

Inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Queen's Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0LB

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 March 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

St Francis is a school community that strives to live out its Catholic mission to others. With 35 languages spoken, pupils actively celebrate people from all around the world. A highlight is the annual 'diversity week', where families of different nationalities share their customs and traditions. Here, pupils love tasting new foods, wearing native clothing and broadening their international knowledge.

Pupils are cheerful, behave well and want to make a difference. They understand right from wrong. Pupils are encouraged to see the good in everyone. When pupils report bullying, the school acts promptly to address this. Pupils know they can talk to adults who will look out for everyone.

The outdoor space is carefully designed so pupils can play organised games and activities during break and lunchtimes. These are popular and really help pupils' physical development and social skills. Pupils welcome and remember fondly the range of clubs and school trips that are on offer.

Academic expectations are high with hard-working pupils who achieve well. This helps most pupils be ready for their next education stage. However, in early years, children currently do not always learn literacy skills and other knowledge as well as they could before starting key stage 1.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's ambitious curriculum teaches pupils a broad range of knowledge combined with immersive experiences to hook pupils' interests. Time has been taken to ensure that the curriculum reflects the school's community and its Catholic faith. By the end of key stage 2, pupils achieve above national expectations.

Across different subjects, the school has identified key knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. Although these are connected across year groups, there remains work to do in how this starts from early years. Planning within the areas of learning lacks precision in what essential knowledge children should grasp. This leads to children being not as sufficiently equipped as they could be when beginning the scope of the national curriculum in Year 1.

The curriculum is newer in some subjects and teachers are beginning to implement this in an effective way. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge in their explanations and present ideas simply to pupils. Questions in lessons enable pupils to think about what they remember and how this links to previous learning. However, the work set for pupils is inconsistent. Some activities do not enable pupils to gain a deeper knowledge. In addition, the school is not consistently assuring itself of how well pupils are learning the intended curriculum in every subject. Leaders have already recognised this and are in the process of training staff to ensure that the appropriate checks on the curriculum can be made.

Reading is actively promoted across the school. Pupils develop their language and vocabulary through listening and reading diverse books. They are enthusiastic about the many books they can choose to read. The school is embedding a new phonics programme and has trained its staff to know how best to teach a child to read, spell and write. Staff are clear about following the programme's planning and structure. However, in early years, adults are not providing children with enough effective practice in letter formation and writing sentences within the teaching of the phonics programme.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive a wide range of support and have their needs identified as early as possible. The school works closely with parents to help pupils meet aspirations. The school provides an additional learning space, where trained staff provide pupils with therapies and extra instruction to help pupils achieve successfully across the curriculum.

Behaviour rules and routines ensure that pupils in this large school know what to do and how to move about sensibly. In lessons, pupils are eager to do well. They love receiving rewards for their hard work and good choices. Older pupils are role models who help younger pupils settle and play happily together.

Different opportunities to enhance pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development serve them well. Pupils are respectful of other faiths. They take on responsibilities, help those in need and contribute their voice to make the school the best it can be. Pupils who do not speak English fluently are fully immersed in school life and closely supported.

Governors are new to their role and demonstrate a good understanding of their contribution in the strategic direction of the school. They know what questions to ask of school staff, so that they can check that agreed priorities are having the right impact for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum in some subjects is not consistently embedded. Sometimes, staff can set work that does not always help pupils learn the planned knowledge. The school should continue with supporting staff to develop greater expertise in teaching the curriculum so that pupils can achieve even higher.
- The learning in some subjects is not always consistently checked. This means that the school is not always clear how well pupils are learning the intended curriculum. The school should continue its work to provide staff who lead

individual subjects with the expertise needed to ensure that pupils achieve well in every subject.

- In early years, the curriculum does not ensure that children build up their knowledge securely. In some areas of learning, knowledge is not clearly identified and planned activities do not always help pupils acquire what they need. This means children are not well prepared in some curriculum areas when starting in Year 1. The school needs to review and reconsider the current curriculum and provision in place.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	118853
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296281
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Angela Trigg
Headteacher	Elisabeth Blanden
Website	www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Francis is a Roman Catholic primary school and is part of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It last had a section 48 inspection in February 2016.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with three governors, including the chair and vice-chair. He held telephone calls with a

school improvement adviser from the local authority and a representative from the diocese.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, art and design, and geography. To do this, they met with subject teachers, looked at curriculum plans, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons, listened to pupils read and looked at pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The views of staff and parents were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's online surveys.
- Inspectors talked to pupils from different year groups about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement priorities, policies, curriculum documents, behaviour and attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings and published outcomes.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Fisher-Pink	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Wakefield	Ofsted Inspector

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