

St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118853
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358460
Inspection dates	20–21 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Alison Cartlidge

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Black
Headteacher	David Bray
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed thirteen lessons taught by thirteen teachers. Meetings were held with governors, parents, staff and pupils. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, information on pupils' progress, safeguarding policies and other documents. Questionnaires from 125 parents and carers were scrutinised.

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

- Achievement and challenge for more able pupils.
- The support for pupils with English as an additional language in English and for those with special educational needs in mathematics.
- The impact of subject leaders on increasing progress in Years 3 to 6.
- The involvement of pupils in assessing their learning.
- How well relationships support pupils in becoming rounded individuals.

Information about the school

This school is much larger than the average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school has a broadly average number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils have a range of needs, with most having speech and language difficulties. The school has a high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language, although only a few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The main home languages of these pupils are Tagalog, Polish and Portuguese. There is high mobility of pupils into the school. The school has received several awards including the Activemark.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This school is improving following a recent dip in performance and provides pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. Good care, guidance and support and strong links with parents and carers and external agencies help pupils, including new entrants, to feel safe, enjoy school and to become well-rounded individuals.

A good range of experiences harness the curiosity of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, getting them off to a good start in their education. In Years 1 to 6, teachers plan some interesting activities, but they do not always ensure that work is matched closely enough to the pupils' differing needs or that all pupils are fully involved and learn quickly. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress so that attainment by the end of Year 6 is broadly average. Pupils make best progress in reading. In writing and mathematics, teachers in Years 3 to 6 do not always provide enough challenge for the more able pupils. Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and include praise and positive comments. They do not always ensure that comments are used to help pupils to improve swiftly. Pupils behave well and are good at taking responsibility.

There are satisfactory procedures for self-evaluation that enable senior leaders to have a realistic understanding of what needs to be done next to improve the school. There are appropriate plans to increase the responsibility of subject leaders so that they have a more proactive role in identifying and eliminating dips in progress as soon as they arise. Improvements in progress over the past year and a commitment to make learning more even across the school, demonstrate the school's sound capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - consistently matching tasks to differing needs
 - involving all pupils so that they work quickly throughout lessons
 - making sure that marking consistently moves learning forward.
- Provide challenging work for more able pupils in Years 3 to 6, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so that they take greater responsibility for identifying and rectifying dips in progress as soon as they arise.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

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

Attainment on entry varies. Most pupils are working within the levels expected for their age when they start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with attainment in writing and linking sounds and letters being below expected levels.

Pupils enjoy school and are confident about sharing their ideas. For example, in a literacy lesson in Year 5, pupils enjoyed discussing what they knew about the style of a particular author. In most lessons pupils, including those with English as an additional language, build steadily on what they already know and make satisfactory progress. Pupils get on with their work sensibly and quietly, as observed in a calm mathematics lesson in Year 4. However, they do not always work quickly enough. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make best progress in learning to read and sometimes struggle in mathematics lessons when the work is too hard. In some lessons, particularly in Years 3 to 6, learning slows when tasks are not challenging enough for the more able. Pupils with English as an additional language make rapid progress in speaking and reading but do not always learn fast enough in writing.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment is broadly average by the time pupils leave the school, with above average standards in reading. Attainment is rising in the school and is currently above average up to the end of Year 2. The gap between reading and writing is closing for less able and average pupils due to some successful interventions. The writing of the more able pupils still lags behind because they do not use punctuation consistently well. Behaviour is good. Pupils are nearly always polite and sensible, although some lose concentration when they are not fully involved in a lesson. Attendance is satisfactory, because some parents choose to take their children on extended holidays. Pupils' sound literacy and numeracy skills and good personal development prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of education and later life.

Most pupils say that they feel safe at school and they have a good understanding about how to stay safe. Pupils take responsibility well. For example, older pupils are proud that they act as play leaders and mentors at playtime. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. They demonstrate a good appreciation of the Pope's recent message 'to care for each other'. They take part in community events and raise considerable funds for charity. Their knowledge of cultural diversity is developing. Pupils enjoy keeping active at playtime and enjoy healthy snacks and lunches. They feel that their relationships with members of staff support them well emotionally.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have strong relationships with the pupils and build confidence by reviewing learning at the start of the lesson. They make sure that pupils know the purpose of activities and make good use of resources to support tasks. For example, in a good mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 6 were enthusiastic about sharing their calculations using the whiteboard, and in Year 1, pupils used information and communication technology to help sort animals from non-animals. Teaching is not consistently good, because there are occasions, especially in Years 3 to 6, when tasks do not match pupils' differing needs well enough and when this happens either less able pupils are not engaged in their learning or more able pupils are not challenged enough.

The curriculum is being successfully developed and links between subjects are being forged through the 'creative learning journey' topics. Pupils appreciate the good range of enrichment opportunities including the educational visit to the Isle of Wight. There are good opportunities for pupils to enjoy taking part in physical activities. Many pupils say that physical education is one of their favourite subjects, demonstrating why the school has the Activemark award. Teachers are not consistently adapting the curriculum to meet the range of needs and ages in each class, including for those with English as an additional language. Intervention strategies are provided and there are signs that these are starting to be productive, including in accelerating the learning of pupils who have joined the school in Years 3 to 6.

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Pupils are cared for, guided and supported well enabling them to feel safe and valued. They make positive comments such as 'you feel safe in the school' and 'teachers are warm and nice', demonstrating the high level of confidence they have in members of staff. Academic guidance is improving well, although it is not yet used consistently enough to always move learning forward swiftly.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders embed ambition and drive improvement satisfactorily because they know what the school does well and how it should be improved. They have successfully managed the expansion of the school to accommodate pupils who arrive after the Reception Year. Together with the governing body and other members of staff, senior leaders are tackling the underachievement that remains in some classes. Information about pupils' progress is being used more rigorously than in the past to identify pupils who are falling behind and to take effective action. The school has plans to extend the responsibility of subject leaders so that they have a sharper understanding about rates of progress across the school and can identify and eradicate underachievement as soon as it arises. Leaders promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination consistently. Pupils come to the school from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and all feel welcomed and valued.

The largely new governing body is becoming increasingly proactive and members are aware of strengths and areas for development. At the time of the inspection, the school's safeguarding arrangements were found to be good and most parents agree that pupils are kept safe at school. Parents are positive about the school and typically make comments such as 'a nice atmosphere and good discipline'. Pupils who are finding life difficult are supported well. The partnership between the school and external agencies is good, enabling leaders to benefit from advice and support from various sources. Whilst the school has some good activities for pupils to learn about life in other countries and the local area, the promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory because the recent evaluation of provision has not been fully shared within the school.

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

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Reception classes and most enter Year 1 having exceeded expectations. A successful focus on personal development and linking sounds and letters raises attainment in these areas of learning especially well. For example, pupils are keen to make three letter words out of the sounds they have learnt. Members of staff form good relationships with the children and their parents and carers, enabling children to settle into school routines quickly. Children enjoy a good balance of adult led activities and tasks they have chosen for themselves. Tasks are explained clearly and independence is encouraged successfully. The outdoor area is used well, especially for physical activities and to support knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, during the inspection, children were observed enjoying the challenges of climbing, cycling and exploring the properties of sand.

Children behave well and persevere with their tasks. Those with English as an additional language are confident when practising what they have learnt. Children co-operate with each other sensibly and listen well, although a few lose concentration towards the end of whole class discussions. Leaders work closely with other members of staff, including the teaching assistants, so that areas for improvement are identified and supported quickly. Assessments are thorough although information gathered is not used fully to identify differences in progress between areas of learning or groups of children. Leaders have suitable plans to increase the involvement of parents in their children's learning.

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

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

About a third of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Most parents and carers are pleased with the school especially that their children are kept safe and happy. The inspection team also found this to be the case. A few parents and carers would like more support in helping their children at home and for the school to take their suggestions and concerns into account more. The inspection team found that the school provides satisfactory information for parents about the curriculum and on pupils' progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St. Francis Catholic Primary 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 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 370 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	59	48	38	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	86	69	37	30	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	42	34	68	54	12	10	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	42	60	48	11	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	56	45	61	49	6	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	46	37	60	48	19	15	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	52	42	65	52	6	5	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)	55	44	52	42	10	8	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	52	42	61	49	12	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	41	68	54	1	1	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	30	62	50	20	16	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	53	42	57	46	10	8	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	53	49	39	9	7	0	0

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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



22 September 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of St. Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone ME16 0LB

We enjoyed coming to see your happy school. Thank you for being so helpful during our visit. Yours is a polite and friendly school which provides a sound standard of education.

These are the best things about your school:

- you learn quickly in the Reception classes
- you enjoy school
- we agree with you when you say that teachers are kind and look after you well
- you are polite and friendly and mostly listen carefully in lessons
- it is good that older pupils help as play leaders and mentors
- the headteacher and other leaders know what needs to be done to make the school better.

These are the things we have asked your school to do next to make it better:

- help your teachers to always give you work that is just right for you, make sure that you are all involved in lessons and use marking to help you to learn more quickly
- make sure that those of you who are quick at learning in Years 3 to 6 are always given hard enough work in writing and mathematics
- help subject leaders to check that you are all doing well and to put things right when you are not.

Thank you once again for telling us about your school and letting us see your work. You could help your teachers by always listening carefully in class.

Yours sincerely

Alison Cartlidge

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