

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111392
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	310588
Inspection dates	11–12 September 2007
Reporting inspector	David Blackburne

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms J Fraser
Headteacher	Mrs Armstrong
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Edward Street Widnes Cheshire WA8 0BW
Telephone number	0151 4247794
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a smaller than average primary school. Pupils are drawn from a wide area and from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils taking free school meals is lower than the national average. The percentage from minority ethnic backgrounds and speaking English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school has achieved a number of national and local awards, including the information and communication technology (ICT) mark, Healthy School award and Sports Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St John Fisher is a good school. It has some outstanding features. A particular strength lies in the outstanding quality of pupils' personal development and well-being resulting from the excellent care, guidance and support they are given. This ensures pupils know their strengths and how they can improve, and helps them to grow into confident, happy individuals who are at ease with themselves and in the company of others. They become responsible young citizens who contribute well to society. Good teaching has a particularly strong impact upon pupils' personal development, encouraging them to behave very well, respect others and display considerate attitudes. It enables them to thrive within the class and school community and achieve well. The quality of relationships within the school creates a positive and caring atmosphere, enabling pupils to enjoy their education. A parental comment that summed up the views of many was, 'My child is extremely happy and looks forward to going to school each day.'

As a result of good leadership and management, and good teaching, pupils achieve well. From a broadly average starting point on entry to Reception, they make good progress and reach above average standards by the end of Key Stage 2. However, standards in writing for the most able pupils are not high enough because writing tasks for this group are not always sufficiently challenging. Pupils receive a good curriculum that is well suited to their needs. It provides plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop well academically and personally. Residential trips offered by the school help pupils in both key stages to take part in a variety of outdoor adventurous activities. These help to boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

The good leadership provided by the headteacher is particularly effective in enabling pupils and staff to develop their potential. Many excellent links have been forged with outside agencies, including the local children's centre and high school. The latter provides specialist teaching in sport and modern foreign languages, which gives pupils an extended curriculum delivered by staff with excellent subject knowledge. Particularly strong and effective links have been developed with local industry within the Children Challenge Industry scheme. This gives pupils an insight into local industries and helps to prepare them very well for the future world of work. The partnership with parents is strong and enables them to support their children better at home.

The school has an accurate view of its performance. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified and addressed. Some impact of this has already been seen in the recent improvement in writing. The good quality of leadership, including that from the governing body, and the leadership's track record in improving standards show that there is good capacity for improvement. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children begin the Reception class with skills that are broadly in line with those expected for their age, although skills in reading and writing are below national expectations. Children make good progress in all areas of learning and rapid progress in reading. By the end of Reception, their standards are above the national average in most areas of learning. Standards in writing remain slightly below the national average, but represent good progress given children's starting points. Good induction procedures help the children to settle into school quickly. The quality

of teaching and the care, guidance and support children receive are good and they benefit from working within a spacious, well-resourced, classroom. Staff expertise helps pupils to socialize well and promotes their excellent behaviour. Children thoroughly enjoy the wide range of learning experiences available in the classroom, but do not have enough opportunities to learn outdoors. Very good use is made of computers to support learning. The teacher and teaching assistant work as a very effective team and successfully promote speaking and listening skills by their interaction with children. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported by the skilled staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement in writing in Key Stages 1 and 2 for more able pupils.
- Make better use of the outdoor environment to promote the learning of children in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and, by the end of Year 6, attain above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' good achievement is the result of good teaching and curriculum provision. This supports and nurtures pupils and, for the most part, challenges them well. Reading is a strength, but standards and progress in writing are not as good, with relatively few pupils attaining above the expected level by Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they are well supported by staff and are given tasks that are well matched to their needs. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language are also very well supported and make good progress. Staff expertise in ICT results in pupils throughout the school producing particularly good standards of work in this subject.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are strengths of the school. Pupils behave exceptionally well and display excellent attitudes to their work. All are proud to belong to St John Fisher School. Relationships are strong. As one school council member said, 'It is the best school because everyone is kind and our teachers are the best.' Teachers really care for all pupils and pupils feel valued and important. 'Kindness boxes' balance 'bully boxes' where pupils report kind as well as poor behaviour. Attendance is good, being consistently above the national average.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Class acts of collective worship give a calm, spiritual experience at the start of the day, providing pupils with regular opportunities for reflection. The five-minute assemblies after lunch give pupils and lunchtime staff an opportunity to reflect on lunchtime behaviour, relationships and experiences. Pupils readily take on responsibilities and are extremely well prepared for their future. Their contribution to the school and wider community, including strong links with the parish, is outstanding. The school council, for example, is justifiably proud of its achievements and is currently campaigning for girls to wear trousers in winter and have more practice time for sports.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality of relationships in class is a key factor enabling pupils to enjoy school and do well. Typically, lessons are well planned and pupils have a clear idea of what they are expected to learn. They receive a good level of challenge in most lessons and a good amount of praise for their efforts and exemplary behaviour. However, more able pupils are not always challenged enough in their writing. Assessment procedures are rigorous and the information gained is used well to plan future work. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support all pupils to ensure that those who find learning more difficult make good progress. The use of computers and interactive whiteboards is a strong feature of teaching in each class, supporting and stimulating pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and fulfils statutory requirements. It caters effectively for pupils' needs, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage has many good features but does not provide enough opportunities for children to learn outdoors. Pupils are given good opportunities to promote their personal development and have an excellent knowledge of how to stay healthy and safe. Provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT is good. The wide and varied curriculum prepares pupils well for their future. For example, good links with local industries have added significantly to the pupils' science experience and Key Stage 2 pupils benefit from learning French, German and Spanish. There is a wide range of enrichment activities, including residential visits at both key stages. Extra-curricular provision, including a strong emphasis on sport, is good and adds much to pupils' enjoyment of school and promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding levels of care, guidance and support make a major contribution to pupils' personal development and their above average standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported. They are provided with challenging relevant targets and their progress is closely monitored. Pupils with English as an additional language have extra support from a specialist teacher and conscientious staff ensure that they are fully supported and involved. All pupils' learning is carefully assessed as they move through the school and this informs the setting of challenging individual targets. Excellent links to outside agencies support the needs of vulnerable pupils very well. Procedures are in place to ensure pupils' health and safety. Safeguarding procedures meet government requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is regarded by staff as an excellent motivator and is successfully strengthening all aspects of leadership and management. She has empowered her senior staff to take on more

responsibilities, which they are doing effectively, and this is making a clear contribution to school improvement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and is a result of a process involving all key stakeholders. All aspects of the school's performance are rigorously monitored and evaluated so that strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified. Some impact of this has already been seen in the recent improvement in writing. The school prides itself on its inclusive nature and it goes out of its way to make pupils of all abilities, different faiths and minority ethnic origins feel welcome. Parents are strongly supportive of the school, which has a good reputation in the local area. The school has shown by its recent improvements in writing and distributed leadership that it has a good capacity to improve. The governing body is good and, through the support it provides for the school and the challenges it gives the headteacher, it makes a significant contribution to school improvement.

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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	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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

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?	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.

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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I am writing on behalf of the inspectors to thank you for the special welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. Everyone was very polite and helpful in answering our questions.

We judged St John Fisher to be a good school and found some areas excellent. You all work hard and learn well and show a lot of care for each other. Your behaviour is outstanding and you know that if anyone has a problem, your teachers will help you to sort it out. We particularly liked how well you try and help everybody stay friends and notice acts of kindness in your school. You are all part of a very healthy school where people care particularly well for each other and enjoy themselves. You make many good choices about the food you eat and many of you spend a lot of your time getting plenty of exercise.

Your teachers help you by telling you what you have done well and what you need to do next. Your targets help you to get better and we found that everybody is doing well at nearly everything they do. We have asked your teachers to help the children who are particularly good at writing to get even better by making the work they are asked to do more challenging. You can help by always trying to produce your best work in writing.

We could tell that you like your teachers and that they help you to learn well. We were very pleased that you get to go out on visits and have lots of visitors into school to help to make your learning even more interesting and fun. We felt that the children in the Foundation Stage would enjoy their time in school even more and do even better if they had more chance to do their learning outdoors.

We were very impressed by the way you try to help others and the sensible way you do the jobs you are given. We are sure you are proud of the many awards that you have helped the school to get.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school. We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make St John Fisher an even better school.