

St Francis CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112035
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	310769
Inspection date	28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Alex Baxter

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Coles
Headteacher	Claire Fortey
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2004
School address	Longfield Falmouth TR11 4SU
Telephone number	01326 211910
Fax number	01326 211020

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

the degree to which the school meets the needs of pupils of differing ability and those who enter the school other than at the normal time

how well teachers stimulate pupils' interest and involve them in learning, for example by using information and communication technology (ICT), especially interactive whiteboards

how effectively leaders and managers bring about improvement, especially in achievement and standards in English and mathematics.

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, Years 5/6 assembly and pupils at lunch and play. Evidence was also gathered from teachers' assessments, pupils' work and discussions with pupils, staff, governors and parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Children's attainment on entry is well below that expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and there is variation from year to year. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average and there are very few pupils with English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is slightly above average. An above average number of pupils leave or enter the school other than at the normal times. Such mobility and LDD issues often affect some year groups very significantly. The school holds the following quality marks: Investor in People, Healthy School, Sport Active and Quality Assurance for Early Years Provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school with a distinctive caring, community ethos. Although a large school, it exhibits the supportive family approach to nurturing the well-being of individual pupils so often celebrated in much smaller schools. Following the inspirational lead of a gifted headteacher, the school is, in many ways, 'ahead of the game' in personalising learning and involving pupils fully as self-evaluative learners. Not surprisingly in this 'hot-bed' of learning, pupils' achievements are outstanding, often from very low starting points, and standards are above average by the end of Year 6. Parents are extremely appreciative and supportive of the school. 'Fantastic' was the superlative most frequently used by parents in their descriptions of the school. Echoing the views of others another parent wrote, 'This school is going from strength to strength. The teachers all seem to go 'the extra mile' for the children'.

Teaching and learning are outstanding and enable all pupils, including higher attainers and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make excellent progress regardless of their capabilities. Pupils arriving from other schools also experience acceleration in their learning from their differing starting points. The innovative involvement of pupils in evaluating their own work and progress is a typical strength in all parts of the school. Teachers and their assistants are very knowledgeable about their subjects and pupils' individual needs. They prepare lessons extremely well and use assessments in an exemplary way to identify pupils' learning needs and to implement stimulating strategies to quicken pupils' progress. Teachers have built on established strengths in ICT. They use interactive whiteboards to promote interest and understanding and digital cameras innovatively, in physical education, for example, to record and play back pupils' movements so they can evaluate and improve their skills. Pupils are given clear targets for improvement and receive precise guidance on how to achieve these. Often such targets are made more appealing to pupils on charts, as in Year 1, for example, as 'rockets leading them to new planets of achievement'. Because targets and high expectations are presented in such an accessible form, pupils know what to aspire to, how to evaluate their efforts and, as a result, meet ever-increasing challenges.

Pupils are taught and progress well in the Foundation Stage (Reception class.) They benefit from high quality care, support and guidance and do extremely well in gaining self-confidence, mixing with others and developing early writing skills. Children have stories to tell, and bring them to life by writing about the giant in 'Jack and the Bean stalk'. However, children's independence as learners is limited, on occasion, because access to outside facilities does not enable the children to choose for themselves when to learn outdoors.

High levels of very effective individual support and often specialist teaching enhance the pupils' developing ability to apply and evaluate their skills in a mature and increasingly effective way as they move through the school. Pupils of all abilities sense their improving skills and say, 'We win lots of awards and competitions because we enjoy school and do our best'. Pupils' speaking and listening, writing, calculation and problem solving skills, for example, continue to improve because pupils are using and applying them in 'real life' situations. They use drama and 'sign words' to develop their ideas. They write about interesting cross-curricular topics, for example in Year 2, when sequencing the lifecycle of a frog. Standards in Year 2 are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. By the time they reach Year 6, pupils' mathematical skills enable them to interpret scale and proportion and read maps accurately. Standards at the end of Year 6 are higher than those usually found in English, mathematics and science and are often accompanied by even higher speaking, listening and sporting skills.

There is an outstanding range of curricular learning opportunities, which enriches teaching and learning and pupils' subsequent achievement. A rich programme of academic study and creative and sporting activity enthuses the pupils and promotes their wholehearted participation.

In response to excellent care, support and guidance, the pupils' personal development and well-being are of the highest quality. Behaviour is exemplary. Attendance is good, with above average attendance for most pupils. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very effective and is supported by excellent links with parents and outside agencies. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including their understanding of Britain's rich cultural diversity, is also very advanced for their ages. Assemblies celebrate the school's Christian heritage, instil an appreciation of the contribution of others and promote the school as a caring community. Pupils are fully involved in the life of the school and their local community. For example, as members of the school council, as prefects in Year 6 or as 'the Friendship Squad' in Year 5, pupils are genuinely committed to helping each other. Pupils are very knowledgeable about health and fitness and adopt healthy and safe lifestyles and, for example, through their interest in 'Fair Trade Practices', are extremely well prepared for the future.

Leadership and management are outstanding. A highly effective and united determination to identify and address every pupil's individual need underpins provision throughout the school. The headteacher provides exemplary leadership and works very effectively with senior colleagues and governors. Together they set high expectations that skills are to be shared fully to meet pupils' needs. Consequently, teamwork enables all colleagues to use their particular talents to the full in promoting pupils' achievements. Parents and outside specialists are consulted regularly and their views are acted upon. Self-evaluation, especially the analysis of pupils' progress and needs, is accurate and also ensures that target setting is used with precision to help pupils reach their full potential. The way the school has raised standards in writing and mathematics by stimulating pupils' enjoyment and involvement as learners rightly places this school at the cutting edge of high quality education and shows an excellent capacity to improve into the future, confirming, as one parent wrote, 'A school to be proud of'.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision and leadership ensure that children make a good start in the Reception class. There are several strengths, including excellent care and very close cooperation with parents, which promote the welcoming, community ethos of the school. Overall, often from very low starting points, particularly in speaking and understanding words, children make good progress. However, skills remain below expectations when children enter Year 1. This is the case in most areas of learning, but in response to excellent teaching of literacy and high quality guidance and support, many children make exceptional progress in writing and in developing self-confidence and social skills. Teaching is good because the teacher and her colleagues have much expertise and work well together to stimulate and encourage children's learning. The curriculum is planned well and pays close attention to children's individual needs. The outdoor area is used well for adult led activities, but currently the youngest children can only use the outdoor learning facilities when taken there by an adult and this restricts their ability to choose such activities for themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve access to the outdoor learning facilities provided for the youngest children so that they can make their own choices about when to learn outdoors.

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Annex A**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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A**Leadership and management**

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis C of E Primary School, Falmouth, TR11 4SU

It was a privilege to inspect your school. I have no hesitation in agreeing with you and with many of your parents who feel that St Francis C of E Primary is an outstanding school. Everyone was so friendly and considerate of each other throughout the day, clearly showing why you enjoy coming to school so much. I would like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to me, particularly members of the school council. I was very interested to hear what you had to say about your school.

These are the main things I found:

- You make outstanding progress and the standards you reach by the end of Year 6 are better than in most schools.
- You give of your best, play a full part in school life and attend well. You really enjoy the excellent learning activities provided for you.
- Your excellent understanding of how to live healthily and safely and wholehearted contributions to the school and community, help you to be very well prepared for the future.
- Teaching is excellent because the teachers and their assistants are very skilled and involve you fully in learning.
- Staff work very effectively with your parents and other people. They know each of you very well and this helps them to give you the right amount of support and to provide excellent care and advice.
- Your headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is strongly supported by other senior managers and governors.

To help the school to improve I have asked the headteacher and governors to make it possible for those of you in the Reception class to choose for yourselves when to learn outdoors.

Please keep your wonderful enthusiasm for school.

Thank you once again, and best wishes for the future.

Alex Baxter Lead inspector