

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

Hazelmere Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 9RW

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 November 2024

Outcome

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Patricia O'Donnell. This school is part of All Saints Catholic Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Stephen Wheatley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Anthony Leahy. The executive headteacher is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils come to school happily each day. They are eager to learn and have very positive attitudes to school life. The many pupils who arrive from other countries are quickly welcomed. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported to learn well. The school has high expectations for every pupil, whatever their starting point. Pupils rise to these expectations and achieve well across the curriculum.

St John Fisher is a caring school, where the 'behaviour bees' of 'be ready, be respectful, be safe' guide pupils to behave well. Pupils are friendly and polite. They respect each other, the adults and the culture of learning that pervades the school.

Pupils develop a sense of responsibility and leadership skills through roles such as librarians, school chaplains or house captains. School councillors are elected from the Reception Year through to Year 6. They engage in fundraising activities and school improvement projects. This gives them a taste of democracy in action.

Themed weeks, trips and workshops enrich pupils' learning. There is a wealth of places of interest nearby for pupils to visit. For example, trips to a local cathedral, museum and theatre help to bring learning to life and provide memorable experiences for pupils.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum is carefully planned. It sets out clearly what pupils should learn and the sequence of learning. This means that teachers know what to teach and when to teach it. Consequently, pupils build their knowledge progressively over time. The curriculum specifies the vocabulary that must be taught in each subject. This supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and pupils who are in the early stages of learning English, particularly well.

The early years curriculum prepares children effectively for later learning. In mathematics, for example, through a number hunt, and a matching game, children in the Reception Year learn about numbers to ten. They practise finding 'one more than' and 'one less than'. Children learn about the past, through historical figures such as Florence Nightingale and Guy Fawkes. This prepares them well for history in key stage 1.

The school promotes a love of reading. Pupils earn recognition and rewards for being 'star readers'. They read regularly in and out of school. Throughout the school, pupils in the early stages of reading have daily phonics lessons. Skilled adults help them to learn the letters and sounds they need to become confident and fluent readers. Sometimes, this involves providing effective, targeted help for pupils who need it.

The school's ambition is for more pupils to achieve highly. To this end, it has systems for reviewing and refining the curriculum, and for supporting teachers to deliver it well. Curriculum leaders check how well the curriculum is working. They make improvements to the curriculum where these are needed. Teachers are skilled at using questioning to identify misconceptions. They adjust their teaching to address these. The school identifies pupils with SEND promptly. Teachers adapt lessons and support these pupils to be successful.

In some subjects, the curriculum is not supporting pupils' learning as well as it could. This is because the systems for checking how well the curriculum is working, and for making improvements, are not as well developed. For example, the school has amended the English curriculum to improve pupils' writing. In English, pupils write at length often, developing their writing skills and stamina. However, in other subjects, pupils do not have regular opportunities to practise their writing skills. This means pupils do not achieve as highly in writing as they could.

There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils are attentive in lessons and move around the school sensibly. They learn the school's routines for behaviour from the moment they join the Reception class. Adults are fair and consistent with their occasional reminders about behaviour expectations.

The school's diverse community provides a rich source of learning about other cultures. Pupils learn to be outward looking and tolerant. They learn about different religions and they appreciate that people can have different beliefs and still get along well. Pupils learn about personal safety, both online and offline, for example in a series of lessons delivered

by police officers. Pupils have high aspirations for their future careers. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governors and trust leaders know the school's strengths and next steps. Leaders are highly reflective and focused on improving the school further. They support staff with training and networking opportunities. Staff feel valued. They are committed to the school and the trust's vision of a high-quality education for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's systems and processes for checking how well the curriculum is working are less well developed in some subjects. Consequently, in those subjects, the curriculum does not support pupils' learning as well as it does in others. The school and trust should ensure that the systems that lead to curriculum improvements are used consistently well, so that the curriculum in all subject areas supports pupils to achieve the school's high expectations.
- The standard of pupils' writing in subjects other than English is variable. Teachers do not always give pupils opportunities to apply their writing skills in subjects such as history, geography and science. As a result, pupils do not regularly get the writing practice they need to achieve the school and trust's high ambitions for them. The school and trust should ensure that teachers provide pupils with more writing opportunities, to apply their skills across the curriculum, so that pupils achieve as well as they can.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the

date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St John Fisher Roman Catholic Primary School, to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148990
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345555
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	144
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Anthony Leahy
CEO of the trust	Stephen Wheatley
Executive headteacher	Patricia O'Donnell
Website	www.sjfisher.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust. It converted to become an academy and joined the trust in April 2022.
- The executive headteacher joined the school in September 2018.
- The school has a religious character. Its last inspection under section 48 of the education act was in October 2023 and the next section 48 inspection is due five years from that date.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with a range of leaders, including the executive headteacher and deputy headteacher. She met with the chair of the trust and the CEO, and governors, including the chair of governors. She also met with the school's improvement partner from the local authority.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work and listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector reviewed a range of school documentation and policies. These included the school improvement plan and minutes of governing body meetings.
- The inspector took account of responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and the free-text responses. She also reviewed responses to the staff and pupil surveys and spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Caroline Crozier, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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