

St Francis CofE Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 134151 |
| Local Authority | Swindon |
| Inspection number | 328841 |
| Inspection date | 11 November 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Shirley Billington |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 267 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 106 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Karen Sylvester |
| Headteacher | Clive Westall |
| Date of previous school inspection | 15 September 2005 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Aiken Road Taw Hill Swindon SN25 1UH |
| Telephone number | 01793 727624 |
| Fax number | 01793 721964 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

rates of progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the impact of strategies to improve boys' achievement in writing

steps being taken to raise standards at the end of Year 6 by improving the performance of potentially higher attaining pupils

use of targets and marking to set high expectations and give pupils a view of what they need to do to improve.

Evidence was gathered from observations in lessons and around the school and scrutiny of pupils' work and a range of documentation. Parents' responses to questionnaires and discussions with pupils, governors and staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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

The school opened in 2004 and since then there has been a rapid expansion of pupil numbers as it has grown from the 'bottom upwards'. Each year since the school opened, a large number of pupils have entered or left in Years 3 to 6. Numbers in these year groups are small. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. There have been several new appointments and changes of staff responsibilities as the school roll has grown. The school has a Nursery for children aged three to four years who attend on a part-time basis. There are now two classes in the Reception Year for children aged four to five years. For the first time, this September, the majority of children who attended the Nursery were able to transfer to a Reception class. All these children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school holds Healthy School status. A community room in the school is used to provide before- and after-school care that is managed privately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The number of pupils on roll has expanded rapidly since it opened four years ago, but the headteacher and staff have succeeded in preserving the family feel that is appreciated by many parents. As one commented, 'St Francis provides an environment which always fills the children with enthusiasm.' A particular challenge for the school has been accommodating a significant number of new pupils each year, many of whom join classes in Years 3 to 6. Parents are positive about the way that these children are supported and helped. As one wrote, 'Our child has settled in exceptionally well due to the care of staff and students alike'.

Children in the EYFS get off to a good start and make good progress through the Nursery and Reception classes. This is successfully built on in Years 1 and 2 and standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average by the end of Year 2. Progress in Years 3 to 6 has been more erratic, but pupils are now learning rapidly in response to good teaching. Achievement is good. Standards at the end of Year 6 are broadly average, but there is variation year on year. In 2007, standards were above average but results in national tests in 2008 were lower, with very few pupils attaining the higher Level 5. Test results are affected to some extent by high mobility as well as, at times, a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in a particular cohort. However, the school has rightly identified that there is scope to accelerate the progress of higher attaining pupils through Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics and science. The most recent data show that pupils in the current Year 6 made good progress in Year 5. They are achieving well and a significant proportion are on track to reach challenging targets at the end of the year.

Strong and determined leadership from the headteacher, with support from governors and a relatively new senior management team, has ensured the successful expansion of the school. Staff taking on new responsibilities are helped by senior managers to gain a view of the strengths and weaknesses in the areas for which they are responsible. Good working relationships are evident throughout the school. As one teacher commented, 'We feel like a team.' Good use is made of information from analysing data on pupils' performance in national tests and checking on the quality of teaching and learning to identify areas for further improvement. The school is successful in tackling areas of weakness. This is evident in the work done over the past year to improve the achievement of boys, particularly in writing. Initiatives to improve boys' motivation to write are having a positive impact so that the gap is closing.

Pupils enjoy school and work hard. They are keen to succeed in lessons and work well together in pairs and small groups. They know what they have to do to improve, but do not always get feedback on how well they are doing in relation to their targets when their work is marked. Pupils appreciate the range of opportunities that they have to join a wide variety of clubs, to go on visits and to participate in themed activities such as the recent 'Brunel Day'. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and local community through taking on a range of responsibilities and getting involved in events such as organising a coffee morning to raise funds for Macmillan nurses. They enjoy the opportunity to influence improvements in the school by putting forward their views in focus groups, responding to questionnaires and through the school council. Year 6 pupils are particularly pleased with the way that they have helped to ensure that healthy snacks are available in the tuck shop. Links with schools in France, Taiwan and the Philippines extend pupils' awareness of the wider world and their responsibilities to

those less fortunate than themselves. However, their understanding of the diversity of modern British society is more limited, an area the school is working on to improve.

Pupils benefit from purposeful and well-focused teaching. A significant strength of the school is the time given by the headteacher and senior managers to support teachers new to the school, some of whom are at an early stage in their career. Lessons are observed regularly and teachers are given helpful feedback on any aspects of their work that might be improved. The result is increasing consistency in the quality of teaching across the school. Pupils enjoy the variety of activities that are planned. As one put it, 'We have a good mix of lessons.' Year 6 pupils are particularly enthusiastic about the amount of practical work in science that they are undertaking as part of the school's focus on improving their investigative skills.

The school has implemented comprehensive systems to track individual pupils' progress. The information has been used well to identify those not making progress at the expected rate and to provide extra support where necessary. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution in helping pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This ensures that these pupils participate fully in lessons and benefit from the full range of experiences on offer. Tracking information is now being used to identify pupils with the capacity to make progress at a quicker rate in order to raise expectations of their potential to achieve higher levels.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children flourish in a secure and stimulating learning environment. Staff have a very good understanding of young children's learning and developmental needs. They have the expertise and experience to ensure that each child develops confidence and independence in learning. Children experience a good balance between adult-directed tasks and opportunities to choose and initiate activities for themselves. As a result, from the Nursery onwards they develop an impressive capacity to work and play independently. They learn to cooperate successfully in well-structured group tasks.

Exemplary attention is given to promoting children's welfare. There are extensive opportunities for parents to become involved in supporting learning, through, for example, talking to groups of children about their jobs. Children's progress is very carefully tracked so that individual needs can be met. Parents are very positive about the way that their children's enthusiasm for school is engendered. As one said: 'He comes home every day full of what activities he has done and what he has learned. He has certainly made an excellent start to his learning journey.'

From a broadly average starting point, children make good progress through both Nursery and Reception. By the end of the Reception Year, standards are above average overall in all areas of learning. However, girls are generally doing better than boys, with the gap most evident in writing, as in the rest of the school. This has been an area of focus over the past year and the most recent assessments of children's attainment show that the gap is beginning to close. There is also some variation in aspects of mathematical development, with children's knowledge of shape, space and measure being weaker than their knowledge of number and calculating skills. This is a current area for improvement, but it is too early to see the impact of specific initiatives to improve attainment in this aspect.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that higher attaining pupils make progress at a good rate through Years 3 to 6 in order to secure an improvement in the proportion attaining higher levels at the end of Year 6, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Ensure that the marking of pupils' work gives them clear information about how they are doing in relation to their targets.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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? | 1 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 2 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| 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

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| 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? | 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 | 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**

Dear Children

Inspection of St Francis Church of England Primary School, Swindon, SN25 1UH

You may remember that I visited recently to see how you are getting on. Thank you to all those of you who explained what you were doing in lessons and what goes on around the school. Particular thanks to the group of Year 6 pupils that met with my colleague and gave him so much helpful information. I thought you might be interested in what I am saying in my report. Yours is a good school. You clearly enjoy your lessons and all the activities that you get involved in.

Children in Nursery and Reception classes get off to a good start and learn lots of new things very quickly. You also do well in Years 1 and 2, which means that you have good skills in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. In Years 3 to 6, there have been lots of children joining and leaving the school and this has affected the progress that some of you make. Things are settling down now and we found that those of you in Year 6 are doing well in English and mathematics. You are also being given some exciting practical work in science to help you to get better at organising investigations and experiments.

Your headteacher works hard with the staff and governors to make sure that good care is taken of you. You told us that your 'teachers are there for you' and that you get help if you need it. You know your targets and that helps you to understand exactly what you need to do to improve. You yourselves make an excellent contribution to the way the school is run by taking on responsibilities and putting forward your ideas. You know the importance of staying healthy and keeping safe. Those of you at the top end of the school are mature and responsible and well prepared for the move to secondary schools.

- To help the school get even better, we have suggested two things that need to be done now.
- Make sure that those of you who are quick to learn make faster progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Make sure that when your work is marked you are told how well you are doing in reaching your targets.

You can help by continuing to work hard and checking how well you are doing with your targets.

With best wishes

Shirley Billington

Lead inspector