

St Francis' Catholic Primary School

Queen's Road , Maidstone, Kent ME16 0LB

Inspection dates

21–22 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Leaders have not successfully carried out the important actions identified at the previous inspection and, as a result, teaching and pupils' progress in writing and mathematics has not improved.
- Leaders' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Leaders do not analyse information about pupils' progress well enough.
- Leaders do not keep a tight enough check on teaching, so weaker teaching has not been dealt with. Teachers do not get enough help and training to improve their skills.
- Leaders think the school is better than it is.
- Pupils do not always know what to do to improve their work and the quality of teachers' marking is not checked thoroughly enough.
- Leaders have not monitored teachers' planning rigorously enough to make sure pupils are given challenging tasks that build on what they can already do.
- Sometimes, teachers do not use lesson time well. Pupils sit and listen for too long. They do not learn actively or on their own quickly enough.
- The governing body does not challenge leaders effectively about pupils' progress or variability in the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- Every pupil is valued; pupils behave well and are safe.
- Children make good progress in the Reception classes because teaching is consistently good with some exemplary strategies for engaging children's interests.
- The different topics and assemblies help pupils to learn to reflect on their lives and the world around them, and to respect each other.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 22 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders. The team also spent time in the Early Years Foundation Stage observing the quality of teaching and support that is given to children.
- The team observed pupils' behaviour around the school, in assembly and in the playground.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Meetings were also held with other senior leaders and staff, with a local authority improvement adviser and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered parents' and carers' views through informal discussions at the start of the inspection and the 41 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The team had lunchtime interviews with the pupils and listened to them read.
- The team examined documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring information. They looked at attendance figures and pupils' work.

Inspection team

Janice Williams, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Ken Bryan	Additional inspector
Lily Evans	Additional inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils 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 in the school.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed to this school.

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Fewer than one in ten of the pupils is known to be eligible for additional support through the pupil premium, which provides the school with additional funding for looked after children, those known to be eligible for free school meals and the children of service families. This figure is well below the national average. There are no pupils looked after by the local authority, or from service families.
- Approximately one third of the pupils are from ethnic backgrounds other than White British. The largest groups are of Filipino, Polish, Portuguese and Indian heritage.
- Around one quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language and this proportion is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported at school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below the average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is good, by ensuring teachers:
 - actively engage pupils' interest in lessons and move learning on at a brisk pace
 - provide work that matches pupils' abilities
 - provide good opportunities for pupils to work independently
 - question pupils effectively so that they are challenged to think and deepen their knowledge.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing and mathematics by:
 - providing appropriately challenging tasks for pupils who need extra help to extend their literacy and numeracy skills
 - ensuring that pupils clearly understand what they should be focusing on in their learning
 - giving pupils effective guidance and feedback about how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge by responding to teachers' feedback.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - making sure leaders' judgements about pupils' progress are accurate, and that they take action where data show progress is less than good
 - checking on teaching rigorously, especially in writing and mathematics, and telling teachers clearly what they need to do to improve their practice
 - providing staff with the information and effective training they need to identify how to improve pupils' progress
 - ensuring governors ask challenging questions about the information they are given and so hold leaders to account for pupils' progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is slow in some year groups in Key Stages 1 and 2. Leaders do not have high enough expectations of the rate at which pupils should learn and have allowed this situation to continue.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is in line with the national average. Pupils of different ethnic backgrounds make similar rates of progress. Progress is weaker where teachers do not regularly assess how well pupils are learning or give them effective on how to improve their work. Progress slows at times in both key stages when teachers do not ensure pupils understand what they are learning. When this happens, pupils do not know exactly what to do.
- Most children enter Reception with skills that are in line with expectations for their age. All children, including those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because teachers thoroughly track their progress through their learning journals and give them the right activities that move them on. Adults teach reading well and ask questions that challenge children to think about what they have read or the stories they have heard, for example about characters' feelings and behaviours.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, make similar progress to others in reading, writing and mathematics. Although questioning by supporting adults is often good, in some lessons, pupils are not provided with appropriately challenging tasks that help them extend their literacy or numeracy skills.
- In 2012, Year 6 pupils known to be eligible for free school meals attained higher levels than pupils nationally in reading and mathematics. By the end of the year, their attainment in English and mathematics was less than a term behind that of other pupils, a smaller gap than in most other schools. They make at least as good progress as their peers, and in some cases, better.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide extra teaching in small groups, for example mathematics sessions, extra help from adults for those pupils learning English as an additional language, and extended school clubs and activities.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because sometimes learning time is wasted and the activities do not provide sufficient challenge for pupils to extend their knowledge and skills more rapidly.
- The pace of learning drops in some lessons when pupils do not have enough time to work on their own or learn actively. This is usually because pupils sit for a long time on the carpet just listening to teachers talk.
- In weaker lessons, teachers do not ask questions that encourage pupils to reflect on what they have learned or use their knowledge to solve problems independently.
- Teachers' planning is variable. In the better lessons, teachers plans take account of pupils' abilities. However, in some lessons, teachers have all pupils doing similar tasks. As a result, some of the work lacks challenge and tasks do not always extend pupils' knowledge or match their abilities.
- Although pupils' books are marked regularly with many ticks, teachers' comments do not often give pupils enough guidance to help them improve their skills. In the few instances where teachers pose a question, pupils do not have the chance to read and respond to comments, so an opportunity to accelerate learning is missed.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is mostly good, and some exemplary teaching strategies are used to sustain children's interest and engagement. In an example of outstanding teaching, the teacher challenged children to use different adjectives to describe Goldilocks.

Children suggested the words 'mischievous' and 'cheeky' and used dramatic voices to play the different roles. There are many opportunities to involve children in independent decision-making.

- Inspectors saw occasional examples of good or outstanding teaching for older pupils. For example in a Year 5 religious education lesson the teacher provided pupils with a selection of verses, coupled with effective speaking and listening activities that made them become very reflective and thoughtful. They all made rapid progress because they were given opportunities to choose their own presentation method and supporting adults offered very good guidance to pupils with special educational needs.
- Most supporting adults provide effective guidance to pupils in lessons. In the better lessons, pupils make faster progress because these additional adults make detailed notes on their progress and teachers use this information effectively to amend their plans. However, in the majority of the lessons, teachers' plans show very little evidence that account has been taken of what has been learned in previous lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Children thoroughly enjoy their time in the Reception classes. They behave well because teachers and supporting adults manage lessons well and children are totally involved in their learning. They learn healthy habits and are encouraged to concentrate on their activities.
- Pupils' behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. Pupils are eager to learn. When teaching is outstanding, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. In these lessons, pupils are caring and thoughtful. Even in weaker lessons that do not engage or motivate them, very few pupils show restlessness.
- There is a friendly and inclusive atmosphere in the school. Pupils are polite and caring towards each other. Although play equipment is limited, pupils participate responsibly in running and chasing games.
- Many pupils view school as important because they have fun and they enjoy playtimes as they say it is the only time they 'get to talk to friends'.
- Leaders recently set up a peer mediator programme in which Year 6 pupils support younger children by listening to their worries and giving advice to help them solve problems. Pupils praise the programme and say they get to evaluate whether the session helped. Some of the peer mediators say that the most recurring problem is arguments between friends and, once this is discussed, issues are normally resolved. Consequently, there are not many complaints of bullying. Very few pupils say that bullying exists, but they agree that if it occurs teachers deal with it properly.
- In a 'praise' assembly, most pupils sat attentively listening to information about their peers' efforts and working attitudes during the week. They spontaneously applauded each other. Many enter the weekly mathematics challenge, including Reception children. Pupils proudly collect and display their certificates.
- Pupils say they feel safe, and know how to keep themselves safe in and outside school, including while using the internet. Most of the parents and carers interviewed and those who responded to Parent View say that their children are safe at school and well looked after.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leadership and management are inadequate because leaders have not effectively brought about the necessary improvements from the previous inspection, and because self-evaluation lacks rigour and is inaccurate. Consequently, there are still too many weaknesses in the teaching of writing and mathematics.
- Strategies that have been adopted to try to speed up pupils' progress have not worked for the last two years. Pupils' progress by the end of Year 6 was slower in 2012 than in 2011. Leaders' expectations of the progress that pupils should be making across Key Stage 1 and 2 are too low. Assessment information is not used well enough to enable leaders to judge progress accurately.

This means leaders cannot ensure pupils have equal opportunities to succeed.

- The headteacher does not have the confidence of all the staff. Some staff are unsure of exactly what they need to do to improve their practice and supporting adults do not always get appropriate information about the pupils they assist.
- Most staff praise the support from the deputy headteacher and say that she looks after their needs well.
- The literacy subject leader is new in post and has had very little impact on speeding up pupils' progress in writing. Due to a lack of effective training opportunities, the mathematics leader has been hindered from driving improvements in this subject.
- Leaders have recently improved the checks they make on teaching to include evidence from planning, pupils' books and information on pupils' progress. However, this has not had enough impact on accelerating pupils' progress. The records of monitoring of planning and lessons do not clearly identify the subjects involved, which limits their usefulness.
- Where leaders note improvements have been made, they do not check against pupils' progress. Sometimes, teaching or planning has been judged good but leaders have not investigated why, if this is so, pupils' progress is not better than it is. Leaders are not properly evaluating what it is about teaching, over time, that is slowing pupils' progress in writing and mathematics.
- The local authority supports leaders by advising on how to improve the way assessment information is interpreted and gives help in judging the quality of teaching. However, leaders have not used the feedback well enough and have judged the achievement of pupils and the quality of teaching too generously.
- The school's records show that some teachers have had their performance assessed recently, in line with statutory requirements. However, the comparatively high number of teachers receiving higher pay points is not, in practice, reflected in good progress made by pupils.
- The curriculum provides many opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through the 'creative learning journey' plans. The topics include many reflective moments for pupils. Pupils treat each other with respect and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds get along well together.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is supportive of the school and is aware that the school's performance does not compare favourably to other schools nationally, but it has not effectively challenged leaders to accelerate pupils' progress. Governors rely on the headteacher for a lot of information. They know what is being done to try to improve the school but have not questioned enough why pupils do not make more-rapid progress. Governors have had many training opportunities, including e-safety, safer recruitment, coaching approaches, handling complaints and capability procedures. However, training has not equipped them to challenge the school's track record on achievement. For example, governors are aware that performance management systems are in place but have not looked closely enough at why teachers receive higher salary rates while pupils make progress which is typically less than good. Governors know that the pupil premium funding is used to provide additional literacy and numeracy support. They make sure that arrangements to safeguard children are fully met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	118853
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	405821

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Black
Headteacher	David Bray
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 September 2010
Telephone number	01622 771540
Fax number	01622 771568
Email address	headteacher@st-francis.kent.sch.uk

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