



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**

### **Inspection Report**



**Name of School: St Francis Primary School**

**LEA: Essex**

**Inspection Date: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

**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: 203**  
**Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body**  
**Date of previous inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011**

**School Address:**  
**Gilchrist Way,**  
**Braintree,**  
**CM7 2SY**

**Tel. No. 01376 320440**  
**Headteacher: Mrs V. Jackson**  
**Chair of Governors: Mr R. Carmoody**

## Information about the school

St Francis Catholic Primary is a one form entry school in Braintree, Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the local parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace, Braintree with some pupils coming from farther afield. There are currently 203 pupils aged 4-11 on roll. Around 96% of pupils are Catholics with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations or other faiths. The proportion of pupils with special needs is around the national average. Since the last inspection there have been many staff changes including the appointment of a new headteacher last year. 58% of the teachers are Catholics, two have the CCRS and one teacher has almost completed the course.

## Key grades for inspection

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

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

**Grade 2**

St Francis' is a good Catholic school with very good leadership and some outstanding features. These include the quality of the prayer and collective worship, the extent to which pupils benefit from the Catholic life of the school and the way leadership monitors and evaluates the provision for Catholic Life. The quality of pupils' learning and progress in religious education is good as are the standards of attainment. There is regular, effective monitoring of teaching, learning and planning. Many governors are of long standing who know the school well and offer a good level of challenge and support. Pastoral care is good and shared by the new parish priest and all staff. Relationships within the school and with the local parish are very good and pupils spoken to said they feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents are happy with religious education and the Catholic life of the school.

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2011 identified three areas for development. Since then the Headteacher and the subject leader who is also deputy Headteacher have put in place an improvement plan which is addressing the areas identified. They have continued to work with staff and pupils to embed structured assessment procedures; there are increased opportunities for pupil voice in lessons; the review of the mission statement has been finalised. The subject leader for religious education has produced an annual wide ranging and comprehensive action plan to sustain effectiveness and put in place further improvements. Along with the Headteacher he has given guidance to teachers all aspects of curriculum religious education, classroom worship and prayer tables. Regular monitoring is ensuring that teaching is relevant and appropriate to children's needs.

The quality of self-evaluation is good. The school documentation is accurate and gives a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic life of the school and religious education. There are effective strategies in place to share good practice and support new teachers. The curriculum which follows the 'Come and See' programme enables pupils to make connections between faith and their own lives. Staff are encouraged to improve their skills through training and embarking on the CCRS course. There are good links with other deanery schools including the secondary school to which most pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2, through in-service sessions and staff meetings. All new teachers are very well supported.

The current leadership has a very good capacity to maintain effectiveness. The Headteacher shows very good leadership of a Catholic community and is well supported by her senior leadership team. Governors have a wide range of expertise and a good knowledge of the Catholic life of the school. The new parish priest who is also a governor visits frequently to plan school Masses and liaise with senior leadership. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen tracking, assessment and planning which are leading to good outcomes for all pupils.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the areas for development identified in the improvement plan with particular emphasis on staff development to help teachers to deepen their understanding of the religious education curriculum.
- Increase the stock of Bibles in Key Stage 2 classes to ensure pupils have immediate access to scripture.

Pupil achievement and progress in religious education are good. All pupils spoken to said they enjoy religious education and the range of activities involved. Pupils observed during the inspection worked well together and take an active part in the lessons. Behaviour for learning is good and pupils have a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Lessons observed were well planned with a range of cross curricular activities in all key stages. All religious education lessons begin and end with a prayer. Across the school workbooks are well presented and show pupils' progress and coverage of the curriculum. Regular tracking is ensuring good progress is made and attainment for all groups is in line with expectations. Marking is positive and pupils are encouraged to respond to comments which help them to make the 'next steps' in their learning. Other faiths are taught well and there are plans for speakers to visit the school.

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They all know the mission statement, 'Following in the footsteps of St Francis: we love God, learning together as a community using our hands, our heads and our hearts' and respond well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. They support a number of charities including Cafod and Brentwood Catholic Children's Society. Pupils have a good understanding of the work of these charities which they are able to link with the life and teachings of Jesus. They also support the local foodbank and a homeless shelter. Pupils are given responsibilities to support the life of the school as school council members, house captains and play leaders. They assist with school assemblies and monthly Masses when pupils act as altar servers and readers. The parish priest who provides pastoral support for staff and pupils comes in frequently and acts as an additional teaching resource. There are good links with Brentwood diocese through training for new teachers and attendance at conferences. Pupils show consideration and respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is good and pupils value the sense of friendship and community created within the school.

Prayer and collective worship are an integral part of school life. Pupils understand the importance of prayer and participate readily in class and assemblies. During the inspection the deputy Headteacher assisted by a group of pupils led an engaging whole school Advent assembly explaining 'Gaudete' Sunday and the symbolism of the third candle on the wreath. Pupils were eager to contribute their ideas for things that bring joy to their lives and for which they were thankful. Singing was excellent with all pupils joining in with enthusiasm. There are regular whole school Masses and plans for year group Masses in Key Stage 2. The cycle of celebrations reflects the Church's liturgical year and enables pupils to understand how faith links to everyday experiences. They respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey through reflective prayer. They learn the traditional prayers of the Church as well as writing their own prayers, many of which were seen during the inspection. A recent innovation is the adoption of class saints who reflect the diverse backgrounds of pupils. There are also plans for a Peace Garden in the school grounds to enhance the provision for prayer and reflection in the school. Year 6 pupils are responsible for planning and leading class liturgies and assemblies and this is to be extended to the rest of the school.

By the end of Key Stage 2 standards of attainment meet diocesan expectations and all groups make good progress. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the learning of individuals and groups of pupils. School leadership gives religious education the same importance as other core subjects and uses staff meeting time and in-service sessions to support teachers.

**Leaders and managers****Grade 2**

The Headteacher and subject leader for religious education demonstrate their commitment to the Catholic life of the school through the way they promote, monitor and evaluate provision. They communicate a clear Catholic vision to the whole community and are supported in this by staff and the governing body who are committed to providing the best possible environment for pupils. The Catholicity of the school is evident in display boards in corridors, assembly hall and in the classroom prayer areas. Masses are a regular feature of school life and parents, parishioners and families are invited to attend.

Members of the governing body have a long standing knowledge and understanding of the school and are well informed about its life through the Headteacher's report, visits to classrooms, assemblies and celebrations and meetings with senior leaders. Governors recently participated in the review of the

mission statement along with staff and pupils. They are involved in the strategic development of the school and engage effectively with all members of the community. Each governor is responsible for tracking a strand of the school development plan which is discussed at every full governors' meeting. The link governor for religious education has many contacts with the school and visits classrooms and looks at pupils' workbooks on a regular basis. She meets the subject leader to discuss the progress of the religious education action plan and reports back to the full governing body. Governors have accessed training provided by the diocese which has enabled them to evaluate aspects of the religious life of the school and to challenge and support effectively.

The subject leader for religious education has produced a targeted action plan for religious education and is well placed to support new teachers. Along with the Headteacher he monitors religious education through workbook scrutiny, observing teaching and evaluating outcomes. He gives feedback after lesson observations resulting in improvements in teaching and learning. Termly moderation takes place across the classes and a portfolio of assessed and levelled work has been started to guide and support teachers' judgements. Training sessions for all staff is helping to ensure that all pupils achieve well. A tracking system enables school leaders to see that all groups are achieving as expected. Leaders support staff development and teachers are encouraged to undertake further training.

School leaders ensure that St Francis is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities and participates in local community events. There are good links with other diocesan schools including the Catholic secondary school to which most pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress through regular meetings and curriculum information newsletters. In addition, the school employs a support worker from Brentwood Catholic Children's Society to work with pupils and families. A number of initiatives including a copy of the 'Wednesday Word' for each family is encouraging parents to share their children's faith journey.

## **Provision**

## **Grade 2**

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. During the inspection, lessons observed were good. In Early Years careful presentation of vocabulary linked to the Nativity was reinforced by a range of cross curricular activities. This good beginning is built upon as pupils progress through the school. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and a range of interesting activities including role play, drama and discussions. All groups of pupils make good progress and behaviour for learning is also good. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding. In most year groups well differentiated tasks enable pupils to work with enthusiasm and interest. Good support by teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons. Marking is positive and there are suggestions of ways to improve. There is every indication that current good standards are likely to be maintained.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The programme 'Come and See' has been implemented throughout the school and is supported by 'A Journey in Love.' There are good quality resources although class sets of Bibles would enable pupils to have easier access to scripture. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the importance of faith to the work of the school. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. They are keen to support a range of charities and understand that a sense of service is based on Jesus' teaching to love one another. The continued focus on the 'Year of Mercy' is contributing very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Provision for prayer and worship at St Francis is excellent. Assemblies and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They include visual presentations, Bible readings, drama, singing and music. On entry to the school pupils are given a prayer book which is used every day in class. Collective worship in classrooms often involves opportunities for personal reflection. A lunchtime 3Rs club; Relaxation, Rosary, Reflection is very popular and well attended. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts and a display board which usually includes children's work. Feast day Masses are celebrated throughout the year and the traditions of the Church are explored with pupils. Parents and families are invited to many celebrations and pupils visit the local church to lead a

Carol Service at Christmas. The parish priest supports the school through Masses and classroom visits as well as acting as an additional teaching resource. Pupils have the opportunity to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent.

The school is constantly seeking to develop practice to improve outcomes for pupils. The subject leader for religious education is reviewing assessment procedures to enable pupils to demonstrate their understanding of religious concepts more clearly. Tracking of pupils' progress is beginning to provide a clear picture of progress in both key stages. There is evidence that good outcomes for pupils are likely to be maintained or improved as the school consolidates and builds on current good practice in all areas.

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.