



St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103452
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 299830
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Helen Barter

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Alvechurch Road
School category	Voluntary aided		West Heath
Age range of pupils	4–11		Birmingham B31 3PN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4753489
Number on roll (school)	188	Fax number	0121 4765782
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Vacant Position
		Headteacher	J McElwee
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2005		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006	Inspection number 299830
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is slightly smaller than most primary schools. Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are small groups of pupils from different ethnic minority backgrounds, all of whom are fluent in English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is lower than average. Children join the school in Reception with skills and abilities which are in line with those expected for their age. Since the previous inspection, the governing body has been reconstituted and a new chair has been appointed. When the school was inspected in October 2005, it was judged to require a Notice to Improve in relation to pupils' achievement, the role of the governing body and the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school has tackled the issues raised at the last inspection in a robust and positive way and now provides a good standard of education. The great majority of parents are very pleased with the school's work and the progress it has made in the last twelve months. They say that the school has 'worked wonders' in improving pupils' learning and involving parents more in learning workshops.

Good leadership and management, good quality teaching, and strong determination from staff to improve has been the key to the school's success. From the good start made in Reception, where children meet the goals expected of them, pupils achieve well throughout the school and reach standards which are above average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. Through better use of assessment of pupils' progress in English and mathematics, senior leaders have worked purposefully to pinpoint gaps in pupils' learning and to carefully target support for those with learning difficulties and for others who are at risk of falling behind. The gradual decline in standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 has been halted in its tracks. Standards have risen markedly and are now above average.

Pupils' good personal development is testimony to the school's good quality care, support and guidance and strong Christian ethos where pupils are nurtured as individuals. The confidence that this gives pupils contributes significantly to the progress they make. Pupils enjoy learning and have very positive attitudes to everything they do. Parents comment how 'teachers work hard to make the school a happy place to be.' Pupils are indeed happy and behave exceedingly well. They describe their school as 'a good place which is educational and friendly.'

The curriculum provided is satisfactory although the significant focus on improving English and mathematics has meant that it is less well balanced than it could be, particularly with regard to the time allocated for pupils to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Procedures for assessing the progress that pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics are not sharp enough to give subject leaders a precise knowledge of how well pupils are doing across the curriculum.

Governance has improved well since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Governors are supportive of the school and have built positive relationships with staff which have improved the school's morale. The swift and effective action to address identified weaknesses, and the renewed vigour and commitment amongst senior leaders, staff and governors to work together to take the school forward, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the work of subject leaders in providing a better balanced curriculum and ensuring that pupils have sufficient opportunities to learn information and communication technology skills.
- Build on the good assessment practice already established in English and mathematics to ensure that pupils do as well as they can in every subject.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Excellent induction procedures help children to settle well in the Reception class and to quickly gain independence and confidence to learn. Careful planning and stimulating activities ensure that children make good progress in all areas of learning and meet the goals expected of them. Most enter Year 1 with good personal and social skills. They are confident speakers and listeners and have well developed physical skills although a few still struggle with their writing.

From this good starting point, pupils achieve well in Years 1 to 6. Improved monitoring of pupils' progress in English and mathematics and good strategies to support pupils falling behind with their work and those with learning difficulties have led to a reversal of the underachievement identified at the last inspection. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics improved significantly in 2006 to be above average and current work confirms that these are being maintained. By the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are above average and pupils meet their challenging targets. Pupils who left the school in 2006 made good progress from above average starting points in Year 3 to reach exceptionally high standards in their end of year tests.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A parent's comment that the school 'produces well mannered children who possess the right morals and outlook' reflects many others made. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Even the youngest children in Reception know the difference between right and wrong. Pupils' behaviour is excellent because pupils know exactly what is expected of them. They reflect carefully on their own and others' lives during Mass and in class discussions. Through the school council and fundraising and social activities, pupils make a good contribution to the school, parish and the wider community. Pupils are sociable and play well together, although some older pupils would like lunchtimes to be organised so that they have more opportunities to play with younger ones.

The good level of attendance reflects pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils greatly appreciate merits which celebrate their successes and say they know they are achieving well 'because the teachers tell us.' They know how to keep healthy and safe and particularly mention the visit from the Life Education Caravan which helps them to learn how to look after their bodies. Pupils value the golden rules which 'make sure

we are all safe and well.' Pupils are developing as confident and mature young people and are well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their pupils well and want them to do their best. In English, mathematics and science, teachers use assessment information very effectively to plan lessons that make learning relevant to each pupil. Work is less precisely planned in other subjects because the procedures for assessing pupils' progress are not as well developed. As a consequence, lesson tasks are not always well enough matched to pupils' learning needs and this sometimes limits progress. Teaching assistants make a considerable contribution to pupils' progress, especially by helping those who have learning difficulties to achieve as well as others.

Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to make learning more interesting and exciting. Pupils' progress benefits from having to respond to the questions and comments teachers make about their work in discussion and through feedback in marking. Pupils are good learners. They fully understand the rules and expectations for learning and behave outstandingly well in lessons. They are committed to doing their best and enjoy celebrating their successes with their friends and their teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The strong and caring Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of the curriculum. It provides very good additional support for personal, social and health education lessons and makes an important contribution to pupils' good development as young people. The school's focus on raising standards in English, mathematics and science has been successful. Now other subjects need to be developed further. Some of these subjects, notably ICT, are not assigned enough teaching time. Although pupils use computers to support their learning in other subjects, they do not have enough opportunities to develop their ICT skills.

The curriculum for children in Reception is good. Children experience stimulating and imaginative learning activities that entice them to explore and to learn. The many opportunities to work and play together help them to develop good social skills and prepare them well for entry into Year 1. Pupils' physical fitness is promoted and extended well through a good range of clubs, competitions with other schools and residential breaks at an outdoor activity centre. Visitors to the school, such as poets and actors, provide good quality learning experiences and contribute to pupils' growing cultural awareness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Child protection, risk assessment and health and safety procedures are rigorously followed by all staff. Pupils say they feel safe and secure at school. They say that the school is a 'nice place to be where everyone is very friendly and it is easy to make friends with other children.' Parents agree saying that 'the atmosphere is calm and positive' and that 'teaching staff are always available to listen to our concerns'.

Effective strategies are used to support pupils' learning in English and mathematics to ensure that pupils make good progress. Targets for learning, set for each pupil, are monitored very effectively. When pupils fail to meet their targets action is quickly taken, including providing extra work in small group sessions or through joining the lunchtime learning clubs. This good practice is not as well developed in other subjects. Careful budgeting has allowed the employment of additional skilled teaching assistants. They are used very well, especially to help those with learning difficulties to gain as much success against their targets as achieved by those who find learning easier.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since its previous inspection, the school has worked with a sense of purpose and commitment to improving the identified areas of weakness. The staff team, led by dedicated and capable senior leaders, has been very willing to accept advice and support from the local authority to bring about improvement. There is a strong determination that the rapid success in raising standards will be maintained. The capacity to bring this about is good. Whilst relatively new, the governing body has rebuilt good relationships with the school and is beginning to make a more effective contribution to its success as it develops a better understanding of its work. The school now checks and evaluates its performance well. It has proven itself to be effective in dealing with key areas of weakness as well as continuing to recognise its many strengths. The firm establishment of systems for tracking pupils' progress and setting challenging targets for improvement has brought success in English and mathematics. There is a clear understanding of how the information gained from these systems benefits teaching quality and pupils' learning. The school recognises that these processes now need to be developed across all subjects so that subject leaders have a greater understanding of how well pupils are doing and are able to identify what needs to be improved further.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	2

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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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

St John Fisher RC Primary School, Alvechurch Road, West Heath, Birmingham, B31 3PN

Thank you very much for making the inspectors welcome when we came to visit recently and talking to us about your school. Your school has improved well since it was last inspected just over a year ago and now provides you with a good education.

These are the best things about your school.

- You learn well right from when you start in Reception to when you leave at the end of Year 6. You reach standards which are higher than a lot of children of your age.
- Your behaviour is excellent because you know exactly what the school expects of you. You told us how the school helps you to grow up well and we agree with you.
- You learn well because teachers plan the right amount of work for you. They also make sure that those of you who find it difficult to learn receive good help.
- You enjoy learning interesting things and are keen on going to clubs, doing sport and going on residential visits when you are in Year 6.
- Adults take good care of you. They do a good job in teaching you to look after yourselves and to care for other people. They make sure you are safe and happy and that any problems you have are sorted out.
- All the staff and the governors are working hard together to make sure that you carry on learning well.

The school has done a lot of work in helping you to improve in English, mathematics and science. So, now we have asked it to work on these things.

- Make sure that you are spending the right amount of time learning the other subjects. We particularly want teachers to make sure that you learn all the ICT skills that you need.
- Check how well you are doing so that you do as well as you possibly can in every subject you learn.

I wish you all the very best for the future.