

St Francis Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116618
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	357992
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	91
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Deborah Saxby
Headteacher	Mr Steven Hollinghurst
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They observed 11 lessons or parts of lessons and 10 teachers. Inspectors also held meetings with staff, governors, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation and policies, including the school's tracking of pupils' progress, the school improvement plan and arrangements for safeguarding. They also studied pupil and staff questionnaires and the 51 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the quality of teaching and the curriculum.
- the accuracy and impact of the school's analysis of pupils' progress.
- the effectiveness of the provision in enabling participation and preparing pupils for adult life.

Information about the school

St Francis is a special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. The headteacher took up post in 2008. The profile of the school population has changed since the last inspection, and an increasing proportion have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have complex medical needs, including life-threatening conditions, and a small minority present challenging behaviour, often linked to an autistic spectrum condition. All have a statement of special educational needs or are in the process of being assessed. Over 10% of the pupils are looked after children.

The school shares a campus with mainstream junior and infant schools and another special school. It has a purpose-built post-16 education centre and nursery provision within the main school building. After-school and holiday clubs are held on the school premises but these are not managed by the governing body and so did not form part of the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Francis Special School has undergone significant changes since its last inspection. Currently satisfactory, it meets the physical and emotional needs of its pupils well, and all involved are ambitious for its continuing improvement. Much has been achieved in the past two years as the school adapts to cater for a changing population within a building that is by no means purpose-built. The strong focus on partnership working and, in particular, on working with parents and carers means that all involved contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. As one parent wrote, 'The positive experience school gives to my son is reflected in his security, happiness and independence.'

The senior leadership team, supported well by the governing body, has not shied away from taking the bold steps required to analyse and improve the school's performance. Accurate self-evaluation has challenged any areas of complacency and the capacity for further improvement is good. Most notably, a revision of the school's tracking system has resulted in more challenging targets being set in order to raise expectation about pupils' progress in their learning. This has already had an impact on many, but some differences remain in the progress made by individuals and groups of learners at different stages of their school career.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for post-16 students is good and results in good outcomes. In the main school, the quality of teaching is more variable and this has an impact upon outcomes for this group of learners. The monitoring of teaching has raised expectations but, while rightly focusing on planning, preparation and delivery, it is sometimes less focused on the impact that these aspects have on pupils' learning. Some staff use agreed methods of communication effectively, and this has a positive impact upon the attitude and behaviour of pupils. However, where this is inconsistent, pupils respond accordingly and methods of managing their frustration vary in their effectiveness.

The school has rightly decided that the curriculum needs revising if it is to raise aspirations and meet the needs of all pupils. A good start has been made on this and pupils have responded well to a more focused topic-based approach in some classes. New roles and responsibilities have been created across the staff but the effect of these in monitoring and delivering the curriculum is at an early stage. As a result, there is more work to be done to ensure that all pupils' needs are met across all areas of their learning and that opportunities for older pupils to gain accreditation are securely in place.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Enable pupils to make as much progress as possible across all aspects of their of learning by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of lessons has a clear focus upon pupils' learning as well as the quality of teaching
 - making full use of the tracking system to identify and address effectively any remaining gaps in the learning and progress of individuals or groups
 - implementing the most effective practices in communication and behaviour management so that pupils experience a consistent approach throughout the school
 - ensuring that the revised curriculum meets the learning needs of all pupils and, for older pupils, offers a broader range of accreditation.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning; they make the most progress in their personal and social education. The overwhelming majority of parents are positive about the difference that the school makes to their children's confidence and independence. Comments such as 'they have provided our daughter with a safe and friendly environment to be able to achieve in a way that is suitable to her needs' demonstrate this. However, some pupils know that they could achieve more, saying, for example, 'This is a brilliant, happy school' but, about their work, 'I think we could do better.'

The school has worked hard to put in place a more accurate method of tracking progress so that it can show that most pupils in Key Stages 3 to 4 are making the progress expected of them, with some making good or very good progress. Overall, though, their achievement is satisfactory. Careful analysis is allowing senior leaders to identify any gaps and raise expectations for groups or individuals who may be disadvantaged. The school has had particular success with the growing number of looked after pupils and can demonstrate the effectiveness of its focused work on 'sensory integration' for a number of the pupils. Pupils make the most progress in lessons which move at a good pace and maintain their interest. When these are planned well, pupils are able to build upon earlier learning to extend their skills and knowledge. In one lesson, for example, a range of mathematical activities enabled all pupils to be involved in learning about shape, because detailed knowledge about the level of each pupil was translated into appropriate tasks with carefully targeted support.

Students in the post-16 provision achieve good levels of success through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Last year, all school leavers gained at least one accredited module. Students also benefit from being able to improve their social skills and take forward particular areas of interest through 'work awareness'

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opportunities and through enterprise schemes, such as making and selling very attractive jewellery at Christmas. As a result, they develop skills that will support them when they are older.

With the exceptions that are explained by medical needs, pupils attend regularly and their enjoyment is evident as they enter school at the beginning of the day. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Supported by excellent relationships, pupils have confidence in all the staff who work with them. As a result, they feel secure in a range of situations and are increasingly willing to attempt new tasks without anxiety. Despite some frustrations, behaviour overall is good. Pupils are very caring of one another and know who they could go to if they have a problem. Health, medical and physical needs are dealt with sensitively so that, as far as possible, pupils are involved in making choices about for what works for them and what does not. Inspectors observed one little boy trialling with great delight a new wheelchair which allowed him more control and choice over his mobility.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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How effective is the provision?

The school's focus on extending the range of teaching approaches means that teachers plan their lessons carefully and generally make effective use of a range of pictures, objects and sounds to encourage choice and support learning. The most effective lessons occur when activities match the full range of abilities so that all pupils make good progress. Learning support assistants know the pupils well and often intervene skilfully to ensure that pupils' involvement in lessons is maintained effectively. However, time is sometimes wasted while pupils wait for each other to take turns or when pupils finish a task ahead of others. All staff are committed to the use of communication approaches which are suited to the needs of each pupil, but these are not always used consistently to ensure that pupils are fully engaged and their learning extended.

The school is in the process of redesigning its curriculum in order to make it more relevant for all pupils. Currently, the range of activities in school and off-site makes a strong contribution to pupils' development and well-being but does not fully match the range of pupils' learning needs and aspirations, particularly at Key Stage 3 and 4. Cross-curricular provision, including literacy and numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are generally well planned for so that outcomes in these areas are usually satisfactory and sometimes good. A range of visits and visitors introduce pupils to other lives and cultures so that they extend their knowledge and experiences well beyond the familiar environment of school.

There are strong arrangements for the care, guidance and support of pupils. A strong commitment to working with parents, carers and a range of agencies to sustain the learning, development and well-being of every pupil is evident. Well-planned transition, including 'together time' for new families, means that even the very youngest pupils enter happily and older students move towards the next stage of their lives with increased confidence. Parents and carers provided many examples of when care had extended beyond the family, such as when children have been in hospital. The school-home integration project is valued by the families it has helped, and all those spoken to appreciate the increased communication that they now have with the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Supported by self-evaluation events which have involved all members of the school

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community, realistic self-evaluation has helped senior leaders to prioritise areas for development well. Staff speak very positively about the developments that have taken place. The school provides good opportunities for professional development and training and has effectively introduced a new staffing structure which includes leadership roles for support staff as well as teachers. Although change has been predominantly led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team, leaders at every level are emerging as an increasingly strong force for improvement. Good administrative processes have helped the school to ensure that resources are used appropriately to achieve value for money and to begin to improve the learning environment within somewhat cramped facilities. Arrangements for safeguarding are secure, with well-developed systems in place to minimise risk and involve key agencies. The school works very effectively with a range of partners to guide pupils and support their families.

Reflecting a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for this complex school community, the school has effectively minimised any discrimination which may arise due to level of need or background. It has extended its support for families and carers extremely effectively. Initiatives such as the school-home project and, more recently, the 'Dads' group', are helping to close gaps in learning. The governing body provides well-focused challenge and has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school; it has supported the school well through a period of change and development.

The school's contribution to building a cohesive community within and beyond its own population is strong. It is an increasingly key player within the local campus and further afield and is well placed to make an even greater contribution as it consolidates its own role and provision within its specialist field.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress. They show great enjoyment of the many activities which are provided both in and out of the classroom. Routines for dealing with the mix of learning, therapy and medical needs are well established and enhance children's opportunities to be as independent as possible while feeling safe in and around the school. Children form good relationships with their key workers and all the staff; they enjoy each other's company and from an early age show an awareness of one another's differences and similarities. They benefit from the close attention paid to their physical, as well as their educational, needs.

Despite limited space, the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of the school provide a stimulating and attractive environment and good use is made of resources. Good one-to-one support ensures access to the many activities provided and good quality planning, tailored to the needs of each child, is supported well by observations of progress made in very short steps. Staff are aware that new ways of recording progress over time have yet to be fully established. Nevertheless, the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good and recent changes to ways of working have been well led and effective.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Achievement for students in the post-16 provision is good. Experienced leadership and management support good progress and positive transition for students as they move up from the main school. Staff support students well so that they develop increasingly sensible attitudes and become more mature in their approach to their work. The good development of students' social skills is evident in their contributions to the school council where they act as good role models for younger pupils. One student summed this up by saying, 'If someone is upset we're there to cheer them up – that's what we're here for!'

Good use is made of accredited modules and work awareness experiences to extend and evidence students' achievements. Through these, they develop key skills and life skills which they are able to transfer successfully to the next phase of education, training or residential provision. Students enjoy curricular opportunities which enable them to

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develop skills in ICT and photography and they take part enthusiastically in everyday activities such as shopping and preparing lunch. Teaching is good and support staff step in well to involve, divert or encourage where necessary; the most effective support is given when students are encouraged to tackle tasks and learn independently.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The very high level of satisfaction felt by parents and carers and their appreciation of the support that the school offers both them and their child, was reflected overwhelmingly in the comments made. With very few exceptions, parents and carers echoed the view formed by inspectors that this is a school which does its utmost to involve and include them in the educational lives of their children. The following comments represent the views of many: 'a lovely school; I cannot speak highly enough of the staff; throughout all the difficulties with her health the class is still a very happy, stable and stimulating environment; 'they pick us up when we are down.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Francis Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 55 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 91 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	75	13	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	80	8	16	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	35	69	14	27	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	65	14	27	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	38	75	10	20	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	67	14	27	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	63	17	33	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	27	53	17	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	73	13	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	59	15	29	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	65	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	71	13	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	75	12	24	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Special School, Fareham, PO14 3BN

Thank you for helping us to learn about your school. We really enjoyed our visit. It was good to meet so many of you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

St Francis Special School is a satisfactory school which helps you to make satisfactory progress in your learning. The youngest children and the oldest students make the most progress. You all seem to enjoy school; you are safe and very well cared for and this helps you to grow into mature young people. There are some interesting things for you to do in and out of school and it is good that so many of these include the people who look after you at home. We enjoyed looking at the photographs of the things that you have done and the records of what you have achieved. It was good to see that so many of you take part in the school council challenge and other events. Some of you are very good cooks and I really liked my lunch with the older students. Thank you!

Your headteacher has some good ideas for the school and all the staff work hard to help you. It is important that everyone who works with you helps you to make as much progress as you can. Although your school does not have as much space as you would like, I have asked your headteacher and the staff to try to find more ways for you to learn and things for you to do that will help you to gain more certificates. Many of you use symbols, switches and signing and I have asked the staff to make sure that they do too.

I am sure that you will all try your best and I hope that you will do well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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