



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for **St Francis Catholic Primary School**

URN: 115194

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Alan Williams, sm, Bishop of Brentwood on:

Date: 24-25 May 2023

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The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	✓
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	✓
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- The school promotes an atmosphere of welcome where every person is valued as a unique gift from God and where everyone's gifts and talents are recognised and celebrated.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well; they are extremely respectful and appreciate all the school has to offer.
- The school promotes exemplary partnerships between the school, the parish and the home which make a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.
- There is a tangible sense of community and inclusion, with parental engagement being a real strength.
- Staff act as excellent role models in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

This Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection was carried out under canons 804 & 806 of the Code of Canon Law. For maintained schools and academies in England it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.48 of the Education Act 2005. For maintained schools and academies in Wales it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.50 of the Education Act 2005.

What the school needs to improve:

- Strengthen leaders' and governors' systematic and structured monitoring and evaluation of religious education to ensure teaching and learning continues to improve in line with the new *Religious Education Directory*.
- Implement a consistent policy to ensure rigour in teacher feedback and pupil self-assessment in religious education, so that pupils know what they need to improve in their learning and can articulate how they have made progress.
- Continue to develop opportunities for pupils to independently prepare, lead and evaluate prayer and worship.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2



Pupils fully understand and embrace the Catholic identity of the school, enthusiastically participating in all activities that support the Catholic life of the school. This is particularly seen in their care for each other, especially when the older pupils support younger pupils. One pupil explained, “everyone is friends with everyone”. There is a clear understanding, by pupils, that the school is following the example of Jesus. They gladly embrace their responsibilities to care for our Common Home through the inspiring work of the Laudato Si’ group. Pupils in this group have impressively campaigned to reduce the practice of using single-use glue sticks and glitter in school. Recently, they have eagerly raised funds to sponsor an elephant at Colchester Zoo. They are able to link these actions to Pope Francis’ messages. Pupils are actively engaged in responding to the demands of Catholic Social Teaching through their support locally for the food bank and globally through their fund-raising for Cafod. Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and throughout the school. They value the chaplaincy provision, and older pupils willingly undertake leadership roles when offered to them, particularly the Young Franciscans. They are particularly proud of the Bible bags, which are taken home in each class to encourage families to read Bible stories at home.

The mission statement is clear, visible throughout the school and well known by pupils and staff. All members of the community embrace the mission statement and keenly participate in activities reflecting the life and mission of the school, for example non-uniform days to raise funds for Cafod. There is a lived sense of community and an exceptionally strong culture of welcome. Parents are very keen to express their views. One parent commented that “We strongly believe that the St Francis School embodies the Catholic ethos” and another stated that the St Francis School is a “lovely school, which is fully committed to teaching students in a Catholic spirit. Everything revolves around instilling Catholic values in their students”. Staff

are exemplary role models. Through their relationship with each other, their love and care for the children and the support offered to parents, they consistently bear witness to the school's Catholic life and mission. The school's environment reflects its Catholic character. The Peace Garden provides a very special, reflective and prayerful area for the pupils and staff. The Garden is greatly valued by all who use it. The chaplaincy provision is strong and pupils have good opportunities for their spiritual and moral development. The provision for RSHE meets the statutory and diocesan requirements.

Leaders and governors are able to articulate the Church's mission. Governors are regular and enthusiastic visitors to the school. They know the school community exceptionally well. Leaders and governors work in partnership with the diocese and they take advantage of some of the services offered by the diocese. Links with the parish are particularly strong. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor to the school. Pupils know him and greet him with great enthusiasm. The school has liaised with the parish to support the training of altar servers. The school's partnership with parents is very strong as there are many strategies to engage with the parent community. Parents have a thorough understanding of the school's mission, which is summarised by one parent who appreciated the school's great effort in supporting pupils: "in line with the Catholic faith, they help children learn integrity, compassion and sensitivity ... it is amazing to be part of the St Francis School community". Leaders and governors are inspirational witnesses to Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching, particularly in reaching out to those who are vulnerable, including newly arrived members of the community and those who have been bereaved. Leaders and governors are supportive of staff and have ensured a well-being policy is actively in place. Whilst governors and leaders are ambitious for the Catholic life of the school, they need to ensure that there are clear systems in place to ensure rigour in the self-evaluation process, leading to well-planned improvements.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

2

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

2

Pupils are developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills in religious education and they are able to talk confidently and enthusiastically about what they have learnt. They show an awareness of key concepts, use subject-specific vocabulary and can express what faith means to them. For example, one pupil in Year 6 knew the story of David and Goliath and explained that “it doesn’t matter how strong you are, God is your strength and is always there for you.” Pupils’ knowledge is clearly demonstrated when teachers clarified prior learning, and also during discussions. Pupils can think ethically and have knowledge of other major religions. Religious education is held in high esteem throughout the school. This is evidenced by the pupils’ behaviour and through the pupil voice discussions with the Laudato Si’ and the Young Franciscans groups. Pupils work independently, with partners, and in groups, responding well to their learning, showing good progress over time. Support for pupils with SEND is a strength within the school; they are well supported by support staff and the SENDCO. Pupils with additional needs take part in all areas of school life. Pupils throughout the school are engaged in religious education lessons. Pupils enjoy learning and as a consequence behaviour is very good. Children as young as Year 1 can, with support, use the Bible to support their learning.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and are committed to both the value of religious education and relationships with the pupils, which are clearly respectful and reciprocal. This is further evidenced in the responses given by the pupils in lessons and in pupil interviews. Teachers plan well to ensure that books show written work in different forms and a variety is evident such as diary entries, news reports and recounts. Other opportunities for creative and spiritual expression may encourage more independence and further deepen pupil understanding. Teachers need to facilitate self-assessment opportunities for pupils at the beginning and end of a topic in order that pupils have more of an understanding of the progress they have made. Feedback and marking varies across the school. When marking and feedback are provided, some pupils respond well.

When pupils are questioned at a deeper level, and they have time to reflect, their understanding is demonstrably better. Teachers recognise the impact that religious education has on the moral and spiritual development of the pupils. The teaching of scripture is embedded in lessons.

Leaders and governors ensure that provision meets the requirements of *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. Governors are proud and supportive of the school. Leaders and governors ensure that religious education has parity with other core subjects in respect of timetabling, staffing and resources. Leaders ensure that teachers plan religious education lessons in line with the diocesan approved scheme of work, Come and See, and therefore the needs of different groups of children are met. Professional development opportunities have been made available for all staff. The religious education subject leader has undertaken professional development for the new *Religious Education Directory*. This now needs to be systematically shared across the school and a clear vision for the future of teaching and learning of religious education needs to be developed, involving all staff. In order to ensure sustained improvement, leaders and governors must develop greater rigour in their self-evaluation.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

2

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

2



The experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school engage pupils of all ages. In whole school assemblies and class liturgies pupils are deeply involved and are able to reflect in silence. Pupils' engagement in communal singing is joyful, enthusiastic and uplifting. Actions with the hymns enable the youngest children to fully participate in the liturgies. Pupils are able to reflect on scripture and have an increasing awareness of types of prayer as they progress through the school, including reflecting on and responding to scripture and traditional Catholic prayers. Older pupils work well with teachers to plan and lead prayer and liturgies in classes. They are also beginning to evaluate these services. This now needs to become consistent practice, appropriate to the age and capacity of pupils across the school. Pupils are able to formulate prayers that are influenced by the curriculum, for example the Laudato Si' group prayer is linked to their care for our Common Home. Pupils are able to articulate the need for prayer for those in wider society and link this to their religious knowledge. One pupil explained the need to pray for the homeless, during an Advent service, because Jesus, Mary and Joseph were homeless.

Appropriately planned prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school. Moments of joy, including St Francis' feast day Mass and the May Procession for Our Lady, are celebrated in the school. Prayers for the Ukraine have been included in the Remembrance Day services. There is a daily pattern of prayer across the school, including traditional Catholic prayers. Scripture appropriate to the season or theme of liturgy is well chosen. For example, a passage from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chosen to link to the school's focus on the virtue of kindness, was also used in class liturgies to inspire pupils to write their own prayers. These prayers were both beautiful and thoughtful. Staff are models of good practice in prayer and liturgy, with many using music to create a time for quiet reflection and hymns to enhance the liturgy. There is a need to ensure further professional development for staff to increase their confidence in supporting pupils to plan, lead

and evaluate prayer and liturgy. Space is used well in classrooms, which all have a focal prayer table. The investment in the dedicated area given to the Peace Garden is a wonderful addition to the space available to prayer in the school. Families are welcomed to monthly school Masses in the school. This link with the parish is appreciated by parents with one explaining, that the parish priest “regularly celebrates Mass at the school and the children are at the centre of the celebration, involved in reading, playing music, singing and altar service.”

The school’s prayer and liturgy policy is accessible. As a result of this policy, staff consistently create a prayerful atmosphere for class prayer and liturgies, through the lighting of candles and playing reflective music. However, there is a need for leaders to further develop this policy to ensure that there is a clear strategy for building up skills of participation as pupils progress through the school. Leaders have a clear plan throughout the year to celebrate the Eucharist each month, incorporating Holy Days of Obligation, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and themes appropriate to the liturgical year. Additional resources for prayer are used in the weekly 3Rs (rest, relaxation and rosary) group. This is an exceptionally spiritual and prayerful experience for pupils, who are encouraged to write their own prayers and sing the creed at the beginning of the rosary. Leaders and governors value prayer and liturgy in the school and allocate appropriate resources. However, the outcome for pupils and the provision would be further enhanced by the regular review of the quality of and impact of prayer and liturgy within the school’s self-evaluation cycle and ensuring that pupils’ views are sought and acted upon.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Francis Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	115194
Full postal address of the school	Gilchrist Way, Braintree, Essex, CM7 2SY
School phone number	01376 320440
Name of head teacher or principal	Victoria Jackson
Chair of governing board	Graham Fretwell
School Website	www.stfrancisbraintree.org.uk/
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Click or tap here to enter text.
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	4-11
Trustees	Diocese of Brentwood
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	14 December 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The inspection team

Gael Hicks	Lead inspector
Lisa Schaberg	Team inspector
Bernadette Matthews	Shadow inspector
Name of inspector	Lead/team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement