



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Francis' Catholic Primary School

Local Authority: Newham

Inspection Date: 17th June 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: Multi Academy Trust
School Category: Primary
Age range of pupils: 2-11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 344
Appropriate Authority: Newham
Date of previous inspection: May 2016**

School Address:	Maryland Park Stratford London E15 1HB
Tel. No.	020 8534 0476
Headteacher:	Mrs Natasha Scott
Chair of Governors:	Mrs Marian Thorn

Information about the school

St Francis' Catholic Primary School is a two form entry primary school in Stratford and is part of the Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust within the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parish of St Francis of Assisi. There are currently 344 pupils on role, of which 56% are Catholic and 36% are from other Christian denominations. There are a higher than national average number of children who have English as an additional language with 25 different languages spoken in the school. There is a higher than average number of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding. The number of pupils deemed to have Special Educational Needs is broadly average.

There are 13 teachers in the school who teach Religious Education, 3 of whom have obtained the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Francis' Primary School is a warm, vibrant, inclusive community which provides its pupils with an outstanding Catholic education, Pupils and staff thrive in a community where everyone is seen as a unique gift from God and special in His eyes and where everyone has the opportunity to be successful. This is clearly evidenced in the school being awarded the Gold Accreditation for Investors in People in 2022.

School leaders and governors, under the expert guidance of the dedicated and inspirational Headteacher, have worked tirelessly to build upon the strengths of the previous inspection and thus ensure that the school has excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

St Francis' develops strong, confident, articulate young people who recognise their responsibilities to each other and the wider community and who have a love of learning and a love of God.

The headteacher, her senior colleagues and governors, share a clear vision for the school and are passionate in their leadership and ambition for the school to be the best it can be. They share a determination that the school is fully committed to the church's mission in education and that St Francis' is a Christ-centred community. They ensure that pupils are given an environment which is highly conducive to learning.

Pupils feel safe, physically, mentally and spiritually, they are well cared for and enjoy attending school. Their welfare is given high priority through excellent pastoral care.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school and offer visitors a warm welcome, happily sharing their experiences and work with visitors.

What the school should do to improve further:

- To reconnect with parents after the recent pandemic, so that they have a more secure understanding of why, how and what their children are learning in Religious Education by, for example, holding frequent parental workshops.
- To support all pupils in further developing their analytical and critical thinking skills to ensure that they gain compete mastery of these skills.

The Catholic character of the school is deeply embedded in all aspects of school life. St Francis' school is proud to proclaim its Catholic identity, and this can easily be seen in numerous ways; not least in the beautiful displays around the school and in the excellent relationships between all members of the community. Inspirational banners showing the school Mission Statement enjoy a prominent position on the corridor and displays showing pupils' work on Building Bridges, The Energy of Pentecost and Building Our Community are just a small sample of how the school shows it is unmistakably a Catholic Christ Centred community.

The Mission Statement 'Peace, Love, Knowledge. We follow Jesus and St Francis praying that we are instruments of peace, learning to love and be loved, embracing our differences and striving for excellence in all we do,' is fully embraced by all members of the community. It is reviewed annually by pupils. All are committed to it and the challenge of living it out in their daily lives. It acts as a guide for pupils and staff to be witnesses to the Gospel and to Catholic Social Teaching.

Pupils are provided with a rich and stimulating learning environment which encourages them to explore and live out their faith, one pupil reported that the school 'brings us closer to God and His family' whilst another said that it gives them 'a strong belief in Christianity and Jesus'. Pupils are given a clear message of how to do good for others not just themselves. They are encouraged to take on responsibilities for shaping the religious character of the school and wider community. This is clearly evidenced in the enthusiastic way they approach their roles as Junior Leadership Team members, Mini Vinnies, the School Council and the Eco Warriors. The Mini Vinnies motto 'Turning concerns into actions' is clearly seen through prayers and the many fund raising activities to support local and national charities such as CAFOD, St Francis Food Project, The Magpie Project and the NEWway Night Shelter project. Pupils have recently raised the amazing sum of over £2500 for the NEWway project whilst staff, acting as excellent role models for the pupils supplied the Magpie project with 1000 nappies.

The Pope's encyclical letters 'Fratelli Tutti' and 'Laudato Si' along with the school's Citizenship Weeks are warmly embraced by the whole community. Pupils are challenged to listen to 'the cry of the earth' and 'the cry of the poor' and pupils were keen to tell the inspector that if they ignore the Pope's message then they are failing future generations and failing God who entrusted people to take care of His creation.

Pupil and staff well-being is given a high priority at the school. Pupils genuinely care for each other explaining that to treat people unkindly or unfairly hurts God. Older pupils talk about the real sense of belonging they experience in school and the strong bond between school, parents and the community. They report that the school feels like home where everyone is accepted.

The recently implemented Zones of Regulation programme helps pupils regulate their emotions, parents speak highly of the programme and how they use it at home to support their children. Other established practices are in place to provide high levels of pastoral care. The Rainbows programme to support loss and bereavement is firmly established. Vulnerable pupils have the opportunity to share any concerns or worries in regular sessions with the school counsellor. Pupils fully recognise that they too can take on responsibilities for looking after each other on a daily basis, such as by being playground buddies or dining room helpers, or in times of need such as supporting peers who have lost family members. When pupils recently heard that the school crossing patrol man had been involved in an accident, they immediately sent him a card to wish him a speedy recovery. Pupils also speak about how they support their peers who have additional needs so that they too can be successful learners.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school environs is excellent. Pupils are kind to each other, they enjoy each other's' company and they enjoy coming to school. Older pupils talk animatedly about the strong sense of community where everyone is treated equally and is given the right to express ideas and opinions without fear of condemnation.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and are kept informed of school events through newsletters and the school website and The Wednesday Word is sent home weekly. They speak positively of the school being a community of faith where every child is supported and encouraged. A

non Catholic parent commented that her daughter is able to compare the similarities and differences between her own faith and Christianity and that she was 'glad that she is able to respect other faiths'.

The dynamic headteacher along with the dedicated and enthusiastic subject leader are highly ambitious for the Catholic Life of the school ensuring it is given the highest priority. They act as excellent role models for both pupils and staff. The RE subject leader is an active member of the parish and is therefore highly visible to both the school and parish community.

Governors visit the school regularly and are kept well informed of what is happening in the school by the outstanding headteacher. They visit classes, meet subject leaders, carry out book monitoring and conduct learning walks.

Links with the parish are strong. The Parish Priest visits the school regularly and pupils speak fondly of his lessons on Ordination and Making Good Choices. Pupils attend Mass in the parish church regularly, acting as Altar Servers and preparing and leading readings and bidding prayers.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

Religious Education (RE) is given high priority at the school and leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference that 10% of curriculum time is given over to the teaching of RE. The school uses the diocesan approved Come and See programme in lessons.

Pupils achieve very well in RE with a significant number of pupils achieving the highest levels. Teachers have strong subject knowledge which they pass on to their pupils allowing them, from their starting points, to make very good and in some cases outstanding progress. They have high expectations of their pupils and pupils comment that these encourage them always to strive to do their best.

Teachers plan and deliver well resourced, creative and stimulating lessons which allow pupils to engage in and enjoy their learning. Pupils are offered a rich curriculum of drama, music, art and writing for a variety of purposes, to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the units and skills taught. From a young age they are encouraged to become religiously literate and use their vocabulary in oral and written work. Due to skilful and innovative planning pupils are able to make a connection between what they are learning in RE lessons and their daily lives. During the inspection younger pupils were able to link family birthdays with the birthday of the church at Pentecost and Year 3 pupils were asked to consider whether all presents came with a bow and colourful wrapping paper, as an introduction to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Teachers' skilful questioning allows them to continually assess understanding and further develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, correcting any misconceptions quickly.

Additional adults are deployed extremely well to support pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). They support learning well, allowing pupils to grow in confidence and make good progress.

The RE subject leader provides excellent support for her colleagues. Each unit is launched by her for staff, so that they all have a deeper understanding of the content appropriate to the phase they are teaching as well as previous year groups and phases. Robust and regular assessment and moderation take place both within house and across the deanery. This ensures that all teacher assessments are accurate. Monitoring of pupils' work via Target Tracker and pupil conferencing, ensures that the progress of individual pupils and groups can be checked and those who may require additional support or who need to close any gaps in knowledge or skills are identified, and measures put in place.

Pupils enjoy RE lessons, they are attentive, focused and demonstrate excellent attitudes to their learning. They are keen to do well and take pride in their work and fully appreciate the efforts teachers put into planning lesson activities. They know how well they are doing in RE and take on board teacher feedback to continually improve their work. Individual class Reflective Journals demonstrate pupils' thoughts at the start and end of units of work and individual lessons and are another way of monitoring pupil progress as well as providing pupils time to reflect on their work.

Opportunities to study other world faiths, with input from both staff and pupils who are from other faith backgrounds, allow pupils to develop a good understanding of the similarities and differences between faiths. Pupils have the opportunity to visit local synagogues and mosques as part of their learning on other world faiths.

RE is led by a highly committed and very able subject leader, she ensures that all teachers are committed to giving RE high status. She further ensures that staff have all the resources they need to deliver high quality lessons and have the opportunity to observe good practice and participate in team teaching to improve their own practice. She is passionate in her endeavours to ensure that RE is an experience and not just a subject on the curriculum. She regularly attends training to keep abreast of new developments and ensures staff are kept well informed so that they can continually review and improve their practice

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

St Francis' is a community where prayer and worship enjoy a high profile and are at the heart of every aspect of daily life; staff act as excellent role models for pupils to follow. Pupils pray together several times throughout the day and are as confident in praying the traditional prayers of the church as they are at devising and saying their own prayers. The experience of living and working in a supportive praying community plays a vital role in meeting and developing the spiritual needs of the pupils.

The RE subject leader ensures that all staff have a strong understanding of the church's liturgical year in order that they can support pupils in planning and delivering prayer, class and whole school liturgies. The Prayer and Worship policy is easily accessible for staff to ensure that worship has a clear purpose, message and direction and that themes chosen for worship are in line with the liturgical year and the Come and See programme.

During the inspection, pupils in Key Stage 1 led an assembly on the importance of saying sorry. The assembly was extremely well planned and delivered. Pupils spoke confidently and their message was supported by song and drama. The singing was joyful and is clearly a strength of the school. Throughout the celebration pupils demonstrated excellent focus and attention. The atmosphere was one of appreciation, joy and celebration and it was abundantly clear that pupils and parents enjoy being able to come together for these celebrations.

Prayer focal areas in classrooms enjoy a prominent position and are beautifully maintained, they form a focal point during prayers and RE lessons. The candle, flowers, holding cross and the Bible are supplemented by personal items from individual classes, including a prayer board where pupils ask for prayers for particular intentions.

Pupils have many opportunities to come together to celebrate and worship together. These allow pupils to deepen their understanding of the richness of Catholic traditions and the various celebrations which occur during the course of the liturgical year. Pupils readily take on the responsibility to lead worship. The Junior Leadership Team prepare the Christmas Carol Concert and Easter assemblies whilst the Mini Vinnies lead praying the Rosary at lunch time during October and May. During Lent groups of pupils volunteer to lead the Stations of the Cross for parishioners.

All pupils are guided to plan, lead or participate in assemblies from a very young age. The choice of music and prayer forms reflect the wonderful diversity of pupils' backgrounds, hymns are often accompanied by very accomplished African drumming.

The 'travelling crib' for Key Stage 1 is a very popular activity and photographs of children and their families praying together with the crib are an excellent reminder of the reverence shown during these

times. Older pupils were disappointed not to be able to participate in this event so staff created an Easter Mystery box for them to share with their families during the Easter season.

Parents speak very positively about the prayer life of the school reporting that '...the prayers offered in school have helped my child to actively participate in family prayers at home especially before and after meals.' and another parent commented that her daughter's prayers 'are well developed and I know this has been enhanced through her interaction with religious studies at school.'

The school enjoys strong links with the parish with members of the school staff being Catechists for the First Holy Communion programme. The subject leader for RE works closely with the parish priest in planning school Masses and other liturgical celebrations and the parish priest regularly visits school to meet pupils and lead celebrations for Ash Wednesday or Reconciliation.