

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Braintree

Gilchrist Way, Braintree, Essex CM7 2SY

Inspection dates

17–18 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good throughout the school.
- Leadership is not well distributed. Too many roles fall to the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The heavy load prevents them from being highly effective in fulfilling the roles assigned to them.
- Governors do not have a clear enough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are not effective in holding the school's leaders to account.
- Too few disadvantaged pupils make good progress.
- Some pupils do not feel safe from bullying and do not have faith in staff to sort out issues quickly when they arise.
- Too few children in the early years make rapid enough progress. Activities are not always well planned to meet the needs of very young children.
- Pupils do not make good progress across a wide range of subjects. In 2016, pupils made less progress than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Pupils are polite and courteous. They behave well and respond quickly to instructions that they are given by adults.
- The school has rigorous procedures in place to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children.
- Teachers use questioning skills well to check whether pupils have understood what they have been taught and to encourage them to think more deeply.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Teaching assistants support pupils well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leadership responsibilities are shared more widely so that individual leaders do not perform too many roles to be fully effective
 - improving governance so that the governing body is better able to hold leaders to account
 - monitoring the pupil premium grant more closely to ensure that spending has a direct impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve outcomes so that all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good throughout the school and over time by:
 - sharing the best practice that already exists
 - ensuring that there is sufficient challenge for the most able pupils
 - teaching handwriting skills explicitly and systematically.

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

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school's leaders and governors have not ensured that the quality of teaching in the school and outcomes for pupils are consistently good. There has been an enormous turnover of teaching staff since the last inspection. This has caused turbulence in the school and means that training that was put in place has not had a lasting impact on improving the quality of teaching in the school.
- Leadership roles are not shared effectively among staff. The headteacher and deputy headteacher carry a disproportionate number of roles and responsibilities and this limits their capacity to be fully effective in any of them. As a result, the school is not improving as quickly as it should.
- The pupil premium grant is not spent effectively because too many disadvantaged pupils do not make the good progress that they should. There is insufficient focus on ensuring that the funding improves outcomes for this group of pupils. The school's leaders have a good understanding of the emotional and social barriers that disadvantaged pupils are facing and have put effective measures in place to address them.
- Some parents express concerns about the school, particularly about provision for the most able pupils, the frequent changes of teaching staff and bullying. One parent said that, 'the school is particularly bad at recognising and providing for more able children – both of our children have regularly told us they were bored in lessons and not challenged enough'.
- Most parents are positive about the school and satisfied with the education it provides for their children. For example, one parent said, 'St Francis school is a great school and my daughter is very happy there' and another commented that 'St Francis is a positive, vibrant and happy primary school'.
- The headteacher has been in post for a year and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She recognised weaknesses in the quality of teaching immediately upon joining the school and promptly requested that the local authority carry out a review of provision. The local authority confirmed the headteacher's judgements and she took prompt action as a result of their recommendations. The large number of changes to teaching staff in September 2016 means that the benefits of earlier training have been lost. It is too soon to see the impact of actions taken since the beginning of this academic year.
- The school's curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced. Pupils are given a good range of opportunities across all the subjects in the national curriculum. Educational visits to places of interest enhance pupils' experiences. Pupils are given regular opportunities to play instruments and to sing. For example, during an assembly seen during the inspection, a group of older pupils played 'happy birthday' competently on the recorder to accompany other pupils singing.
- The primary physical education and sports premium is spent effectively. The school uses the funding well to enhance pupils' understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle. The funding is used to provide a greater quantity and range of extra-curricular

sports clubs. The take-up of these is high and the clubs are full. The funding has also enabled the school to take part in a wide range of competitions, both in school and with other schools locally.

- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, moral development can be seen in the way pupils respond to teachers. Pupils know right from wrong and write their own class rules. Pupils are given the opportunity to pray throughout the day and the school's Catholic ethos is clearly evident. Pupils are taught about other religions and are given opportunities to think about the impact of beliefs after events in their lives.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to learn about fundamental British values. For example, they learn about democracy through the election of school council representatives and prefects. They show great tolerance to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's leaders ensure that no negative messages are given to children about people who have 'protected characteristics' (specific areas covered by equality and diversity guidelines and legislation).

Governance of the school

- Governors do not know the school's strengths and weaknesses well enough. They do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the school's assessment information and what this tells them. As a result, their understanding of how well the school is doing is too generous.
- The headteacher is providing the governing body with better information about the school than they have received in the past. Governors are not using this information well enough to hold the school's leaders to account. Minutes of governing body meetings do not show rigorous questioning of the school's leaders or healthy challenge of the information that they are given.
- Governors show great commitment to ensuring that the school is an inclusive community where everyone is welcome and valued. They have shown that they are happy to make adjustments and exceptions to meet the needs of individuals.
- The school's governors are very willing and supportive. They are very keen that the school continues to improve and that it offers pupils a good standard of education.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's arrangements for the safer recruitment of staff are rigorous. All necessary pre-employment checks are carried out extremely diligently to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children.
- The school's single central record of pre-employment checks meets statutory requirements. The record is extremely well maintained and its importance is understood very clearly.
- The headteacher has greatly improved the system for recording child protection concerns. Records are now kept securely and accurately.
- In the past, some aspects of child protection procedures have not been good enough.

The school's records show examples of action having been taken without first seeking the necessary advice from children's social care. The school has relied too heavily on its pre-existing knowledge about families when deciding what action to take about concerns raised. Systems have now been overhauled so that this is no longer the case.

- All classrooms have a copy of the school's safeguarding staff information folder. The folder contains a wealth of important information about safeguarding procedures and practice, including a copy of the most recent version of the statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education'. Staff know where the folders are kept and refer to them when necessary.
- Staff receive regular and appropriate training. As a result, they are fully aware of how and when to make a referral to the school's designated safeguarding leads. Staff show good understanding of the signs to look for that might cause concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good throughout the school. The frequent changes of staff mean that almost all teachers were new at the beginning of the academic year. As a result, the actions taken by the school's leaders in the last academic year have not had a lasting impact.
- The most able pupils are not stretched and challenged as they should be. Teachers' expectations of what these pupils should achieve are not high enough. The most able pupils are held back by being asked to do tasks that are too easy for them and do not extend their learning. For example, in mathematics pupils are required to complete unnecessary amounts of the same calculation before moving on to other work. This limits the progress that they make.
- Pupils are given too few opportunities to develop their writing stamina by writing at length. They are frequently given worksheets to complete that limit the length and type of response that they are able to give. As a result, pupils make less progress than they should.
- Pupils' handwriting is often immature and poorly formed. For example, younger pupils form letters incorrectly and use capital letters inappropriately. This is because handwriting is not taught explicitly and systematically enough.
- Some teaching is less effective, and where this is the case pupils make less progress. For example, in some cases, teachers do not explain teaching points or describe what they want pupils to do clearly enough. As a result, pupils do not understand what they are taught or what they are expected to do.
- Where teaching is weaker, teachers' management of pupils' behaviour is less effective. Where this is the case there is some low-level disruption in lessons, such as pupils speaking when the teacher is talking, or fidgeting and daydreaming rather than concentrating.
- Some teachers use questioning skills effectively and this helps pupils to make better progress. For example, teachers use carefully chosen questions to identify pupils' misconceptions and this enables them to respond quickly. On other occasions, they use more abstract questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply about the subject, or

enhance their own learning.

- Teaching assistants are used effectively in classrooms, particularly to provide support to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants are skilled at knowing when to step in to provide support and they are responsive to individual pupils' needs. Teachers ensure that teaching assistants are well informed about what they are expected to do and what they are intended to achieve.
- Homework is used to good effect, particularly to encourage pupils to read frequently and to promote a love of reading. Most pupils read at home regularly and their home-school diaries are used well. Pupils read confidently and expressively as a result.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils do not feel safe from bullying and do not have confidence that staff will be able to sort issues out when they arise. Pupils say that some staff deal with bullying more effectively than others. One pupil commented that staff say 'I'll keep an eye on him or her' but that 'it doesn't help'.
- Some parents do not feel that the school always deals with bullying effectively, and inspection evidence supports this. The school's anti-bullying policy does not contain sufficient detail to ensure that allegations of bullying are always dealt with fully and proper records kept. The headteacher has improved the system for recording bullying incidents and is now better able to monitor incidents that occur. Actions taken are neither prompt nor decisive enough to ensure that bullying is quickly eradicated when it occurs.
- The vast majority of pupils feel safe at school and free from bullying. They say that staff are 'kind' and that they 'always help you'.
- Pupils are very respectful towards one another and listen carefully to what their peers say. They enjoy each other's achievements and show genuine pride in their classmates when they win an award. For example, in a celebration assembly that took place during the inspection, pupils were delighted to be awarded their 'pen licence' and their peers were very pleased for them too.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave sensibly and appropriately around the school and in the playground. They know the school's rules well and follow them responsibly. Pupils generally respond quickly to adults' instructions.
- Pupils are polite, well-mannered and very courteous to adults. Staff provide very good role models, routinely showing pupils how people behave in respectful relationships. As a result, there is a strong atmosphere of mutual respect in the school.

- Pupils are welcoming and friendly towards visitors. They are keen to speak about their work and their school.
- Attendance is improving and is currently above the most recent national average. Clear strategies are in place to address absence issues and no pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' attainment in the key stage 2 national tests has been below average for the last two years. Pupils do not make enough progress during their time at the school.
- In 2015, progress was below the national average in writing, and well below in reading and mathematics. In 2016, pupils made much better progress. Although the two sets of results cannot be directly compared, as the assessment system changed completely between 2015 and 2016, the school's results now compare much more favourably with the national average than they have in the past.
- Results in writing were unrealistically judged to be high in 2016. Pupils' attainment was shown to be well above the national average and their progress in the subject was assessed to be in the top 10% nationally. Work in pupils' books and writing samples from the 2016 cohort of pupils confirm that these very high results are partially due to inaccurate assessment. However, it is clear that standards are rising in writing.
- Pupils do not make good progress across a wide range of subjects. Progress is better in some subjects, and in some classes, than others. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to write in subjects other than English.
- The most able pupils do not make the more rapid progress that they should. They are not challenged sufficiently in lessons, and expectations are not high enough.
- About half of the disadvantaged pupils in the school make the good progress that they should but others do not. Leaders do not focus strongly enough on checking that measures that are put in place are effective in ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make more rapid progress. The most able disadvantaged pupils make good progress, particularly in reading and writing.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. Suitable measures are planned well to meet the needs of individual pupils.
- Pupils' exercise books show that pupils are mainly working at an appropriate level for their age. There is a good amount of work in both English and mathematics and progress is clear. Pupils make good progress in science, particularly in key stage 2.
- Pupils are now making much better progress in phonics. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check were below the national average for the three years up to 2015. In 2016, in response to changes made by the current headteacher, there was a sharp increase in attainment and the proportion of pupils who reached the expected level was just above the national average.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children enter the early years class with skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age. The proportion of pupils who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has risen for the last three years and is now above the national average. Children are adequately prepared for Year 1. Too few children make rapid progress or exceed expectations in early years.
- Some activities are not well matched to the needs of young children. Where this is the case, children do not engage with the apparatus they are given in a meaningful way because they do not understand what they are expected to do. For example, children were given tablets to use but without support or any clear purpose. As a result, children became frustrated because they did not know what to do.
- Leadership of the early years is not fully effective. The substantive early years leader is currently taking a period of planned leave and the arrangements to cover this absence are not strong enough. Leaders do not currently have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the early years provision and improvement planning is not robust enough.
- Children behave very well and enjoy coming to school. They settle quickly to activities and enjoy playing with their friends.
- Staff ensure that parents are fully involved in their children's early education. Communication is strong between home and school. Parents find the school's online assessment system very helpful and they appreciate being able to monitor closely the progress their children are making.

School details

Unique reference number	115194
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10019181

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	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Carmoody
Headteacher	Victoria Jackson
Telephone number	01376 320440
Website	www.stfrancisbraintree.org.uk
Email address	head@st-francis.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 November 2011

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about key stage 2 results, the curriculum, pupil premium spending and sports premium spending on its website.
- The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left the school in July 2014. The previous long-standing headteacher returned from retirement to become the school's interim headteacher, initially for a term and ultimately for an academic year. The current headteacher took up her permanent post in September 2015.
- There have been a large number of staff changes in recent years. The deputy headteacher is the only member of the teaching staff who was employed at the time of the last inspection.
- The school met the most recent floor standards. These are the minimum expectations, set by the government, for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence in order to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Inspectors observed parts of 16 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' exercise books, spoke to them about their work and listened to them read.
- Meetings were held with the school's leaders, a group of governors, a representative of the local authority and the school council. The lead inspector also spoke with a second representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- The views of parents were taken into account through the 57 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, conversations with parents as they brought their children to school, and 34 text responses.
- The views of staff were taken into account, including the seven questionnaires that were completed, and through conversations throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Hopkins	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Pardy	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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