

St Francis Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115198
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311874
Inspection date	9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Lester
Headteacher	Mrs S Breen
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
School address	London Road Maldon Essex CM9 6HN
Telephone number	01621 856698
Fax number	01621 859225

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The following issues were investigated: the pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, and how well the school's leadership promotes high standards. Evidence was gathered from observation of lessons, the pupils' work, discussion with them and with staff, along with a scrutiny of school documents and parent questionnaires. 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 form, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Francis Roman Catholic Primary School is close to average size. The school population represents a mix of social backgrounds, but pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils whose first language is not English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is close to the average nationally. Children join the school with standards that are close to national expectations. The school has received a number of accreditations recently, including Investors in People and Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school judges itself to be outstanding, and the inspection confirms this. The quality of education is never less than good in any class and frequently excellent. This is the main reason why pupils make outstanding progress. Within this school, which promotes high spiritual and moral values, excellent systems for care, support and guidance lead to pupils feeling both supported and valued. 'The school is a part of my family,' commented one girl.

Pupils make rapid progress in their learning from the Foundation Stage through to the end of Year 6. By the time they leave, their attainment in English, mathematics and science is exceptionally high. The school is particularly successful in developing pupils' writing skills. As a result, they write fluently and accurately from an early age. In Year 6, the proportion reaching the higher level is much higher than average and more than two thirds attain the higher level in reading. This ability to read and write very well helps them to achieve high standards in other subjects across the curriculum. In 2007, attainment in the national tests for English and science was well above the national average. It was above average in mathematics. Overall, pupils made very good progress. The provisional results for 2008 show that standards have risen since then. Many more pupils reached the higher level in mathematics, for example. In all subjects, progress from their levels on entry to the school has been outstanding.

Parents are almost unanimous in their praise for the school. Very many responded to the inspection questionnaire. Almost all agreed that the school provides an excellent education and that their children enjoy attending. The few adverse comments relate to isolated instances of disruptive behaviour in one year group and the school's responsiveness to parental views. The school is very aware of both issues. The behaviour problem has been largely resolved and overall, behaviour is excellent. The school is about to initiate a parents' forum to provide more opportunities for parents to air their views and will make public the actions it takes in response, where appropriate. The current arrangements are satisfactory, in line with those in most schools.

The headteacher, ably supported by her senior leadership team, has provided outstanding leadership that has led to significant improvements in the school. These have been evident in the improvement the teaching of writing, which is now excellent. There is a very good understanding and use of assessment data, which has enabled senior leaders to focus very effectively on school priorities, with a clear emphasis on what needs to be done to raise standards. The headteacher has brought in new tracking programmes so that pupils' progress is measured accurately. The school has improved target setting and intervention programmes, so that staff give effective support to pupils who need additional help. The school has made excellent progress since the last inspection and is very well placed to improve further. The headteacher's highly effective management ensures that staff all work to a common purpose and morale is high. Governors work well with the school and have a good understanding of their roles. Subject co-ordinators monitor and lead their areas of responsibility very well indeed.

Another outstanding aspect of the school, and one praised by parents, is the pupils' personal development. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They are responsible and tolerant, with a very clear understanding of right and wrong. Teachers are very skilful at teaching religious education using a multi-faith approach, relating the customs and beliefs of other faiths to the pupils' own, so that they grow to understand and appreciate cultural diversity. Spirituality and the values of love and understanding support all that the school does. Pupils' attitudes to school are excellent, because they feel safe and cherished. All

are made to feel welcome within an inclusive and supportive community and all have every chance to succeed. As a result, attendance is above average. Pupils willingly take on responsibilities in the very active school council. Their participation has a very real influence; for example, their ideas and suggestions have changed the way that school meals are organised.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Relationships are excellent, so that pupils are confident to express their ideas. Teachers plan interesting and challenging lessons so that pupils concentrate and try hard to succeed. When teachers plan their lessons, they set tasks at different levels of difficulty, so that each pupil can work at a level that is appropriate and challenging. Teachers liaise very well with the teaching assistants, who as a result give very good support to pupils who need additional help. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and sustain a good pace so that they learn quickly. Their classroom management is excellent.

The curriculum is good, with a wide range of clubs and visits, as well as a strong emphasis on the teaching of the skills of literacy, numeracy, science, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT). Rightly, the school is now seeking ways to forge links between subjects on a thematic basis, so that they are not taught in isolation. There are already good examples of links between English, history and religious education. These give purpose and relevance to study and allow the skills taught across the curriculum to be reinforced. For example, the skills of writing to give information, taught in English, are revisited and extended when writing 'newspaper' accounts of events in history.

Parents praise the highly effective support and guidance systems. These are part of the reasons why pupils who find learning difficult, including those with autism and behaviour disorders, make excellent progress. All statutory safeguarding requirements and procedures are in place. The pupils report that there is almost no bullying and any minor incidents that do occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Excellent health education ensures pupils understand how to lead healthy lives. They readily explain the reasons for taking regular exercise and enjoy eating healthily. Parents comment on how well the school prepares their children for the next phase of their education. This is outstanding, because of the many opportunities pupils have to work together and take responsibility for their learning. The high standards they achieve and their personal qualities ensure that they are ready to contribute very well to a modern, culturally diverse society.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of education in the Foundation Stage is excellent and therefore children achieve exceptionally well. A good range of varied and appropriate activities ensures that children enjoy learning and quickly acquire the skills they need. Almost all have reached the standards expected nationally by the end of their time in Reception and many are already working at National Curriculum levels. The Foundation Stage is led very well. There are effective assessment systems and appropriate teaching approaches that help to develop children's confidence and independence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the curriculum so that links are made between subjects which add relevance to pupils' work and further develop and reinforce literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

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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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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?	2
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	2
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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Roman Catholic Primary School, Maldon, CM9 6HN

Thank you very much for making me so welcome at your school. You were all very friendly, polite and helpful and I enjoyed meeting so many of you. It was very interesting seeing you at work in your classrooms and I particularly enjoyed sharing your morning assembly and listening to your beautiful singing. I would like to say special thanks to the members of the school council who told me what it is like to be a pupil at St Francis.

Your school provides you with an outstanding education. You feel safe and cared for because the school looks after you so well. It supports you very well indeed with your learning: many of you told me how kind and helpful your teachers are. You make excellent progress and, by the end of Year 6, reach higher standards in English and mathematics than pupils in many other schools. You behave extremely well and enjoy your learning because the teaching is so good and you have such interesting lessons.

The teachers in charge of the school are leading and managing it exceptionally well. I have asked the school to make stronger links between subjects, because I know that you enjoy being actively involved in your learning, using your literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in all your subjects.

Once again thank you for your help. Work hard and make the most of your time in this very special school.

Yours sincerely

Paul Cosway

Lead inspector