

St John Fisher Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124461
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314938
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	836
6th form	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Goodwin
Headteacher	Fionnuala Hegarty
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Ashfields New Road Newcastle ST5 2SJ
Telephone number	01782 615636
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspector and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John Fisher Catholic High is an average-sized, over-subscribed comprehensive school with a stable staff and pupil population. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased over the last three years but remains below the national average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language are below the national average, although they have increased in the last two years. The school has recently been successful in gaining the specialist college status in humanities.

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 Catholic High School is a good school. In addition, it has some outstanding features. Pupils achieve well and some achieve very well. Standards are above average by age 16 and this represents good achievement. Pupils' achievement is improving year on year as a result of the school's continual drive to improve teaching and the curriculum. Their progress is particularly good in Years 7 to 9, especially in English and science. While progress remains good in Years 10 and 11, it is not as fast, notably in mathematics, where there has been some underachievement. The most able pupils do really well because of challenging teaching and a wide range of activities that help broaden their experience and understanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, as do the growing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The school is led well by the highly committed headteacher, who has high ambitions for the future improvement of the school. She is well supported by an effective senior leadership team and by staff, governors and parents, who support her clear vision and educational direction. The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is good. There is a clear and successful focus on helping pupils achieve as well as they can and to provide a curriculum which closely matches their individual needs and which captures their interest and aspirations. The school has a well-planned programme for making further improvements in teaching and learning, the curriculum, and leadership and management. It has correctly recognised that some teaching does not meet each student's individual needs as well as it might. It is focusing on ensuring that work meets the needs of individual pupils more fully and shows them clearly what they need to do to further improve their work. The school has implemented a support and training programme for staff to help achieve the planned improvements. Inconsistencies exist in the effectiveness of middle managers to lead their subjects, and the school has put in place improved managerial arrangements to support them.

The staff give their time generously. This is evident in the long list of extra-curricular activities, which are attended by a large number of pupils. As one pupil said, 'There is always something to do; I particularly like the extra help with my homework.' Pupils are guided very well towards, for example, healthy lifestyles and making healthy choices for meals. The pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and to the well-being of others, both locally and internationally, are a credit to the school. For example, the school has links with schools in Nigeria, Mozambique and India. The pupils' contribution to the community is also notable, as is their excellent behaviour. The pupils are well mannered, articulate and ambitious. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They say that their children greatly enjoy school and make good progress because the teaching is good. Pupils' personal development and well-being, and their care, guidance and support, are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is exemplary. They are proud of their school and enjoy the challenges set for them. Their good rates of attendance also reflect their sense of achievement and enjoyment. Pupils say they feel really safe, happy and secure in school. They also report that if there are any incidents of bullying, they feel confident to talk to adults. The school council members are active and pupils feel that its work makes a real difference to the quality of life in school. In lessons, and in other aspects of the school, pupils show a good sense of responsibility and are prepared very well for their future economic well-being. The school provides good value for money and has good capacity for making further improvements. This is because it has successfully tackled the issues raised by the previous inspection and has identified the right priorities to build further on its

successes in an outstanding caring and learning environment. The parents are overwhelmingly positive and appreciative of the care the school shows for their children, and feel very well informed about their progress.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education for its pupils. It is well led and involves an effective, committed team of staff in developing all aspects of the sixth form work. A good range of suitable courses is available and retention rates are high. Staff are effective in promoting both the personal development and academic achievement of all its pupils. Overall, pupils make good progress and their standards are above average, although there is variance in achievement between subjects. The atmosphere in the sixth form is highly supportive, producing a fine community spirit and a strong work ethic. The pupils' personal development and well-being, as well as their care guidance, and support, are outstanding. Pupils appreciate the personal attention and excellent guidance they receive in helping them to decide future pathways. The sixth form is improving the amount of vocational education on offer through the excellent collaboration with the adjacent Newcastle College. There are many opportunities for pupils to get involved in the life of the school, with music, subject-specific activities and many sporting options made available to them. They enjoy their studies and take up significant roles in the rest of the school, willingly giving their time to mentor younger pupils and help in a range of clubs and activities, giving many an opportunity to, as one pupil put it, 'put something back into their community'. Teaching and learning on AS and A level courses is uniformly good, catering well for individual learning needs. There is a regular and rigorous system for reviewing pupils' progress, which ensures that early support is provided for those who need it.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve further achievement and standards in mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- Improve teaching so that more of it is more focused on meeting the needs of individual pupils and shows them clearly what they need to do to further improve their work.
- Develop the ability of some middle managers to lead their subject teams.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils enter the school with attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. They make good progress as a whole and achieve well so that by Year 11, standards are above average. More-able pupils, in particular, do well because work for this ability group is challenging. In Key Stage 3, progress is very good and there has been a significant improvement in achievement in English, and very good achievement in science. Progress in Key Stage 4 is good, but not as fast as in the lower school. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE subjects at grades A*–C is above average and is high when English and mathematics are included. However, the progress that many pupils make in mathematics in Key Stage 4 is not as fast as it should be and there has been some underachievement recently. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and achieve as well as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's strongly positive ethos and sense of community contribute significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Pupils greatly enjoy school and are keen to learn, and behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. Levels of attendance are good and this is continuing to improve further because of the relentless drive for improvement by the school. Pupils say that they feel really safe around the school and appreciate the support that older pupils give willingly. Pupils appreciate the comprehensive range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities and take-up for these is excellent. Most pupils are aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles through regular exercise and a well-balanced diet.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Opportunities abound for the promotion of Catholic values and pupils develop a respect and tolerance for others, and a strong awareness of their place in the community. They develop very good social skills as they progress through the school, and links through the British Council with Nigeria, Mozambique and India help many to develop an understanding of the breadth of cultural traditions in the wider community. Pupils' contribution to the community is outstanding, with many young people taking opportunities to be involved in charities, for example, support for the elderly and the disadvantaged. These and other activities such as developing enterprise and work-related skills help them prepare very well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and in the sixth form. Teaching also has some outstanding features. Teachers are specialists in their subjects. They communicate information at the right level and with enthusiasm that inspires pupils. Occasionally, however, over-long teacher exposition slows the pace of a lesson. Teachers create an atmosphere in classrooms that is highly conducive to learning. In response, pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are exemplary. Lessons are well planned around clear objectives, with an appropriate range of activities for pupils to achieve them. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboard to enhance the presentation of many lessons. In the best lessons, opportunities are given for pupils to learn independently and for them to present their findings to the rest of the class. Question-and-answer sessions are well conducted, but sometimes do not involve enough pupils. Good use is made of homework to extend pupils' learning.

In English and the humanities, insightful diagnostic comments appear on pupils' work, showing them how to improve, but there is also some cursory marking in some subjects that is less helpful. Similarly, opportunities for self and peer assessment are variable on a regular basis.

Teaching in the sixth form is also effective. Its hallmark is thorough organisation of courses and stimulating use of discussion and other activities that engage pupils in effective learning. Pupils speak highly of the individual tuition they receive from their teachers. Their progress is

monitored closely each term, using the rich data available, and intervention is effective in assisting any pupils giving cause for concern.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has been very creative in developing its curriculum to match the needs and interests of all its pupils. The Pathways Curriculum is well designed to personalise learning for five different groups of pupils, allowing fast tracking through Key Stage 3 of the academically able, and additional numeracy and literacy lessons for those who are weak in these areas. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented are well catered for. Detailed planning by departments has adapted the curriculum successfully to meet the needs of the different groups. Attention to numeracy and literacy skills is a strength of the curriculum and the school enters all Year 11 students for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN) qualifications and is highly successful. Citizenship is taught as a discrete subject in all years and is well planned, leading to a GCSE qualification in Year 11. In accordance with its Catholic foundation, the school makes extra provision for religious education across the school along with personal and social education. Good provision is also made for information and communication and technology (ICT) throughout the school.

Clear progression routes are mapped through the pathways curriculum across the school. Careful guidance is given to pupils over their selection of courses in Year 10 to help avoid choices that are stereotypical. The core curriculum in Key Stage 4 has been extended to include humanities in Year 10, reflecting the school's new status as a humanities college from September 2008. The school has also improved the amount of vocational education on offer through its excellent collaboration with the adjacent Newcastle College. At present, opportunities for taking part in physical education activities are limited to one period a week in Key Stage 4, although plans are in hand to increase time for the subject next year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This is an inclusive school in which truly every child matters. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety are robust and clear safeguarding practices are fully in place. Pupils speak highly of the support they receive and say that they feel safe, valued and respected within a strong and vibrant community. The vast majority of parents are complimentary about this aspect and many other aspects of the school's work.

Data are used well to ensure that target setting is accurate and rigorous, and the school's effective monitoring of pupils' achievement contributes to the good progress that they make through the school. Pupils are aware of their academic targets and the majority know what they have to do to achieve them. Assessment procedures are robust and followed consistently across the school, allowing regular monitoring of pupils' progress and triggering intervention where necessary to prevent underachievement. As a result, pupils have a clear understanding of the level they have reached in a subject.

Pastoral support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for those for whom English is an additional language, is very effective and this enables them to match the progress

of other pupils through the school. The excellent liaison with external agencies, such as health and social services, and further support from the school chaplaincy team are strengths of the school. These help pupils, particularly the more vulnerable, to access care, guidance and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The strong leadership and vision provided by the headteacher are well recognised by staff, pupils and parents. They appreciate the very strong and positive school ethos that promotes academic success and outstanding personal and social development and well-being of all pupils.

The leadership and management of the school are good, with some outstanding features. The senior leaders work effectively as a team. One of the strengths of the school's work is the way that senior staff and governors keep a very close check on the school's work. There is a strong culture of review and improvement planning, which takes account of the views of parents and pupils. There are very good links with local schools and support agencies to ensure that pupils experience minimal disruption at the point of transition.

Middle leaders are committed to providing every opportunity for all pupils to do well. A developing team of middle managers is gaining confidence in being able to lead their own departments. However, there are still inconsistencies between and within subjects and aspects such as how well students' work is marked. The senior leadership recognise this and have put in place clearer line management systems to provide effective intervention and support. Good monitoring and evaluation systems are in place, including rigorous analysis of attendance, attainment and progress towards targets.

The governors actively support the school and give of their time generously. They hold senior managers to account constructively. There are effective committee structures in place; financial management and control are very good. Governors are well informed, are highly supportive and act as critical friends to the senior leadership team.

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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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
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	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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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	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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic High School, Staffordshire ST5 2SJ

Thank you very much for the very warm welcome you extended to me and my colleagues when we visited your school in March. It is a delight to write to you and say how impressed we were with you and your school. We think it is a good school. It also has some outstanding features.

We were extremely impressed with your positive attitudes and exemplary behaviour. It is because of these positive attitudes, hard work and determination that you achieve well. You are taught well by teachers whom you appreciate and who enjoy their subjects. You have a good opportunity to study a wide range of subjects and pursue additional interest in the extensive programme of out-of-school activities and the strong links with the others schools and the adjacent Newcastle College. Your links through the British Council with Nigeria, Mozambique and India show that you have a keen interest in understanding other cultures and traditions in the wider community.

Thank you very much for contributing to the inspection. We spoke with many of you in class and around the school and with those of you who are members of the school council. You were very proud of your school and full of praise. Many of you told me that you felt the school did all it possibly could to help some of you who have experienced some personal difficulties and tragedies. Your parents are very supportive of what the school does for you.

In discussion with the headteacher, who is very much respected by pupils, staff and parents, the senior leadership team and the chair of governors, I asked them to:

- improve achievement and standards in mathematics at Key Stage 4
- improve teaching so that it focuses on meeting your individual needs and shows you clearly what you need to do to further improve your work
- develop the ability of some middle managers to lead their subjects.

I look forward to hearing about your future success. I wish you all the very best.

Rashida Sharif Her Majesty's Inspector

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