

Inspection of a good school: St Francis Special School

Patchway Drive, Oldbury Way, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 3BN

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 June 2023

Outcome

St Francis Special School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff have created a happy and nurturing environment. Pupils arrive at school to a warm welcome and this helps everyone to start the day with a cheerful outlook. Pupils have extremely strong relationships with staff. This is because staff know the pupils exceptionally well. Parents are appreciative of the care their children receive from the caring staff.

Pupils enjoy being with their friends at breaktime. Staff support pupils to use their preferred form of communication to choose from a range of play activities. Some enjoy relaxing in the immersive room, while others join in with creative activities in the outdoor classroom or have fun with bubbles. Some pupils have been learning to ride bicycles. They join in with a fun song to help them remember to wear a helmet. This keeps them safe as they ride around the track in the playground.

Leaders and staff share high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Predictable daily routines are well established, and this creates a sense of security and safety. Pupils are taught to express and understand their emotions. This helps them to make positive choices and regulate their behaviour independently. Skilled staff deliver sensitive support to individual pupils who need additional help to manage their behaviour.

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

Leaders are steadfastly committed to their vision for pupils to fulfil their potential and succeed during their time at St Francis. They have designed a well-constructed curriculum offer. In most subjects and across all phases, leaders have identified the order in which pupils should learn the essential knowledge and vocabulary. Based on their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets, pupils follow a personalised curriculum pathway. This includes children from the early years through to pupils in the sixth form.

Teachers combine their knowledge of the pupils with specialist expertise from therapists, to modify and adapt learning to meet the needs of the pupils in their class. While in most

instances pupils are provided with purposeful tasks, in some lessons the activities offered do not always help children to achieve the intent of the curriculum. This includes missed opportunities to model and practise the skills needed to achieve the identified tasks. As a result, pupils are not always able to secure the intended learning.

Reading runs seamlessly throughout the school. Across all phases, pupils enjoy listening to a wide range of stories, books and rhymes. A new and well-stocked library is at the heart of the school. Staff skilfully deliver sensory stories using tactile objects and sounds to bring stories to life. Leaders have devised a newly implemented programme to help children at the earliest stages of learning to read. They are taught to listen and discriminate between sounds through fun activities. They learn to recognise the sounds of letters. Leaders and staff use assessments to carefully identify which pupils may benefit from more formal phonics lessons.

Developing pupils' communication is a priority for leaders. While most pupils access a tailored communication support system, sometimes pupils' independent or proactive communication is limited. This is because, in some instances, pupils are not always provided with the necessary communication support to facilitate their full participation in learning.

Pupils' personal development is a significant strength. This aspect of the curriculum is carefully planned to help pupils understand the world they live in. Pupils elect their classmates to the school council, and they take this responsibility seriously. Some pupils act as 'interviewers' and take part in staff recruitment processes. Pupils can recall detailed learning from a recent assembly about sun safety. They are exceptionally well informed about how to keep themselves safe online. Older pupils contribute to the school environment through their learning in horticulture. They are proud of the raised beds that are full of flowers that pupils have planted. Learning is not limited to classrooms. If a pupil needs to learn in another space, staff make this happen with ease. Pupils appreciate sessions in the forest school, or personalised programmes delivered in the immersive room.

Leaders want the best for pupils, and they focus on preparing them for their next steps after leaving school. Leaders have given the sixth-form environment a distinct 'college' feel. This helps pupils to experience a gentle transition while remaining within the familiar school setting. Pupils learn about the world of work through enterprise projects, and complete bespoke life skills courses leading to meaningful accreditation.

Staff enthuse about the sense of teamwork here. They feel well supported by leaders. Members of the governing body are well informed. They offer appropriate challenge and support to continue to make improvements for the pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have robust systems and processes in place to keep the pupils safe. Leaders diligently record any concerns, and report safeguarding referrals without delay. Leaders

take sensitive action and work effectively with other professionals to make sure that pupils and their families get the help they need. Staff are well trained and highly vigilant in this work. They are swift to notice any potential safeguarding issues because they know the pupils so well.

Through the thoughtful personal, social and health education curriculum, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some instances, opportunities to promote pupils' communication are missed. This sometimes limits pupils' full and independent involvement in learning. Leaders should ensure that staff have the necessary knowledge and expertise to support and facilitate pupils' communication at all times.
- In some lessons, the activities provided do not help all pupils achieve the intended learning outcomes. There are some missed opportunities to learn, practise and build knowledge and skills over time. As a result, pupils do not always secure the intended learning. Leaders should ensure that all adults have the necessary expertise they need to prioritise the right activities and approaches, so that all pupils achieve the intended outcomes.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in November 2012.

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	116618
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10268992
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	103
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tina Ellis
Headteacher	Rachel Weldon (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.stfrancishants.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Francis Special School caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- St Francis Special School is part of the federation of Heathfield and St Francis Schools. Heathfield School is a special school situated next door. The schools share a governing body. The majority of St Francis Special School's senior leadership team work across both schools.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 executive headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and teachers. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body including the vice chair and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. These deep dives included discussions with curriculum leaders and teachers, lesson visits with leaders, talking to or observing pupils and looking at their work/evidence of their learning. The lead inspector also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum planning in a range of subjects, pupils' work and a range of documentation, including for individual pupils. This included EHC plans and individual pupil targets.
- Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and outside during social times.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising safeguarding records and policies, speaking to staff and discussing this with pupils.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including school improvement documentation and governance minutes.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Becky Greenhalgh

Ofsted Inspector

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