

TEACHING AND LEARNING

“A striking feature is the pupils’ enjoyment of school. This is a key contributor to their outstanding achievement and high standards”

(Ofsted 2009)

The school is organised into seven single aged classes supported by an excellent and dedicated team of teachers and support staff. The first year at school is the Foundation Stage. Children then spend two years in Key Stage 1 (infant years) and four years at Key Stage 2 (junior years).

EARLY YEARS

“Children make a great start in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Parents are delighted with the way their children are prepared for and welcomed into the Reception class”

(Ofsted 2010)

When children start school at St Francis, we aim to help them settle in quickly so that they enjoy coming to school each day. The induction process includes children making visits to the classroom and the Foundation Stage teacher visiting their nursery or pre-school group. This supports a smooth transition to school and helps to build firm relationships with children and parents. In their first few weeks at school children are helped to feel comfortable and safe in their surroundings.

The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage (Reception class) is based around six areas of learning:

- Communication, Language and Literacy
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Mathematics
- Understanding of the world
- Expressive Arts and Design

Learning takes place in a variety of ways. Carefully planned activities, often within a theme, eg: Pirates or Dinosaurs, are designed to take account of the learning needs of each pupil. Some activities are adult led and some child initiated. Children will learn as a whole class, within a small group and one-to-one. A visitor to the Reception class will see children actively engaged in a range of tasks both inside and outside the classroom and will hear lots of talking. A longer stay will help a visitor observe children being taught how develop skills of collaboration and independence and encouraged to be curious and questioning.

Reading, Spelling, Writing

Children are taught to read using phonics as the building blocks to learning letter names and sounds and then applying this knowledge to word building. Daily phonics lessons and practice takes place in the Reception class. Children also learn to recognise and read important key words that cannot easily be 'sounded out' such as 'the', 'said' and 'when'. When children acquire a sufficient bank of sounds and key words they are able to begin to use a reading book. The support of parents for the child throughout the whole of this process is crucial to the child developing their confidence and enjoyment of reading. Parents are asked to regularly help children with learning their sounds and key words and hear them read.

As children learn to identify and read letter sounds they are taught how to write them and will practice writing letter shapes in a variety of ways – fingers in the air, fingers in sand, using a computer and using pencils and pens. Correct pencil grip, letter shape, size and orientation are taught. This process supports the child with their spelling and writing. As knowledge and confidence grows children will begin to write by 'sounding out'. Children are provided with frequent opportunities to practice their writing skills in the Reception class that includes a writing area for child initiated writing and activities planned by the teacher.

KEY STAGE 1 and KEY STAGE 2

"High quality teaching which engages and motivates pupils helps ensure the high standards achieved"

(Ofsted 2009)

Everyone is a learner at St Francis where expectations are high and all are encouraged to give of their best. A variety of teaching methods is used to support learning. Children will learn as a whole class that is led by the teacher. Sometimes they will work in a small group with a teacher, other times they will work collaboratively within a small group. Teachers will support children on a one-to-one basis as well as ask children to work independently.

A visitor to the school will see children learning, using a range of resources and equipment, in their classrooms, the ICT suite, the art area, the Hall and outside. Children will be active and motivated in their learning and will be having fun. A visitor will witness children learning the importance of listening, discussion and questioning in a culture of mutual respect and inclusivity.

The curriculum at St Francis fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum. It includes core subjects and several foundation subjects. The core subjects are RE, English, Mathematics and Science. Foundation subjects include History, Geography, Art and DT, Computing, Music, PE, Modern Foreign Languages and PHSE (Personal, Health and Social Education). An overview of what children will be learning in their class is sent home each term.

"St Francis is a place where my learning expands in every lesson" (pupil)

English

All children are taught to develop their use of language so that they can receive and communicate meaning in spoken and written forms. Language is used to learn, to express feelings, to record and classify information and to identify and solve problems. An essential part of the learning process is the ability to communicate orally. It is an integral part of the curriculum at St Francis that children develop confidence as speakers and listeners and they are provided with many opportunities to practice these skills.

We want children to acquire a life long love of reading, both for pleasure and for information seeking. Children have access to a wide variety of texts including fiction and non-fiction. The school has a small but well resourced library that is regularly used by pupils. Reading is taught using a variety of strategies to support fluency, accuracy and understanding. As these skills develop, children are encouraged to become increasingly independent and reflective. The support of parents in hearing their child read throughout primary school is fundamental to developing the child as a reader. This should continue through the junior years where the focus will shift from supporting word building and accuracy to helping with fluency, comprehension and building vocabulary.

Speaking and reading support the development of writing, which is essential to thinking and learning. Children use writing as a means of developing, organising and communicating ideas. Children are taught to write both expressively and to convey information. The curriculum is carefully planned so that children develop writing in different styles for a variety of purposes and audiences. As children develop as writers they are taught skills of presentation, editing, revising and redrafting. Grammar, punctuation, accurate spelling and handwriting are taught as part of the writing process to enable pupils to express themselves clearly.

***“Our teachers are kind & encouraging. Whenever you’re stuck they always help you”
(pupil)***

Mathematics

Our aim in Mathematics is to encourage a positive attitude by making it both relevant and enjoyable. Children are taught that Mathematics is a lifelong skill that includes understanding and being able to use numbers, working with shape and collecting and using data. Through whole class teaching, group and individual work, pupils develop mathematical skills, knowledge and language. They are taught strategies for mental calculation and written methods of recording. Children are given opportunities to practice and apply their mathematical skills in a variety of situations including real life and problem solving scenarios. Learning takes place through regular practice of skills, written and practical tasks, games and the use of ICT.

Science

Science involves understanding and exploring the world and the way in which things work. At St Francis, we encourage children to develop their sense of awe and wonder in the world as part of God’s creation. Through our Christian ideals children are encourage to become

caring people who respect living things and the non-living environment. Science is taught both discretely and as part of the topic based approach so that knowledge and skills are taught with continuity and progression. Children are encouraged to develop their skills of observation, prediction and questioning. Scientific skills are practiced through investigations and practical work where children will often work in small groups. Use is made of the school's outdoor environment, such as woodland and pond areas, to support real life scientific investigation.

“At St Francis I can achieve things I never thought I could” (pupil)

Computing

Children are taught a well balanced blend of skills in word processing, data handling, measurement and control. As well as learning specific skills, pupils have the opportunity to apply them in other areas of the curriculum. The school's networked ICT suite is well used by all classes and by small groups and individuals. Use of the internet is supervised and cipherring software provides additional protection; it is also made clear to children that responsible use of the internet is expected. All classes have an interactive whiteboard and there is a bank of laptops that can be used by pupils within a classroom. The school is well equipped with peripheral technological equipment such as programmable toys, listening centres, digital cameras, sensors and camcorders. From September 2014 children will also be introduced to computer programming.

**“You work incredibly hard in lessons and meet the very high expectations demanded of you by your teachers”
(Letter to pupils, Ofsted 2009)**

Foundation Subjects

A topic based approach is used to teach children skills and knowledge in History, Geography, some Science, DT and Art. This is carefully planned so that children receive a balance and progression of content and skills as they progress through the school. Thus some topics will have History focus and others a Geography focus, for instance. Children are given the opportunity to practice their English and Mathematical skills through topic based activities. Activities are planned to challenge, promote independence, encourage creativity and to be fun. Real life experiences, trips out and visitors to school are used to support learning. Children are helped to learn with each other and from each other.

Music, Art and Drama

We are a creative school and enjoy music, art and drama which are woven through the curriculum and support the prayer life of the school. A visitor to the school will see children's work colourfully displayed in corridors and classrooms, some form of dance or drama being practiced and will hear music whether it be singing or the playing of a musical instrument.

Art and music skills are taught to all children and they are given many opportunities to apply these in a cross-curricular way.

Assemblies, masses and other liturgical celebrations all include dance, drama and music with every child having a turn. Christmas productions, a Spring Concert and a year 6 end of year play are regular parts of the school calendar. Children take part in music and dance festivals with other schools. The school has a choir which sings at school and parish events and sometimes in the local community. As part of the Local Authority's Wider Opportunities scheme, older pupils learn a musical instrument as a whole class. Peripatetic music teachers offer lessons for small groups of key stage 2 pupils in violin, guitar and flute. There is a charge for these lessons in violin, guitar and flute.

“St Francis is a home where I can achieve my hopes and dreams” (pupil)

Modern Foreign Languages

Learning the basics of a Modern Foreign Language is introduced at Key Stage 2 with French being taught at St Francis. In addition, there is an after-school French language club for which there is a small charge.