



## **SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT**

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the  
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of  
Denominational Education under Section 48  
of the Education Act 2005

**URN 118853**

**St Francis Catholic Primary School  
Queen's Road  
Maidstone Kent  
ME16 OLB**

**Inspection date: February 26  
2016**

Chair of Governors: Sarah Whitbread  
Headteacher: Elisabeth Blanden  
Inspectors: Damian Fox  
John Bonicci

**EDUCATION COMMISSION**  
St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR  
Tel 01689 829331 Fax 01689 829255  
**Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford**

# SECTION 48

# Introduction

## Description of the school

St Francis School is a two form entry school in the Maidstone Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is in the Kent Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is St Francis. 53% of pupils are members of the parish. Pupils also come from the parishes of St Peter's, Bearsted and St Thomas More, West Malling. 70% of pupils are baptised Catholics. 5% are from other Christian Faiths and 4% are from Other Faiths. The remaining pupils have no faith affiliation. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years of age. There are 406 pupils on roll. This has increased from 351 in 2013. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly around average. The majority of pupils are White British. The EAL figure of 33% is well above average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who receive extra support in class is below average. There are 32 pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium.

Date of previous inspection:

12<sup>th</sup> February 2011

Overall Grade:

2

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

# Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

**GRADE  
1**

St Francis school is outstanding at all levels. It has improved on the “Good” given in the last inspection. It is a model of inclusion with a wide range of opportunities for every pupil to succeed. In the last three years, governors have developed a much deeper understanding of their role. They are committed to the Church’s mission to education. They are active and effective in their support for the Catholic life of the school and Religious Education.

The leadership of the Headteacher is outstanding. Throughout the inspection, staff, parents and pupils spoke very warmly about the impact of the Headteacher on the life of the community. Parents said that she was trustworthy, honest and good at listening.

The links with the parish are one of the many strengths of the school. There are three priests in the parish, two of whom are regular visitors.

The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They are extremely well behaved, very proud of their school and show respect for each other. They appreciate the care they receive. One pupil remarked that “teachers treat everybody as they would treat themselves.”

Overwhelmingly, parents strongly agree that the school provides high quality education and care for their children. They feel part of the family. One parent said “I can see how the Catholic ethos has been embedded across all areas.” The school is a role model for Catholic education. St Francis is a deeply spiritual worshipping community. Gospel values are at the heart of school life.

The school has addressed the issues raised at the last inspection. The capacity to develop even further is outstanding.

## **What steps need to be taken to improve further?**

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue to ensure a robust monitoring system for Religious Education; embed assessment of AT2 to ensure coverage in line with the existing effective assessment of AT1.
- Enhance the Catholic life of the school by developing a book of prayers from the school community.

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

Pupils take full advantage of the outstanding opportunities to contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school. They understand and appreciate the mission of the school to serve everybody.

The impact of the mission statement is manifest in the relationships and obvious mutual respect and care pupils have for each other. Pupils agreed to the words and meaning of the mission statement. The behaviour of the pupils in class and around the school is exemplary. Pupils spoke warmly of the care given to them through the peer mediators and the support for all pupils through the work of the EAL interpreters.

In discussion, pupils were able to articulate their awareness of and the value of prayer. It is a way of life for them. Their prayer intentions are taken to the Chapel and offered during the daily rosary.

Pupils appreciate the “feelings box,” they post their concerns and worries which teachers address quickly and sensitively. One pupil described the teachers as “selfless.” A parent said that the school “is like a family.”

Understanding the needs of others in the local and wider community is a central feature of the school. All pupils are involved in raising money for organisations such as CAFOD and the Maidstone Christian Care Centre. The choir regularly sing to raise funds for the Maidstone Hospice. Last year they participated in fundraising for Yirgalem in Ethiopia as part of the *Education for All* project.

Pupils value and respect the Catholic tradition of the school and its very strong links with the parish community. There are parish-school groups such as the “Friends of St Francis” which organise fundraising activities.

## **How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education**

Standards pupils achieve in Religious Education are very high and continue the upward trend of the last three years. They are in line with other core subjects which themselves are significantly above national averages. By the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils secure high levels of attainment and progress.

Pupils respond positively to high expectations of learning and behaviour in the classroom. There is appropriate challenge and support for pupils in lessons. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils responded enthusiastically to a range of opportunities to develop their understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. They understood how to “imagine, explore and consider.” In the Year 3 lesson, some pupils were curious about the Last Supper and asked thought provoking questions about its meaning. Progress was excellent.

Pupils say that they enjoy the topics and the activities in Religious Education and as a result, they are highly motivated and engaged in learning. The quality of written work consistently shows that pupils are proud of their learning and are making good progress overall.

### **How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship**

The Chapel is a very effective part of the school. It is a quiet area for all members of the community to pray and meditate. Up to 40 pupils attend the daily rosary before school. Pupil chapel monitors will organise the use of the chapel so that pupils can go and pray throughout the day. Pupils participate enthusiastically and with great reverence in all acts of worship. Through the pupils' Religious Education Team, they are actively engaged in preparing themes and prayers. The whole school assembly inspectors visited was a beautiful and spiritual occasion. It was led throughout by pupils, including asking the questions about the Gospel story. The pupils sang beautifully and prayed reverently.

The priests confirmed that pupils are fully involved in the planning of prayer and worship and that their responses are faithful and sincere. The school should now have the confidence to publish a unique St Francis collection of prayers for future generations.

## **How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

Leaders, governors and managers at all levels demonstrate a deep commitment to the Catholic Life of the school. The level of monitoring and evaluation is outstanding and leads to effective planning for continued improvement. One parent commented that the school is “relentless in improving.” All governors were involved in the self-evaluation process. Their judgements are honest and accurate, although inspectors felt that the school occasionally underestimated their own value. The Chair said that the school is now at a point of continual self-review. Governors are proactive in identifying the strengths of the school and areas which need development. They understand how to improve. Minutes of meetings confirm that the religious dimension of the school is always a main agenda item for discussion. The Chair is an effective leader with a clear vision for the school. For her, the “Catholic life is woven into the fabric of the school.” Her vision is shared with and understood by school leaders.

The link governor is a regular presence in the school and participates in acts of Collective Worship. He ensures that all governors are fully informed of what is good and what needs to be addressed. His value to the school is recognised by pupils and parents alike.

The Headteacher’s faith and her commitment to the pupils has a significant impact on them. Her resilience and ability have helped guide the school to be the outstanding Catholic school it is today. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of her work.

The school benefits from its close relationship with the parish. The Parish Priest confirmed the strong links between home, school and parish. This deep and solid foundation for pupils provides them with lifelong lessons. Consequently, in an area which provides a range of secondary schools, 80% of the St Francis’ pupils go to the adjacent Catholic secondary school.

Parents were fulsome in their praise for the leadership of the school and their impact on their children. One parent particularly noted the influence of the school on the lives of their children and their understanding of the faith.

The Religious Education Leader is an experienced and highly effective leader. Her enthusiasm and commitment to her faith is an inspiration to all members of the community. Through the Religious Education Team, pupils are actively involved in preparing and leading Collective Worship. The Chapel is a wonderful addition to the school. It is used regularly for the rosary and for quiet prayer and reflection.

**How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils**

Leaders, governors and managers are deeply committed to continuing the upward trend of improvement in standards in Religious Education. The link governor regularly observes lessons and carries out pupil book scrutiny. He meets with the Religious Education Leader regularly to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and to review steps to improve them further.

The governing body reviews the school's *Religious Education and Sex and Relationships* policy on an annual basis. Parents confirmed that they are fully informed of the content and appreciate the quality of delivery.

The Religious Education Leader's experience ensures that the progress of each pupil is a priority for governors and teachers. There is rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and a detailed system of monitoring and evaluation. Regular formal assessments provide accurate information for each pupil. Interventions are therefore appropriate for the needs of each pupil. The Religious Education Leader attends moderation with other schools. School based training on assessment and challenge has resulted in greater teacher confidence and in raising standards of teaching and learning. Planning for further improvement starts from a position of strength.

**The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education**

The quality of teaching is never less than good and is often outstanding. Lessons build on prior learning and are well structured with a lively pace. The variety of tasks engage pupils of all abilities. Pupils respond well to working collaboratively as well as independently. As a result, they are highly motivated and eager to learn. One pupil said the “we are taught very well.”

There is evidence of high level questioning which challenges the pupils to think for themselves and contribute to the group. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were asked to “imagine, explore and consider” the concept of Jesus as the Son of God. The use of drama in the Reception class resulted in genuine interest and amazement.

Teaching Assistants were deployed very effectively in all lessons so that pupils with particular needs made progress. A Year 3 pupil with very specific needs, was integrated into the learning very sensitively.

The marking and dialogue between teachers and pupils was excellent. There was clear guidance for pupils to help them progress further. The quality of pupils’ written work is very high. They take great pride in their work.

**The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils’ learning**

The allocation for Religious Education across the school is 10%. The school follows ‘*The Way, the Truth and the Life*’ programme. Pupil progress and lesson observations show that the curriculum is presented in a way that stimulates pupils’ interest and engages them in learning. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils were challenged to investigate how onlookers felt when Jesus healed the blind man. They responded with enthusiasm and intelligence. Pupils confirm that they enjoy the lessons and that they are always learning.

The impact of the curriculum in its wider sense is excellent. It is enhanced by the Latin Club, which is run by the link governor and Bible Journaling, which encourages pupils to reflect on scripture and its relevance for their lives today.

The curriculum is enriched by the many opportunities for charity work throughout the year such as singing for the Hospice.

Throughout the school, displays reflect the deep commitment of the school to its Catholic identity and pupils’ learning. Prayer tables and prayers are prominent in all classrooms. Of special note was the Diversity Week which was a week of celebrations of faiths and cultures from around the world. It was based on the uniqueness of each of us in the eyes of God.



## **The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school**

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is outstanding. It is an integral part of everyday life and enhances and strengthens the spiritual and caring ethos of the school. There are extensive opportunities for the school to come together for daily prayer and worship. The Parish Priest said that there is a “brilliant pupil led Religious Education Team” which plans Collective Worship to inspire staff, parents and pupils. Behaviour at Mass is “outstanding.”

Masses and assemblies are enriched by the engagement of pupils. They are inspired to sing enthusiastically and pray sincerely.

Parents said that they are astounded by the quality of the class Masses. Parents and pupils are appreciative of the many prayers, assemblies and the presence of the Parish Priest for Mass and Reconciliation, because they offer highly effective spiritual experiences. Staff all fully support the Catholic Life of the school.