

St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Queen's Road, Maidstone, ME16 0LB

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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.

- The relentless determination and commitment of the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have significantly raised standards of teaching and pupils' achievement since the last inspection. As a result, all aspects of the school's work are good.
- Pupils attain results and make progress in line with, or above, national figures in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have increased their skills and subject knowledge. Together with highly effective teaching assistants, they form an impressive professional workforce, committed to ensuring that all pupils make progress.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make the same good progress from their starting points as other pupils in the school and nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils all make good progress in line with other pupils in the school and nationally. There is very little difference between their attainment and that of other pupils.
- Children in the early years make good progress and are extremely well prepared for Year 1.
- Pupils behave well. They are courteous and considerate. They attend well and value being part of the harmonious and diverse 'school family'.
- Pupils are safe in the school. Any concerns about pupils' safety or well-being are followed up meticulously by school leaders.
- Governance is a strength of the school. Governors check the school's work thoroughly and question school leaders closely to ensure that pupils learn and achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not attain the highest levels in all subjects.
- A very small number of pupils do not do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection began as the fifth monitoring visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, in connection with the school being judged to require special measures at its last inspection. Inspectors deemed the monitoring visit a section 5 inspection in the afternoon of the first day.
- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Inspectors observed 12 lessons and made several shorter visits to classes. Six lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. The lead inspector listened to a group of pupils reading.
- Inspectors checked pupils' books in lessons and also scrutinised a sample of books from a range of pupils.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, phase and subject leaders, the inclusion manager and the family liaison officer. They met with a group of governors and the lead inspector had a telephone conversation with an additional member of the governing body. Meetings were held with representatives from the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors met with three separate groups of pupils and spoke to pupils in lessons.
- The school's improvement plan, self-evaluation documents, information about pupils' current achievement and records of behaviour, attendance and punctuality were scrutinised. Inspectors considered information about staff's performance management and leaders' records of monitoring of teaching. The lead inspector also checked the school's safeguarding procedures and record keeping.
- Inspectors took into account the 31 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View. Inspectors also spoke to parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

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' Catholic Primary School is a larger-than-average voluntary aided primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is smaller than the national average.
- The numbers of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are smaller than the national average.
- The majority of pupils are White British. A higher than average number of pupils come from a number of different minority ethnic groups.
- A much higher than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that all teachers set tasks that stretch and challenge the most able pupils, including high-attaining disadvantaged pupils
 - checking that the teaching of the new curriculum deepens pupils' understanding and provides sufficient challenge to prepare pupils well for the next stage.
- Increase pupils' rates of progress and raise standards of attainment in writing by:
 - setting tasks that will develop pupils' stamina when writing extended assignments
 - developing pupils' language acquisition and fluency in speaking and listening activities, including in the early years
 - ensuring that pupils use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation and that those who struggle are given enough extra help to improve their accuracy.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have brought about significant improvements to the school since the last inspection. Their determination, ambition and unwavering belief that all staff can improve have revitalised teaching, raised pupils' achievement and transformed the ethos of the school. Outcomes for pupils are now in line with, or above, national figures as a result of school leaders' systematic focus on improving day-to-day teaching and ensuring that no pupil is overlooked.
- School leaders regularly analyse pupils' rates of progress and have ensured that teachers' assessments are accurate. Recent changes to the scheme of assessment for the new National Curriculum have been thoroughly checked against expectations for each pupil. Leaders make sure that any shortfalls or gaps in pupils' progress are tackled promptly to ensure progress.
- School leaders have made sure disadvantaged pupils make good progress and catch up with their peers. They make effective use of the pupil premium funding to provide high quality support and additional programmes to help with reading, writing and mathematics. The acting headteacher has rightly identified that the most-able disadvantaged pupils need to make more progress in order to attain the highest levels. Phase and subject leaders take a strong lead in developing and improving teaching and achievement. They monitor teaching closely and take increased responsibility for ensuring that no pupils are left behind in either their key stage or subject area.
- Dedicated leadership makes certain that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are supported effectively. The inclusion leader ensures that pupils are provided with appropriate extra help in and out of lessons to ensure their good progress.
- The new curriculum is a growing strength of the school. It provides a range of interesting opportunities for pupils to apply their improved literacy and numeracy skills in different subject areas. Themed weeks, such as 'writing week' and 'arts week' enable pupils to deepen their learning and broaden their experiences. However, a few parents and pupils, particularly in Year 5, have raised some concerns about the new curriculum, believing that it may not be sufficiently demanding for the most able.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. The religious calendar provides many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their feelings and explore deeper moral questions. There is a wealth of social and cultural experiences on offer, inside and outside of the curriculum, including charity work, trips and clubs. British values are threaded through the systems and attitudes in the school. For example, the school council and head girl and boy are democratically elected.
- The school prides itself on its dedication to promoting equal opportunity and celebrating diversity. The many home languages spoken in the school are seen as enriching by every pupil and staff member. All groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress. No excuses are made for underperformance and school leaders do all they can to remove any barriers to learning or personal development. In this way, discrimination is tackled and good relations between all members of the school community are sustained.
- The sport premium has been used effectively to develop teachers' skills and expertise in teaching gymnastics. It is early days, but teachers have gained confidence and pupils, including the youngest children, are developing better physical control and mastery.
- Teachers' pay awards are closely based on school leaders' thorough monitoring of the quality of their teaching. Staff only progress up the pay scales if their teaching is good enough and their pupils achieve well.
- While the school was required to need special measures, the local authority and the diocese worked well together to provide high levels of support for improving teaching and strengthening leadership. Over time, the level of external support has decreased, to reflect the improvements made and the growing expertise of school leaders.
- Since the last inspection, safeguarding procedures and policies have been overhauled and staff and governors have received good quality training. The school meets all statutory safeguarding requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are astute and challenge school leaders with incisive questions. They are committed guardians of the vision and values for the school and convey ambition and confidence. Governors are keenly aware of the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils because they are provided with comprehensive and accurate reports from the acting headteacher.
 - Governors ensure that the acting headteacher and other staff are set challenging performance management targets. Governors ensure that good teaching is rewarded through pay progression and that action to address weaker teaching is swiftly implemented by school leaders. They are particularly

- mindful that highly paid staff need to demonstrate value for money in improving outcomes for all pupils.
- The school's drive to ensure better progress for disadvantaged pupils is reinforced by the governing body. Careful account is taken of the planned spending of the pupil premium and its impact on pupils' achievement.
 - Governors have ensured that the school is financially stable, notwithstanding increases in expenditure to support essential improvements to teaching and leadership.
 - Governors check the school's child protection procedures and work to safeguard pupils diligently. Spot checks enable governors to gain an objective view of the school's work. However, governors are aware that more members need to be trained in safer recruitment procedures, as back up for existing arrangements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are unfailingly polite and friendly to adults and each other.
- Pupils concentrate well in lessons. They respond promptly to instructions and guidance from staff. A strong sense of routine and staff's consistently high expectations help to create respectful and courteous habits. For example, pupils invariably line up quietly and walk with appropriate solemnity into assembly because they want to set an example and create a good impression.
- Pupils wear their uniform with pride. They keep their books neat and tidy and understand the importance of taking care of their work.
- Pupils enjoy working and playing in a diverse community. They appreciate the number of languages spoken in the school. 'Young interpreters' are bilingual pupils who are appointed to support new entrants to the school with settling in and making friends.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with national figures and has improved in recent years. The 'Attendance Ted' and 'Punctuality Pup' are awarded to classes with the best attendance and punctuality, which maintain the high profile of good attendance and timekeeping among parents and pupils. However, not enough is being done to analyse patterns of attendance or lateness in order to prevent poor habits developing for individual pupils and families.
- Pupils' behaviour at breaktimes is lively and nearly always good natured. Pupils told inspectors that arguments or teasing are sorted out fairly by teachers and the peer mediators. The evidence seen during the inspection and over time shows that serious incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with strictly but fairly and that low level disruption is rare. For those pupils who have difficulties in meeting the school's high expectations of conduct, the school can point to significant reductions in incidents of poor behaviour over time.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils feel safe and know that staff are there to help them. Pupils have received comprehensive guidance about safe use of the internet and social media. The very few incidents of bullying are dealt with fairly and effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying through a recent anti-bullying campaign, which really captured their interest and earned their commitment.
- School leaders act promptly if there are any serious concerns about a pupil's safety or well-being. Efficient and detailed record keeping, prompt action when there are concerns, careful monitoring and close liaison with the local authority children's services promote high levels of care and protection for pupils who may be at risk.
- Staff have been well trained in child protection procedures and understand their responsibilities. Previous shortfalls in procedures and practice, such as the implementation of the whistle-blowing policy, have been tackled effectively.
- School leaders and staff are continuously vigilant about road safety. There is now a 'walking bus' to support pupils' safe and healthy journey to school, and staff on duty oversee pupils' arrivals and departures.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. Nearly all teaching is consistently good and there is no inadequate teaching.

- The school's focus on improving pupils' literacy skills is clearly demonstrated in their work in other subjects such as religious education and the creative curriculum. Strong teaching in mathematics has a positive impact on pupils' confidence, skills and interest in numbers from the early years onwards.
- Lessons in all classes typically capture pupils' interest through appropriate choices of exciting and stimulating resources. Nearly all pupils settle quickly to work and are keen to make the most of the opportunities to learn and contribute. They are committed learners and are confident about asking for help if needed. As one pupil said, 'You only have to put your hand up if you are stuck and the teacher will help you.'
- Teachers assess pupils carefully through searching questions, skilfully evaluating their responses during lessons. Teaching assistants also play a crucial part in keeping a watchful eye on how pupils are doing, adjusting the amount of support and level of questioning to ensure rapid progress.
- Pupils' books in all subjects are marked well, with appropriate next steps which pupils act upon to improve their work.
- Good teaching in the classroom is complemented and strengthened by a useful range of extra help, including a popular homework club.
- Teachers take careful account of pupils' prior attainment and usually match activities well to their abilities. However, in a very few cases, teachers do not set hard enough work for the most-able pupils or promote excellent learning habits. Some time is lost because the most-able pupils wait for extension work from the teacher when they have finished, not having been taught how to take more responsibility for checking their understanding or that they have fully mastered the task set. This is particularly so with Year 5 pupils who are studying the new curriculum. A few pupils told the inspectors that they sometimes felt 'held back' because they were not moved on to what they perceive to be higher level work.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement has rapidly improved since the last inspection and is now in line with, or above, national figures in reading, mathematics and writing at both key stages.
- In 2014, at the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment was above the national figures for reading, mathematics and writing, including at the higher levels, showing a sustained improvement over the last few years. Pupils' screening check scores for phonics (sounds that letters make) show significant improvement and are well above national and local averages.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics, reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 2 is in line with national figures. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in mathematics, reading and writing is above the national figure, a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- The school's current assessments accurately demonstrate that most pupils in Key Stage 2 have already made more than the expected progress. However, a small number of pupils do not make as much progress in writing as they do in reading and mathematics because they sometimes struggle to write longer, sustained assignments.
- The proportion of pupils who made better than expected progress in 2014, including the most able, is close to the national figure and a big improvement on previous years. However, a few of the most-able pupils did not attain the highest levels in all three areas of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils make as good and often better progress than their peers in school and nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. School leaders have accurately identified that a few more-able disadvantaged pupils need to make even more rapid progress to attain the highest levels in writing, particularly grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities make good progress from their starting points, notably in writing. Effective programmes of extra help enhance strong class teaching and support, leading to good progress and significant gains in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress, acquiring strong skills in their spoken language and quickly catching up with their peers. There is no gap in achievement between pupils from different ethnic groups in the school.
- Reading is a strength of the school. There is a well stocked and attractive library at the heart of the school building. Pupils read fluently and with interest and understanding. Reading for pleasure is encouraged and parents support their children's regular reading practice at home.

The early years provision is good

- Children attend the Early Years Foundation Stage full-time. Starting points for children as they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage vary considerably. Some have skills and experiences that are well below what is typical for their age and some are more able and well prepared for school. Regardless of their starting points, children flourish in the early years, make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage in their school lives.
- Activities for children in the early years are well planned and supported with high quality and exciting resources. Staff take detailed note of each child's needs, skills and personality when planning activities and gauging progress. A good balance is achieved between learning and play directed by adults and activities chosen by the children themselves.
- At the time of the inspection, activities in the early years were planned around the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Children were enthralled by the arrival of the giant's boot; they exercised their imaginations through dressing up, drawing castles and acting out the story. The use of a classic fairytale also enhanced children's cultural experiences and their understanding of how a typical story unfolds.
- The teaching of early reading, writing and mathematics is good. Children learn their letters and sounds well and enjoy writing. Classroom displays and children's books celebrate examples of their neat and correctly formed cursive handwriting. Staff are rightly focusing on improving children's speaking and listening skills. This is because they have identified that some children are hesitant when talking and do not use spoken language fluently or creatively as part of their play and interactions with adults.
- Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly in the early years. Staff make the most of opportunities for children to learn about the world outside. For example, children regularly visit the Forest School and enjoy exciting visits from parents with careers in the fire service or veterinary medicine. In addition, children benefit from a well-planned programme of religious education, which helps to promote their self-awareness, values and respect.
- Children behave well in the early years. Consistently high expectations promote helpful routines. Staff insist on good manners when children ask to take turns or for some materials and equipment. Children are also actively encouraged to be kind and friendly towards each other.
- Procedures to keep children safe are followed scrupulously, in line with the rest of the school. Children are taught about safe behaviour and looking after themselves, including when to go to an adult for help. Staff are vigilant and their knowledge of the children ensures that they are safe and well cared for.
- The early years provision is led and managed well. Planning, assessing and monitoring progress are all carried out effectively. Activities are carefully adapted to meet the needs of different children joining the school and detailed records are compiled to assist children's smooth transition to Year 1.

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	446197

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	390
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Whitbread
Headteacher	Elisabeth Blanden [Acting]
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2013
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