



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Francis Catholic Primary School

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DfES Number: 9363421

Headteacher: Mrs Margaret Clerkin and Mrs Patricia Burke

Chair of Governors: Mr Paul Hooper

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 21 November 2011
Date of previous inspection: 7 October 2008

Lead Inspector: Mr Michael Sheridan
Associate Inspector: Mrs Angela Ireland

Description of School

St Francis is an oversubscribed voluntary aided Catholic primary school, situated in the Redhill Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by Surrey local authority. The principal parishes the school serves are the Sacred Heart Parish of Caterham, Whyteleafe and Godstone and the joint parish of All Saints, Oxted and St Ambrose, Warlingham. The school also takes a significant number of pupils from a much wider area. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10.1% in Key Stage 1 and 10.5% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. In responding to a request from the local authority for a temporary increase in the pupil admissions number, the number of pupils currently on roll is 274. This represents a 9.6% increase since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 95%. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of pupils are from a white British heritage and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry into school is generally above average. The number of pupils who have special educational needs is broadly average. Since the last inspection, the school achieved Healthy Schools status in 2009, gained the Inclusion Quality Mark in 2010 and the Sing-Up Platinum Award in 2011. In January 2011 the school adopted a model of co-headship.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Francis is an outstanding school. It is an inviting and welcoming community founded on the Gospel values of forgiveness, compassion, justice, acceptance and peace. Leadership in the school is outstanding at all levels. The joint headteachers are outstanding practitioners and role models and work effectively with a visionary governing body. Together they are strongly committed to the Catholic life of the school and provide an education for pupils which very successfully integrates the sacred with the secular in accordance with the Church's teaching. The prayer life of the school is outstanding and makes a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Leadership at all levels in the school successfully promotes community cohesion so that, supported by the Religious Education curriculum, pupils are aware of the importance their contributions make to the common good of society in their local and wider communities. The school successfully supports parents and carers in their role as first educators of their children. The commitment of parents to the school is very strong and the Catholic life of the school is enhanced through their involvement. Achievement and standards in Religious Education are significantly above average and pupils gain knowledge skills and understanding at a good rate across the Foundation Stage and both key stages. Teaching and

learning in the subject are good, as is the use of technologies in engaging and extending pupils of all abilities. The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding and provides a systematic study of God, the life and teaching of Jesus and the Church, the central beliefs that Catholics hold, the relationship between faith and life and other world religions. The Religious Education curriculum in the school makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. The leadership and management in the subject is outstanding. Rigorous planning and strong quality assurance ensure that Religious Education provides an environment which promotes high standards and the faith development of pupils across the age and ability ranges. The inclusion of all pupils is very effectively promoted as is the efficient use of resources. Very good links exist with the parishes and the Diocese to underpin high standards in Religious Education.

Improvement since the last inspection

Grade 1

There was only one key issue listed for the school to improve further in the previous inspection report. This related to instituting a programme of staff moderation of pupils' work in order to agree levels of attainment and to ensure consistency across the school. Since then it has been well embedded into the school's procedures. Staff meetings and key stage team meetings have been productively used to enable staff to moderate pupils work and to grow in confidence.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 1

There is a well-planned handover strategy for the successor to the current Religious Education co-ordinator, which extends over the whole of the current academic year. This will ensure a smooth transition as the new co-ordinator takes up post in September 2012. Also, the very good quality of the school's self-evaluation and planning, together with the high levels of commitment and expertise of governors and all staff, ensure that the school has an excellent capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that Assessment for Learning is further embedded in Religious Education by sharing good practice of interactive marking across the school and developing self-assessment and peer assessment in Key Stage 2
- Audit and review the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in Religious Education to further enhance teaching and learning in the subject

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

Grade 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Both headteachers have a clear vision of Catholic education based on Gospel values which is reflected in all aspects of school life and shared effectively with all stakeholders. The senior leadership team, Religious Education co-ordinator and governors work very well together to create a strong, cohesive team which ensures that every pupil is nurtured and uniquely valued. Along with the senior leaders, the governors are highly effective and make a positive contribution to the school. Governors achieve the right balance between support and challenge. For example, they rigorously monitor the progress of the school development plan and join the staff on an annual professional development day to evaluate whole-school planning and to establish priorities for action. The school also seeks input into this process from pupils and parents through questionnaires. As a result, the school development plan, with the Catholic life of the school and Religious Education at its heart, is a meaningful document which sets a strategic direction for all stakeholders. The school sets a high priority on succession planning through adopting a model of shared headship and, in Religious Education, ensuring the co-ordinator works in partnership with the Liturgy and Liturgical Music co-ordinator. The distinctive Catholic nature of the school is evident from the religious icons and artefacts around the premises. For example, in the entrance hall, there is an impressive display which includes a statue of St Francis and a book on his life together with an exhibit relating to 'Signs and Symbols' from the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme. Religious Education has many outstanding features and very effectively supports the school's belief that all are created in the image of God.

The Mission Statement, which is prominent in all policy documentation and around the school, ensures that the vision of the school is accessible to the school community. One pupil said, 'The Mission Statement is there to make the school a better place.' The school has a sex and relationships education (SRE) policy, which is included in the Education in Personal Relationships (EPR) policy. These are reviewed regularly and involve consultation with all key stakeholders in the school community. An exemplary feature of the school's music policy is the inclusion of a section designed to support the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of all pupils. Pastoral care in the school is outstanding. The parish priest is a governor and makes regular visits to the school. Along with the school's leadership, he actively supports and promotes the spiritual life of the school community and is a member of the school's Catholic Ethos Group. Very good links exist with parents and carers. They are kept well informed through a number of means, especially a weekly newsletter which is displayed both in the parish and on the website. The strong Catholic ethos of the school is clearly evident in articles published in the newsletter. Parents have very positive attitudes towards the school. Their views are sought through those who are governors and through annual surveys. One parent wrote, 'I think St Francis does an excellent job in developing the children's spiritual knowledge.' The school has strong links with the Diocese, with leadership at all levels regularly attending meetings and training offered at the Diocesan Education Centre. As a consequence of the strong commitment to Catholic education by the whole school community, pupils progress very well.

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade 1

Prayer and worship are seen as central to the life of the school. Pupils learn the traditional prayers of the Church and are able to compose their own. Every classroom and shared area has

an attractive, interactive focal area, reflecting the current 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme topic. These are well used to encourage pupils to relate the topic to their own lives through prayer and scripture. The Religious Education co-ordinator effectively supports all staff in the planning and creation of the prayer areas. There is a carefully planned programme of assemblies, Masses and liturgies, which is rigorously monitored by both headteachers and the Religious Education co-ordinator. The programme is closely linked to the 'Here I Am' programme and the liturgical year and is of a high quality. Pupils are given regular opportunities to plan and lead sections of assemblies, to compose their own prayers for Masses and para-liturgies and involve other pupils in active responses. By allowing pupils to help in its organisation, the school's liturgical provision is highly appropriate to the age and family background of the pupils. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school and works with the school in ensuring the spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils progresses well. He celebrates the Eucharist and liturgies during times and seasons of the Church and the school year and involves his neighbouring parish priest and other priests from the Deanery. For example, the opening Mass of term, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi and the Lenten Sacrament of Reconciliation service are all celebrated in the school. Whole school Masses are also celebrated in the parish church twice yearly.

Pupils are introduced to a wide variety of prayer. This includes suitable opportunities for personal reflection which are effectively used to deepen their personal relationship with God. The very good Key Stage 2 assembly attended reinforced the current 'Here I Am' topic of 'Visitors', with an emphasis on 'being ready'. Pupils were invited by the teacher to pause for quiet reflection on the gospel reading of the Widow's Mite. They were then led, through skilful questioning, to the conclusion that the widow's giving was the best she could do, an example all Christians are called to follow. During the assembly pupils were confidently involved in reading the gospel, leading prayers, singing songs of worship heartily, in one instance with signing, and assisting in the use of technology. ICT and music were used to great effect, to set a reverent atmosphere and to give an added dimension to the theme of the assembly. An excellent, apt, yet simple, example of a sacred space was created by the placing of a candle on a white cloth with two small coins. In addition, prayer and reflection are built into all lessons. As a result, the prayer life of the school makes a considerable contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

Grade 1

Community cohesion is an outstanding feature of this inclusive school. A community cohesion audit accompanied the school's 2010 questionnaire and its results contributed to the school development plan. As a result, this important area of the school's Catholic life is given a high profile. The Mission Statement, 'Inspired by the light of our faith, we ... work together, learn together, care together in God's love', is evident in the life of the school. Pupils with special educational needs are valued by the school community and make good progress. Pastoral care is a strength of the school. There is a peer mentoring system in place where older pupils, who are prefects, support younger pupils at break times. The prefects are easily accessed by wearing 'buddy' hats in the playground. One pupil wrote for the school website, 'St Francis' School prefects make the school a better place.' During the inspection, pupils stated that incidents of bullying are extremely rare at the school and the buddy system is effective in supporting the anti-bullying policy. Pupil voice is expressed through an active student council. As a result of their suggestions for improvement with senior leadership, a number of enhancements have been made to enrich the pupil experience. For example, 'Friendship Benches' and compost bins for recycling fruit scraps have been installed in both playgrounds. The school is a member of a recently formed partnership of Catholic schools in the Deaneries of

Redhill and Epsom, aiming to further promote their schools' Catholic identity through greater collaboration and mutual support. Governors, senior leaders and school managers have drawn up a plan of action which encompasses shared services, INSET days and continuous professional development within the partnership. This excellent initiative will enable the school to build capacity for even further improvement in its Catholic life. The school also collaborates with schools which are not Catholic through the Tandridge Confederation of schools. Parents speak highly of the school. During the inspection comments from parents included: 'The school has a very friendly environment. Teachers are great'; 'There is a big family feel. The children are given a strong sense of values. They are recognised for this.' There is a very strong and active School Association consisting of parents and teachers. The Association involves the school and the local community through their social and fundraising events. For example, the Association organised a film night for the pupils and a St Patrick's family night celebration in the school hall and a Summer Ball in the parish hall. Funds were raised through events such as the Summer Fayre and a karaoke night to contribute towards the purchase of items to enrich the school environment or curriculum. Past examples of these have been the extension to the hall and the purchase of computer equipment.

Strong links exist between the school and the parishes it serves with some parents, staff and governors being actively involved in parish life. The school has a Sing-Up Platinum Award and pupils sing in the church choir. Pupils are also involved in parish liturgies as servers and readers. The Religious Education programme supports social cohesion through the study of world religions, including Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. As well as educational visits to the local parishes, visitors from other religious backgrounds, for example, the local Imam and a representative from the local synagogue, come into the school to talk to pupils about their traditions and beliefs. The school has a plan in place to extend its programme of educational visits for upper Key Stage 2 pupils to the local synagogue for the first time in the Spring term. In the Summer term, the school is expanding the study of world religions by introducing a unit on Sikhism. This study of other faiths positively impacts on pupils' understanding and respect for other communities. The school reaches out to the wider community by forming links with schools abroad. There are established links with schools in Japan, India, France and Spain to promote the use of language skills in lessons. As a result of its self-review, the school recognises the need to develop links nationally and are investigating the possibility of collaborating with an inner-city school in London. The school community generously supports a wide range of charities, including the local hospice, the Cabrini Children's Society, Children with Leukaemia, the Shoe Box Appeal and CAFOD. Consequently, pupils are made aware of the important role they play in society caring for the well-being of others in communities locally, nationally and globally.

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Grade 1

Given pupils' starting points, attainment in the Foundation Stage and both key stages is significantly above average. Due to focussed teaching in Reception, pupils settle quickly into learning and make good progress in Religious Education. Throughout Key Stage 1 pupils consolidate their learning and, given their initial capability, achieve good standards. This good progress continues throughout Key Stage 2 and, by Year 6, most pupils reach levels of attainment which match national expectations and a significant proportion exceed them. Levels

attained in Religious Education are broadly similar to those achieved in English and significantly exceed the national expectation. In terms of reading in English, many pupils achieve high standards that surpass those of their written work, although Religious Education work in a sample of pupils' books scrutinised during the inspection was neat and well presented. In addition, the content of work in their books is of a high standard, indicating that pupils take pride in their work. One parent said, 'The RE books are lovely. It's the one book I keep.' Pupils develop a good standard of religious literacy. For example, they are able to articulate connections between the signs and symbols of baptism and the significance of the Sacrament. This is reinforced by the inspiring displays which include pupils' work around the school. Pupils enjoy Religious Education lessons and gain a great deal from them. There is a very good work ethic in the school and pupils stay on task and make good progress in the subject during their lessons. When asked about their approach to the subject in the classroom, one Year 3 pupil said, 'I try to let my light shine.' Taking into account the quality of work and displays at all levels in the school, Religious Education makes a significant contribution to the moral, spiritual and social development of pupils.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Grade 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with some outstanding features. During the inspection, the majority of pupils who were asked said that they enjoy Religious Education. This, together with the effective and skilled application of the behaviour management policy by the staff, leads to little or no disruption in Religious Education lessons. In lessons judged by the inspectors to be good, the pace was brisk with an effective balance between teacher and pupil input. Teachers acted as facilitators for learning by using skilful questioning techniques and productively employed well-briefed, learning support assistants. For example, in a Year 5/6 lesson on 'Helen's Visitors', the teacher used challenging questions to skilfully evoke pupil responses in describing the feelings of the host as she recalled all the visitors she had received in the previous week. Some pupils' responses included words like 'special', 'joyful', and 'loved'. Independent, differentiated learning was evident in the activity related to the central character's feelings and to the purpose and value of visiting. The learning support assistant was gainfully deployed in working with two 'extension group' pupils by asking them challenging questions and enabling them to progress through the activity at a lively pace. Whilst interactive whiteboards were well employed in all lessons observed, the application of these resources as aids to teaching and learning would benefit from an evaluation of the way in which they are best employed during lessons, particularly in relation to their interactive features and multimedia functions.

Assessment of pupils' work is regular and consistent and makes a good contribution to their progress. During the inspection, interactive marking was evident in the vast majority of books sampled. For example, a Year 2 pupil responded to the teacher's prompt, 'What is the cross showing us?' by writing, 'That Jesus died on the cross and we are part of God's family.' With less able pupils at Key Stage 2, there was evidence that notes were given on how to improve their learning. This is very good practice which should be extended across all ability ranges. Learning objectives are well matched to the full range of the pupils needs. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress in Religious Education. They receive helpful information in letters to enable them to offer their children support at home.

Quality of the Curriculum

Grade 1

The Religious Education curriculum time at the Foundation Stage and both key stages comfortably meets the 10% requirements of the Bishops' Conference and the Diocese. The school follows the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme, as recommended by the Diocese. Investigation and reflection are key components, which equip them with the tools to respond to God's call in everyday life. The curriculum builds on the foundations laid at home. It is carefully co-ordinated with personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) and the 'In the Beginning' sex and relationships education programme, which are all set in the context of Catholic teaching. The school is aware of the need to further develop the teaching of other faiths and has introduced the study of Sikhism into the programme for the coming term. Full advantage is taken of opportunities to develop pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Very good use is made of ICT and of creative cross curricular links to enrich Religious Education; for example, the impressive artwork in the Religious Education displays, the music and literacy, which are planned and evident in lessons, and the raising of awareness for the common good through supporting charitable causes make the subject enjoyable and relevant to the lives of the pupils. As a result, the curriculum makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils in the school.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education are outstanding. The headteachers, senior leaders and governors place a high priority on the subject as evidenced by the resourcing and rigorous monitoring of the subject. Also, the Religious Education co-ordinator and EPR co-ordinator are line-managed by one of the headteachers. Succession planning for the role of Religious Education co-ordinator is firmly established, with the co-ordinator, who is responsible for liturgy and liturgical music, shadowing and supporting the current subject co-ordinator throughout this academic year. They work together extremely well and vindicate the adoption of this exemplary strategy by the school. The subject coordinator is a reflective practitioner, who inspires confidence among her colleagues and leads the subject extremely well. She is ably supported by the contributions of the Liturgy and Liturgical Music co-ordinator and EPR co-ordinator. Both the headteachers and the subject co-ordinator regularly attend Diocesan training and meetings to ensure that the school is well-placed to respond to current developments. The priest governor is the link governor for Religious Education. He works closely with the co-ordinator, meets regularly with staff and monitors planning and lessons for feeding back to the governing body. The Religious Education action plan is robust, derives from the school development plan and is focused on improvement. The matching of activities to pupil abilities in Religious Education, highlighted in the last report, is now consistently applied in all teachers' planning. A subject policy is in place which strongly supports progression throughout the school. A manual pupil tracking system is in place and makes a positive impact on pupils' attainment as underachievement, including those pupils who need to be challenged yet further, is identified and acted upon. Moderation in assessment has been skilfully managed within the school by the subject co-ordinator and accuracy in assessments has become increasingly consistent. The partnership of Deanery schools provides an exciting opportunity to extend moderation beyond the confines of the school and is an area worth exploring. The inspectors endorse the school's plans for adopting the electronic tracking system, used for the other core subjects. This will further facilitate both assessment analysis and target setting in Religious Education across the school. Religious Education is viewed by the school's leadership as a core subject. Consequently, the department receives a budget reflecting this status. Very efficient use is made of resources.