

St Francis Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109239
Local Authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	324927
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Curtis

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin O'Neill
Headteacher	Caroline Hostein
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 September 2005
School address	Station Road Nailsea North Somerset BS48 4PD
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress and 104 questionnaires returned by parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How successfully the school is narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' writing, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- The impact of strategies to raise standards in mathematics in Years 3 to 6
- The impact of 'Curriculum Redesign' (the school's term for revising its curriculum to be more creative and making more effective links between subjects) on outcomes for pupils
- The quality of pupils' cultural and multicultural understanding and how well community cohesion is promoted via national links in the United Kingdom.

Information about the school

This is an average size primary school, with one class in each year group from Reception through to Year 6. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, mostly in speech, language and communication, is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is well below average. The headteacher has been in post since September 2008. During the inspection, a supply teacher covered the absence of the deputy headteacher in Year 6. In Year 4, one of the two job-share teachers had been in the school for just seven working days. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Reception teacher has been in post since January 2009.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This school is a vibrant learning community full of happy and well-motivated pupils. Their incredible hard work in lessons together with the highly effective teaching are the key reasons why pupils' achievement is outstanding. A significant strength is the way in which pupils work in collaboration with each other. For example, in a science lesson in Year 6, linked to an investigation on gravity, pupils worked very effectively in teams, including mixed-gender groupings. The quality with which they listen to and value each other's views is a prime example of their very high speaking and listening skills. Pupils make outstanding progress from the day they start school which contributes to the high standards achieved year on year, but particularly at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. The high standards are evident not only in English, mathematics and science, but in most other subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT), art and design and geography. Importantly, pupils use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills successfully in other subjects.

Managers in school are quick to identify any relative drop in performance by pupils. In the 2008 National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 6, for example, results in mathematics were not as high as in previous years. Immediate action was taken to analyse the reasons behind this. As a result, teachers identified the need to provide greater support for pupils of average to below average ability. Evidence from the inspection and the school's own tracking data indicate strongly that the actions taken by the school are proving successful. Staff are very accurate in identifying the school's strengths and areas for improvement through careful analysis. This is reflected in accurate, albeit slightly cautious, views on the school's relative strengths. The school shows excellent capacity for further improvement.

The school also identified that boys were not doing as well as girls in writing, despite the fact that boys in the school outperform boys nationally. The result of this analysis led to the introduction of 'Curriculum Redesign' which had an immediate and tangible impact on improving boys' writing because they see the relevance of what they are asked to write. For example, in Year 5, boys are engaged and motivated in writing newspaper front pages linked to their science work on Earth and Space. The opportunity to write reports under headlines, such as 'Alien Invasion', really captured their enthusiasm and imagination.

Children make a great start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development and this

underpins positive attitudes and exemplary behaviour. Parents are delighted with the way their children are prepared for and welcomed into the Reception class. Currently, however, the outdoor learning area is too small and this restricts opportunities for the free flow of activities from indoors to outdoors.

Pupils' enjoyment is evident no matter where you are in the school. Attendance is excellent. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. They are thoughtful, caring and very mature young people who are prepared very well both socially and academically for secondary education. While pupils have a deep understanding of their local and international community, their understanding of the ethnic diversity of other schools and communities in the United Kingdom is, as yet, underdeveloped.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' awareness of the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom through developing links with other schools and institutions that have greater ethnic diversity.
- Increase the size of the outdoor learning area for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that there can be a greater free flow of activities between indoors and outdoors.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Outcomes are outstanding overall. Standards are very high as shown in National Curriculum assessments and tests over the last few years. A key strength seen in all lessons is the level of sustained concentration and perseverance shown by pupils when working. They are highly motivated to succeed. In particular, they respond well to high quality challenges from teachers and very effective questioning by teaching assistants. As a result, progress in lessons is excellent. In Year 1, for example, by the end of the lesson on magnetism, pupils understood and explained the terms, 'attract' and 'repel'. In a French lesson in Year 3, pupils made rapid progress in learning 'colours' because the range of activities held them spellbound. Evidence from the inspection, including the school's own tracking data, shows that standards continue to be above average across many subjects. In lessons, boys and girls contribute equally to discussion. There is a significant strength in group work where pupils work effectively in teams. Mixed-gender teams are the norm and pupils are skilled at negotiating roles and responsibilities. In Year 6, during a practical investigation on gravity, there was real harmony because everyone knew and performed their role within each group admirably.

Whether in the classroom, playground, hall or around the school, pupils are smiling, exceptionally polite and well mannered and very keen to engage in conversation, especially with inspectors! Both the school council and the Year 6 group who met the inspectors were articulate and confident in answering questions. A striking feature is the pupils' enjoyment of school. This is a key contributor to their outstanding achievement and high standards. They feel totally safe in school and show high

levels of care when handling equipment in practical lessons. They have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. The school council plays an important role in the day-to-day life of the school by managing the budget for playground equipment. Pupils have very strong links with the local community and, during the inspection, many were genuinely moved during an assembly which focused on their support for a local hospice. Prayers written and read by members of Year 6 reflected a deep spiritual awareness. In Year 4, pupils are heavily involved in the national consultation process over whether a barrage to generate electricity from tidal power should be built across the River Severn. As a result, they have a very strong awareness of environmental issues.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

High quality teaching which engages and motivates pupils helps ensure the high standards achieved. Lessons are well planned and pupils understand links in learning because teachers refer to previous lessons and to what will happen next. For example, in Year 6, pupils knew that following their science lesson on gravity, there was to be an ICT lesson in which they would use a spreadsheet to input and analyse the data from the results of their experiments. Teachers' exceptionally high expectations help ensure that pupils work hard in lessons and produce work of a very high standard. Pupils settle immediately to their work and consistently give of their best. Teachers and teaching assistants provide excellent support for groups and/or individual pupils in order to maximise learning. In particular, teaching assistants are skilled in asking questions which make pupils think and have to explain their answers rather than just give a 'yes' or 'no'.

Pupils' work is marked diligently and pupils say that it is helpful because it tells them how they can improve their work. Termly assessments are used effectively to identify any potential underachievement by individuals or groups. Where potential

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

underachievement is identified, support is put into place immediately. A vibrant and stimulating curriculum motivates and engages pupils, with the result that standards are high in many subjects. The quality of curriculum enrichment, together with a wide range of extra-curricular activities, helps both pupils' progress and attainment. They are prepared to go the 'extra mile', for example members of the netball team acted as ball girls in a tournament at Team Bath.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher recognises the many strengths of the school evident in the previous inspection report and in the trend of high standards in National Curriculum tests and assessments. She has already gained the support of staff, pupils and parents who are behind her as the school continues to evolve. The headteacher has reinforced the very strong team ethos and managed a period of staffing instability very effectively. Parents of pupils in Year 6 were especially pleased with a meeting they had with the headteacher and the supply teacher, which allayed concerns they had in relation to the continuity in their children's education. The headteacher, with excellent support from staff, has quickly remedied areas of underperformance, such as the relative decline in standards in mathematics in 2008.

Governors are hard working and very supportive. They take their monitoring roles seriously and provide constructive feedback following their visits to the school. They challenge the school and are aware of areas of relative underperformance. They have supported staff in the very successful strategies to tackle and remedy the gap between boys' and girls' standards in writing, and the relative underperformance in mathematics. Governors ensure the school works closely with the local community and the wider internationally community, especially in regard to working with other churches. They have not been sufficiently challenging of the school in relation to its links with the wider ethnic diversity of communities within the United Kingdom.

Links with parents are strong. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, parents feel they have a really good understanding of what their children will be learning each term. In Years 3 to 6, parents are not as confident that this information is available to them. Parents value the formal meetings to discuss their children's progress, but are equally pleased that the school has an 'open-door' policy which means they may discuss immediate concerns with teachers.

The school complies fully with all statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils. Health and safety checks, together with rigorous risk assessments, mean that pupils are secure and safe in school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start school with standards in line with or slightly above those expected for their ages. As the result of good provision, they settle quickly and happily into the day-to-day routines of school life. By the time they enter Year 1, the majority meet or exceed expected standards in all six areas of learning. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is outstanding and from this early age children are prepared exceptionally well for transfer into Year 1. They benefit from the excellent example set by older pupils and very high expectations from their teacher and teaching assistant. Teaching is good, especially the teaching of letters and sounds, problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. In their knowledge and understanding of the world, children showed good skills in using ICT to write captions (in full sentences) to go with their 'pirate' pictures. Through themes, such as 'pirates', boys are motivated and show a real enthusiasm to write. As a consequence, there is real progress in closing the gap between boys' and girls' writing when they start Year 1, with the result that there is no significant difference between boys and girls in the current Reception class.

Children enjoy role play and, currently, the 'Garden Centre' is proving to be a great hit, with children enthusiastically planting seeds and 'potting out' young plants in the secure covered courtyard. The 'Garden Centre' even has a restaurant, where the headteacher is regularly served coffee and tasty treats! Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Recent changes have been positive and build on the previous good practice by strengthening development to comply with the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework. There is a sense of frustration that the restricted space for outdoor learning impedes ideas and enthusiasm to really extend the free flow of activities from indoors to outdoors.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2

Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
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Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents who returned questionnaires are very supportive of the school. Many wrote positively about the school and its work. One typical example is, 'The school provides a "wholeness" of education, combining sound academic teaching with Christian values and approach to life.' Another example is, 'I feel very fortunate that we have such a fantastic school and positive, praising teachers on our doorstep.' Inspection evidence endorses such views. There were a very few parents who ticked the 'sometimes' boxes on the questionnaires, mainly in relation to the quality of communication between home and school. Inspection evidence shows that a few parents are not sure about the school's homework policy and would like more information as to what their children will be learning each term, particularly in Years 3 to 6.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School, Nailsea BS48 4PD

On behalf of Mrs Wilkinson and myself, I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. We were delighted to meet so many of you, including the school council and those of you in Year 6 who met with us at lunchtime. I am delighted to tell you that you go to an outstanding school, although I have a feeling that perhaps you, and your parents, know that already.

There are so many wonderful things in your school that they are too numerous to mention. These are the ones that really stood out:

- The standard of work you produce in so many subjects, including English, mathematics, science and ICT, is high and much better than for many children of your age.
- Your behaviour is excellent and the way you work so successfully in teams is impressive.
- You work incredibly hard in lessons and meet the very high expectations demanded of you by your teachers.
- You genuinely enjoy learning and the very exciting range of things you can do both in and out of lessons.
- Your headteacher and all other teachers, teaching assistants, staff and governors want you to achieve your very best – and you do!

While your school is outstanding, inspectors always encourage schools to try to be even better. From our findings, we have asked the school to:

- Give you a greater understanding of schools and communities in the United Kingdom which have a wide range of pupils from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds.
- Make sure that the youngest children in Reception have more space for their outdoor learning.

Whatever you do, do tell your teachers this part of my letter: we would love to have stayed longer in your wonderful school and with such super young people.

Yours faithfully

David Curtis
Lead inspector

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