



# Ss John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 105531  
**Local Authority** Manchester  
**Inspection number** 287250  
**Inspection dates** 21–22 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Joe Peacock

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Woodhouse Lane
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Benchill
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11		Manchester M22 9NW
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 9983422
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	320	<b>Fax number</b>	0161 9455616
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Marie Greenhalgh
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Mulcahy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 October 2001		

<b>Age group</b> 3–11	<b>Inspection dates</b> 21–22 February 2007	<b>Inspection number</b> 287250
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This larger than average school, is located in the middle of one of Europe's biggest housing association-owned estates in South Manchester. The number of pupils from minority ethnic families, predominantly Indian, has increased significantly in the past two years, accounting for a third of all pupils. Most of these pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average and the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has recently gained a number of nationally recognised awards, such as Inclusion Gold and Investors in People.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which provides excellent value for money. It has been likened to an oasis in a harsh environment, somewhere welcoming and safe. The level of care, support and guidance is outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to achieve their goals and dream of who they may become. The headteacher has been the inspiration and driving force, creating the very special family atmosphere that exists in school today. Pupils are very proud of their school and its considerable achievements. The choir, for example, has performed songs in Italian, Latin and English to celebrities and to two Prime Ministers. Visitors constantly stream to the school to see for themselves why it is so good and to take away ideas.

Excellent relationships exist between teachers and their pupils. Pupils' positive attitude towards their learning and their good behaviour contribute very effectively to the outstanding quality of their personal development and well-being. All have a good knowledge and understanding of different cultures and world religions. Community links, especially through the choir and with the local church are strong. Attendance is below that for most schools despite the school's best efforts to improve it. There is too much unauthorised absence.

The attainment of most children entering the Nursery is very low, especially in their social and language development. The good quality of provision in the Foundation Stage, especially for those who have English as an additional language ensures that all children make very good progress. The low start means that most do not achieve their targets by the end of Reception despite their progress. All pupils continue to achieve well throughout the school and by Year 6, their level of achievement from their relative starting points is outstanding. Standards are typical for their age in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties make very good progress as they are provided with challenging work and the additional support they need to keep up with other pupils.

The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. In the Foundation Stage, children benefit from the very favourable adult to children ratio and make exceptional progress in their social and emotional development as well as their communication skills. There is a purposeful atmosphere for learning throughout the school. Teaching assistants provide excellent support for pupils' learning, especially for those who find learning difficult. Staff plan lessons well; they take account of the different learning needs of their pupils and carefully monitor the progress they make. The curriculum is outstanding because of the way it is tailored to meet individual pupils' needs. It is enhanced by lessons in Italian and French, and a good range of activities for pupils to enjoy outside normal school hours. As a result, pupils of all ages and abilities are successfully motivated and challenged by the interesting tasks that they are given to do. Arrangements for assessment provide a wealth of information on the standards being achieved and this enables children's progress to be carefully tracked term by term.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff work effectively to tackle identified priorities for improvement. All regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning

and other aspects of school life. The governing body has a high level of expertise and all governors are fully committed to helping the school to monitor its effectiveness, giving the school an excellent capacity to improve further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve attendance and reduce the rate of unauthorised absence.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Children enter the Nursery with very low levels of achievement. Once in school, they get off to a good start in a well organised Nursery and continue to make very good progress to the end of the Foundation Stage. This is particularly noteworthy in their personal, social and emotional development. Their attainment, however, is below average in all areas except their physical development, which is average. High levels of progress are maintained throughout both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Teacher's expectations of pupils are high and as a result, they not only achieve the goals set for them by staff but also know what they need to do to improve further. Achievement across the school as a whole is outstanding as pupils leave school with standards that are broadly in line with national expectations, having caught up from a very low base. The school was, in 2005, recognised in the list of the one hundred most improved schools in the country. The dip in performance in English and mathematics in 2006, caused by the influx of so many pupils with English as an additional language has been turned around and these pupils make excellent progress because of the support they receive. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are quickly recognised and they achieve very well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The playground, voted the best of any school in Manchester for two years running, contributes greatly to both the social and spiritual development of the pupils with its prayer garden, climbing wall and wealth of play opportunities for pupils. A strong emphasis on personal and social development of children in the Foundation Stage helps them to quickly settle and form good relationships. Pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is outstanding. The headteacher's stated aim of 'treating all children as equal children of God' is apparent throughout the school. Pupils are always willing to help each other both in and out of class, as can be seen by the 'Amigos' scheme to support each other in the playground. Pupils are very well behaved in lessons. Despite an almost endless list of initiatives to improve attendance, it has remained below average, improving slightly since the last inspection. Pupils show an awareness of the need for healthy eating and exercise. The outstanding school choir is in the lifeblood of the school and is used to great effect in reaching out to the community. Pupils contribute to school development through an active school council, which runs its own budget.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is never less than good and often outstanding, especially in Year 6. This ensures that all pupils make excellent progress by the time they leave school. Music and drama teaching are both outstanding and result in the highest standards being achieved by pupils. The management of pupils' behaviour is another major strength, ensuring that pupils always work hard and develop positive attitudes towards their learning. Care is taken to support lower attaining pupils and those who have English as an additional language and these pupils make excellent progress. Information from assessments is used well by staff to set lesson objectives and identify any pupils who may need additional help or support. Teaching assistants do an excellent job of supporting any pupil who is experiencing difficulty.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

The mission statement says, 'daily we seek to provide opportunities and rich learning experiences to further the development of the whole child'. The school manages to do this brilliantly. The outstanding curriculum meets the needs of all pupils superbly well and as a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding and all make exceptional progress. Good use is made of the information and communication technology (ICT) suite to enhance pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy, and of the new interactive whiteboards, where available, to make lessons more interesting. Specialist teachers for Italian and drama, sports coaches, a good range of extra-curricular activities, such as choir and gardening clubs and many educational visits and visitors add breadth to pupils' learning. Health and safety is very well promoted. The curriculum successfully raises pupils' awareness about diversity in our multi-cultural society with experiences such as St Thomas' day when 800 people, mainly from the local Indian community, gathered in the grounds to celebrate their cultural heritage.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

The outstanding provision for care and support makes a major contribution to all pupils' academic and personal development. An informal pastoral care system, which sensitively uses information from all sources ensures that the school is constantly responsive to pupils' needs and that they get the care and support that they need to aid their academic progress. Detailed tracking ensures that any underachievement is quickly identified and tackled. Effective child protection and health and safety systems are in place to ensure pupil well-being is paramount. Good staff training and clear procedures, alongside the inspirational outdoor playground facilities, ensure that behaviour is good. Throughout the school, there is a very high level of commitment

from the staff who seek to improve the standards achieved by the pupils and make them higher.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

Simply outstanding! The headteacher is a man with a mission, a dream. His inspirational leadership and management has won the hearts and minds of the locals and succeeded in creating a very attractive and supportive place in which to live and work for pupils, parents and staff. The deputy headteacher shares the same passion to create the best possible opportunities for children in the area. Together they make a formidable team. The way the many pupils from minority ethnic families and those with learning difficulties settle so well into school is a credit to all the staff with management responsibilities. Described as the 'rising star of South Manchester' the school has risen further and is shining brightly.

The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and the views of staff, governors, parents and children are taken into account when deciding future priorities for improvement. All teachers play a vital role in monitoring the school's work and performance, and governors are fully involved in the process. The school has managed to recruit governors with a high level of expertise. As a result, the capacity for further improvement is excellent.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you all, looking around your classrooms and joining you for Mass on Ash Wednesday. We think that your school is outstanding, one of the best. The things that we think are particularly good are:

- how hard your headteacher, deputy headteacher and all the staff are working to make sure that your lessons are really interesting and guaranteed to make you want to learn
- how well you behave in class and around school. It is good to see how well you get on with your teachers and each other
- the good start that you all have in the Nursery and Reception classes with lots of interesting things to do, like painting outdoors and using magnifiers to look at textures
- we were most impressed with how well you are cared for and supported by your teachers, their helpers and the many lunchtime staff. We think that the Amigos do a great job at playtimes
- the way your school is such an important part of the local community
- the excellent opportunities you have to enjoy music and drama in school. The choir sounds fantastic. I expect that they are looking forward to opening the Irish Festival in Manchester town hall. We hope it goes well.

We are asking the school to improve its attendance record, which is not as good as many other schools. It makes it very hard for the school to raise standards further when its pupils do not attend classes as well as they might.

Thank you again, for helping us with this inspection. We think that you are lucky to have such a great school. We hope that you will all try to come every day so that you do not miss out on any of the exciting things that happen.