



St Francis Catholic Primary School

URN: 118853

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

13–14 June 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church’s educational mission

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

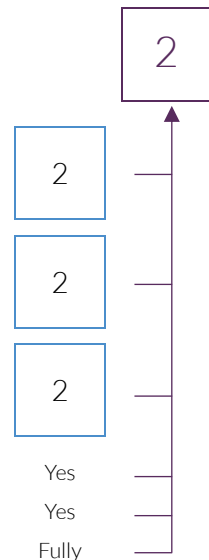
Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops’ Conference

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



What the school does well

- The Catholic life and mission of the school is a strength and evident throughout the school.
- The inclusive nature of the school shows that pupils with identified needs are well cared for and are able to participate in the life of the school alongside their peers.
- The deployment of learning support staff enables all pupils to achieve to their best of their ability.
- Teachers’ questioning identifies where pupils are in their understanding, they adapt their questions to improve pupils understanding and learning.
- The school’s approach to retrieval practice means pupils make good progress in knowing, remembering and doing more.

What the school needs to improve

- Integrate Catholic social teaching into the rhythm and life of the school so that pupils confidently articulate the theology underpinning their actions.
- Develop effective strategies for stretch and challenge especially for pupils who are high attainers.
- Ensure monitoring by leaders and governors is effective to further improve the quality of religious education and prayer and liturgy across the school.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

2

Pupils understand the nature of the school's Catholic identity, they value its distinctiveness and actively participate in promoting it. For example, they are proud to receive and wear the mission tie. Pupils feel valued and cared for; they are happy, confident and feel secure. Support for pupils new to the school is given by Year 6 Young Language Ambassadors, who are paired with pupils who speak the same language to give support and explain things to help them settle in. Through activities in Diversity Week, pupils are aware of differences in other faiths, beliefs and cultures. They develop a mutual respect and understanding of each other's identity. The Eco Warriors promote understanding of the need to take care of our common home. The school is actively engaged in outreach activities; raising funds for others is a strength, for example, the *Danceathon* and *Shootathon*, raising money for Maidstone Hospital and the Catholic Children's Society and 'wear yellow for cystic fibrosis', though pupils do not fully understand the theology underpinning such activities. One parent stated, 'the school embodies a vibrant community dedicated to nurturing spiritual growth and fostering a deep sense of belonging'.

The school's mission statement expresses clearly the educational mission of the Church and the school's charism. It is known, revisited at that start of each school year and has a tangible impact in the school. Staff embrace it and enthusiastically contribute to, and participate in those activities which reflect the mission. One member of staff stated, 'the school's mission statement isn't just a static proclamation but a dynamic force driving our collective endeavours', and 'staff are empowered to embody the values of our mission, fostering an environment where personal growth and the nurturing of faith are not just encouraged but actively cultivated.' The inclusive nature of the school is a strength; the school celebrates the

presence of those from various cultures and beliefs, going the extra mile to understand their needs and provide support not just to the pupil but the whole family. For example, parents are offered support with completing forms or purchasing uniform; 'welcoming the whole family, not just the child'. Staff are positive role models for pupils through their relationships with each other, and the love and care they have for the pupils. The Catholic character of the school is reflected in the school environment; pictures, statues, the Chapel and prayer garden all evidence this. Through the use of the Ten:Ten resources, provision for relationship, sex and health education meet both statutory and diocesan requirements.

Leaders are determined in the pursuit of the Church's educational mission. Policies and procedures reflect the Catholic identity of the school. Engagement with the diocese is good; the head teacher and subject lead regularly attend conferences and training provided. The school has achieved participator level in the Oscar Romero Award. Links with the local parish are strong with the parish priest being a regular visitor to the school, as well as the religious education link governor. One parent commented 'they have very good collaboration with the local Catholic Church and get children involved in the Church activities'. There is a desire on both sides to develop links further. Pastoral care of the staff is good with a commitment to the physical and mental well-being of all staff evident for example well-being days. New staff are mentored by a more experienced member of the community. Staff are confident they can raise any concerns with school leaders. An active parents' association and school Parental Champion help to further engage parents in school life, for example through the Mother's Day and Father's Day breakfasts.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

2

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education

2

2

Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons. Lessons observed demonstrate many pupils are enthusiastic, want to answer questions and try hard to do their best. Some pupils confidently share their ideas using correct religious terminology. In one Year 5 class pupils discussed God as 'omnipotent' and 'omnipresent', though did not fully understand the definition of these terms. Pupils make good progress over time; the school's approach to retrieval practice is having a positive impact. Good use of class learning support staff in class ensures pupils with additional needs are included in discussions and are able to complete the work set. Providing adapted tasks for this group of pupils would help them progress more quickly. Where pupils have the opportunity to work independently, they respond well to the challenge. Pupils' work shows signs of emerging individuality and creativity. Pupils have some understanding of how well they are doing, but need to have a much clearer picture of the steps needed to improve. Behaviour in lessons is good, with most pupils engaged in the discussion or activity. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are able to look up scripture passages using correct biblical references.

There is much evidence of good quality teaching and learning in religious education demonstrating the teachers' commitment to the value of the subject. The school uses the scheme *The Way, The Truth, The Life*, enhanced by additional resources. Most teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge; where there are weaknesses, staff are confident they will receive support to address them. Where questioning is probing it enables pupils to think more deeply about the topic being studied. This skill needs to be demonstrated more consistently across all classes. Marking reflects the school's policy; teachers provide feedback using coloured stamps, but this makes little difference to the pupils' understanding of how to improve and make even further progress. Good quality resources,

including adults, are used effectively to optimise learning. In lessons pupils are given space and time to reflect on how what they learn impacts their lives in school and in the wider world. The school is developing strategies to enable pupils to explore topics in greater depth. Lessons observed show this is beginning to have an impact for the higher attainers. Each class has a big book which showcases what they are learning, as well as examples of art and other creative activities.

Teachers speak highly of the support given by the religious education lead. Through regular professional development opportunities, and the provision of good resources, teachers' subject knowledge is improving. This is further enhanced by pairing more experienced teachers with those with less experience or who are new to the school, leading to greater confidence. Through regular briefings, reports, meetings and visits by the link governor, governors are kept apprised of the provision for religious education. The subject leader is fully aware of the demands of the *Religious Education Directory* and is working towards full implementation by the diocesan deadline. She has a clear vision for teaching and learning, and has the expertise to secure this vision and improve teaching and learning. School leaders and governors recognise the importance of religious education when setting budgets and allocating resources. Regular monitoring takes place through learning walks, work scrutinies and lesson observations. The religious education link governor is actively involved in this process. Governors hold the headteacher and subject lead accountable for the provision and quality of teaching and learning in religious education. Even greater progress could be achieved through more focused and targeted monitoring by school leaders.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

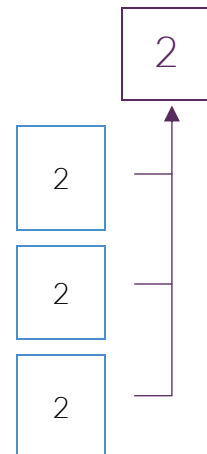
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



Pupils respond well to the experiences of prayer and liturgy, they reflect reverently, join in the prayers and sing readily. Prayer and liturgy is appropriate to the pupils' age, they understand a variety of ways to pray, praying the traditional prayers of the Church or praying the rosary in the Chapel before school, led by a member of staff and the pupil RE team. Prayer at the start of religious education lessons includes scripture, symbol and other elements of worship. The pupil RE team, consisting of pupils from Years 2 to 6; fulfil a very specific role, checking the class prayer tables, or contributing to the Wednesday Word assembly. They have a strong desire to be more actively engaged in planning, preparing and delivering prayer and liturgy, particularly whole school assemblies. The Wednesday Word assembly reflects on the Gospel from the forthcoming Sunday. The biweekly Mission Tie assembly is to reward pupils who have demonstrated joy, respect, trust and faith in the preceding two weeks. These ties or badge are highly prized and worn with pride.

Prayer is central to the life of the school. Daily staff briefings begin with prayer. Pupils participate in pray at the beginning and end of the day, and before and after lunch. Prayer and liturgy reflect the liturgical year, incorporating a variety of ways of praying. One parent commented, 'I am always so happy to join in with Mass and watch how well the children take part and behave. I really appreciate that children can attend the Mass in school'. Every class has a focal area, and a small prayer table used during lessons. The small chapel and outdoor prayer garden provide tranquil spaces for group and individual private reflection. One Year 3 class began the religious education lesson with a time of prayer and singing in the prayer garden. Using Mark 10 Mission resources, class liturgy is focused, uses scripture and enables pupils to reflect. In a Year 2 and a Year 3 class careful attention was given to c

creating a calm and prayerful atmosphere using music and symbols, enhancing pupils' experiences. Some active pupil participation was observed during these times of prayer; most were focused and engaged. Each class has a prayer bag which is taken home, containing a small cross, a rosary, candle, and guidance on how to use them. These support families to develop and deepen their prayer life. One parent reported really valuing the bag as it helped connect prayer at school and home in a more tangible way.

The prayer and liturgy policy is easily accessible on the website, and reviewed regularly, especially at the beginning of each academic year. Leaders and governors have a planned the school calendar to set aside opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist throughout the school year. This is planned jointly with the religious education lead and the parish priest. Key moments in the liturgical year and significant days are celebrated, for example the school feast day and a celebration to recognise those who have received their First Holy Communion. Key stage 2 pupils can celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent. One parent commented, 'They have very good collaboration with local Catholic Church and get children involved in the Church activities'. The religious education lead provides teachers with resources for prayer and liturgy; she is working towards them having greater involvement in planning for class prayer and liturgy. Teachers appreciate the resources provided and are becoming more confident in adapting them to suit the needs of their class. Increased monitoring of prayer and liturgy will help improve the quality and pupil's experiences.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Francis Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	118853
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8865207
Full postal address of the school	St Francis Catholic Primary School, Queen's Road, Maidstone, ME16 0LB
School phone number	01622771540
Headteacher	Elisabeth Blanden
Chair of Governors/Trustees	Angela Trigg
School Website	www.st-francis.kent.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	26 th February 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Patricia Horsman	Lead
David Hennessey	Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement