

Inspection of St Francis Catholic Primary School

Mill Road, Shelfield, Walsall, West Midlands WS4 1RH

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

St Francis Catholic Primary is a calm school. Pupils behave very well. They respect others and are taught many values based on the faith of the school. From the early years right through to Year 6, pupils are kind to each other and keen to do the right thing. They follow the school's rules. This helps to keep everyone happy and safe, both in class and on the playground.

Bullying is not accepted. Pupils and staff know what it is and what to do were it to happen. Pupils know that staff have high expectations for their behaviour and conduct.

Expectations in English and mathematics are also high. Over time, pupils have done very well in these subjects. In other subjects, the picture is more mixed. Pupils do lots of interesting things in class, work hard and enjoy what they do. However, at times, lessons in some subjects do not focus tightly enough on what pupils need to know and remember.

Staff and leaders are kind, firm and fair. They have improved the school over time and are committed to improving it further. To this end, they ask pupils for their ideas and involve them in many different aspects of school life.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Over time, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have improved. In writing and mathematics, standards are usually high. This is because leaders and staff pay a lot of attention to these subjects. They make sure pupils do lots of work and practice. In the early years, children get a solid grounding in number and letter sounds. This sets them up well for key stages 1 and 2. The school has a consistent, effective approach to teaching reading. Staff promote reading in many different ways. During periods of remote learning, for example, staff made videos of themselves reading stories for pupils to listen to. As pandemic restrictions ease, they have plans to get going again with author visits to the school and other extra activities.

The mathematics curriculum is equally successful. Consequently, most pupils are suitably literate and numerate when they move up to secondary school.

In other subjects, the picture is more mixed. In languages, for instance, the school has just switched from Spanish to French. A scheme of work and resources are in place, although staff and pupils are still getting to grips with these. Subjects including history, science and design and technology are organised and taught through topics. These topics start with a big question, which is designed to make pupils think. Through this approach, pupils do many interesting, thought-provoking and worthwhile things. However, some lessons link different subjects together in unhelpful ways and some subject-specific content gets diluted. Activities keep pupils keen and busy but do not necessarily focus their learning on the right things. In

history, the school covers a lot of extra content. Again, this is not always helpful because some important content is reduced to fit everything in. Having said this, in computing and geography, guidance for staff is clear and well organised. Both subjects are taught regularly and the knowledge to be taught is clearly defined and well sequenced.

Senior leaders and governors have established routines for checking on how well pupils are learning. They know that they need to make further changes to the school's curriculum design so that all subjects are equally well planned and sequenced.

The school works with several other professional organisations to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In most cases, this is working well, and pupils are included in all the school does. Where this is not possible, leaders have made some short-term arrangements to manage challenging behaviour.

The disruption caused by the pandemic halted school clubs and extra-curricular activities. These are now beginning to restart. Over the past year, staff found imaginative ways to make up for missing activities. For example, when a Year 6 residential visit to a specialist centre was cancelled, staff organised an overnight stay at school and put on special activities. In addition, pupils get involved in other aspects of school life. By becoming junior eco-warriors, for instance, they learn about how small actions can make a big difference.

Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning and one another are very positive. They develop into mature and considerate young people, who get on well with others.

Staff say that workload is reasonable and that they enjoy their work. Governors are active in their support for their school. They are informed and know what needs to be strengthened further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a thorough approach to safeguarding and safety matters. All staff know how to report concerns. Records show that this is done in a timely way and followed up with the right people. Leaders are well informed about safeguarding risks. They have some excellent ways of sharing and reinforcing important messages, with staff, pupils and parents. This helps adults and pupils to spot risks and supports them to do the right thing if anything worries them.

The school maintains an up-to-date record of employment checks on adults in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to plan next year's curriculum and train staff in how to deliver it, that they are in the process of bringing this about. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied in this case.
- Curriculum guidance in several foundation subjects is not sufficiently clear about the content that pupils need to know and remember. This means that in some subjects, such as history, staff try to cover too much and do not focus enough on what pupils really need to know. In addition, some cross-curricular links between different subjects cause subject-specific content to be diluted. Leaders should review curriculum guidance in several foundation subjects, including history, art and design and design and technology. They should do this to make sure that the right knowledge is taught in the right order and in sufficient depth so that pupils learn and remember the right things.
- Some subject leaders are further ahead in their leadership roles than others. Leaders should continue to support subject leaders to develop and improve their checks on learning. Governors should ensure that their routine checks on the school's work include gathering feedback about the progression of knowledge in foundation subjects.
- Short-term arrangements to support a small number of pupils with SEND are not ideal, which limits aspects of their school experience. Leaders should work with the local authority to find more satisfactory support and solutions.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	104239
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10211996
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Gough
Headteacher	Dawn Richards
Website	www.st-francis-p.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Francis is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school. It does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, the inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, science, languages and history. In these subjects, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work. The inspectors also looked at the curriculum in other subjects, including computing, geography, art and design, music and design and technology, in less detail to check how they were organised and taught.

- The inspectors noted 2019 performance data about the school and looked at school documents. These included information about behaviour, the curriculum, attendance, governance and improvement planning. They also checked the school's website.
- The inspectors asked pupils, staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements and safety routines. The lead inspector examined the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records.
- The inspectors watched pupils' behaviour in class, at lunchtime, on the playground and at other times during the day. They also observed the pupils at a hymn practice and going to Mass on Ash Wednesday.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, governors, school staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with an external consultant and a representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors talked informally with pupils and staff to gather general information about school life. In addition, they took account of the responses to Ofsted's surveys of staff's, pupils' and parents' views. An inspector spoke with parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Hughes

Ofsted Inspector

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