

St Francis' Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118853
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313120
Inspection date	12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	357
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Clark
Headteacher	David Bray
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2003
School address	Queen's Road Maidstone ME16 0LB
Telephone number	01622 771540
Fax number	01622 771568

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's provision in contributing to improving standards and pupils' achievement; the effectiveness of systems to track and assess pupils' progress; and the impact of leadership and management in contributing to school improvement. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, analysis of nationally published and school data, scrutiny of school documentation, pupils' work, teachers' planning and the views of parents, and discussions with pupils, staff and the vice chair of governors. 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 the report.

Description of the school

The school is similar in size to other primary schools. A number of pupils live beyond the immediate parish and travel considerable distances to attend the school. Pupils come from a broad range of cultural heritages. More pupils speak English as an additional language than is found nationally and many are at an early stage of learning to speak English. A higher than average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' starting points on entry to the school are varied, but taken together are below average. There have been significant changes in the leadership of the school since the last inspection. The school has gained the Investors in People, Healthy School and Active Mark awards.

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' is a good school with a strong Christian caring ethos. The responses to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. One parent summed up the views of many in the comment, 'I am delighted with the school and welcome the opportunity the inspection brings to praise the staff'. The school works very well with parents and carers, as recognised in another response: 'The school encourages parental interest in its daily life, and helps children to maximise their potential'. Standards vary from year to year because of the differing capabilities of pupils but are generally above average in the Year 2 and 6 tests. Effective provision for pupils with English as an additional language enables them to make good progress. The school recognises that in the last two years, some pupils, mainly boys who had learning and emotional difficulties, did not make enough progress between Years 2 and 6. Over the last year, the school has been tracking pupils' progress more closely and has introduced a number of new programmes to quickly help any pupil not making the expected progress. The data held in the school indicates that these initiatives are successful. Pupils' achievement is now good, enabling the school to set more challenging targets for its future performance. New teaching approaches to ensure consistency across the school, for example in writing, calculation and science investigations, have also brought about significant improvements, although standards in writing do not yet match those in reading. Pupils enjoy school because teaching is good and they find the curriculum interesting. Teachers share learning objectives well at the beginning of lessons so that pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Pupils say 'we are expected to try our best' and 'this helps us to reach our full potential'. Their good attitudes to learning are shown in the pride they take in the quality and presentation of their work. Teachers mark pupils work with care. Any misunderstandings are corrected and pupils are given feedback about what they have achieved in relation to the learning objective. Often teachers make suggestions about how work could be improved, but pupils do not have enough opportunities to put this into practice by trying it out in a subsequent piece of work or incorporating it into their next target. The termly targets help pupils to understand the next major stages in their learning, but sometimes the next steps are not clear enough, particularly for older pupils. The curriculum is good and there is an effective balance across all subjects. Pupils sometimes use their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. The school plans to extend such opportunities to provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their skills across the curriculum and to make learning more relevant and interesting. Pupils enjoy opportunities to work collaboratively, for example in practical science, and recognise that this develops the skills needed for later successful learning. Pupils also enjoy the increased number of extra-curricular clubs and activities, covering a range of interests. Many Year 5 pupils speak enthusiastically of how they are looking forward to the residential visit planned for them later in the year. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good and promoted well through good quality care, guidance and support. Behaviour is good and pupils are sensitive to the needs of others, so that they understand how to contribute effectively to the school and wider community. Pupils feel safe because they are confident that any worries or troubles

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 9

Whilst children's attainment is slightly below expected levels on entry, they have good social skills. They settle quickly and have an enthusiasm for school that helps them to make good progress, so that by the time they join Year 1, most children are in line with the national average.

Children treat each other with kindness and work and play effectively together. They enjoy exploring new ideas, such as exploring symmetry with the help of a mirror. This helps them to understand the world around them and to develop the early skills of numeracy. The curriculum is good and planned well to meet the requirements of the Foundation Stage. Adults are very aware of the needs of individual children and respond well to their ideas, which deepens children's thinking and develops their vocabulary well. Children enjoy discussing their thoughts with adults and with one another. This is particularly helpful for children who join the school with little or no English.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of marking by ensuring that pupils understand the next steps for their learning and follow up on the advice provided on how to improve their work.
- Implement the plans to improve the curriculum by developing stronger links between subjects.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well 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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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**

- 13 March 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of St Francis' Catholic School, Maidstone ME16 0LD
Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave me recently, and particularly to the school council for giving up their time to talk to me. It was good to hear about the interesting things you do in school. I agree with you that St Francis' is a good school.
- You make good progress because you are taught well.
- You enjoy learning and know that you will do well because you are expected to work hard.
- The school council does a good job helping to represent your views to adults and to plan activities, such as fundraising, for everyone.
- You get on well together so that the school is a happy place.
- Many of you are very active and enjoy extra-curricular activities, such as at the after-school football club on the day of the inspection.
- The sports activities help you to keep fit and you also know about which foods to eat to stay healthy.
- Adults take good care of you and help you to sort out problems well.
- The headteacher and the staff think very carefully about how well the school is doing and introduce new things to help you to improve your work. I have made some suggestions to help the school get even better.
- I have asked your teachers to make sure that you understand exactly what you have to do next in your learning and to give you a chance to try out their suggestions about how to improve your work.
- I agree with your teachers that learning would be even more interesting for you if subjects were linked more closely, as they are already for some of you in Year 6. You, together with the adults in the school, can make the school even better. Please keep working hard and doing the best you can. I wish everyone at St. Francis' School every success in the future.
Yours sincerely Mrs H Hutchings Lead Inspector



13 March 2008

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You, together with the adults in the school, can make the school even better. Please keep working hard and doing the best you can.

I wish everyone at St. Francis' School every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs H Hutchings
Lead Inspector