



St John Fisher Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number	121717
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	292212
Inspection date	17 October 2006
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Hookstone Drive
School category	Voluntary aided		Harrogate
Age range of pupils	11–18		North Yorkshire HG2 8PT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01423 887254
Number on roll (school)	1351	Fax number	01423 881056
Number on roll (6th form)	309		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs S Ambler
		Headteacher	Mr P Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group 11–18	Inspection date 17 October 2006	Inspection number 292212
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors, one of whom inspected the sixth form.

Description of the school

St John Fisher is a large Roman Catholic High School which draws on a wide geographical area, including the towns of Harrogate and Wetherby. The majority of pupils come from relatively advantaged backgrounds, but a significant proportion of pupils do not and there are a number of less able pupils. The school has specialist status in arts and in humanities. There are extensive sports facilities and an arts centre on site, but other accommodation is rather cramped because of the large numbers on roll. The sixth formers are part of an ecumenical associated sixth form of over 900 students, the rest coming from the neighbouring Saint Aidan's Church of England High School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St John Fisher Catholic High is an outstanding school. Pupils achieve high standards. Equally importantly, the school fosters their personal development exceptionally well. Pupils are happy at school. There is an unhurried, quiet, disciplined feel about the place which comes from everyone, staff and pupils, being clear about why they are there and what they are trying to do. The school's mission is to build 'a true community of faith and place of learning' and it is highly successful in so doing. It shows great humility in its achievements, reflecting its Catholic values. The headteacher says: 'The great strength of St John Fisher is the people.' The school is alive with exciting projects and initiatives. The joint sixth form is outstanding. Its large size makes it very cost effective; it is able to offer a wide range of subjects and opportunities for personal development, as well as high standards. Pupils leave school socially mature and outstandingly prepared for success in future study and employment.

Shared faith and understanding of Catholic values underpins all that the school does. The care and development of the pupil as an individual is at the heart of the school's practice and planning. The school's success is promoted significantly by its two specialisms, first because these have allowed the school to extend the range of opportunities for pupils and second because involvement in the arts is building pupils' confidence and fostering success. The humanities specialism is bringing an added dimension, not least in the development of teaching techniques. The school has moved forward considerably since the last inspection. For example, the provision for information and communications technology (ICT) and for citizenship education, and the planning and delivery of the personal, social and health education programme are all much better. Careers provision and the content of reports to parents are also much improved.

All this has been made possible through strong leadership and management, led by the headteacher, whose vision for the school is successfully translated into practice. Decisions and actions always have the well-being of students to the fore. A better range of curriculum options meets pupils' needs, and consequently, examination results are continuing to rise. This has been accompanied by close scrutiny of how individuals are doing and good support for those who find learning difficult or who become disaffected.

Pupils say that a minority of lessons and subjects are not interesting and that when lessons are dull they get a bit restless. The school has begun to encourage the sharing of good practice, using effective departments and teachers to promote a greater variety of teaching methods and techniques, such as the use of ICT to promote learning and increase motivation. The school has excellent capacity to improve further. It has identified the small number of

subjects and the year groups where progress could be faster, and is taking action on these.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Parents, teachers and students believe that the associated sixth form is something special, and inspectors agree. It provides an outstanding all-round education for its students, founded on high expectations. It successfully achieves its aim of providing a Christian environment in which all students have the opportunity to fulfil their academic potential. Standards are very high and students' achievement is outstanding. Students value the 'family feel'. The sixth form maintains the unique identity of the two separate schools, yet operates as one highly successful unit. A shared, distinctive religious character underpins the ethos, resulting in an environment where students feel valued and are able to make terrific progress. Excellent value for money is achieved by sharing resources, staff expertise and experience and through the specialist status.

Students have superb attitudes to learning. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, and are founded on mutual respect and trust. Examination results have risen year-on-year, testimony to exceptionally high quality teaching. Teachers are subject experts; they provide interesting tasks, extensive opportunities for independent and personalised learning and a strong focus on examination preparation.

Students regard the sixth form as a 'half-way house' between school and university. They particularly like the 'mix of people', which they feel prepares them well for making new friends and for adapting to future university life. A significant number of students continue their studies into higher education, including the best universities in the country.

The elected sixth form councils represent the views of the student body very effectively. They actively raise money for charity and campaign for healthier living within school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is outstanding, as a result of countless opportunities to explore different beliefs and to participate in artistic events, high-level debates and social gatherings. As a result, students are becoming caring individuals and responsible citizens.

The two senior management teams work closely together to operate a fully integrated sixth form with an excellent curriculum and a clear vision of strengths and areas for development. As a result of their inspirational management and the sterling work of the senior tutors, examination results have improved and the curriculum now offers a rich diversity of choice. More and more students are attracted into the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils in Years 7 to 11 make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups.
- Ensure that good practice is spread across subjects so that lessons fully engage pupils and meet their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are well above average, with particular strengths in mathematics. The school's analysis of examination results for 2006 shows a continuing upward trend. Pupils enter the school with attainment above the national average and make good progress, especially in Years 7 to 9. Progress is not as consistent in Years 10 and 11, but is never less than satisfactory. The school is effectively tackling one or two comparatively weaker subjects by reviewing schemes of work and enhancing teaching techniques. It is focusing more closely on how some individual pupils are doing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with others in the school. For many pupils their achievement in the arts through music, drama and dance or through sport is as important as their academic achievement and here the school shines. Standards in ICT have risen and pupils are well equipped for the next stage in their education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's measured, sensitive and creative atmosphere enables pupils to become confident, thoughtful and appreciative young adults. Faith and spirituality stimulate respect for others, a strong sense of responsibility to the community, and a desire for excellence. Pupils treat assemblies with dignity and reflect carefully on their messages. They enjoy school; their attendance is above national average and they form excellent relationships with teachers and with each other. Behaviour is excellent around school, pupils showing courtesy, consideration and maturity. Behaviour in the vast majority of lessons is very good, only flagging when teaching is too dry or unexplained. The school council is increasingly influential and pupils understand the part they have to play in making it successful. Pupils thrive on the opportunities to work with the community which specialist status offers, and have a good and growing awareness of the range and significance of cultures in modern society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching overall is good and the teachers have very good subject knowledge. The best teaching creates an atmosphere where thinking and independence are stimulated. Pupils feel that they are well taught and that their teachers are approachable. Pupils have good attitudes to learning; they are attentive in class and take care with their work. Humanities specialist status has enabled some teachers to extend their repertoire

of teaching methods, for example, by using ICT to engage and promote learning. Teachers have recently been focusing on how best to assess pupils' progress and the expertise of some subject departments has begun to be shared to enable teachers to better meet the needs of all pupils. Most lessons are very well planned, but there are some lessons where the range of teaching methods is too restricted, for example, by too much talk by teachers, or where the clarity of explanations is not as good. Pupils say that this makes these lessons less interesting. However, this is only a minority of lessons and the school is working hard to develop the quality of teaching to the level of the very best.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is excellent with considerable emphasis on arts education. It provides pupils of all abilities with a highly suitable range and balance of experiences. These opportunities build their confidence and encourage enjoyment of school. Provision for ICT is now very good, with discrete lessons in Years 7 to 9 and a highly successful Key Skills GCSE course for Year 11 pupils. GCSE pupils can specialise in arts or humanities subjects, or are offered a flexible curriculum which can include vocational courses and individual programmes of work-related learning. This flexibility is an important factor in motivating pupils. There are numerous extra-curricular activities, from sport to 'street cred' dance, from steel drums to juggling. These are much appreciated by pupils, who support them enthusiastically and appreciate the efforts of others in them. As a result, all pupils feel able to shine, and feel the joy and deep satisfaction of succeeding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's strong ethos of cherishing each member of the school community is seen as the responsibility of all staff. Procedures for integrating new pupils are extensive, and founded on strong relationships with feeder schools. Pupils feel secure and happy, and quickly grow into confident and settled learners. Trained peer listeners, learning mentors and a range of pastoral staff provide advice and support. Open access to many parts of the school at lunchtime and to places such as the Oratory, 'Smile room' and Learning Support Centre provide good opportunities for work, pleasure, and quiet reflection. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or with English as an additional language, are thoroughly assessed and clearly communicated to teachers. Health and safety procedures are rigorous. Pupils are very appreciative of the high quality guidance when choosing GCSE options and when deciding on their post-16 direction. Reports to parents are excellent. They summarise achievement and guide progress, while also paying attention to pupils' evolving personalities and broader contributions to school life.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers have an unwavering focus on the needs of every individual pupil. Governance is very strong, with governors bringing a range of expertise and experience to support and challenge the headteacher. The school is highly self-evaluative. It has taken time to consult widely on how it is doing and to act on the findings from this. New staff are bringing added vitality. Strong links with other schools and the local community, through shared curriculum projects and resources, enhance provision still further. The school provides excellent value for money.

It struggles with cramped accommodation. It does well to minimise the impact on learning resulting from several temporary classrooms.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

I write to thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school and to let you know about our findings. We think that your school is outstanding. It meets its aims to be 'a true community of faith and a place of learning'. The decisions it makes about your education are focused clearly on improving what it can provide for each one of you.

- Standards are high, especially in mathematics, and you make good progress.
- The sixth form is outstanding all round: examination results, breadth of subjects and the provision for students' personal development.
- Specialist status in the arts and in humanities has made a huge difference to the opportunities you have to get involved and enjoy school, for example, through music, drama and dance, and to contribute to the wider community.
- The curriculum is excellent and is supported by a wide range of activities and visits.
- The school cares for and supports you very well; this is central to its philosophy.
- You are well taught overall, but a minority of lessons can be rather dull.
- The headteacher has a strong vision for your school. His leadership and that of the Head of Sixth Form, supported by the other managers, is outstanding.
- As pupils you leave school socially mature and outstandingly prepared for success in future study and employment.

We read about your views and those of your parents, the staff and others connected with the school and we talked to a number of you during our visit. This was all very positive: your parents are very supportive of the school and you told us that you are happy here.

We have made two suggestions for how your school might improve further:

- make sure that your progress is consistently good across subjects and year groups
- encourage teachers to share more their ideas on how to make lessons really interesting and effective.