

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Braintree

Gilchrist Way, Braintree, Essex CM7 2SY

Inspection dates

5–6 February 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads the school with energy and purpose. She has focused relentlessly on improving the quality of education and raising achievement. Hence, improvement since the last inspection has been sustained and rapid.
- Governors provide strong oversight of the school's work to ensure that all pupils receive a good-quality education. They skilfully challenge leaders to do even better.
- Pupils across the school, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are making good progress in their learning.
- Pupils' attainment at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is now above average by the end of key stage 2. Although improving over time, not enough pupils are achieving greater depth or a high standard, especially in writing and mathematics.
- The curriculum for English and mathematics is planned and taught well. The leaders for English and mathematics promote their subjects effectively.
- The curriculum in other subjects is not as consistently well developed. Many of the other subject leaders are new to their role. They are knowledgeable and keen to develop their subjects further.
- Pupils are highly positive about school. This is because staff have successfully instilled a love of learning. Hence, pupils are often engrossed in their work in lessons and work purposefully to produce the best work they can do.
- Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds get on exceptionally well with one another. They are sociable, reflective youngsters who are very well prepared for their next step in education.
- Children in the early years benefit from good teaching and make strong progress in their first year in school. Their learning experiences outdoors are not as wide-ranging or interesting as they are in the classroom.
- Not all pupils' spelling and use of grammar in their writing are strong enough. On occasions, pupils who have grasped essential ideas are not moved on quickly.
- Teachers have established a strong working partnership with teaching assistants, who provide skilled support to the pupils they work with.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school and supports younger pupils' reading and spelling effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen and deepen pupils' learning and enable more to achieve greater depth or a high standard by:
 - ensuring that pupils who have grasped knowledge and ideas are moved on more quickly to their next steps in learning
 - continuing with work to strengthen pupils' use of grammar and punctuation when writing
 - developing the roles of leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics so that they are effective in driving the development of their subjects
 - ensuring that work in other subjects enables pupils across the school to more consistently develop deeper knowledge, understanding and skills
 - ensuring a sharper overview of impact from the wide range of data and information collected on individual pupils' learning and progress.
- Develop the outdoor area in the early years to provide interesting and exciting experiences for children that cover all of the areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has established an effective team and a strong sense of purpose. She has created a culture of high expectations within which staff and governors have a common understanding of the school's main aims and goals. As a result, all are working together in a unified way to achieve these.
- Clear systems and processes are in place to manage the school and drive further improvements. Leaders are particularly good at ensuring that staff work consistently to the policies and standards they set, including for teaching and learning.
- The leadership of teaching is strong. Leaders, particularly the headteacher, have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development from their thorough monitoring of teaching and learning. They provide teachers with good-quality feedback and expert guidance on how to further improve their teaching.
- Leaders provide a wide range of training and professional development for staff. This is informed by the school's thorough checking of teaching and learning and tailored very closely to staff needs, as well as the priorities in the school development plan.
- Pupils' progress and achievement are checked with care so that leaders and class teachers know how well pupils are learning and where they might need extra support or challenge.
- The school pays good attention to equality of opportunity and ensures that different groups of pupils are achieving the best possible outcomes. They use specific funding well, such as the pupil premium grant and funding for SEND, making sure that pupils at the risk of underachieving or those with gaps in their learning receive the right support.
- The support for pupils who speak English as an additional language, especially beginners, is exceptionally well coordinated and organised, enabling them to acquire English speedily.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous. Leaders know where further improvements are needed and how to secure these. All the issues identified in the previous inspection have been fully addressed. The local authority has also provided good support for improvement.
- The school has gathered a considerable amount of data and information and most of this is analysed well. Sometimes, however, data and information are not pulled together to give a clearer overview of impact.
- The school is focusing well on developing the roles of subject leaders. The roles of the leaders for English and mathematics are now very well established but other subject leadership roles are not as advanced.
- The school is very clear on the purpose of its curriculum and that it should be both inclusive and provide pupils with a well-rounded education. Therefore, pupils experience a wide range of subjects that are enriched with visits and a wide variety of extra-curricular activities.
- The curriculum in English and mathematics is very well designed to support systematic development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills and to deepen these. In

other subjects, the planning ensures that pupils develop secure knowledge and understanding but does not ensure that pupils have consistently good opportunities to deepen, extend and apply their learning systematically.

- The school gives pupils' personal development a high priority. As a result, pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop personal and social skills, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, through the curriculum, assemblies and the wider curriculum.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school and generous in their praise. The following comment from a parent reflects the views of many: 'St Francis is such a lovely school, the headteacher is always on hand to listen and solve any concerns and put our minds at rest as parents.'

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Governors are exceptionally well informed about the school's work and how well the school is performing. They visit regularly and spend time speaking to staff and pupils about their work and experiences of school.
- The governing body is highly systematic now in how it follows up developments and initiatives to ensure that they have made a difference.
- Governors have established strong relationships with leaders, within which they provide a well-managed balance of challenge and support. They ask probing questions and follow through a line of enquiry until they are satisfied that an issue has either been dealt with or there are robust plans to do so.
- The governing body shares and promotes the high expectations set by the headteacher. They are just as ambitious to make the school the best it can be.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a strong culture of safety and safeguarding.
- The staff know pupils and their families exceptionally well and are quick to pick up on pupils who need additional help or support.
- Staff are well trained and know what they should look out for. They are vigilant and quick to report any concerns so that leaders have a clear picture of where pupils, and their families, may need support.
- Pupils feel safe and are confident about speaking to adults if they are anxious or worried about anything.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use effectively to plan lessons and to question pupils' understanding. They provide pupils with useful examples to help

them. In mathematics, they provide pupils with worked examples that show them how to solve problems or work through calculations step by step.

- Teaching assistants provide strong support in lessons to pupils who need additional help or confidence-building. They question pupils well to develop their knowledge and understanding of their work. Teaching assistants explain and demonstrate to pupils what they need to do and how to do it, which pupils find very helpful.
- In the teaching of English and mathematics, teachers ensure that they are developing pupils' knowledge and understanding consistently and systematically across the school.
- The high expectations teachers have of pupils result in good levels of challenge in the work pupils are given. Teachers actively encourage and support pupils to develop depth in their learning. There are occasions, however, when pupils who have understood the ideas and grasped the main learning points are not moved on quickly enough.
- Teachers pay good attention to developing and expanding pupils' vocabulary and are precise in their own use of technical language and vocabulary. They expect pupils to apply the same level of precision in their use of language and vocabulary when responding to questions or explaining their work. However, not all teachers pay enough attention to improving pupils' spelling and use of grammar in their writing.
- The school has a good range of resources, including practical resources for mathematics and technological resources. These are used well in lessons to support learning. For example, in an English lesson in Year 5, pupils rehearsing their play scripts made excellent use of tablets to film the rehearsals to help them to review and refine their performance and scripts.
- The school has invested in high-quality reading texts for the teaching of reading. These are having a very positive impact on the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils say that the books they are reading are helping them to expand their vocabulary and feel that they are using a wider and more interesting range of words in their writing.
- Pupils understand their learning well. They know what is going well and where they need to improve. As a result, when choosing the level of challenge to work at in mathematics, for example, pupils make informed choices. They act on the good-quality feedback they receive from adults, and indeed one another, to make their work better.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are polite and well mannered. They are open and welcoming, and they maintain an excellent balance between being curious and friendly while remaining respectful.
- Pupils love school and they love learning. In discussion, they were brimming with enthusiasm about their work. They enjoy being challenged and have the confidence to have a go at more difficult work.
- In lessons, pupils work exceptionally well, helping one another to solve complex problems in mathematics or collaborating on a piece of writing. Their social skills are

highly developed, and pupils of all ages listen to others with interest and respect, building well on one another's contributions during discussions.

- The small but noticeable number of pupils who join the school mid-year settle in very quickly and make new friends because others are so supportive and help them to become part of the school community.
- Overall, there is a strong sense of belonging among pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. Staff and pupils are proud of the school's diversity and value the different cultures and languages represented in the school.
- The work the school does on pupils' personal and social development ensures that they are thoughtful and reflective about the world around them.
- Pupils make a good contribution to school life through the work they do on the school council and by sharing their views about how well the school works.
- The care and support given to individual pupils, and families where necessary, are excellent. Staff know pupils as individuals and provide a safe and harmonious environment for them to develop and grow. Parents agree that their children are safe and happy at school.
- The school makes strong provision for pupils' mental health and well-being and encourages pupils to take care of their own health and physical and mental welfare.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils conduct themselves exceptionally well around the school and in lessons. Their excellent behaviour makes a significant contribution to their learning. Parents and staff say that pupils' behaviour when they go out on visits and trips is impeccable.
- Pupils understand the need for good behaviour and the school's expectations of them. School and class routines are exceptionally well embedded. Pupils' excellent behaviour is underpinned by strong moral values so that pupils understand the reasons why good behaviour is important. Consequently, they are exceptionally good at managing and moderating their own behaviour. Staff rarely have to remind pupils about behaviour expectations.
- Any misbehaviour, including name-calling or bullying, is rare. Pupils are actively involved in the school's anti-bullying initiatives. For example, they have created a helpful and informative school display about bullying, with the strapline 'Be brave, be bold; make sure you've told'.
- The school has worked very systematically to improve attendance, and it is now in line with national averages. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, value their education and most rarely miss a day. The very small number who are persistently absent are being supported successfully to improve their attendance. The school's systems and processes to follow up absences are very robust.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils currently in the school make consistently good progress in their learning as they move through the school. Good teaching and more accurate assessment of pupils' learning are contributing to the good progress pupils are making.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2018, pupils' overall attainment at the expected standard was above average in reading, writing and mathematics combined. This was a significant improvement on the previous year.
- Pupils who took the tests last year also made better progress than in the year before, and similar to the progress made by pupils nationally, from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2. This is part of an improving trend, with evidence of pupils in the school making stronger and more sustained progress. Results at the end of key stage 1 were in line with the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language in Year 6 achieved well last year. The key stage 2 results showed that both groups had made considerable progress since being assessed at the end of key stage 1. Pupils who speak English as an additional language also did very well at the end of key stage 1 in 2018.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the high standard at key stage 2 and greater depth at the end of key stage 1 is increasing over time. There is more to do, however, to enable even more pupils to achieve at higher levels. For example, an insufficient grasp of grammar and punctuation holds some pupils back in attaining greater depth in their writing, especially pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils' knowledge and use of phonics are good because of strong teaching. As a result, pupils learn to read quickly and know how to tackle the new vocabulary they come across in their reading.
- Pupils' writing is developing well. They make particularly rapid progress in Year 1 to develop high-quality written work. Good-quality literature and focused work on understanding character and plot are promoting both enjoyment of reading and a good understanding of the subtext in the books pupils are reading.
- Pupils with SEND are meeting their targets well. Their written work shows good progress from their starting points. Those who are disadvantaged and also have special educational needs are making good progress because their needs are well met.
- Pupils across the school make reasonably good progress in subjects other than English and mathematics, including science and religious education, but deeper knowledge, understanding and skills are not as consistently well developed in these subjects as they are in English and mathematics.
- Overall, pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education.

Early years provision

Good

- Children get a good start to their education in Reception. They are supported to settle in quickly, including those who speak English as an additional language, most of whom are beginners in English at the start of their Reception Year.

- Children begin Reception with a wide range of skills and knowledge but, on balance, these are lower than expected, based on their ages, especially their language and communication skills. All groups of children make good progress from their starting points. Children who begin with little English make rapid progress in developing their English language skills. Assessments at the end of early years show that a broadly average proportion of children achieve a good level of development. An increasing proportion are exceeding this.
- Children are given good-quality activities to support their learning in the classroom. These are well planned to cover the areas of learning well and to do so in an interesting way. Hence, children are actively engaged in their learning. They are enjoying the current theme of 'Space' and have worked with adults to design and develop the role-play area into a space station.
- Adults interact well with children to encourage them to develop their speaking skills and to extend their thinking. Children who speak English as an additional language thrive in early years because they are well supported and the practical nature of the activities ensures that they are fully engaged and involved.
- The outdoor area provides excellent opportunities for physical development, with attractive, purpose-built equipment for climbing, as well as bicycles and tricycles to manoeuvre through tracks. Children enjoy this immensely. However, the outdoor area is currently less well developed to support other areas of learning. School leaders and governors are keen to have an area that provides as good an outdoor learning experience as the indoor classroom.
- The early years provision is well led. There is a clear vision for learning and development. This includes a strong focus on empowering children to be independent learners and to incorporate their ideas and interests in the work planned for them.
- Children are very well looked after and safe in the early years. They interact well with one another, as well as with adults. Detailed and accurate assessments are made of their progress, and this information is used to develop their next steps in learning. Children are well prepared for learning in Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	115194
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10058669

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Carmody
Headteacher	Victoria Jackson
Telephone number	01376 320 440
Website	www.stfrancisschoolbraintree.co.uk
Email address	admin@st-francis.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 November 2016

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to other primary schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average.
- The majority of pupils are White British. About a quarter of pupils are from a White other background, mostly Polish. Others are from a range of other minority ethnic groups. A little under a third of pupils speak English as an additional language and most are at the early stages of learning English when they start school.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average. A broadly average proportion have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is designated as a voluntary aided Catholic school. Its last section 48 inspection was in December 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in all classes. A number of these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders for English and mathematics and other middle leaders. They also met with a group of five governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Members of the inspection team spoke informally to pupils in lessons and around the school, as well as holding discussions with representative groups of pupils.
- The inspection team took account of 53 parental responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. The team also looked at written responses from 23 parents.
- Ofsted questionnaires completed by 21 members of staff at the school were also considered as part of the inspection process.
- A member of the inspection team spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at school.
- Members of the team observed the work of the school. They looked at the school's improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the governing body and the arrangements for ensuring that pupils are safeguarded. Documentation reviewed included records of assessment information relating to pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance. The school's website was also checked.

Inspection team

Gulshan Kayembe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Cindy Impey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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