

St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118908
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	339321
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1095
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Clough
Headteacher	David Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
School address	Ordnance Street Chatham ME4 6SG
Telephone number	01634 335757
Fax number	01634 335833
Email address	headteacher@st-johnfisher.medway.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 42 lessons and tutor periods, involving over half of the teaching staff. Meetings were held with the Chair of Governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at planning documents, assessment information and pupils' work. In addition, 51 questionnaires completed by parents and carers were analysed along with 33 from pupils and 17 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of the school's involvement in school improvement programmes on raising attainment and improving pupils' learning and progress
- the effectiveness of the changes made to improve teaching and the curriculum, particularly for girls
- the quality of provision and students' achievement in the sixth form.

Information about the school

St John Fisher is a larger-than-average, ethnically diverse secondary school. About half of the pupils are from White British backgrounds, with the largest groups from Black African or Eastern Europe heritages. An above-average proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school part way through their education. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is increasing steadily year-on-year and is high. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is involved in the Gaining Ground programme; a national school improvement programme designed to improve performance. Since November 2009, it has been supported by a partner school which is a designated National Support School and its executive principal who is a National Leader of Education.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the sixth form.

The local authority recognised the school's weaknesses at the beginning of the current academic year. Steps were taken to strengthen leadership and staff development through a partnership arrangement with another school. The headteacher of the partner school has been appointed as executive principal at St John Fisher. Changes have also been made to strengthen governance. Significant improvements have been made, most particularly in pupils' behaviour, which is now good. Pupils say that the 'zero-tolerance' approach has made a real difference and that they are proud of their school again. Their spirits have been lifted by some refurbishment and improved facilities, for example in the library, where they have better access to computers. Pupils are responding well to higher expectations for their personal and academic development, shown in their above-average attendance.

Pupils' attainment is marginally below the national average by the end of Year 11, and their progress is satisfactory overall. However, this has been achieved through additional lessons and revision courses, mostly for Year 11 pupils, to make up for inconsistent progress in lessons because teaching has too many weaknesses. Frequent changes of teachers for some groups has led to a lack of continuity for pupils, limiting their progress. Pupils generally show interest in their learning, but in the weaker lessons this is not sustained because tasks lack relevance or they are not closely enough matched to needs. By contrast, when activities capture their interest, pupils are enthusiastic learners. Pupils make consistently good progress in English and satisfactory progress in the other core subjects of mathematics and science. This has not been the case across the wider curriculum. However, pupils are now making more rapid progress because the curriculum has been broadened with the introduction of more vocational and applied courses. This has enabled a closer match of courses to the pupils needs and interests, particularly girls. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress overall, often boosted by the additional provision in Year 11. In lessons, pupils' progress is sometimes limited when teachers do not use assessment information well enough to take account of individual starting points or needs, such as when pupils find writing difficult or are at a relatively early stage of learning English. Teaching assistants give good support in

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lessons, but their contribution to the lesson is not always planned carefully enough by the teacher.

The sixth form is inadequate because of weaknesses in teaching that are similar to the rest of the school, and a curriculum which has not promoted appropriate progression for students from their GCSE starting points. Some changes to the curriculum were made for students currently in their first year in the sixth form, and close monitoring of their progress is now starting to improve attainment. Planning is well advanced to improve the curriculum further for the coming year.

The executive principal has brought a sense of urgency to all areas of school improvement. Under her skilled and resolute leadership, there is a strong sense of purpose amongst staff and a determination to bring about the necessary changes. An improving trend has now been established because self-evaluation is accurate and staff understand how they can bring about improvements. The need to depend on supply teachers has been vastly reduced by the recruitment of staff with the necessary skills and expertise. Support partners are helping to embed effective monitoring and evaluation practices at all levels of leadership. The success of the changes already made is evident in improved attainment for pupils across the school, which confirms the capacity for further development and improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils' progress is more consistent across the school, by:
 - giving pupils work which consistently engages and interests them
 - using the information from the marking and assessment of pupils' work to plan work which is appropriately challenging and closely matched to the prior attainment of the different groups within the class
 - matching the support from teaching assistants more closely to the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Raise students' attainment in the sixth form by improving the quality of sixth-form teaching and implementing the planned changes for their curriculum by the beginning of the next academic year.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Results in external examinations are below national averages but attainment is rising and the school is gradually closing the gap between its own performance and national benchmarks. Results from early examination entry or modular GCSE courses show that further improvement is likely this year. Given pupils' lower-than-average attainment on entry to the school, achievement overall is satisfactory. There are no significant differences in the overall progress made by different groups in the school over time, although limited specialist support for pupils who have specific learning difficulties, as

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well as for those who speak a language other than English at home, means that these pupils do not always make the short-term gains that they are capable of. Together with skills developed through vocational and applied learning courses, pupils' basic skills give them a satisfactory foundation for their future education and economic well-being. In lessons, the vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes and take pride in their achievements, for example in presenting their work well. Pupils' feedback, in a recent survey, indicated that they want more lessons to be interesting and active, and that they respond particularly well when given practical tasks where they can share their learning with one another. Pupils understand their learning, know the quality of their work and have a reasonable understanding of how to improve it. In the most successful lessons, pupils make a good contribution to a shared learning atmosphere. This was evident, for example, in one lesson where pupils asked probing questions of their teacher which showed the depth of their understanding about the Black Death. In too many lessons, however, learning was slow because pupils were chatting and their behaviour was not managed promptly enough in line with the school policy.

The school is calm, even when pupils have to negotiate narrow stairways. Pupils comment positively on the impact of the new behaviour management systems so that there is less disruption to their learning. They welcome the opportunities to share ideas about how the school can improve further, such as through the work of the year and school councils, and are encouraged that their views are acted upon. The school is a cohesive community where all groups of pupils get on well together, with shared values based on its faith status. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. There are opportunities to contribute to the school, for example as peer mentors, but pupils do not participate in many activities beyond the school. Because the sixth form is currently on a separate site, students have few opportunities to act as role models or interact socially with younger pupils. Pupils participate well in discussions about ethical issues in tutor periods and in history and English lessons, though opportunities are sometimes missed to extend their understanding, for example, of multicultural issues. Pupils have a satisfactory approach to leading healthy lifestyles, understanding why there are limitations to the range of food on offer. All participate in at least two hours of physical activity each week, and a satisfactory proportion attends extra-curricular sporting activities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

There has been a rigorous and effective approach to transforming teaching and learning. Although this is still at a relatively early stage, the school's data on the quality of teaching over the past year show improvement. Further work is necessary to ensure more consistently good teaching, which needed to accelerate pupils' progress and make up lost ground. Currently an unacceptable proportion of lessons has significant weaknesses. These are found across all subjects and more often in lessons for groups of lower-attaining pupils where a few teachers do not have the required skills in planning appropriate work or managing pupils' behaviour. There is a good basis for further development because most lessons are now appropriately paced, and teaching styles, tasks and materials engage pupils so that their learning is at least satisfactory. Teachers regularly identify what different groups within the class should achieve but pupils are not always given work at the right level that will help them to achieve the learning intentions. Although some inconsistencies remain in practice, pupils' work is assessed regularly and most teachers give pupils good guidance on how to improve. Assessment data are monitored closely and pupils identified as underachieving, particularly older pupils, are given extra help to catch up on coursework and attend additional classes, which ensures that they make satisfactory progress overall.

Over the last two years, the school recognised that the curriculum was not suitable for some pupils and was the source of some poor behaviour. Since then the range of vocational courses has increased. The new Key Stage 4 curriculum currently offered to Year 9 students builds firmly on recent improvements and provides a number of suitable pathways for students of different abilities. Extra-curricular provision and uptake are

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limited, with sport providing most of the offer.

Transition into the school is smooth, including for those who join at other than the usual times. Year 9 pupils are generally well informed about their option choices. Transition into the sixth form has been less successful, leading to a substantial proportion of students on inappropriate courses. Careers guidance effectively widens pupils' horizons and aspirations, although it only begins formally in Year 10. The recently introduced systems for improving behaviour and attendance, with stepped consequences and the refusal to authorise term-time holidays, are effectively ensuring pupils' good behaviour and reducing persistent absence. The work of the 'Turnaround Centre' has led to a dramatic decrease in exclusions and enabled older pupils to complete their courses. Further development is necessary to support pupils in managing their own behaviour and returning to their normal lessons more quickly. A range of programmes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language ensure that they make satisfactory progress. However, there is too little evaluation of the gains in pupils' progress to identify which are the most successful and to inform the next steps. Improvements have been made in specialist staffing but expertise is limited in the teaching of reading, overcoming specific learning difficulties and meeting the needs of the steadily increasing proportion of pupils who join the school speaking little English.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, staff and governing body, under the guidance of the executive principal and colleagues from the partner school, have made a good start in transforming the school. This is particularly evident in improvements in leadership and management, the climate for learning including behaviour, and a reduction in the proportion of inadequate lessons. Ongoing work is based on an accurate evaluation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. There is a shared recognition that teaching and learning need to be stronger. Some members of the governing body, including the Chair, make an effective impact on setting priorities for improvement, but others are insufficiently engaged. Training is planned to bring about a better understanding of the work of the school and to improve the organisation and professionalism of the governing body. The training programme for staff has been rigorous and effective, for example in standardising planning, introducing mentoring for

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colleagues and sharing effective practice. Robust action has been taken to reduce the numbers of lessons taught by supply staff. Teachers with the appropriate expertise and experience have been appointed to bring greater stability as the school moves forward. The impact of partnership working is increasing, for example, as the diocese strengthens governance. Changes made to the school's pastoral systems have resulted in one point of contact for parents and an improved turnout for parents' evenings. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are robust and a particular strength lies in the effective approach to securing the welfare of those students identified as most at risk, particularly through the school's committed approach to collaborative working with key agencies. Safety issues are integrated well into the curriculum so that pupils have a good awareness of how to take care of themselves. Arrangements to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination are satisfactorily ensuring that all groups of pupils make similar rates of progress. Measures have been introduced to improve communication and promote the progress made by pupils from Eastern European backgrounds. The school shows respect for other faiths. For example, Muslim pupils are given time and a place for prayers. Wide-ranging plans have recently been put in place to promote community cohesion and pupils' understanding of their place within a broader local, national and global context, but there has been insufficient time to measure the impact of most actions taken. A notable exception is the impact on the attitudes of pupils involved in community outreach brokered by Charlton Athletic Football Club.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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The sixth form is inadequate because students' achievement is too low and has declined in recent years. This is because of shortcomings in teaching similar to the rest of the school, and in the academic curriculum which has not provided appropriate progression for all students staying on after GCSE. A minority of students begin AS and A-level courses with GCSE attainment well below that of most students following such courses, making it challenging for them to work effectively at the required level and make progress in line with that found nationally. Consequently, although the majority of students satisfactorily progress into further or higher education, overall results are well below national averages and the progress made by students is too slow. The curriculum has failed to keep pace with national developments, and approximately a third of students are following inappropriate courses for their needs. The new sixth-form leadership team demonstrates passion, commitment and drive and its members have communicated clearly to staff their vision for improvement. A curriculum review is under way and guidance onto courses has been reviewed. Good use is made of data to monitor students' progress, but improvement is recent and the impact is seen mainly in improved attendance and the performance of students identified for one-to-one support. Students value the support of their teachers in providing after-school and holiday courses to help those needing extra direction in their studies. Other improvements, for example, new arrangements for private study, are also having an impact but changes to dedicated accommodation are limited until the planned move of the sixth form to the main school site in the next academic year.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The response rate to the questionnaire was low. A few parents or carers indicated that a similar survey had been carried out recently by the school and the evidence from this was also taken into account during the inspection. Parents and carers are mostly satisfied that pupils are safe in school, and are particularly pleased with the positive impact of the stricter approach to behaviour and recognise the improvement in lessons. They expressed greatest concern about a lack of continuity in learning because of the number of lessons which have been taken by temporary teachers. The school has recently informed parents and carers of the action it is taking to address the key concerns raised in the earlier survey, namely its intention to limit the use of supply teachers, to improve arrangements for homework and to further improve communications with parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1095 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	37	21	41	7	14	2	4
The school keeps my child safe	10	20	33	65	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	12	30	59	7	14	5	10
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	10	29	57	7	14	6	12
The teaching is good at this school	5	10	29	57	9	18	4	8
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	10	25	49	12	24	5	10
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	8	33	65	3	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	20	24	47	4	8	2	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	4	8	31	61	8	16	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	16	20	39	9	18	5	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	6	31	6	5	10	3	6
The school is led and managed effectively	6	12	35	49	11	22	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	22	20	39	9	18	5	10

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School, Chatham ME4 6SG

Thank you for the welcome and courtesy you showed the inspectors, particularly in giving up some of your own time to share your views about the school. You told us of the recent improvements, particularly the improved behaviour that is making learning better and that you are again proud of your school. You make satisfactory progress in your studies, which means that you are generally able to take up courses of your choice when you leave school or enter further education. However, progress is not good enough in the sixth form and many students are not following courses which suit them. There is still more to be done to make sure that all your lessons are at least satisfactory so we have given the school a notice to improve. This means that it will be visited by inspectors to check on the improvements being made.

You have a good understanding of how to stay safe and know how to lead healthy lives. You have good opportunities to give staff your views of the school and appreciate that these are listened to, for example, in improving computer provision in the library. Most of you know the quality of your work and what you have to do to improve. Older pupils spoke of the help teachers give to make sure that you do as well as you can in your examinations.

Under the leadership of the executive principal and headteacher, staff are focused on the right things. We have identified the areas for improvement that will help the most:

- giving you work which engages and interests you in all lessons
- making sure that the work you are given is closely matched to your needs so that you make faster progress
- making sure that those of you have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language receive greater support in lessons
- improve teaching and the curriculum in the sixth form.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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