

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101460
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307693
Inspection date	10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Gray

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Gregory Griffiths
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Kale Road Erith DA18 4BA
Telephone number	020 8310 7311
Fax number	020 8312 1017

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: how well pupils progress in reading, writing and mathematics, especially boys and higher attaining pupils; the consistency of teaching and the effectiveness of leaders' strategies to raise attainment. He gathered evidence from records of pupils' attainment, samples of pupils' past work, observations in lessons and round the school, meetings with staff, governors and pupils and an analysis of 52 responses to the parents' questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is similar in size to most schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average; the Black or Black British African group is the largest, representing more than half the number of pupils. About a quarter of pupils are at the early stages of learning English; Yoruba is the most common additional language. A higher proportion of pupils is entitled to receive free school meals than is usually found. A greater than average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and statements of education need. The largest group has specific learning or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and autism.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that enables its pupils to achieve well in the work they do and in their personal development. One parent commented, 'In today's society, it is so nice for my children to go to a school where discipline and respect are demanded from all'. This is clear to any visitor; the school is calm and orderly yet pupils' enjoyment of their work is everywhere evident.

Behaviour is good, and excellent for the oldest pupils. The school's values are gradually acquired by the pupils, with the result that the eldest are mature, thoughtful and considerate. Pupils show a good understanding of and respect for all the religions they learn about, not only Christianity. When pupils were asked what they like best about school, one reflected and replied, 'All bind together in one'. Another liked the fact that 'teachers appreciate our work'. This gives them pride in what they do, though younger pupils are occasionally a bit noisy in doing it. Pupils know how to stay healthy and feel very safe in school. They trust all adults to sort out any problems they might have. Pupils' confidence is reflected in the outstanding attendance rates, the highest in the borough.

The good teaching enables pupils to learn well and make good progress in their time in school. Their starting points are low in communication, language and personal development. By the time they reach Year 2, standards have risen to a little below the national average. Standards in the current Year 6 are above average. This is a result of rapid progress in Years 5 and 6. In an outstanding lesson in Year 6, pupils were preparing video interviews of their memories of school. They all scripted their speech and, in groups, they rehearsed, timed and filmed them, one person holding up the script as a prompt board. Progress in other year groups is good overall, but it is uneven from class to class. Consistency of teaching is an issue the school is tackling, but it has been made harder in recent years by the extent of staff turnover.

The match of the curriculum to pupils' needs is good and improving. Those who start school with little or no English make good and sometimes outstanding progress in learning English. Two pupils who began in the last two years with no knowledge of the language reached Level 4 in this year's Year 6 English tests. Pupils with learning difficulties also achieve well, with examples of excellent progress. In past years, boys did not perform as well as girls, especially in writing. The school continues to work on this, and the impact is clear from the Year 6 tests, where boys did better than girls in writing. The school has also been focusing on the achievement of higher attaining pupils, again with success for the oldest pupils, but there is still work to be done. Teachers do not always give higher attaining pupils work that is hard enough.

The school gives excellent pastoral care to all pupils, as is clear from the comment of a parent: 'My son's teacher has a listening ear at all times'. There is an outstanding partnership with parents and other institutions. The high attendance rates are the result of constant vigilance on the part of the school. Parents who are unable to attend progress evenings are offered appointments at more convenient times and curriculum events are offered to give parents more familiarity with the curriculum. Pupils are keen on learning French as a result of teachers' enthusiasm and the work with a local secondary school. Academic guidance is good and improving. The rigour with which pupils' progress is tracked has been stepped up this year. Its best feature is its two-pronged approach: not only are those pupils targeted who have made less than the expected progress, but also those who, regardless of their progress, have not yet reached the expected standard for their age. This is having a real impact on raising standards.

Good leadership and management are the cause of this success. The headteacher has been in her post for only a few months, and her promotion caused a vacancy at deputy headteacher level. This is being filled by two middle managers, who are leading the work on raising achievement for boys and higher attaining pupils. Because of temporary or newly-qualified staff, the roles of middle managers are vacant for the time being. Despite this, the impact of the school's work is clear and shows that there is a good capacity to improve further. Leaders have an accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Governors know their school well because they are well informed, though their involvement in strategic planning has not been as great as they now wish it to be.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children begin Reception with well below the expected skills, especially in language and social development. Many find the process of learning to learn difficult and initially need coaxing to share and take turns. In the autumn term, the school employs two assistants to help pupils settle in, but there is only one for the rest of the year. This means that the teacher is sometimes hard pressed to give attention to all the activities when her assistant is outside. This is being remedied for next year. The school is to improve the way it assesses the entry skills of children when they start school, in order to have a clearer view of the progress they are making. The children currently in Reception have made satisfactory progress and will begin Year 1 with attainment that is well below what is normally found.

What the school should do to improve further

- Achieve a greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school.
- Enable teachers to make a better match between higher attaining pupils' prior learning and the activities they receive.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 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	1
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	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?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

17 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Erith, DA18 4BA

You were very courteous and welcoming when I visited your school and I thank you for helping me to have an enjoyable day. I quickly saw what a happy place St John Fisher's is from so many smiling faces among pupils and adults.

You grow into responsible and respectful individuals and learn to behave well. The oldest pupils set a really good example to the younger ones and I expect that your teachers are proud of you. You know how to keep healthy, though some of you don't always have the chance for sporting activities. You feel very safe in school and show a good knowledge of the Christian and other world religions. Sometimes, younger pupils are a bit noisy in their lessons, though this is often because of excitement.

The standards reached by the oldest pupils are above average. This is a good achievement and comes about because of good teaching. Progress is good across the school, though it is best for the oldest pupils. I have asked the school to try and make all the learning as good and as much fun as in some of the lessons I saw.

Adults are trying very hard to make boys better at writing, and I witnessed several groups where boys were receiving extra help. I was pleased to see how hard they were working, and this is helping them to improve. Pupils who are new to learning English also receive special help and make big strides in speaking. Those of you who learn fast make good progress by the time you reach Year 6, but in some lessons your work is too easy. The second thing I have asked the adults to do is to give you challenging work more often.

All adults take extremely good care of you and you repay this with excellent attendance - some of the best in the country. Well done and do your best to keep it up (except when you have chicken pox, as a number did this year). Your new headteacher is leading the school well and her staff share her work to make your school the success it is.

I hope you go on having a good time at St John Fisher's.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray

Lead Inspector