

St Francis Catholic Primary School

Mill Road, Shelfield, Walsall, West Midlands, WS4 1RH

Inspection dates 9–10 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils thrive in this school. Their behaviour is impeccable. The school helps them to develop into confident, socially mature individuals who have a pride in their school and an understanding of the community in which they live.
- A strong sense of trust and challenge inspires pupils to work hard and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Teaching is imaginative and effective, so pupils learn to be inquisitive and creative.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is effective, so children get off to a good start and are well prepared for the National Curriculum by the time they enter Year 1.
- Pupils in Years 1 to 6 now achieve well. They make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics and are catching up fast from previous underachievement. The most able pupils are now beginning to reach the higher levels of which they are capable.
- Leadership at all levels is strong and effective. Leaders, including governors, have urgently and rigorously tackled the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They have ensured that teaching has improved swiftly and that pupils now achieve well.
- The school ensures pupils are able to keep themselves safe and are well prepared for life in modern democratic Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Some pupils who find learning difficult do not make the same rapid progress as their classmates. Teachers do not always help these pupils to read and spell new words correctly, or modify questions so they are more easily understood. Sometimes teachers do not plan appropriately small steps for these pupils. As a result, some of these pupils do not always understand lessons and do not know how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 11 lessons and through a series of walks around the school. While visiting lessons, inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors reviewed pupils' writing, mathematics, science and other exercise books and heard some pupils read. They also observed playtime and lunchtime activities.
- Meetings were held with: the executive headteacher and acting headteacher; other senior staff; a group of teachers and teaching assistants; four members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body; two representatives of the local authority; the junior leadership team; and other groups of pupils. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the Archdiocese of Birmingham. Inspectors spoke informally to other staff and pupils around the school.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to allow inspectors to view the results. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers of children from all year groups at the start and end of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, which included: the school's checks on how well it is doing and plans for improvement; evidence about how teachers are set targets to improve pupils' progress; records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching; minutes of meetings of the governing body and the senior leadership team; information about pupils' progress over time; and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sandra Hayes, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sheila Ann Boyle

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- St Francis is slightly smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British origin and speak English as their first language.
- Around a third of the pupils are disadvantaged and eligible for support through the pupil premium, which is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in care). This is a little above average.
- Around one in 10 of pupils are disabled or have special educational needs, which is a lower proportion than in most schools.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attend part time in the Nursery class and full time in the Reception class.
- The school does not meet the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school was inspected in September 2013 and judged to require special measures, as it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Since then, it has been monitored on three occasions by Her Majesty's Inspectors.
- The headteacher left the school in February 2014. Since then, an executive headteacher has been responsible for the school. She is also the headteacher at Holte School in Birmingham. One of her senior staff is the full-time acting headteacher and will continue to fulfil this role for the foreseeable future. Other staff from Holte School have provided specialist support to leadership at different levels and to improve systems for ensuring pupils are safeguarded.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils who struggle with learning make similarly rapid progress to that made by pupils who find learning more easy, by making sure:
 - teachers identify precisely the gains these pupils need to make in lessons
 - teaching activities, including questions, are matched to these pupils' needs as well as for pupils who find learning easy
 - teachers help lower-ability pupils use phonics skills (knowledge about letters and the sounds they make) to read and spell new words easily
 - pupils who find learning difficult know how well they are doing and how they can improve
 - advice given to these pupils leads to improvement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher and her team have instilled a relentless focus on achievement across the whole school community. The acting headteacher leads the school with calm commitment to improving outcomes for each and every pupil. She has earned the trust and loyalty of staff, parents, carers and pupils.
- The executive headteacher and acting headteacher continue to provide strong senior leadership. Leaders from the support school provide excellent training and guidance when requested by the acting headteacher. Governance is now strong. Leadership throughout the school is now effective. There is secure capacity to sustain and to build on the significant improvement made since the previous inspection.
- Key stage leaders, subject leaders and those with responsibility for other aspects of the school's work – such as special educational needs – work effectively together to support senior leaders in monitoring the schools' work. Leaders' checks focus rigorously on the quality of teaching and on pupils' achievement. As a result, leaders at all levels have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Where concerns are found, urgent remedial action is taken. Action plans are frequently updated to address emerging issues.
- Teachers' performance targets reflect the leadership's ambition for pupils to achieve well. High-quality training and coaching are provided to help teachers meet their targets. Teachers appreciate this and act willingly on advice given. Leaders at all levels hold teachers rigorously to account for pupils' achievement. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement has improved and are now good.
- The school's approach to teaching different subjects through themes reflects its Christian ethos and provides an excellent breadth of opportunities and experiences for pupils. This helps them develop as individuals, gets them ready for the next stage of their education and prepares them for life in modern democratic Britain. The curriculum promotes tolerance, understanding and equality of opportunity.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve better now than they did previously because leaders have used the pupil premium funding effectively to provide additional teaching support and resources. Leaders carefully check whether these spending decisions are making a difference and are always looking for new ways to provide extra help to pupils who need it.
- Primary schools receive money from the government to ensure pupils are physically active and adopt healthy lifestyles. Leaders at St Francis have used this funding to gain access to expert training for teachers and to provide challenging competitive experiences for pupils. Therefore, pupils frequently participate in high-quality physical activity.
- While there had been no weaknesses previously, leaders have overhauled the school's systems for safeguarding pupils. Leaders are now proactive in ensuring pupils are protected from the dangers of extremist behaviour and in preparing pupils for life in modern democratic Britain.
- The local authority brokered the initial partnership with the executive headteacher and is committed to supporting the continuation of this arrangement. Support for assessing pupils' achievement has secured teachers' understanding of what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. Leaders appreciate support given for the recruitment of staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know what makes this a good school and what more needs to be done to achieve their aim for the school to be outstanding in all aspects, including its reflection of a Catholic ethos.
 - Governors systematically challenge leadership and hold the school to account. Committees are used effectively to provide in-depth examination of pupils' achievement, financial management and the rate of school improvement. In this way, governors have overseen rapid improvement.
 - Governors are equally evaluative of their own work, reflecting critically on their improved knowledge and skills and identifying ways in which governance can be further enhanced.
 - Governors use published data, and the detailed information about pupils' achievement provided by the acting headteacher, to identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and to judge the impact of spending decisions. For example, minutes of meetings show governors check whether the pupil premium funding is making the desired difference to individual disadvantaged pupils.
 - Governors are well informed about salary decisions. They ensure that the pay policy is used to reward good teaching and tackle underperformance. Governors have high expectations of all staff and are prepared to take decisive action to ensure these are met. For example, governors recently carried out interviews for a permanent headteacher. None of the candidates met with the governors' expectations, so no appointment was made. Governors have now drawn up a plan to secure senior leadership for the foreseeable future.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' attitudes and conduct make a significant contribution to the life of the school.
- Pupils love learning. They display high levels of enthusiasm and concentration. They have the tenacity to overcome problems and achieve well. They readily take responsibility for their own learning, asking questions and following advice to improve the quality of their work. They work equally well in all lessons and when receiving extra support from teaching assistants.
- Pupils' conduct is impeccable in lessons, around the school and when off the school site. For example, they hold doors open for adults and each other, exchanging polite comments as they do so. Pupils' behaviour frequently receives praise from members of the public, for example following off-site educational visits.
- Genuine respect is at the heart of relationships in the school. Pupils are kind to one another. They play well together, taking turns and sharing equipment. Playtimes are good-humoured and orderly. Pupils listen respectfully to one another's views in lessons. Pupils are courteous to all adults, regardless of their role, be it as teacher, support staff or volunteer.
- The school keeps detailed records of any concerns about pupils' behaviour. These logs are thoroughly analysed. The school uses the outcomes of this analysis to diagnose the reasons why individual pupils may exhibit challenging behaviour. Appropriate referrals are then made to other agencies, which helps the pupil reintegrate into school life.
- Pupils care deeply about their school. An elected junior leadership team and school council contribute significantly to decisions about school life at a fundamental level. For example, the junior leadership team evaluates the school's action plans and demonstrates an impressive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Pupils have a mature approach to dealing with bullying. The junior leadership team has drawn up an anti-bullying charter, which is clearly understood by all pupils and sets the tone for the excellent ethos of the school. Pupils explain that bullying does rarely happen, but that the effective mentoring system ensures it is dealt with quickly.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Their personal development is nurtured. As a result, they thrive and become socially able individuals within a climate of tolerance and equality.
- Staff are well trained to keep pupils safe. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff and visitors are robust. The school has formulated a detailed policy and has provided training to support all adults to be alert to the dangers of radicalisation and respond appropriately to concerns, should they arise.
- The school supports pupils well in staying safe online. Pupils know about staying safe when out and about and how to avoid being influenced by adults with extreme views.
- The school's actions to improve attendance and punctuality have had a positive impact. Attendance is now in line with national figures and persistent absence has steadily reduced over the last year.

The quality of teaching is good

- Relationships between adults and pupils in lessons reflect the culture of respect that permeates the school. As a result, pupils are confident learners, prepared to take risks and to challenge themselves.
- Teaching helps pupils cooperate and work collaboratively. For example, older pupils provide support to younger ones. In this way, it promotes social and moral skills and enhances pupils' self-esteem.
- Teachers use imaginative approaches to inspire pupils. As a result, pupils develop curiosity, enthusiasm for learning and the skills of enquiry and investigation.
- Teachers now cater well for the most able pupils by setting challenging tasks in lessons. This is why their achievement has improved rapidly and many are now working at the high levels of which they are capable.
- Lessons proceed efficiently, so learning time is well used. For example, teachers judge carefully when to talk to the whole class and when pupils need to get on with their work uninterrupted. Some lessons proceed exceptionally smoothly because teachers' management of the lesson enables pupils to take

control of their own learning. Pupils appreciate these opportunities, work very hard and progress quickly.

- Teaching strategies enable pupils to articulate their thinking, challenge one another and refine their ideas. This contributes to the good progress they make in lessons and helps them to communicate effectively with each other and adults.
- Teachers' questions challenge pupils to think deeply and to apply their knowledge. Teachers and teaching assistants use questions skilfully to unpick pupils' misunderstandings. On occasions, when the teacher is talking to the whole class, questions are too tricky for some lower-attaining pupils to understand, so these pupils do not fully take part in the discussion.
- Teachers help pupils know what they need to achieve each term by setting clear targets. Teachers' effective marking helps pupils take small steps in their learning by showing what they have done well and suggests how the work might be improved. Occasionally, the targets teachers give to pupils who find learning tricky are a little too ambitious, and teachers do not explain them clearly enough. Consequently, when teachers mark these pupils' work, they are unable to give sufficiently precise guidance to help them quickly make the necessary improvement.
- Teaching helps pupils master reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills. In English lessons, teachers explicitly teach spelling, punctuation and grammar skills and then give pupils plenty of opportunities to practise them in different subjects. Teachers teach reading and mathematics skills systematically. However, teachers do not always help some lower-attaining pupils to read and spell basic words correctly.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Low results in national tests in recent years reflect a legacy of underachievement, rather than the current picture. Year 6 pupils in 2014 had made accelerated progress in the second half of the year in reading, writing and mathematics, but there was too much ground to make up to have an impact on their overall scores. Consequently, scores remained well below national figures.
- Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills at levels below those typical for their age, particularly the skills that relate to reading and writing. They make good progress, so by the time they leave the Reception class, most have reached a good level of development and are well prepared to start Year 1.
- The school's data, work in pupils' books and evidence from lesson observations indicate that standards are rising fast in Years 1 to 6. Most pupils have made rapid progress since early 2014 in reading, writing and mathematics and are now attaining at least in line with expectations for their age. Increasing numbers are reaching higher levels.
- Some gaps persist between groups of pupils, but these are closing rapidly. In the 2014 end of Key Stage 2 tests, disadvantaged pupils' scores were almost a year behind other pupils' in the school in writing and mathematics. The gap was almost two years in reading. Compared with other pupils nationally, the gap was around four terms in reading, writing and mathematics. These gaps, wide as they were, had narrowed from those in 2013. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are catching up with other pupils because they are making faster progress than other pupils nationally. In some cases, the gap has closed altogether.
- There are now clear criteria for identifying and supporting disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. As a result, their achievement is improving and is in line with that of other pupils.
- National test results in 2014 indicate that some of the most able pupils did not make the minimum expected progress in reading. They made expected progress in writing and mathematics, but few made more progress than this. Assessment of these pupils' prior attainment is shown to have been inaccurate. Therefore, it is difficult to demonstrate accurately the progress they have made since the end of Key Stage 1. These pupils are currently being well challenged in lessons and school records indicate they are making good progress, so are beginning to reach the higher levels of which they are capable.
- Pupils make a good start in mathematics in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They develop the skills of counting, recognising number and identifying the properties of two-dimensional shapes. Pupils currently in Key Stages 1 and 2 are reaching the standards expected for their age in mathematics.
- Pupils speak confidently in lessons, in pairs, in small groups and in front of the whole class. They know when to speak formally and when it is appropriate to speak informally. Older pupils can present a reasoned point of view. Pupils are confident to ask questions and to challenge what others say.
- Pupils' writing skills have improved since the last inspection. Most now write fluently and legibly, using interesting sentences and imaginative language.
- Pupils enjoy reading. Older pupils say they have many opportunities to read in school. They talk about

their favourite books and authors. They say teachers make reading interesting. During the inspection, pupils across the school took part in creative activities linked to the books of Roald Dahl. This brought purpose to their reading and effectively integrated the stories into other lessons. Younger pupils' phonics skills are improving. Most pupils in Year 1 reached the expected level in the national phonics check in 2014. This proportion was much higher than in the previous year and was comfortably above the national figure.

- A small number of lower-ability pupils still find it difficult to apply their phonics knowledge to reading and spelling new words. Some of the reading books these pupils are given are too difficult, so they struggle to read them. Sometimes, these pupils do not always know how well they are doing or what they should do to improve their work.

The early years provision

is good

- From relatively low starting points, children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. By the time they leave the Reception class, they are ready to start the National Curriculum.
- Planning shows good depth and breadth across all required areas of learning. Teachers adapt tasks effectively to reflect the interests and needs of the pupils. As a result, children enjoy learning and achieve well. The highly organised and stimulating environment, both indoors and outdoors, makes a significant contribution to children's personal development and learning.
- The good support from staff and close partnerships with parents and carers ensure children form secure bonds and strong emotional attachments. Children join in with daily prayers, assemblies and church services with older pupils.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is always at least good and is often outstanding. As a result, children get off to a good start by learning about numbers and developing phonics skills. Children enjoy their learning and are always willing to show what they can do.
- When children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers work closely with parents and carers to assess what skill levels children are working at. Teachers keep a close check on children's progress so they quickly identify children who are more able and those who need additional support.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and staff work well together. They have good understanding of strengths and areas for development and use this knowledge to plan for improvement.
- Children's behaviour is exemplary. They are very cooperative and tolerant of one another. They get on very well, sharing and playing happily together.
- Arrangements for keeping children safe are highly effective.

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	104239
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	450792

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Gough
Headteacher	Dr Helen Rudeforth (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 September 2013
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