



St Francis Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115194
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290160
Inspection dates 5–6 March 2007
Reporting inspector David Wynford-Jones

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Gilchrist Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Braintree
Age range of pupils	4–11		Essex CM7 2SY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01376320440
Number on roll (school)	210	Fax number	01376 322498
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Caroline Sutton
		Headteacher	Mr Gareth Olney
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 5–6 March 2007	Inspection number 290160
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Francis is slightly smaller than most schools. Attainment on entry is similar to expected levels for children aged four. The socio-economic circumstances are very varied but overall are favourable. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and also those with learning difficulties and disabilities are below the national averages. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are a few pupils with Black or Asian backgrounds. Six pupils are at the early stages of learning English. Mobility is slightly below the national average. The school gained the Investors in People award in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school and reflects its Christian ethos well. The care, guidance and support provided is good. Parents are extremely supportive and very pleased with the school. One parent wrote 'Both our children are happy, they are making good progress and enjoy going to St Francis.'

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Good relationships with adults and between themselves help pupils to feel safe and develop confidence as they progress through the school. Pupils say they enjoy and want to come to school and know who to ask for help if they are worried. By Year 6, many pupils are self-assured, polite and articulate. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Effective links with the church and the wider community encourage pupils to develop their cultural awareness and to care for others. Pupils are keen to raise funds to support a school in Uganda.

Achievement and standards are good. Children make good progress in the Reception class and the majority meet or exceed the expected levels by the end of the year. They do particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development and in developing their communication, language and literacy skills. This reflects the emphasis the school places on developing social and communication skills. In Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. However, this has not been the pattern over the last few years, when standards were average in reading and writing and below average in mathematics. This is because teaching is effective and links between the Reception and Year 1 classes are well developed. Recent interventions in mathematics have resulted in improved standards. Standards in English and mathematics are currently above average in Years 5 and 6, confirming that the above average results in the Year 6 national tests in 2006 were not a 'one off'. Pupils with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language are supported well and many make good progress in relation to their starting points and needs.

Teaching and learning are good. Recent, more rigorous use of assessment procedures and closer monitoring of teaching by the senior leadership team have resulted in higher expectations and pupils are making better progress. Pupils are better able to assess their own progress accurately and honestly. However, there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In some lessons teachers do not adjust the difficulty of the work to meet the needs of individual pupils or explain clearly the expected learning by the end of the lesson. There are some examples of good quality marking but this is not consistent in all subjects. The curriculum is good and is enriched effectively by educational visits and visitors to the school and a number of extra-curricular activities. The school is working towards 'Healthy Schools' accreditation. Most pupils' understanding of healthy living is developing well but this could be consolidated in some lessons.

Leadership and management are good. Effective steps have been taken since the last inspection to promote improvement. The accurate school self-evaluation has enabled staff and governors to gain a clear understanding of the school's strengths and to identify appropriate priorities for improvement. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust. Governance is satisfactory. Many governors are knowledgeable, supportive and good advocates for the work of the school. They provide some challenge but this could be more rigorous, for example in analysing the standards the school achieves and identifying the criteria for success in the school development plan. Overall, the school provides good value for money and has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching to match that of the best.
- Ensure the governing body provides greater challenge to the school on its overall effectiveness.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are improving rapidly because teaching is more focused and better use is being made of assessment. In 2006, for the first time in many years, the standards the pupils reached at the end of Year 6 were above the national average. Analysis of the school's assessment data and scrutiny of work shows that most pupils in the current Year 5 and 6 are working above the expected levels in English and mathematics and to a lesser extent in science. This represents good progress from when they first attended school. Children are given a good start in the Reception class and they develop their social skills well. The standards they reach in communication, language and literacy are above national expectations. Standards in the current Year 2 are above average and pupils are making good progress. Writing is consistently of a good standard. Earlier weaknesses in mathematics have been tackled so that the pupils are now achieving the expected levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. The vast majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. However, a few pupils lose concentration and limit the effectiveness of some lessons. Pupils say that there is some bullying in the playground but that it is dealt with promptly by staff. They are clear about the need for rules and the consequences of not keeping to them. Pupils are polite and confident and demonstrate mature attitudes as they take responsibility in the school as school counsellors or as 'playground monitors'. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and demonstrate a good appreciation of health issues but some still have to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils also make an effective contribution to the wider community by being involved in parish activities and raising money for local and national charities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is improving rapidly and is good overall. This is enabling the pupils to make better progress and achieve well. Lessons are well planned; links are being made between subjects; information and communication technology (ICT) is used to support learning and pupils are involved in assessing their own learning. However, there are variations in the quality of teaching. In some lessons teachers tell the pupils what they are going to do, not what they are going to learn. In others they do not sufficiently challenge pupils through supplementary questioning, some parts of the lesson are too easy for a number of pupils, and the quality of marking is inconsistent. Pupils have a better understanding of how to improve their work in English, as target setting and marking is more informative than in some other subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well in lessons. This contributes much to their good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills but more could be done to consolidate pupils' learning through other subjects. The science curriculum is developing satisfactorily but is not as effective in contributing to raising standards. The work in other areas, such as art and design, music and physical education, is also promoted well. The curriculum is used well to encourage pupils' appreciation of topical events and improve their social responsibility. This is done through useful work on global warming and awareness-raising about the lack of opportunity for access to schooling across the world. There are good opportunities for them to learn from the many visitors to the school and to go on outings. For example, older pupils undertake residential trips to the Isle of Wight. Visits to the Houses of Parliament and visits from a 'Roman Soldier' are used to make learning come alive. Good use is made of the local environment in history and geography. There is a good range of extra activities for pupils to take part in such as dance, golf, football and an orchestra. These activities help pupils to gain self-confidence; enjoy their learning and contribute much to their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a safe and secure environment where all pupils are looked after well. Child protection arrangements are effective and particularly vulnerable pupils are treated carefully and sensitively. Pupils appreciate the way in which this caring attitude is shown by all staff. One pupil said, 'The best thing about this school is the way that all adults listen to us when we need help'. The school works well with parents

and other agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are met well. Advice and support are secured from outside agencies when appropriate. Risk assessments are in place and the statutory requirements relating to the monitoring of staff appointments are met. Procedures to identify and support pupils with learning difficulties are good. Assessment data is being used well in reading and writing to set learning targets for pupils. Pupils say these are valuable in helping them to improve their work but the targets for mathematics are not as clear and helpful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and the increasingly effective senior leadership team have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development in the school. They are focused on raising standards and ensuring pupils achieve well. Much has been accomplished recently in improving the quality of teaching. The areas for improvement are reflected in the school development plan but the criteria for evaluating its success lack quantifiable targets. The role of subject co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning is developing satisfactorily. Governors are very supportive of the school and are regular visitors. They appreciate the inclusive nature of the school and its role within the Catholic community. Although challenging statutory targets have been set, the Governors have not monitored and evaluated the school's performance with sufficient rigour.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 March 2007

Dear Pupils

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Gilchrist Way, Braintree, Essex, CM7 2SY

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. Looking at your books and talking to you about your work and your school helped us a lot in coming to our inspection findings. We were very pleased to hear that you like coming to school and your attendance is very good. We thought that you were very friendly and polite. Your behaviour in class and in the playground is good. It was great to see you enjoying your lessons.

We believe your school is a good school and does a lot of things well. Your headteacher and teachers work hard to make certain that you are well cared for and are safe. You certainly have a lot of exciting after-school clubs to attend and really interesting visits to go on. The standards you reach by the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Well done.

We also think that your school could do even more to help you reach even higher standards. We have asked your teachers to look at the way they teach and to see if they can improve their teaching further. We have also asked the governors to look carefully at the standards you reach and to check that the school is doing as well as it could to help you to reach even higher standards.

Once again, thank you for making our visit enjoyable.

Best wishes to all the pupils at St Francis Catholic School.

David Wynford Jones

Lead Inspector