

St John Fisher RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110907
Local Authority	City of Peterborough
Inspection number	329234
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Cook HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	744
6th form	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Judith Jones
Headteacher	Ms Mary Mihovilovic
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	Park Lane Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE1 5JN
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St John Fisher RC School has a richly diverse school population. Nearly 60% of students are from minority ethnic groups, which is well above average. Approximately a third of students are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. The proportion of students whose first language is not English at over 50% is well above the national average. The proportion of students who are identified as having learning difficulties is above the national average. Attainment on entry is below average. The school is part of the Team Peterborough federation which includes other schools and the Regional College in Peterborough who jointly provide a range of courses for students from all four institutions.

In February 2008, the Local Authority (LA) issued the school with a Warning Notice raising some concerns about the standard of education at the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

There are features of this school that demonstrate the intention to meet the needs of its diverse cultural, ethnic and religious community. Students' behaviour, in general, is satisfactory and where firm and sensitive discipline is given, an orderly and positive atmosphere is maintained. The school's Catholic identity ensures that students make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development overall is satisfactory. However, these positive features are outweighed by the school's failure to ensure all students make progress in their studies and always feel supported in order to meet their individual needs.

Standards at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE level are well below the national average. A significant proportion of students make inadequate progress. The groups that underachieve most significantly include: boys, students eligible for free school meals, those who have English as an additional language (EAL) and those who find learning difficult. The quality of teaching varies but overall it is inadequate. Good teaching does take place, more so in specific subject areas, for example English. Where teaching is ineffective it fails to engage students in learning because behaviour management is weak, and in some lessons, does not take into account what is needed to help students learn. Inadequate teaching in mathematics results in students making inadequate progress in this subject.

Overall the curriculum is inadequate because it is not sufficiently matched to the diverse needs of students. Different aspects of the support given to students are not sufficiently co-ordinated to identify where the curriculum provided is not helping students achieve. However, the school successfully provides opportunities for some students who have English as an additional language to study courses in their home language.

Leadership and management are inadequate. The school, LA and the Diocese are not working co-operatively in a constructive partnership. Leadership at all levels across the school varies in its effectiveness. Senior leaders are not coping with the demands of having to plan strategically and deliver at least satisfactory provision for an ever-changing student community. The gathering and analysis of evidence about the school's performance and effectiveness lack rigour. Actions to secure improvement are therefore not properly founded on rigorous self-evaluation and leadership is insufficiently strategic. Governors are unclear about which groups of students are making inadequate progress and they have not reached a clear consensus in order to be able to hold the school to account. The school does not have the capacity to improve and there is some way to go if the school and external partners are to agree priorities for what should happen next.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good quality of education where standards are satisfactory and improving. Students make good progress from their starting points post GCSE. The school is part of Team Peterborough, which has increased student choice. This federation enables a wide range of A and AS level courses to be offered and an increasing number of vocational courses

at level 2 and 3. The curriculum is supplemented well by activities linked to general studies, religious education and physical education. Teaching is good with teachers developing students' independent learning and analytical skills. Staff have good subject knowledge and plan a range of stimulating tasks. Sixth-form students are good role models and take an active part in the school by, for example, acting as head boy and girl and supporting Year 7 in developing their reading skills. Students comment on the good care and guidance they receive with increasing numbers going onto higher education. They know who to turn to for help. However, academic guidance is inconsistent and students do not always have clear advice on how to improve or on how teachers' marking relates to exam criteria. Attendance is good in Year 12 but in Year 13 some individuals do not have consistent patterns of attendance. Leadership and management are good. The quality of provision is monitored effectively and takes into account student views and scrutiny of their work. However, monitoring of the provision across the Team Peterborough partnership is inconsistent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievement especially in mathematics and for underachieving groups, including boys, students with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language.
- Co-ordinate more effectively any additional support for students, especially those with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language so that the curriculum meets their needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least satisfactory or better.
- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously analyse the effectiveness of actions taken to improve students' learning and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Considerable numbers of students, including particular groups, underachieve significantly. Inadequate progress in national tests and examinations at Key Stage 3 and 4 is most evident amongst boys, students eligible for free school meals, those who have English as an additional language (EAL) and those who find learning difficult. The amount of overall progress students make in mathematics is also inadequate; this is clearly linked to inadequate teaching, and weak leadership and management in this subject area.

Students' progress is better in Key Stage 3 and data indicates it is satisfactory. Standards at the end of Year 9 have remained steady over the last three years whereas national average standards have improved. Therefore, when compared to the national picture, standards at St John Fisher are slipping behind. When students start in Key Stage 4 in Year 10 their rate of progress then declines. The percentage of students in 2007 gaining 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE was well below the national average and fell compared to the previous year. Again the 2007 GCSE results show stark differences between different groups of students. For example, 32% of boys achieved 5 A*-C passes compared to 57% of girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school helps students to make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Significant contributions are made to this by religious education courses, and moral education is promoted effectively within the context of the catholic ethos. The school community celebrates diversity; staff and students alike value the wide range of different religions and cultures represented within the school. There is good participation in extra sporting activities that helps students who participate stay fit and establish a healthy lifestyle. Students are actively involved in contributing to the world community making significant contributions to charitable causes. The students on the school council make a good contribution to school improvement, by, for example, helping with ideas for the new building and reviewing the behaviour and anti-bullying policies.

In the majority of lessons behaviour is satisfactory or better although in less effective lessons students' behaviour deteriorates, they lose their concentration, ignore teachers and stop working. Students respond well to the high levels of staffing around the school during informal times and when staff are present, students behave reasonably well. When staff are not present, a minority of students do not conduct themselves in a safe way towards others. Although many students report that they feel safe at the school and enjoy their education, there were a significant number of students who spoke to inspectors who do not feel as safe or free from bullying as they should.

Satisfactory attendance at the school has been sustained over the last few years. Effective support for work experience contributes to the development of students' work place skills. However, low standards mean that students do not develop essential skills, for example in mathematics and ICT, that will contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning across and within subjects is inconsistent and is inadequate overall. The notable difference in how well different groups of students learn in some lessons relates directly to wide variation in the quality of teachers' planning, organisation of lessons and management of students' behaviour. In some lessons, high expectations are immediately evident for students' positive behaviour, participation, concentration and completion of work. These teachers plan and deliver lessons effectively so that they start crisply then move along at a brisk pace ensuring that learning is maximised throughout. The range of approaches and resources teachers use in these lessons encourages all students' active participation. They work with sustained interest, are productive and make satisfactory progress. By stark contrast, inadequate teaching, as seen in a third of lessons observed by inspectors, results in a significant proportion of students making insufficient progress. This occurs when the work is not tailored well enough to meet their varying needs and abilities so that all can succeed; many lose interest and a significant minority eventually switch off entirely. Students' poor attitude to learning in these lessons is typified by relentless off task talking and unwillingness to participate, so

valuable learning time is wasted. Too often this is left unresolved because teachers either employ a limited range of appropriate strategies to tackle this effectively or just ignore what is happening.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is inadequate because it does not adequately meet the needs of all of the students. The school recognises that the plans and construction of the new school building have hindered the development of the curriculum, particularly with regard to provision for ICT. Although there are plans to improve the curriculum, it is not carefully monitored to identify what needs to be done, so that fundamental weaknesses remain in mathematics and ICT provision. The range of vocational courses on offer is developing at Key Stage 4. Only a small number of students take part in the increased flexibility programme, which aims to give students a curriculum that is better suited to their needs and aspirations. Students appreciate the broad range of extra curricular activities on offer, which includes sporting activities and subject workshops but the take-up is variable. Many students take part in and enjoy the trips abroad which are offered to most years. About 9% of students study courses in their home languages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Many students appreciate that staff are available to listen to their concerns. However, a minority of students do not report their concerns to staff because they are not confident in the support available. Most staff are highly committed and caring but the lack of a strategic approach or effective evaluation of their work means that the quality of care, guidance and support is inconsistent. Students' progress is inadequately monitored or analysed so that support and intervention are not evaluated properly or targeted efficiently. There are some examples where intervention and support has led to reasonable outcomes for students but this is not consistent. For example, collaborative work with parents has been successful in encouraging some students with previous persistent low attendance to attend at acceptable levels. Individual learning targets are not used consistently with students and many students are unaware of them or of their purpose. Effective, intensive work to assist students who have a first language other than English enables many of these students to make good gains in English but this progress is not reflected across the curriculum. The whole-school approach to setting personalised programmes of work and targets for students with additional needs lacks coordination and is ineffective. Not all staff know the priorities or necessary support strategies for the students they teach or support which hampers students' progress across the curriculum. Health and safety procedures and training for staff meet statutory requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leaders care about the success of the school but the challenges they currently face have overwhelmed them. Leadership and management are inadequate, primarily because they have had too little impact on raising achievement and meeting the needs of all students. Working relationships between leaders of the school, the LA and the Diocese have broken down and there is no agreed course of action to improve the school.

Some subject leaders have taken small steps to tackle the underachievement of different groups of students but they do not check to ensure that new approaches have the desired impact. There is a lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. Judgements made about the quality of teaching were found to be too generous. In general, the school's judgements about its own effectiveness are also too generous. Managers at all levels do not track the achievement of all groups of students well enough. As a result, the school's strategic plan, detailing how it intends to make improvements, is weak.

Individually, governors are supportive and committed to the school but collectively significant differences of opinion have resulted in a breakdown in constructive working relationships. The limited nature of the information provided for governors and their lack of understanding of the school's weaknesses result in their inability to ask challenging questions and hold the school to account. The school does not operate as a cohesive community where all students can flourish and achieve all that they should.

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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?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	4	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	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?	4	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 May 2008

Dear Students,

Inspection of St John Fisher RC School, Peterborough, PE1 5JN

I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of our inspection visit to your school. Firstly, I would like to thank you for the many conversations we had with a number of you who were all very honest and thoughtful about what they told us. It was good to see that so many of you value each other's cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of the positive findings of the inspection was our judgment that the sixth form is good. Students in the sixth form benefit from good teaching and the opportunities on offer through Team Peterborough.

Having looked carefully at how much progress you are making and how the school is meeting your needs, the inspection team judged that your school requires 'special measures'. This means that your school needs to improve if it is to ensure that all students do well and feel safe. We have given the school the following key priorities:

- To improve the progress that you make in all subjects, but especially in mathematics. We are particularly concerned that the school ensures that the achievement of boys and for those of you who need extra support with learning or who speak English as an additional language is at least satisfactory.
- We have asked the school to make sure that everyone works together to make sure the support they give you is just right. This includes making sure that in all of your lessons teaching is always helping you to learn. You can help here by letting people know if you are worried about the progress you are making.
- We have made clear that all staff with leadership responsibilities need to make sure that the school improves and that the senior leadership team and governors ensure your school is a safe place to be in.

Your school will now be visited regularly to check how well the school is improving. I hope that you will feel part of the important improvement work that needs to be done and I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector