



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Francis Primary School

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 10th December 2015

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils: 4 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 200
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 4th February 2009

School Address:
Mount View, West Chase
London Road
Maldon
CM9 6HN

Tel. No. 01621 856698
Headteacher: Mrs S. Ginzler-Maher
Chair of Governors: Mr M. Catchpole

Information about the school

St Francis Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided school in Maldon, Essex and is part of the diocese of Brentwood. It serves the parishes Maldon, Burnham and the Tiptree part of Kelvedon. There are currently 200 pupils aged 4-11 on roll. The proportion of Catholic pupils is 77%. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with a small number coming from a range of ethnic minority groups. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is around the national average.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Francis' is outstanding in its effectiveness in providing Catholic education. The Catholic ethos is strong and permeates all areas. The school is very well led, with a clear sense of purpose and direction and has very good provision for prayer and collective worship. Outcomes for pupils are excellent as is the capacity for sustained improvement. There are many opportunities for spiritual and moral development which are part of the provision for religious education, prayer and collective worship. Senior leaders are excellent role models and have strengthened the Catholicity of the school in recent years through reviewing provision and improving the classroom environment as well as putting in place robust systems for teaching, learning, assessment and monitoring. Pastoral care is very good and shared by all members of the school community. Pupils enjoy school and appreciate opportunities given to be involved in all aspects of school life. Parents praise the high standard of education and the good level of communication. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' standards of attainment are in line with or exceed diocesan expectations.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2009 identified no specific areas for development other than those already identified in the school improvement plan. Since then there have been changes in leadership and a period of instability. However, the school has recently reviewed provision and the executive headteacher supported by her leadership team and governing body has put in place a number of initiatives linked to curriculum development and the Catholic life of the school. Standards of attainment in religious education have risen and staff inset to assist the introduction of the religious education programme 'Come and See' has also ensured sustained improvement. Marking is positive and enables pupils to identify next steps in their learning. The subject leader has a good understanding of her role and is well placed to support colleagues. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has effective strategies to share good practice.

The senior leadership team have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. Senior leaders are very good role models and all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their skills through meetings and attendance at diocesan led training. Governors are proactive and have an excellent capacity to fulfil their role in relation to the school's Catholic foundation.

The current leadership has an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The executive headteacher shows outstanding leadership of a Catholic community. She has a clear focus on the central place of religious education in which she is well supported by staff. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which lead to good outcomes for all pupils. The religious education subject leader has attended diocesan training linked to the 'Come and See' religious education scheme and supports colleagues in lesson planning and delivery as required.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to consolidate initiatives linked to Catholic life and religious education.
- Develop joint moderation of attainment levels in religious education to ensure a good understanding of the requirements of the Curriculum Directory

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Attainment and progress in religious education are very good. Lessons observed during the inspection were good or better and pupils worked with interest and commitment. Pupils spoken to said they enjoy their religious education lessons especially when art and drama are involved. They are keen to respond to questioning, participate eagerly in activities and work well together whether in groups or pairs. They are gaining religious literacy at a very good rate and have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age. Teachers ensure key religious vocabulary is on display and careful tracking enables necessary interventions to take place promptly. Workbooks are well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and give evidence of very good progress made by all groups. Standards of attainment are in line with or exceed diocesan expectations.

Pupils make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. A group of Year 6 pupils work as the Religious Education Pupils Leadership Team. They run lunch time bible study and prayer groups for other pupils and choose the 'Scripture of the Week.' All pupils respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year including Brentwood Catholic Children's Society, Children in Need and Cafod. The school also sponsors the education of two children, one in Niger and one in Bolivia. As befitting a school named after St Francis, animals are not forgotten and the school sponsors a red panda at Colchester Zoo. Older pupils are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives and understand that a sense of service is part of being a member of a Catholic community. Relationships are excellent and pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is very good and pupils spoken to said they valued the friendliness and sense of community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their faith journey. Daily prayer in classrooms includes the traditional prayers of the Church as well as meditation and reflection. Pupils' own prayers are used in assemblies and class acts of worship. There is a pause for the Angelus every day and Rosary clubs held in May and October are well attended. Pupils write their own bidding prayers for masses as well as acting as readers and altar servers. The local parish priest is a frequent visitor and acts as an additional resource in class. Recently introduced class assemblies are giving additional opportunities for pupils' participation in prayer and worship.

Pastoral care is very good and given a high priority by staff and governors who work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. A dedicated worker from Brentwood Catholic Children's Society supports vulnerable children and their families. Pupils feel safe, well cared for and know where to go when they need help or support. Pupils value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents value the care given to their children, the quality of education and the approachability of staff.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The executive headteacher supported by senior staff demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way she promotes the provision for the Catholic life of the school. She has put in place robust systems to ensure religious education is monitored through planning, lesson observations and scrutiny of workbooks. Governors support her in this are part of the monitoring process. There is a strong commitment both to improve in all aspects of education and to provide high quality care and support for pupils. Together the headteacher and subject leader have a very good knowledge of areas for development in religious education and are well placed to support colleagues. There is currently a very strong focus on planning and assessment as the school consolidates the implementation of the 'Come and See' religious education programme and the updated Curriculum Directory. The school has put in place strategies to challenge to the ablest children. Much emphasis is placed on staff development which includes teaching assistants who play a key role in the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Two of them have the CCRS qualification and two more are in the process of achieving it.

The governing body has a high level of expertise and an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The link governor works closely with senior leadership to observe aspects of religious education throughout the school. She visits classes and attends assemblies and liturgies. She also organises tours of the parish church for pupils to enable them to understand the significance of various features and Catholic traditions. In addition, the governing body is well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report, meetings with subject leaders and frequent visits. They also attend some staff training sessions as well as diocesan meetings for governors.

St Francis is a highly inclusive school where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and pupils are taught to respect other faiths which are well taught. Pupils are given very good opportunities to develop a sense of service through charitable fund raising and involvement in the local community which includes entertaining the elderly at a Christmas lunch and performing at the Brentwood Carol concert. Opportunities for spiritual development ensure that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the good level of contact with the school.

Provision

Grade 1

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is very good. During the inspection lessons observed were good or better. Plans are linked to prior learning and differentiated for all abilities with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. In all classes observed pupils worked well and made good progress. Teachers take opportunities to develop understanding and higher order questioning was a feature of many lessons observed. Very good support by teaching assistants enable all groups to achieve well. In an excellent Year 2 lesson on the Annunciation pupils reflected on Mary's feelings when she was visited by Gabriel and linked the account in Luke with Isaiah's prophecy. In Key Stage 2 class sets of Good News bibles enable pupils to become familiar with scripture and, in a Year 6 lesson, look for Angelus references in the gospels of Luke and John. Marking is positive, interactive and often includes suggestions of ways to improve. Good assessment, planning and tracking supports the learning and progress of all groups of pupils.

The quality of the curriculum is very good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education and the budget allocated ensures that a good level of resources is available. The religious education programme 'Come and See' has been in place for two years and is enhanced by other resources and cross curricular links. There are clear guidelines in the religious education policy detailing how the subject is to be delivered and staff in-service sessions support teachers in planning and delivery. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. Other faiths are taught well and supplemented by visitors who give talks to pupils. The support given to families through a wide range of extra-curricular activities gives a strong sense of community to the school. There is every indication that current high standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

Provision for prayer and worship at St Francis is excellent. A wide range of assemblies and liturgies are planned carefully and contribute greatly to pupils' spiritual development. They often include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. During the inspection members of the religious education pupil leadership team prepared and led an assembly for pupils in Key Stage One which explored Advent and the appearance of angels. Pupils were given opportunities to join in prayers and singing as well as personal reflection. An Early Years liturgy included pupils' own 'thank you' prayers. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts and display boards which include children's work. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to many celebrations. The priest from the local parish supports the school through masses, liturgies and acts as chaplain on an informal basis. Pupils visit the church for masses and to develop their knowledge of Catholic traditions. Parish links are very good with many pupils acting as altar servers.

The inspector would like to express her thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.