

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Littlemore

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123217
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292613
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Collins

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father John Hancock
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Milham
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2002
School address	Sandy Lane West Littlemore Oxford OX4 6LD
Telephone number	01865 779676
Fax number	01865 716558

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school draws pupils from a wide area, some parts of which are of high social deprivation. It has recently completed its change to a one-form entry primary school. About half the pupils are of White British background. There is a high proportion of pupils from different ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English has doubled in the last three years and is now above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational need, is well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good education and is steadily improving. More than one parent commented, 'This is a school I'm happy to send my children to'. The school has experienced considerable challenges in recent years, including the recruitment of staff and the increasing numbers of pupils with learning difficulties. The headteacher, supported well by her senior leadership team, has taken decisive action to tackle this, improve behaviour and address the trend of falling standards.

The Year 6 national tests results have continued to improve since 2005. However, in 2007, standards were still below average in English and science, and well below average in mathematics. There was a similar picture in Year 2 where writing, reading and mathematics were below the national average. No pupils attained the higher than expected level. Similarly, by the end of Year 6 attainment by more able pupils was well below average in English, mathematics and science. Current inspection evidence shows that standards are improving and both Year 2 and Year 6 pupils are on track to meet challenging targets in 2008. Given pupils' low starting points and the barriers to learning they face, this represents good progress. This is because teaching is now good overall, assessment is used more effectively to support different groups and pupils are now making progress that is more consistent. For example, planning for more able pupils is now becoming more closely focused on providing appropriate challenges to help them to raise their achievement. However, the leaders have rightly recognised that there is more to do to secure a consistent approach.

The vast majority of parents think well of the school and recognise that the school is now improving steadily. As one remarked, 'Every effort is made for my son to achieve his goals'. Personal development is good with spiritual, moral, social and cultural development being outstanding. Links with the church are very strong and contribute significantly to pupils' very good awareness of their own and others' beliefs. Pupils care for each other immensely and willingly including other pupils in their games at playtime. They take very good care of their surroundings. They have a very strong sense of moral responsibility, for example, showing a very mature understanding of the plight of those less fortunate than themselves when charity fund raising.

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is a stronger focus on improving standards in English and mathematics but opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to use their developing skills in reading, writing and mathematics in other subjects. Additionally, marking is not consistent across the school and does not always help pupils to know what they need to do in order to improve.

Leadership and management are good. Middle managers are beginning to develop their skills of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. This is enabling the school to build an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan sets out the correct priorities for improvement. However, targets for improvement are not sufficiently focused on evaluating their impact on raising standards and achievement. Several governors are relatively new but show a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Whilst being supportive of the school they do less to challenge the school's decisions about its future improvements. Given recent improvements in teaching, planning and the increasingly effective use of assessment, the school shows a good capacity to improve still further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children enter school with levels of knowledge and skills well below national expectations. Consistently good teaching and well-managed provision helps them to make good progress. The pace of learning is good, enabling a few children to reach the learning goals expected of five-year-olds. There is an effective programme of stimulating indoor and outdoor experiences, including a 'forest school' project. Children show high levels of enjoyment and engagement with their learning. The Foundation Stage coordinator very ably leads the good quality staff team. They work together well to ensure that children work and play in a safe environment. Thorough and accurate assessments of progress are kept and these are used very effectively to plan tasks that are well matched to children's needs. A successful balance of welfare, care and stimulation prepares children well for the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science, particularly for more able pupils by increasing the level of challenge in lessons.
- Improve the consistency of marking so that it offers better guidance for pupils on what they need to do improve.
- Make school improvement targets more specific by linking them to expected gains in pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the Nursery with verbal, social, communication and mathematical skills well below those normally expected. The school works hard to compensate for these barriers to learning, and achievement in the Foundation Stage is good. Even so, few pupils enter Year 1 having attained the expected goals for their age. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 2, standards are below average and remain so, particularly in mathematics by the end of Year 6. Early signs are that recent efforts are having an impact and standards are rising. Overall, pupils' progress is good. In particular, pupils with English as an additional language make good progress as they move through the school. Additional support from the local authority and external consultants is helping to improve how well teachers are tracking the individual progress of pupils and to identify effective ways to address any under performance. Consequently, progress is becoming more consistent. For example, a successful initiative recently focused on improving writing across the school. There are similar plans now in place to tackle the issues over pupils' performance in mathematics but these have not yet had time to show an impact on standards. Planning for more able pupils is becoming more securely established but there remains more to do.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has created a strong, caring and supportive ethos. The school is a safe and happy place where pupils learn and enjoy coming to school. All staff engage in a caring way with pupils and provide good role models. Playground and reading 'buddies' give opportunities for older pupils to accept responsibilities and contribute to the school community. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding. Pupils are kind and considerate to each other and

have a highly mature understanding of right and wrong. They enjoy responsibility very much and work together sharing resources and supporting each other very well. Pupils get on very well together. Attendance is average and improving and the majority of pupils have good attitudes to learning. They listen well to their teachers and each other. They enjoy school because 'it's the best'. Pupils show a pride in their achievements, for example taking in their stride opportunities to perform at the Royal Albert Hall. The school council is a good opportunity for pupils to develop a sense of responsibility and feel part of the school community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and, consequently, pupils' learning is improving. With the help of the national Intensifying Support Programme, planning is now more consistent and targeted to help pupils make progress that is more constant. However, in some lessons planning for more able pupils lacks sufficient differentiation and challenge. In the better lessons, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, use effective questioning to stimulate pupils' interest and set challenging tasks. In the few less successful lessons, overlong introductions and unexciting tasks slows the pace of learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good. Teachers' assessments are used with increasing effectiveness to track pupils' progress and to target intervention and support at an early stage. Marking is inconsistent however, as it does not always provide pupils with advice on how to take the next step in their learning. Teaching assistants provide good support to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and pupils whose first language is not English. This helps them to access learning and make good progress towards their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A recent review of the school's curriculum means that the staff are now better placed to meet the personal and academic needs of the pupils. Provision is good for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language. Physical education lessons, swimming and some sporting clubs make good contribution to pupils taking exercise and being healthy. Similarly many older pupils benefit from good provision for dance and drama. However, the curriculum does not yet meet consistently the needs of higher attaining pupils and recent improvements to the mathematics curriculum are only just beginning to accelerate improvement in this subject.

The school makes good use of local and residential visits in Key Stage 2, helping to develop social skills and personal responsibility. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of extra curricular activities that are well attended by many pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong commitment by teachers and other adults to support both pupils' personal and academic development. Pupils' safety and care are well promoted across school. Child protection, health and safety procedures, and risk assessments are robust. Partnership with parents is strong and several described the school as promoting 'a safe and caring atmosphere'. Good links with outside agencies are used well to provide good support and guidance to vulnerable pupils. The school is successful in helping pupils to recognise and celebrate their

talents and abilities. A number of parents expressed their appreciation of the way the school has enabled pupils to mature. Pupils' progress is tracked effectively in maths, reading, writing and science. As a result those with learning difficulties are swiftly identified, well supported and their progress closely monitored. The school has put in place good systems to support the increasing number of pupils who are learning English as an additional language.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The effective leadership of the headteacher and the senior team, along with the support of the local authority and external consultants, has guided the school through a recent period of significant change. Problems over the recruitment and retention of staff have been overcome and staff morale and confidence are now stronger. This has improved outcomes for pupils through sharper teaching and good progress in learning. The issues over meeting the particular needs of increased numbers of pupils with special educational needs, those with learning difficulties and pupils still learning English as their first language, are being tackled with equal determination.

Middle management is developing well. For instance, the leader of the Foundation Stage has good oversight of the quality of education being provided by staff and the children's achievements. The school accurately evaluates its strengths and weaknesses. However, the school improvement plan does not always establish a clear link between the actions proposed and how these will help raise standards.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

29 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 6LD

We were pleased to visit your school and see you working so hard. The school council and Year 6 pupils told us how much you enjoy school and that you like your teachers and all the other adults who take care of you. We were impressed by your good behaviour and your attitudes to your work. We agree with you and your parents that there are many good things about your school.

Here are some of the things we think your school does well:

- You are making better progress and your standards in English, mathematics and science are beginning to rise.
- We agree with you that the school takes good care of you.
- The headteacher and other teachers and governors are doing a good job in running the school.
- The ways in which the school helps you to develop a sense of maturity and care for others is outstanding.
- You like coming to school because your lessons are enjoyable and interesting.

These are some things we think they could do better:

- Improve your standards in English, mathematics and science.
- We have asked the school to set targets to improve your standards more carefully so they can measure how well you are doing.

We have asked all the teachers to make sure that when they mark your work they explain what you need to do to improve.

You can help them by continuing to work hard and enjoy your time at school. Remember to ask your teachers if you have a problem, we are sure they will help you to become even better than you are now.

Good luck in the future to you all.

John Collins

Lead inspector