the school through a period of considerable uncertainty and have provided high-quality support to enable school leaders to meet the challenges they faced. They make regular visits to the school and are knowledgeable about current students' achievement and performance data. Information on the quality of teaching is shared with the governing body so that they can link this to managing performance and pay progression for teachers. They make informed decisions about how to spend the pupil premium and check that this is having an impact on raising the achievement of eligible students. They have ensured that the school's financial position has improved, and the budget will carry forward a surplus this year. They bring to the governing body a range of skills, which enables them to support and challenge school leaders to achieve the significant improvements that have been made.
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What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 118908 |
| Local authority | Medway |
| Inspection number | 405824 |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 897 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 110 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Maureen Pearson |
| Headteacher | Catherine Burnett |
| Date of previous school inspection | 6–7 July 2011 |
| Telephone number | 01634 335757 |
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