

Inspection of an outstanding school: The St Francis Special School, Lincoln

Wickenby Crescent, Ermine Estate, Lincoln, Lincolnshire LN1 3TJ

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2022

Outcome

The St Francis Special School, Lincoln continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn in a very calm and inclusive environment. Staff have the highest expectations for all pupils. They show great care for pupils because they want the very best for them. Pupils thrive as a result.

Pupils feel safe and happy. They say that they can let staff know if they are worried. Pupils know that staff will help to resolve their concerns.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They engage really positively with their learning. Pupils show respect to each other and adults. They model the school's values of 'respect, perseverance, kindness, independence and teamwork'. Pupils know that bullying is wrong. They are confident that staff will act quickly to stop any unkind behaviour.

There are many opportunities for pupils to involve themselves in school life. Pupils can work in the school shop. They can attend clubs, including karaoke, reading and different sports. All pupils in the semi-formal curriculum took part in the whole-school Harry Potter summer performance. Pupils celebrate others' achievements, including in assemblies. Opportunities to dance in assemblies allow pupils to mix with each other. They thoroughly enjoy these occasions.

Parents and carers welcome the support their children receive. Several commented on the fact that staff go 'way above and beyond' what you might expect in caring for and teaching their children.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is very ambitious for all pupils. Learning is highly personalised to meet pupils' additional needs and to match their aspirations. This helps pupils to prepare very well for their next stage. Leaders celebrate pupils' achievements in all of the forms it may take. Leaders are aspirational for every pupil.

In the pre-formal curriculum, staff provide close care and support, sensitive to pupils' needs and their comfort. They carefully observe pupils' reactions to each activity to spot signs of their engagement. Staff foster this engagement further. When appropriate, they change activities to allow pupils to engage in new experiences.

Pupils who study the informal curriculum receive well-considered support to engage with their learning. They learn how to manage their emotions and behaviours. Leaders regularly check on these pupils' achievement. They ensure that pupils who need it receive further support.

Leaders check for any gaps in the knowledge of those pupils who study the semi-formal and formal curriculums. They identify how best staff can help to fill these gaps. Teachers carefully plan the order in which they teach key knowledge so that pupils can build their understanding over time. Teachers only introduce new knowledge when pupils are ready. This supports pupils to connect new learning with what they already know. This helps many of these pupils to achieve exceptionally well. For example, some older pupils successfully complete accredited qualifications. These qualifications help them in their next steps.

Staff foster a love of reading. They read books to pupils to encourage them to enjoy stories. Staff teach the different sounds that letters make to pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. The books these pupils read match the sounds they know. This helps them to grow in confidence in their reading.

Most pupils develop their understanding of mathematical knowledge very well. They progress from developing an understanding of number to being able to complete calculations with increasing confidence. They then apply this knowledge to real-life situations, such as using money. Older pupils, for example, completed a task calculating what food they could buy on a given budget.

Staff use their knowledge of pupils' additional needs well when planning learning. They continually check that pupils understand what they are learning. They provide extra support when it is needed. They also regularly adapt how they teach so that pupils can better understand the knowledge they are learning. When the time is right, staff encourage pupils to work independently. Staff foster in pupils positive attitudes to learning and the determination to succeed. Pupils flourish with the encouragement they receive from staff. They become engrossed in their work and thoroughly enjoy learning.

Promoting pupils' personal development is at the heart of the school's work. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme provides many opportunities for pupils to consider who they are and their place in their community. Pupils learn about difference and the importance of respecting all people. They know, for example, that people with disabilities should have the same opportunities as other people. Visits to places of worship enable pupils to learn about different beliefs and cultures. A recent visit to a food bank helped pupils to find out how some people struggle to afford food. Pupils collected food to donate. Older pupils can complete work experience placements. They receive highly effective support to prepare them for their next steps, including going to college.

Leaders are rightly proud of the first-rate provision the school offers. They know their school, its staff and the pupils well. Leaders value the challenge and support they receive from governors. Leaders are keen to learn from the practice of other special schools. They also provide specialist support to local mainstream and special schools.

Staff feel very well supported by their leaders. They know that leaders prioritise staff's workload and well-being. Staff appreciate this support. They value highly the opportunities they have to undertake training and to work closely with parents.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are highly vigilant of pupils' welfare, including those pupils who are unable to communicate using speech. Leaders and staff fully understand the increased vulnerability of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In particular, they know to look for any changes in pupils' behaviours as a sign of possible welfare concerns. Staff know to report any concerns they may have, however minor. Leaders respond in a timely manner to any safeguarding concerns. They work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils, and their families, get the support they need.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online and when crossing the road.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in June 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	120755
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10211575
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	164
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Richard Barwell
Headteacher	Janette Kennedy
Website	www.st-francis.lincs.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	4 May 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Francis Special School is a special school that provides for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils are pupils with SEND who have education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Some pupils have severe physical disabilities.
- More recently, the school has begun to provide for pupils with severe and moderate learning difficulties. Some of these pupils have social and emotional mental health needs.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken

that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the assistant headteachers and a range of other staff.
- The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body, including the chairperson. He also spoke by telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English and communication, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector observed some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also considered three of the four curriculum pathways. These are the pre-formal curriculum, the informal curriculum and the semi-formal curriculum. Inspectors met with the assistant headteachers who have oversight of these pathways, considered curriculum thinking around each pathway and looked at pupils' work and achievements.
- Inspectors considered pupils' EHC plans and any targets based on these plans that inform curriculum planning.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around the school.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding by reviewing the school's record of pre-employment checks and by holding discussions with leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments submitted. Inspectors also took into account the views expressed through the Ofsted survey of the school's staff.

Inspection team

Simon Hollingsworth, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Anne Maingay

His Majesty's Inspector

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