

St Francis Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123172
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327864
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	296
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Shane Clark
Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Lipscombe
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Horspath Road Cowley OX4 2QT
Telephone number	01865 468190
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Francis is a primary school of average size that serves a socially and ethnically diverse community on the south-eastern outskirts of Oxford. About half of the pupils are of White British heritage; the remainder are from a wide range of minority ethnic communities. The largest of these groups, representing 9% of the number on roll, comprises pupils of Pakistani heritage. A few pupils, about 5% of the roll, are in the early stages of learning English. In contrast, the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, currently 36%, is about twice the national average. The learning needs of these pupils vary widely; however, most have moderate or specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The school has achieved the Healthy School award and has the bronze level Eco School award, which acknowledges its promotion of pupils' environmental awareness. For the past seven years, the school has had a deficit budget.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Francis Primary is a good school. It is effective in taking children from very low starting points when they join the Nursery classes to broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. The pupils achieve well because they thrive within the caring environment provided for them. This is a strong feature of the school, and one that many parents highlighted in their responses to the inspection questionnaire. One summed up their views when writing, 'I am delighted with the care and encouragement that my child has received. She has really grown in confidence.'

The school is effective in ensuring that all pupils are fully included in all activities. A key factor in the good progress made by pupils is the very good provision for the large number who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These pupils are given good quality help to ensure that they play a full part in lessons.

Pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum, enriched with a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and are generally taught well. Although teaching is good overall, it is inconsistent, and in some classes pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress. When this occurs, it is usually because teachers do not use information from their assessments of their pupils well enough when planning their lessons. The result is that the work set does not always provide good levels of challenge for the pupils, particularly the more able.

Underpinning the pupils' good progress is the good climate for learning evident in all classes. Pupils are generally well behaved, keen to learn, attentive, and play a full part in lessons. This occurs because teachers motivate their pupils and manage their behaviour well. Other reasons for the good progress made are the good quality of academic guidance provided for pupils through dialogue with teachers in lessons and the evaluative marking of their work, particularly in English. Teachers know their pupils well. They carefully record termly checks on pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, so that the progress made by the pupils in these subjects can be tracked regularly. This enables potential underachievement to be identified and tackled at an early stage. However, this focus tends to be on pupils whose attainment is below the level expected for their age, and the higher-attaining pupils are less likely to be identified as in need of extra help.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides clear direction for the school and is well supported by the staff in initiatives designed to raise standards, such as the current focus on mathematics. Governance is good. Governors are well informed and closely monitor the work of the school. The school has made good progress since its last inspection, and its track record in improving standards in English and mathematics shows that it is well placed to develop further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle well into the Nursery (Foundation 2 and 3) and Reception (Foundation 1) classes and achieve well overall because of the good provision. Staff are particularly successful in developing the personal and social skills of children, and the impact of this is seen in the good climate for learning throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage classes. The rapid improvements made in children's personal and social skills, from a very low starting point, provide a secure platform for the good personal development of the pupils as they later progress

from Year 1 to Year 6. Children also make good progress in their physical and creative development and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. However, children's progress in developing their basic skills in literacy and numeracy is only satisfactory. This is because the curriculum generally lacks the intensive focus on literacy and numeracy required in order to accelerate progress in these areas. For example, although staff are good at developing children's skills by constantly talking about the activities underway, they sometimes miss opportunities to improve children's speech by modelling grammatically correct responses to questions. By the time children transfer to Year 1, standards are generally close to the national average in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative and physical development. However, standards are well below average in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

Children have caring and trusting relationships with the adults who have charge of them and ensure that they are well looked after. The curriculum covers all areas of learning, and the introduction of systematic teaching of letters and their sounds is beginning to make a positive impact. There is a good balance between activities chosen by the children and those directed by the adults. Overall, children make good progress in their learning because they are taught well and there is always something to capture their imagination and hold their interest within the wide range of activities provided.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers make consistently good use of assessment information when planning their lessons, so that they routinely provide achievable challenges for all the pupils, particularly the more able.
- Ensure that all staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes place an even greater emphasis on developing children's basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Even though pupils make steady progress in Years 1 and 2, standards are generally well below average by the end of Key Stage 1. A three-year decline in standards has been halted, and the results of this year's assessments of pupils show improvements in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school's challenging targets for pupils' attainment have been met or exceeded in all areas assessed. Overall, progress accelerates as pupils move through the school, although there are differences in the rates of progress between classes, reflecting inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Early indications are that attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is likely to be similar to the broadly average level achieved in 2008. A rise in attainments in mathematics, as a result of the school focus on this subject, is offset by a slight decline in English. A common feature of attainment at the end of both key stages is the lack of pupils who exceed the nationally expected levels.

Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress because they are fully included in all activities and given good quality help whenever they need it. Those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress. Their specific needs are very clearly identified and their progress in reaching the challenging targets set out in their individual plans is closely monitored.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils get on well with one another, and their behaviour is generally good. Pupils say that bullying is not a problem but, if it does occur, they feel that teachers deal with it well. In closely controlled situations, such as when entering the hall for assembly, pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Pupils have positive views about all aspects of their school. They particularly appreciate the wide range of activities available for them. Although most pupils attend regularly and are punctual, overall attendance is just below the national average. The school's rigorous and effective monitoring shows that holidays taken during term time by a small minority of families adversely affect the attendance rate. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to be safe, for example in handling equipment. The Healthy School award and bronze level Eco award reflect pupils' good knowledge of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and their awareness of the impact that they can have on the environment. Pupils are appropriately prepared for the next phase of their education and for their future economic well-being. Their skills in teamwork and their diligent approach to tasks are good, but their basic skills in literacy and numeracy are only satisfactory. They are well prepared for a future as good citizens through their contributions to the day-to-day life of their school and their support for local community activities, such as participation in a 'fun day'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers relate well to their pupils, who respond by working hard in their lessons. A few of the pupils have social and emotional difficulties, and the teachers' calm, non-confrontational approach to class management helps ensure that these pupils are fully included in lessons. Nonetheless, any breaches of the school's behaviour code are acted upon quickly and firmly.

Teachers provide their pupils with clear explanations, sometimes using role play to heighten pupils' interest. Teachers are good at monitoring the pupils' progress as they work and in providing additional guidance as necessary. However, the work planned is not always sufficiently well matched to the pupils' different abilities and this can lead to some lack of challenge, particularly but not exclusively for the more able learners.

Teachers teach information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively to their pupils but the use of it to help add interest to lessons and extend the pupils' understanding was rarely evident during the course of the inspection. To some extent, this is because of unreliable hardware, an issue resulting from the financial constraints in recent years.

The highly skilled support staff make a considerable contribution in ensuring that those pupils who find learning more difficult are working as well as they are able and are making good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and acquire the skills they need through the well-planned curriculum. Over a number of years, the school has devised a curriculum that

ensures good progression in the development of pupils' skills, even though almost all pupils are in mixed-age classes. A two-year cycle of topics makes good links between subjects so that pupils are able to use the skills learned in one subject when working in another. Art is particularly well planned. Pupils study a good range of artists, and use a variety of media and many different techniques to produce good quality pieces, including three-dimensional art and some representing a range of cultures. Enrichment activities, such as after school clubs, are a strength. These clubs provide a wide range of options for pupils, including many that help promote a healthy lifestyle.

Basic skills are given appropriate prominence. The systematic, regular teaching of phonics is beginning to show dividends, but record-keeping has yet to be improved further. The provision for pupils' personal development is good and is provided through residential visits, personal and social education, and in religious education topics such as 'living as part of a community'.

The ratio of computers to pupils falls well short of the national average. The impact of this shortage is that pupils make little use of ICT as a day-to-day tool for learning.

Provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, is very good. It is particularly well planned and modified to pupils' needs and helps ensure that these pupils are fully included in all activities. Where appropriate, pupils are withdrawn from lessons for highly effective, intensive support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a well-maintained, attractive and welcoming environment for learning. Child protection procedures and risk assessments are securely in place ensuring that pupils are safe and well cared for. The individual needs of pupils are well known, and pupils are supported and guided positively and sensitively in their personal development. Vulnerable pupils and those who find learning difficult are particularly well cared for and supported by the school, which makes good use of external agencies to provide specialist help when needed. The school has worked hard to improve attendance and the positive impact of its initiatives is beginning to be seen.

The academic guidance provided for pupils is good. Pupils are well supported in their learning through verbal and written feedback. Marking is particularly informative in English and guides pupils' learning well. Pupils know their targets in literacy and numeracy well and say that these guide their learning. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well as they transfer to secondary school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The impact of leadership and management is seen in the good progress made by the pupils. This has been achieved during a period of considerable financial constraint as the school has successfully worked to bring its budget into balance. The headteacher has led the school well, despite the lack of a deputy headteacher. This situation is to be remedied at the start of the next school year, now that the school's finances are secure. Since her appointment some eighteen months ago, the headteacher has been supported well by the staff team. Staff with management responsibilities have an accurate understanding of the strengths to be built on

and the weaknesses that need to be addressed. For example, senior leaders recognise the need to refine the computerised system for checking on pupils' progress in order to provide a longer-term overview of different groups of pupils, including whole-class groups and year groups. At present, the tracking system only maps out pupils' progress over the course of a single year.

The school is working hard to improve its partnership with parents, for example in improving attendance. It satisfactorily promotes community cohesion.

The chair of governors provides clear leadership and organises the governing body very well. He is supported by a knowledgeable group of governors who monitor the effectiveness of the school well. Overall, the governing body acts very successfully as a critical friend to the school.

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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	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

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

01 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Church of England Primary School, Cowley, OX4 2QT

On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to thank you very much for being so helpful when we came to visit your school. We really enjoyed meeting you, talking to you and looking at your work. Your parents think that you go to a good school, and we agree.

Here is a list of some of the things we like best.

- You learn well in lessons and make good progress because you are taught well.
- You develop your personal skills well and have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. This is important in helping you to become good citizens in the future.
- You enjoy and learn a lot from the interesting and exciting activities your teachers plan for you.
- Those of you who find learning difficult make good progress because you are given really good quality help.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after.
- Your headteacher and all of the people who help manage your school are doing a good job.

Every school has something that could be improved, and this is what we have asked your school to concentrate on to help you to do even better.

- We would like your school to make sure that more of your lessons really make you think hard. Your teachers can do this by looking carefully at what you already know when they plan your lessons. We are sure that you are ready for this challenge!
- We would also like the teachers in Foundation 1, 2 and 3 to concentrate even more on helping their children to learn to read, write and count. They do a lot already, but we think that the children need to be better at reading, writing and number work when they join Year 1. This is really important because it will help them to get on even better as they move through the school.

I wish you great success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector