



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**

### **Denominational (S48) Inspection Report**

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

**Local Authority: Essex**

**Inspection Date: 29 April 2022**

**Reporting Inspector: Mrs Angela Podmore (Lead Inspector)**

**This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.**

**Type of School: Voluntary Aided  
School Category: Primary  
Age range of pupils: 4 -11  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 206  
Appropriate Authority: Essex  
Date of previous inspection: 10 December 2015**

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

**Tel. No. 01621 856698  
Headteacher: Mrs Sarah Ginzler- Maher  
Chair of Governors: Mrs Emma Spring**

## Information about the school

St Francis Catholic Primary School is a one form entry primary school in the historic town of Maldon on the River Blackwater. The school is located within the diocese of Brentwood and has been part of the Christ the King Federation of schools since January 2018. It serves the parishes of Maldon, Burnham and the Tiptree part of Kelvedon. There are currently 206 pupils on roll of which 45% are Catholic with 28% being from other Christian denominations and 28% being from other or no faith backgrounds. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average and the number of children having English as an additional language is again lower than national average but is rising. The percentage of children described as having special educational needs (SEN) is 12%. A number of teachers at the school have gained the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or another Catholic qualification.

## Key grades for inspection

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

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

## Grade 1

St Francis is an outstanding Catholic school. The Catholic character of the school can clearly be seen in many ways but most noticeably through the highly positive relationships both within the school and the wider community. Under the inspirational Executive Headteacher and her senior leaders, the school provides its children with a safe caring environment with Christ and Gospel values at the centre of everything. School leaders, along with dedicated and experienced governors, share a common vision for St Francis to be the very best it can be, and a community where every member is recognised as being a unique gift from God. St Francis School is a community with a strong vision for continuous development and a determination not to be complacent but to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, can grow and develop their unique gifts and talents to the full.

Pupils and parents are rightly proud of St Francis School. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school commenting on its warm, supportive environment and the pervasive family atmosphere. They further report that the core values of kindness, forgiveness and love are firmly embedded in the pupils and that the children know each other and support each very well. They are thankful for the support both pupils and families receive from the school and the way this continued throughout the recent pandemic.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, they know they are safe and that they belong to a community where they are surrounded by people who are 'never going to judge them unfairly and where there is always someone for them to talk to or seek help from', should the need arise.

The school has excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

## What the school should do to improve further:

- Develop a sensory garden for quiet meditative prayer and reflection.
- Further develop pupils' awareness of other faiths by using what already exists within the school community and also which can be sought elsewhere by inviting speakers into school and arranging visits to other places of worship.

St Francis is a school which is justifiably proud of its Catholic character, it is a joyful, Christ centred community where Gospel values are at the heart of everything they undertake. Beautiful and inspiring displays and iconography in classrooms and communal areas further reflect the school's Catholic identity and provide the pupils with a rich and stimulating environment where they can flourish and excel.

The school Mission Statement 'Love one another as I have loved you', along with the words of St Francis, the school patron saint, 'For it is giving that we receive', are fully reflected in the daily lives of the whole school community. Under the excellent leadership of the Executive Headteacher and her leadership team, all staff model the Mission Statement, which in turn ensures that all pupils also express it in their day to day activities. All truly live out the aims and mission of the school.

A real strength of the school is easily identified in the positive relationships between all members of the school community. Pupils know that they belong to the family of St Francis as well as the wider family of God. One pupil wrote that they are a community of 'unique people, we work together to help everyone. We always support one another, respect people's ideas and choices, involve people, value all opinions and persevere when doing our work'.

The rich curriculum ensures that not only do pupils make excellent academic progress but also that their spirituality is allowed to grow and flourish. The vision of school leaders to provide opportunities for all to develop and grow together in Christ is at the forefront of school policies and practice. Pupils' physical and mental well-being are highly valued and staff ensure pupils are well prepared to successfully meet the challenges of the next stage of their education and become independent, resourceful and resilient learners with an excellent understanding of their responsibilities as global citizens. Pupils take their responsibilities as global citizens very seriously, putting their faith into action through their involvement in many charitable events, raising funds for a variety of projects locally and nationally. They talk with passion about their shoe box appeal, CAFOD, Walking for Water and cake sales. Pupils fully appreciate the reasons why they undertake these things; they want to share Jesus' love, some people need things more than others and that by helping others they are following Jesus' example. They fully recognise and appreciate the calling of Pope Francis in his Laudate Si message to look after our common home. The Eco Team is charged with making the school the best it can be, they encourage their peers to make and keep pledges to save the environment. They proudly proclaim: 'The eyes of the world are upon you, we must listen and respond to the cry of the earth'. Their recent Earth Day project to Save the Oceans is beautifully displayed for the whole school community to witness.

Pupils' exemplary behaviour and attitudes both in lessons and at other times throughout the school day make for an environment which is highly conducive to learning and personal development. They show their respect for each other daily in their relationships and in their keenness to take on additional responsibilities.

Governors are highly ambitious for the Catholic Life of the school and along with school leaders lead by example and make a significant contribution to the life of the school. Under the leadership of the knowledgeable Chair of Governors they have an excellent understanding of school improvement and the governor responsible for Religious Education meets regularly with the subject coordinator to review the subject. Governors have a broad set of skills which they can call upon to support the school.

Under the outstanding direction of the Executive Headteacher, all staff and governors are fully committed to the Church's mission in education, leading by example in promoting the Catholic life of the school. Governors make a significant contribution to Catholic Life by their commitment and involvement in school activities.

St Francis school uses the diocesan approved 'Come and See' scheme of work, ensuring pupils build up their skills, knowledge and understanding as they progress through the school.

Pupils' achievement in Religious Education (RE) across all key stages is excellent with a significant number of pupils achieving the highest levels at the end of both key stages. From their various starting points, pupils' books show rapid and sustained progress as they journey through the school continually building upon prior learning. Rigorous and robust tracking and monitoring takes place regularly so that any interventions can be implemented quickly, this is particularly important for those pupils who join the school mid-year in order that their progress is in line with their peers. Formal assessment is carefully planned by the very experienced subject leader using the diocesan assessment grids and then transferred onto Target tracker so that any pupil experiencing difficulties is quickly recognised and appropriate support put in place.

Teachers plan and deliver high quality lessons using a wide range of teaching styles to enhance the enjoyment of lessons for their pupils, including role play and discussing religious art. Resources are used highly effectively to support pupils' learning and pupils have access to a wide range of artefacts, books and bibles. They have a strong understanding of the structure of the bible and can use scripture references in their learning. In an upper Key Stage 2 class, pupils made excellent use of scripture, video and religious art to discuss how the disciples must have felt when they met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Younger pupils explored the theme of Good News using home-made 'communication devices', cards, pictures of family celebrations and role play. During all lessons observed, pupils were on task and fully focused on their learning.

All teaching is consistently strong and very often outstanding. High expectations, teachers' strong subject knowledge and confident delivery provide challenge, allowing pupils to continually develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Marking and feedback enables pupils to reflect on their work. Pupils' respond well to teacher comments during 'Fixit' times.

Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to their learning, their focus and concentration in class are to be commended. Their work books are very well presented showing the respect and love they have for the subject. Books contain a wide range of age appropriate activities which are built upon year by year. Work is well scaffolded to meet the needs of all pupils – to support and challenge as necessary. Additional adults are very well deployed to support learning, re-explaining, checking understanding and helping to maintain focus. Pupils' behaviour for learning, concentration and focus are all contributory factors in their progress and attainment.

The Religious Education subject leader is highly committed, hard working and forward thinking in how she sees the continued development of the subject. She is an excellent role model supporting colleagues, organising training opportunities to continue to develop excellent practice. Moderation of pupils' work occurs regularly within school and across the federation as well as within the deanery to ensure that teacher assessments are accurate. A collection of pupils' work at various levels is also available for staff to cross reference current work.

The Executive Headteacher, senior leaders and governors ensure that Religious Education is given a high priority. The curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Leaders ensure that the budget is in line with that of other core subjects and that all staff have access to regular continuing professional development opportunities to develop and improve their practice.

Prayer and worship are real strengths of the school. Pupils are highly confident and adept at planning, preparing and delivering both prayer sessions and acts of worship. During the inspection, the RE Ambassadors led a truly inspiring assembly on trust linked to Pentecost for their Key Stage 1 peers. The ambassadors delivered their presentation with confidence, passion and energy. Their younger peers were fully engrossed and the awe and wonder in the hall was tangible.

Class prayer leaders take their role very seriously. They lead prayer at various times throughout the school day, and confidently lead their peers in saying the Angelus at noon. During the inspection younger pupils invited their classmates to pray with them in the prayers they had written for their personal intentions. Pupils have opportunities to enjoy a variety of types of prayer, inspiring reflective prayer sessions enhanced by contemplative music was observed during which time, all pupils were reverent and reflective. Pupils' spontaneity in joining in and leading prayer is a central feature of their lives.

Prayer focus areas in classrooms are beautiful. They are excellently maintained and cared for by the pupils and create an atmosphere conducive to prayer and reflection. Pupils immediately turn to these areas during times of prayer. A beautiful prayer tree in a communal area of the school, with a prayer intention box, is further testimony to the importance of prayer. RE ambassadors take their responsibility to check these areas very seriously.

Pupils receive a prayer book on entry to the school. These books contain some of the traditional prayers of the church as well as the prayers used in Mass and other liturgical celebrations. Pupils keep their books as they journey through the school, taking them with them when they attend Mass or Reconciliation services so that they can follow and respond to the liturgy.

Pupils are offered many opportunities for prayer, reflection and worship throughout the year. They enjoy praying the Rosary, receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation, the Mary procession where they bring flowers, as well as Mass to celebrate various events. They speak fondly of celebrating their class Mass and feast days Mass when their families can join in the celebration. The RE ambassadors play a very important role in preparing for these celebrations. Older pupils speak enthusiastically of the opportunities for Retreat days at Bradwell and Walsingham House.

Class Worship books provide beautiful photographic evidence and reminders of the many celebrations held during the year. The planning sheets show the detailed research pupils put into planning and organising these celebrations.

Links with the parish are strong and the Parish Priest is a welcome visitor to the school. He joins pupils in class to discuss topics such as ordination as well as saying Mass for the whole school community on many occasions.

Parents are kept well informed of what is happening in school through newsletters, Home-School link books and invitations to assemblies and Mass.

The Headteacher, her staff and School Governors are outstanding in promoting the provision for Catholic Worship. They are passionate and committed to delivering meaningful and purposeful worship to bring pupils closer to God. The experience of living and working in a supportive praying community has a positive effect on the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. One newly arrived pupil joyfully told the inspector 'Before I came here, I didn't know any prayers and now I know lots.'