

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**



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 0QZ

Chair of Governors	Mrs Angela Black
Headteacher	Mr David Bray
Inspectors	Mrs Bernadette Dowswell
	Mr Roger Tapley

Inspection dates 12 February 2011

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Introduction

Description of the school

St Francis school is voluntary aided and is situated in the Maidstone Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Kent LA. The principal parish, which the school serves, is St Francis' Maidstone. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 80%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Key Stage 1 and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 363. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Around 60 of the pupils receive extra support in class. The largest number of pupils in the school comes from a white British background but the school includes pupils from a wide variety of other ethnic backgrounds, particularly, Filipino, Indian, Portuguese, Polish, Black African and Afro-Caribbean. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Francis' is a good school, which is effective in demonstrating its Catholic ethos. It is a welcoming community and the care given to pupils and their families and the quality of relationships throughout the school are very good. There is a strong Catholic ethos, which is firmly rooted in the Gospel values of love, respect and forgiveness. Parents are supportive of the school and appreciative of the care and education their children receive. One parent wrote, 'Both my children are very happy and flourishing in their school environment'. Pupils are well behaved, enjoy school and show respect and care for one another. The parish priest visits regularly and is well known by pupils and the whole community. The links with the parish are good and developing well. All pupils, including those with additional needs, make progress in religious education. However pupil progress varies between classes because work provided for pupils does not always match their abilities, or challenge pupils who are more able. Progress on the issues identified in the previous inspection has been limited. The school needs to address the development of assessment, challenge for the more able pupils and the quality of marking as a matter of priority. Governors are supportive of the Catholic ethos of the school and are involved in its Catholic life. They now need to ensure they are aware of the strengths and areas for development in religious education. With a firm commitment from senior management and support and challenge from governors, the school has a sound capacity to improve.

Grade 2

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Ensure that all teachers plan consistently for the varying abilities within their class and that teaching and tasks provided are sufficiently challenging for the more able pupils.

Develop a structured system of assessment and ensure that assessment data is recorded in such a way that pupil progress is tracked and the process has an impact on attainment.

Develop a whole school approach to the marking of pupils' work in religious education, including an indication to pupils regarding how they can improve.

Strengthen the monitoring role of the co-ordinator, in order to give support to staff and improve standards of teaching and learning.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Grade 2

The headteacher, governors and Senior Leadership Team have a good understanding of Catholic education. They demonstrate this by working together to develop an inclusive community where everyone is valued. The Mission Statement was reviewed in 2009 during a parish mission in which the school was very involved. The statement is displayed throughout the school and now needs to be included in all school policies. The many displays in central areas and classrooms, such as the one on St Francis in the hall and one on the Last Supper, proudly proclaim the school's Catholic identity. The partnership with parents is very good and when speaking with them many expressed their appreciation of the 'family' atmosphere in the school and the well rounded education their children were receiving. Parents are welcomed into the school on many occasions and many attend class and whole school Masses. Pupils clearly enjoy school and speak warmly of their teachers. Links with the parish are good and both school and parish are seeking ways to develop links further. Some staff are active members of the parish and serve as catechists, which strengthens the bond further. Once a term the school leads and is involved in the family Sunday Mass in the parish. Preparation for the Sacraments is parish based but the school premises are used for some of the lessons after school. Some governors are new to their role, but all fully support the Catholic life of the school through visits and attendance at various Masses and events.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

Grade 1

St Francis' school is a truly worshipping community with prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist at the heart of school life. There is a good programme of assemblies, Masses and other liturgies that take place throughout the school year. Pupils are given very good opportunities to participate in all acts of worship through reading, serving and through music, art, drama and dance. Mass is celebrated in school on many occasions, both for individual classes and the whole school. The Mass celebrated in the hall for the whole school during the inspection was on the theme of Jesus as the Light of the World. There was a real sense of celebration and pupils clearly enjoyed the Mass, with many taking an active part. Pupils knew the Mass responses very well and their singing was of a very high standard. All pupils were attentive, reverent and respectful and conducted themselves very well throughout the mass. A large number of parents and grandparents were also present. Prayer is an integral part of every school day. Pupils are learning the traditional prayers of the Church and have many opportunities to write their own prayers. Examples of thoughtfully written prayers were evident in displays, books and portfolios. Even young pupils are comfortable with short periods of stillness and silence and are able to reflect quietly. All classes have focal areas for prayer and most of these are attractive and integral to the prayer life of the class. The school is fortunate to have a small chapel, which is used in various ways, for example before school in May and October pupils

are able to come and pray some of the rosary. The chapel is also used by class groups for prayer and meditation linked to their religious education lessons. The school has various other liturgies and celebrations during the year, for example Reconciliation services and the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Year 6 pupils have a special day at Aylesford Priory when they are able to reflect on their time at the school and look forward to the next stage in their school life. Collective worship makes a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils.

Community Cohesion

Grade 2

The school is a warm, welcoming and inclusive community, which extends a warm welcome to all families. A practising Christian parent (but not Catholic) wrote, 'We find the general delivery and ethos of religious education to be both positive and forward looking in both principle and practice'. Some parents whose first language is not English, have had the opportunity to improve their English with the help of a member of staff. Relationships are built on mutual respect and all are treated equally. Pupils work and play very well together and are sensitive to each other. Older pupils are encouraged to exercise responsibility and those in Years 5 and 6 have been trained to help younger pupils at lunch times. The school council is involved in many different fund raising activities and have been involved in some minor changes to the school. They could now be given further opportunities to exercise independence by taking charge of their meetings and representing the members of their class. In the past the school has celebrated the wide diversity of cultures within the school through International weeks but these no longer take place. The school needs to seek ways to celebrate this rich diversity. The local cluster of three Catholic primary schools and the Catholic secondary school are beginning to develop close links. An excellent example of this is the recent evening of prayer and reflection for the staff of these schools. Other events are planned, including a shared staff training day of reflection. The school does have very close links with the neighbouring Catholic secondary school. The school premises are occasionally used for some functions to support charities, such as the Heart of Kent hospice and Congo Action. Pupils are encouraged to be part of the local community and there are many sporting and musical links between schools. The choir particularly is involved in many community events. Many families take part in the annual 'Mela Festival' in Maidstone each September and pupils are involved in dance and art workshops. Pupils are encouraged to consider those less fortunate than themselves and contribute generously to a wide range of charities, such as a centre for the homeless, the Cabrini Children's Society, Lepira and many others. The school helps to develop pupils' awareness of global issues through CAFOD and a link with a refugee school in Ethiopia. Pupils learn about some other world faiths in their religious education lessons. Consideration could now be given to arranging for pupils to visit other places of worship and to inviting visitors from other faiths to talk to them. This would help to raise pupils' awareness of religious diversity in British society today.

Religious education

Achievement and standards in religious education

Grade 3

The attainment of the majority of pupils on entry to the school is generally that expected of their age, although a good number do not speak English as their first language. Very good care and support in the Reception classes enables pupils to settle quickly into school life and become secure and confident in their environment. Pupils make satisfactory and sometimes good progress as they move through the school, but progress is inconsistent and variable. At the end of Year 6 the majority of pupils achieve standards that are expected of their age and some achieve above this. However the lack of challenge for the more able pupils prevents some of them from achieving the higher levels of attainment. There is clear evidence that many pupils are developing a good knowledge of their faith. Pupils in a Yr 1/2 class had a very good knowledge of the Last Supper and of some other events in Jesus' life. Those in Year 3 could recall previous learning about the Passover. Pupils have good oral skills and are able to relate what they are learning to their own lives. The use of talk partners helps pupils to become more confident in discussing their ideas and this was seen even with the youngest pupils in a Reception and Year 1 class when they were asked to share ideas on what they found easy and difficult to remember. The work in pupils' books is generally well presented and shows a variety of work. There is very little evidence that pupils are given tasks which are differentiated according to their ability and limited evidence to indicate that more able pupils are using higher level thinking skills and engaging in sustained independent work. Pupils enjoy their lessons and work well co-operatively and independently and listen carefully to their teachers and to each other.

Teaching and learning in religious education

Grade 2

The quality of teaching throughout the school is varied. During the inspection, teaching observed was never less than satisfactory, some was good and one lesson was outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers use a variety of techniques and strategies, which stimulate and interest their pupils and activities and are well matched to pupils interests and abilities, including challenge for the more able pupils. Occasionally activities are too tightly directed by the teacher and prevent pupils' from developing and extending their learning. All lessons have clear learning objectives, which are shared with pupils. A strength of all lessons observed was the way in which teachers built on pupils' previous learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and warm and positive relationships with their pupils. In some lessons teaching assistants are very well deployed and make a valuable contribution to provision, but in other lessons they are not used fully. Assessment of pupils' work is at an early stage of development. There are no examples of levelled work and teachers have not had the opportunity to share in moderation of pupils' work in order to ensure accuracy in their judgements. Teachers need to consolidate their understanding of Levels of Attainment through further

training and support. All pupils' work is marked but there is no consistent approach and most marking gives pupils little indication of how they can improve their work and move on in their learning. Parents are informed of the religious education topics through regular newsletters and homework; recently they were asked to help their children at home with learning some of the Mass responses. All lessons provide pupils with very good opportunities for quiet reflection and prayer, which make a further contribution to their spiritual development.

The religious education curriculum

Grade 2

The school uses the 'Here I Am' religious education programme and 10% of curriculum time is devoted to explicit teaching of the subject. The curriculum builds well on pupils' prior attainment and relates to their own experiences. A good example of this was in a Y4/5 class where a PowerPoint presentation showed photos from school events and world news to enable pupils to reflect on these memories. Teachers' medium term planning is in place but shows little evidence of differentiated activities to match the varying needs and abilities of all pupils. The teaching of other faiths is good and a group of Year 6 pupils spoke confidently about what they had learnt during their study of Islam. There are some good links with other curriculum areas, particularly literacy and ICT. The programme for Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education, which incorporates the emotional development materials (SEAL) helps to prepare pupils for the demands of life today. The policy for Sex and Relationship Education needs to be reviewed in line with Diocesan guidance and the Diocesan Policy for Education in Human Love. There are some good resources for the teaching of religious education but those for the teaching of other faiths need to be improved. The school buildings and grounds are well maintained and cared for and together with the attractive displays provide a pleasant and attractive learning environment.

Leadership and management of religious education

Grade 2

The co-ordinator for religious education has only been in post since the beginning of this term but had the opportunity to shadow the previous co-ordinator for one term. She is committed to developing her role and to ensuring that religious education is given a high profile within the school. There is an action plan with targets linked to both the Catholic life of the school and to raising standards in religious education. The co-ordinator now needs to ensure that the plan includes specific steps on how targets are to be achieved. Staff are given support both informally and through staff meetings. Good use has been made of Diocesan training through attendance at co-ordinator meetings and the annual residential conference. This enables the school to keep abreast of new initiatives. The parish priest meets with the headteacher and co-ordinator to plan the programme of Masses and other liturgies throughout the year. The monitoring role of the co-ordinator is under developed. The senior management needs to initiate a monitoring plan, which is rigorous and systematic and includes regular scrutiny of pupils' books, teachers' planning and observation of lessons. Following any monitoring, staff need to be given developmental feedback in order to support them in their

teaching and for monitoring to have an impact on raising standards. The governing body has received an annual report from the co-ordinator, which has primarily reported on events and developments in the Catholic life of the school. They now need to ensure that they are more involved and informed regarding the religious education curriculum and the standards pupils achieve. All staff give strong support to the Catholic ethos of the school.