

# St John Fisher Catholic High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	106535
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wigan
<b>Inspection number</b>	309157
<b>Inspection date</b>	27 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Thompson

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	967
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr D Mallin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Ward
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2004
<b>School address</b>	Baytree Road Springfield Wigan Lancashire WN6 7RN
<b>Telephone number</b>	01942 510715
<b>Fax number</b>	01942 519039

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; personal development; leadership and management; the impact of specialist status; and the effectiveness of assessment procedures. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of students' work, assessment data, school documents and parents' questionnaires. In addition, there were discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

This average size school is a specialist college for the performing arts. Although students are from the full range of backgrounds, a substantial minority are from areas of considerable social disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is close to average. There are much fewer than usual students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Only a few students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including statements of special educational need, is close to average but rising. The school has the Healthy Schools Award and has had Leading Edge status since 2004. Over recent years the school has been through a period of disruption in management as the result of long term illness. About one in six of the staff is new to the school in the last two years. The headteacher has been in post since September 2007.

## 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. Standards are rising and students make good progress. What strikes a visitor immediately is the lively confidence of students of all ages. They are open, courteous and friendly. They have a high regard for their school and most enjoy their education. Consequently, attendance is above average and improving. The school's specialist status has had a marked impact on students' good personal development through the innovative and imaginative use of drama that pervades the curriculum. For example, there has been a whole school African week, a professional script writer has worked with the science department, a stand up comedian has worked on improving oral skills and a drama piece was performed in Spanish. This approach not only helps develop self-confidence and expression but promotes good understanding through the exploration of issues. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to express their views. They are confident that they are listened to and can point to examples of how they have influenced changes in school life. A high proportion of parents expressed positive views of the school in letters to inspectors. Typical comments include, 'The school is genuinely committed to enabling all children to achieve their maximum potential.'

By the end of Key Stage 3, results in the 2007 national tests were above average in English, mathematics and science. GCSE results for 2007 were well above average overall and showed improvement on the previous year. The school's specialist targets were met and some of the best examination results were in art and design and drama, reflecting the impact of the school's specialism. Most groups of students achieve better than might be expected in relation to their starting points. Nevertheless, within the overall picture of good achievement, data show that some 15% of last year's Year 11 did not achieve as well as expected in their journey through the school. In particular, this included students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who did not do as well as they should. The school's analysis shows that much of this underachievement was the result of persistent poor attendance among this group of students. This had a considerable effect on the school's data on achievement, although the GCSE results were the school's best ever. Girls' achievement showed a considerable improvement as a result of successful action taken by the school to deal with difficulties identified through monitoring of performance.

Students' good personal development benefits from the wide range of extra-curricular activities that the school provides. Their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles is excellent and supported by extensive and successful participation in sporting activities. The great majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school when not directly supervised. They feel safe in the school. A small number of parents expressed concerns about bullying. The school's approach to tackling incidents is thorough. Students say that they are confident that reported cases will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Students respond well to the carefully planned activities that promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result of the school's specialist status, cultural development is particularly strong. Students eagerly take advantage of the many opportunities to make an excellent contribution both to the school and the wider community. Rising standards and the increasing focus on work related learning mean that students are increasingly well prepared for their future lives and careers.

Teachers build well on good relationships with students to manage their lessons so that little time is wasted. Students respond well to teachers' expectations of their work and behaviour and this contributes significantly to the good progress made in most lessons. Teachers make effective use of their subject knowledge to provide clear demonstrations of techniques and

modelling of answers. In this way they set standards, and help students to develop confidence and gain a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn. A typical comment, supported by nods of agreement by others, 'Sir always helps you to get it right,' illustrates the confidence that students have in their teachers. Nevertheless, there are times when teachers do too much for their students instead of pushing them to think for themselves. Although some students know their targets, too many only have a vague idea and are not clear as to the steps they need to take to improve their progress.

The school makes good use of partnerships and community links through its specialist status to enhance the curriculum, making a significant contribution to students' personal development. A good example is the way that alternative curricular pathways have been developed through work related learning. The school's records show that these have had a considerable beneficial effect on the attitudes, attendance and progress of students who previously had difficulties in the school. Discussion with students confirms that they appreciate the opportunities that the school provides. As a result, increases in students' enjoyment and motivation help to improve progress.

Students are very well cared for and supported. Students speak highly of the support they receive. They say that teachers are approachable and care for both their personal and academic well-being. This plays a significant part in maintaining students' good progress. Procedures are in place for safeguarding and for risk assessment. The school has developed very good systems to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable students. Careful checks are kept on their progress and welfare. Sensitive support is provided by teachers and classroom assistants for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The use of assessment and academic guidance to set appropriate targets for students is good in some areas but is not consistent across the school. The process of assessment and target setting is not well enough developed to provide clear enough guidance to support progress or to inform planning. There are some impressive individual interviews following interim assessments at which personal and academic targets are set. These are established at Key Stage 4 but are relatively new at Key Stage 3 and have not been implemented fully across the school. Targets are not reviewed frequently enough to pick up difficulties at an early stage and enable action to be taken.

The headteacher and senior staff provide good leadership that is to be seen in the calm and purposeful atmosphere of the school and the high quality of care that it provides. The school's leadership coped well with the difficulties of recent years to maintain the rising trend of standards. Nevertheless, achievement was affected in some subjects because the monitoring process was not consistently rigorous enough. Very good use has been made of the school's specialist status to add relevance to the curriculum and to raise standards and achievement. The new headteacher has set out clear plans for improvement to increase openness and accountability. There is a clear and unequivocal focus on continuing to raise standards and achievement. Senior staff are working well as a team to manage improvement. However, the monitoring and evaluation skills of some leaders at all levels are not consistently well developed. This has meant that some areas of underperformance were not identified as quickly as they should have been. Governors are very knowledgeable and play a full part in shaping the direction of the school to take advantage of its specialist status. They are accustomed to asking the hard questions that hold the school to account for its performance. They have shown their understanding of the school's needs by astute appointments. In view of the progress made since the last inspection, the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

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

- Develop the self-evaluation skills of leaders at all levels so that the school's performance is monitored rigorously.
- Improve the process of assessment, target setting and review so that students know clearly how well they should be doing and what they need to do to improve.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	3

### 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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

<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.



## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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	2
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**

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School, Wigan WN6 7RN

Thank you very much for your courtesy and the way in which you welcomed us into your school. We enjoyed the lively conversations we had with you and seeing you at work. Many of you told us how good you think your school is. We agree with you that yours is a good school. You play a big part in making it so by your behaviour and attitudes - particularly those of you who represent the school in sport and those who contribute to the whole community through drama.

There are many good aspects to your school. The best things are:

- you receive good teaching that enables you to make good progress and standards are rising
- you form good relationships with each other and your teachers
- you develop confidence in yourselves
- you make a very strong contribution to the community
- you have an excellent understanding of how to keep fit and healthy
- the curriculum enables you to discover interests and talents and prepares you well for the future
- all adults in the school care for you and support you very well.

Part of our job is to recommend ways in which the school can improve. We have asked your school to do two things to help make yours an even better place to learn. These are:

- to make sure that all the people with responsibility for the different aspects of school life are able to keep a close check on quality and performance in their areas to help you improve your progress
- to help you make the best progress you can by making sure that you know clearly how well you are doing, how well you should be doing and what you need to do to improve.

Thank you for helping us with our work. We wish you well for the future and hope that you will continue to help in making St John Fisher a good place to learn.