

St John Fisher (RC) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117480
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312629
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Florence Olajide

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	207
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Wright
Headteacher	Mr Charles McNerney
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hazelmere Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL4 9RW

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 September 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an area north of St Albans. Most pupils come from the immediate vicinity of the school, many from families with a professional background. Three quarters of the pupils come from White British families. The others represent a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including Black African, pupils from Traveller families and other White backgrounds. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and those who speak a home language other than English are well below average. A smaller than average number receive additional support for learning, emotional or physical needs, although the proportion with statements of educational need is broadly average. The school makes provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from the age of four and pupils enter the school with standards that are slightly above what is typical for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. Its Christian ethos underpins the good pastoral care and helps to foster a community spirit where pupils and adults feel valued. Relationships are very positive and there is a strong emphasis on responsibility and care for others. This successfully promotes pupils' personal development and well-being, which are good. The learning environment is calm and purposeful and the school offers an interesting and varied curriculum, which highly motivates pupils. One parent explained, 'My child is buzzing with excitement when the day is through.' Nonetheless, the school does not yet capitalise on pupils' readiness and eagerness to learn by providing high quality teaching which enables them to make good progress. Some of the teaching is good, but not consistently so across the school. In particular, the use of assessment to inform planning and move pupils forward in their learning is at an early stage and pupils do not yet receive effective academic guidance on what they need to improve and how to do so. As a result, although pupils attain above average standards by the time they leave the school, this only represents satisfactory progress from their starting points. Pupils' overall achievement is therefore no better than satisfactory and some are capable of doing better. Children get a sound start to their education in Reception class but standards in language, literacy and communication are below other areas of learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Following its last inspection, the school went through a period of difficulty in securing the appointment of a headteacher. This had a negative impact on staff morale, the pace of improvement and pupils' achievement. The current headteacher has successfully re-established a positive community spirit and teamwork among staff. However, leaders were slow to identify and rectify the underachievement that had set in. This was reflected in the 2007 end of Year 6 national assessments. Over the last academic year, improvement strategies have been largely successful in bringing about satisfactory progress in 2008. This is especially so in writing in Key Stage 2. The school is now turning its attention to addressing weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics in order to accelerate pupils' progress in this area. Nevertheless, despite the recent success, targets are not yet being used effectively to raise standards, and in some instances are not challenging enough. Strategies for assessing pupils, and analysing and monitoring their progress also lack rigour.

There have been several changes within the governing body recently. A small group of governors who are actively involved in the life of the school have a suitable understanding of its work and provide leaders with sound support and challenge. The school is working closely with the local authority to provide appropriate professional development for the staff. Given the school's circumstances, it has made satisfactory progress in relation to some issues identified in the previous inspection and a good beginning in others. Recent improvements indicate that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The school provides children with an attractive, stimulating and welcoming learning environment. It liaises well with other providers and parents to ensure that children make a smooth and swift transition into school. Children's personal development and well-being are good. Adults provide them with good emotional support to ensure they settle in well. Although they have been in school for less than a week, children were settled and eager to learn. In a short space of time, they have learnt important routines and respond extremely well to adults and each other. They

show good interest in activities and in exploring ideas, and they share equipment and resources amicably. Children have access to a well-thought-out outdoor area that supports all aspects of their learning and effectively builds on the work done in the classroom. Staff help children to learn satisfactorily. Planned activities are purposeful and children have good opportunities to make choices in their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Adults pay close attention to children's development and assess their progress regularly. However, assessments of what they are able to do when they first start school are underestimated. Therefore, judgements about their progress are not always secure. By the time children leave the Reception year they attain standards that are above age-related expectations in all aspects of their learning and achievement is satisfactory. Nonetheless, their attainment in communication, language and literacy is much lower than in other aspects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement, particularly in mathematics and ensure that targets are sufficiently challenging.
- Improve systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress and use the information effectively to identify and tackle any underachievement.
- Ensure that feedback and marking enables pupils to know exactly what they need to do to improve.
- Raise standards in communication, language and literacy in the EYFS.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards throughout the school generally remain above average from year to year but the 2007 national assessments indicated low achievement at the end of Year 6. In 2008, standards at the end of Year 2 were average. At the end of Year 6, they were above average, representing satisfactory achievement. The 2007 results identified lower attainment and achievement of boys. However, current school data does not reflect a discernible pattern in the achievement of gender groups. Rather it varies within the different year groups and across subjects. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds do not form large enough groups to make generalisations about their achievement. The achievement of pupils who find learning more difficult and those with physical needs or a statement of educational need is satisfactory. The school met its 2008 end of Key Stage 2 targets in mathematics and science and significantly exceeded the English target.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and permeates every aspect of the life of the school. Uplifting assemblies raise self-esteem and enable pupils to grow in self-awareness, think in moral terms and reflect upon their feelings and actions. Pupils take great pride in their achievements. Pupils are courteous and polite; they show respect for one another, the adults

and the school. Behaviour is good overall. Their behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Although they work and play together harmoniously, some can be too boisterous during playtime. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and personal safety, and this influences what they do. Hence, they look after one another well. Older pupils take on many responsibilities, including mentoring the Reception children. The curriculum ensures that pupils develop respect and appreciation, for their own and other cultures. Pupils play an active part in school life by organising fund-raising for charities and offering their ideas for improvement. Pupils' preparation for the next stage in their learning and their future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The teaching is beginning to engage pupils more, for example, by using 'talk partners'. In response, pupils are very enthusiastic about learning and give their best, particularly when actively engaged in tasks. They enjoy exploring ideas and developing their understanding through experimentation. Pupils are usually clear about what is expected of them in lessons. In the best teaching, effective use is made of assessment to ensure a good match between tasks and pupils' abilities, and to ensure that they develop a thorough understanding of concepts. Pupils are also increasingly involved in self and peer assessment, for example, by acting as 'critical friends' to each other. However, this is not always the case and the general use of assessment is weak. Consequently, some tasks do not stretch the more able pupils adequately. Resources are used well to support learning and interactive white boards are sometimes used effectively to demonstrate and develop ideas. Teaching assistants provide pupils with good support and can often be seen explaining concepts, asking questions and encouraging pupils to put their ideas forward.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Very effective links with a wide range of external organisations and partners ensures that the curriculum is lively and varied. Visitors such as authors and community members, and themed weeks, like the 'World Wide Week', bring learning to life and add much to pupils' enjoyment. Pupils' clear recollections demonstrate the good learning from these stimulating and interesting events. Pupils enjoy residential visits, which provide opportunities for team building and develop their self-confidence. They learn French from Year 3 onwards and a range of extra-curricular activities extends and enriches the curriculum further. The school has begun to modify the curriculum effectively to respond to pupils' needs. For example, a consistent and coherent method for teaching writing has resulted in swift improvements in standards and planning is beginning to link subjects creatively to make learning more active and relevant.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents' views that this is 'a very caring school' are accurate. Pupils thrive emotionally. They feel safe because staff attend to their needs and readily provide effective guidance in personal matters. The very few racist or behavioural incidents are handled promptly and effectively. Nonetheless, academic guidance is not as strong. In their books and during lessons, pupils

receive feedback about how they are doing. However, often, this is neither clear nor concise in giving pupils a good understanding of what they should do to improve their work. While some pupils know their individual targets, others have only a vague awareness of what they need to improve. The homework policy is not always followed consistently. The school meets current requirements for safeguarding its pupils and pays appropriate attention to risk assessments. Training for staff and governors is up to date.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders at all levels are involved in evaluating the impact of the school's work. As such, they have a good understanding of what needs to improve and the current school development plan accurately identifies the most pertinent improvement priorities. Some subject leaders are increasingly more effective within their areas of responsibility although the existing good practice is yet to be extended more widely across other subjects to maximise learning opportunities. Governors are supportive but not all are sufficiently involved in monitoring the work of the school.

The main weakness in leadership and management is the lack of rigour in the systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress and the weak use of targets to raise achievement. Pupils' performance is not monitored regularly or carefully enough to ensure that they make progress at the rate of which they are capable. Pupils' individual targets do not always take full account of their past performance or potential and sometimes lack sufficient challenge. While good attention is paid to monitoring and improving staff performance, this is not linked closely enough to measurable outcomes for pupils.

In recent months, leaders have established a sharper focus on raising pupils' achievement and there are advanced plans to extend the successful work done in writing to mathematics. The school effectively promotes a community spirit. Positive links are fostered with parents and the school makes effective use of available resources to provide pupils from traveller communities with good support.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	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 learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

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

11 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Fisher (RC) Primary School, St Albans, AL4 9RW

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us when we visited your school recently. As we promised, this letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

Your school is a really caring one. We were very impressed by how responsible you are. You and the adults all do your best to look after one another and you treat each other with respect and kindness. We noticed how well you behave especially in lessons. You understand how your actions affect other people and, mostly, you choose to do what is right. You have many chances to take part in sports, trips and other interesting activities like the 'World Wide Week' where you learnt about different kinds of people. Some of your lessons are very interesting. You told us you enjoy school because of these activities and your attendance is good.

Overall, your school is satisfactory. Although you work hard, we noticed that many of you are not achieving as well as we think you ought to especially in mathematics. When we asked, some of you could not really remember your targets or how to improve your work. We know the staff have worked hard to help you improve your writing.

To make your school a good one, we have asked the staff to:

- help you to achieve more especially in mathematics and make sure that your targets are not too hard or easy
- regularly check how well you are doing and use the information to decide how to help you improve
- tell you exactly what you need to do to improve your work
- help the youngest children in Reception to do better in their speaking and literacy work.

We hope that you will continue to work hard and wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Florence Olajide

Lead inspector