

# St Francis Special School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	120755
<b>Local Authority</b>	LINCOLNSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	313732
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alan Lemon

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	100
6th form	35
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Alan Goulding
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Ann Hoffmann
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Wickenby Crescent Ermine Estate Lincoln LN1 3TJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01522 526498
<b>Fax number</b>	01522 569128

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

All of the pupils have statements of special educational need and their learning difficulties and disabilities are very varied. The majority have a physical disability (PD) and some have medical conditions. The next significantly sized group are those with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Among the many other identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities are pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and sensory impairments. Pupils are very largely from White British backgrounds. Attainment on entry is very varied but mainly it is very low compared to all pupils of a similar age. There are a small number of pre-school children on roll in the Foundation Stage and 35 post-16 students on roll in the further education department. A small number of pupils are on the roll of both a mainstream school and St Francis, which enables them to attend classes at both schools.

There is boarding provision for up to 18 pupils. These pupils board at the school for a various number of nights during the week in term time depending on their individual programmes. Boarding provision was inspected by Ofsted in January 2008. The local authority's Early Intervention Team and Team Around the Child are based in the school. The school has achieved the Investor in People standard. It also has the Healthy School Award, Basic Skills Quality Marks for primary and secondary and the Inclusion Quality Mark. It is pursuing the Careers Mark and has very recently submitted an application for Specialist Special School Status in the areas of physical and sensory provision.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Francis Special School is outstanding in every respect. The school has a well-established reputation locally as a centre of excellence. The previous inspection produced a very positive report and the improvement since then has been considerable. This is the result of excellent leadership and management throughout the school. The very clear direction of the headteacher and her senior team maintains the school on a very firm footing and with a strong flow of improvements. Self-evaluation is accurate as the school knows itself extremely well. It has an excellent capacity for further improvement. This is strengthened by the exceptional support and guidance of governors who provide a great deal of experience and expertise in managing the school and have a first-hand view of the strength of its provision and pupils' welfare.

Strong, committed, sharply focused leadership is infectious, permeating all of the work of the school. The very substantial staff team are completely united in their mission to promote pupils' achievement, personal development and preparation for the future. They are exceptionally well-equipped with the wide range of expertise required to accomplish this aim and do so with remarkable success. The care, guidance and support for pupils is outstanding in meeting their very varied needs. Provision in the Foundation stage, further education department and in boarding is exceptional. The curriculum is outstanding in providing a variety of learning opportunities that suit the very widely varying needs of pupils. Activities are planned really well so that all pupils are engaged and interested by their work. A comprehensive range of partnerships including support agencies, schools, colleges, businesses, the community and parents complement the school's work. The school also plays a very effective part in supporting PD pupils in mainstream schools by sharing their expertise and allowing some of these pupils to attend classes at St Francis. A multitude of parents are in no doubt as to the excellence of the school in meeting their children's needs. Their comments overflow with praise and many describe how their children have, much more than could have been expected, blossomed, matured and become independent.

Pupils' personal development and well being are outstanding. They have exceptionally good attitudes to school, behave exceptionally well and tackle confidently the many essential challenges with which school presents them. Their very well-informed views on healthy living and staying safe ensures they are really sensible in looking after themselves and each other. They thoroughly enjoy school and, largely as a result of this, are very keen to contribute in school and beyond in a great many ways.

Pupils throughout the school achieve exceptionally well because staff deal most effectively with all their barriers to learning. The successful combination of excellent provision in school and opportunities developed through partnerships with schools and colleges mean pupils of all capabilities are being stretched to very good effect. The highest attaining Key Stage 4 pupils and post-16 students attending mainstream school classes, gain passes at GCSE and A level in a good number of subjects each year. More generally, pupils make excellent progress in acquiring basic life skills, improving their capacity for independence and gaining vocational skills and qualifications. As a result, they are exceptionally well prepared for the future and the outstanding quality of teaching and learning makes a significant contribution to this. Teachers and their assistants are highly skilled and work amazingly well together. Their assessments of pupils' needs and progress are very thorough. A substantial amount of data from tests and assessment is collected to keep track of every pupils' progress. However, there is some mismatch between

the analysis from data and pupils' actual progress, which is often more accurately represented in teachers' records and pupils' records of achievement.

### **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

#### **Grade: 1**

Students' achievement is exceptional in preparing for leaving school. They all gain qualifications from a wide choice of courses including the National Skills Profile, GCSE and A-level subjects. Students' success is the result of their extremely positive attitudes to learning and to the outstanding teaching in the further education department. Students are happy, self-assured individuals with a sharp focus on working hard and achieving. They derive great benefit from the very high expectations set by staff and the expertly planned work in every lesson. Outstanding leadership and management has ensured the curriculum is broad and very relevant to students' needs. Their very wide range of ability is catered for superbly, through strong links with local schools and colleges in particular. Work related learning, vocational skills and independence are prominent strands in students' learning opportunities. In addition, there are a great many other interesting and exciting activities giving enjoyment and promoting students' social and cultural development. The further education department has its own excellent accommodation with a distinctive ethos reflecting students maturity.

### **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

#### **Grade: 1**

Children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage and make outstanding progress. Teachers and their assistants are extremely committed to children's well-being and have substantial expertise in meeting their needs. The teamwork of staff is exceptional and teaching and learning are outstanding. Thorough assessment is used very effectively to plan programmes for each child. This includes all areas of learning, with a strong emphasis on communication and physical development. Children love achieving house points and are thrilled by reaching targets and as a consequence being rewarded. Parents are delighted with their children's progress and the care they receive. There is superb communication with parents and with others involved in supporting the children. Partnerships are extremely effective in promoting children's progress and securing a very high quality of care.

### **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

#### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 8**

The leadership and management of the boarding provision is very strong. Boarding is integrated thoroughly into the school's aims and makes an outstanding contribution towards pupils' achievement and personal development. Ofsted's recent inspection of boarding provision judged it to be good with some outstanding features. The Head of Care has made good progress on dealing with all of the recommendations from that inspection. Care staff know boarders extremely well as a result of the thorough assessment of their needs and the close links with parents and support agencies. Activities in boarding hours are carefully planned to promote pupils' independence and these are linked with an accredited like skills course. Pupils have a good deal of say in their leisure activities. They have a wide range of interesting and challenging options that contribute significantly to developing their self-confidence and social skills.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Review the methods of analysing pupils' progress and ensure that all the data collected provides an accurate account of pupils' performance.

## Achievement and standards

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The staff's very substantial knowledge and expertise in the range of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities are put to very effective use and result in all pupils achieving exceptionally well. The rate of progress from Foundation Stage through to the further education department is outstanding. This is the result of lively, expert teaching throughout the school which really engages pupils and makes them very keen to succeed and work as hard as they can. The considerable care taken to ensure pupils have the most appropriate resources for learning supports their progress. Simple and very sophisticated electronic aids are used extremely effectively by pupils and this contributes enormously to their rate of progress, particularly in their ability to communicate. Pupils make excellent progress in lessons because work is so well matched to their very different capabilities. The standards pupils attain reflect their very different capabilities although, overall, standards, compared to all pupils of the same age, are very low because of pupils' significant learning difficulties. By following a wide choice of pathways, pupils in Key Stage 4 and in the further education department achieve substantial individual success from acquiring basic skills and independence to Entry Level Certificates, GCSE and A levels in a wide range of subjects.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Social development is underpinned by pupils' impressive gains in communication, mobility and independence skills. Pupils love school, attendance is good and behaviour is excellent. They are exceptionally tolerant of individual differences, and relationships between pupils and with staff are outstanding. The celebration of pupils' achievements raises their self-esteem and the house points system fosters very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils have a strong voice and influence on school life, particularly through the school council, and take seriously their many responsibilities. Recycling, raising funds for charities, acting as 'buddies', entertaining the local community and school council work are among the many contributions that they make. Pupils acknowledge that they adopt much healthier lifestyles than they used to because it has such a high profile in school. They feel very safe in school and have a thorough understanding of safety matters. Because they improve their basic skills so effectively, get on very well with others, and develop realistic aspirations for the future, pupils are very well prepared for leaving school.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Teachers and their substantial teams of support assistants are very experienced and effective in meeting pupils' needs. Their rapport with pupils is excellent which means that pupils of all capabilities settle quickly in lessons and engage in learning. Lessons are planned with close attention to detail, particularly in matching work to each pupil's abilities. As this spans the earliest stages of learning and GCSE level work within some groups, planning is a considerable achievement. Furthermore, work is challenging and interesting, involving pupils deeply in activities as diverse as exploring the characters in a Shakespeare play and scientific investigation of the different characteristics of soils. Learning resources are of very good quality and carefully selected, promoting especially the progress of the least able pupils across the school. Excellent use is made of a wide range of information and communication technology in this respect. Assessment is thorough and used well to identify targets for pupils and to adapt the curriculum to their needs.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The school provides an outstanding range of learning experiences promoting pupils' academic and personal development. A thorough knowledge of pupils' needs and aspirations support a highly individualised approach to planning work and activities. Pupils particularly appreciate the school's flexible approach to planning their work that enables examinations to be taken when pupils are ready. Moreover, staff provide opportunities to develop a wide range of life skills from travelling independently to driving. This demonstrates the provision for communication, mobility and the development of independence skills which is a key strength of the school. There is excellent enrichment through a wide range of clubs, visits, visitors, residential journeys, themed days and a summer school. Boarding provision is used very effectively to extend social and independence skills. Partnerships with a wealth of other establishments and places of work enable the school to provide opportunities in mainstream schools, a range of suitable courses and accreditation and a very good number of vocational experiences in a wide variety of workplaces.

### Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Parents are delighted with the excellent care provided. One wrote that the challenges faced by the school in meeting her child's complex needs had 'never diminished the staff's enthusiasm for trying new ideas.' Staff work very constructively with a broad range of agencies and professionals to ensure that pupils have the help and support they need. Pupils are full of praise for the help that they are given. They are treated with great respect and health and safety matters have a high profile. The support for pupils who need help in communicating is quite exceptional. No stone is left unturned in the quest for a suitable means of communication. As

a result many strategies and technologies are tried and tested until a suitable solution is found. The expertise of speech and language therapists is used very well in supporting pupils with such difficulties. Pupils' progress is carefully and frequently reviewed, and staff ensure that pupils are aware of their personal targets and how well they are progressing towards them. Good quality guidance enables pupils to consider suitable future options and form realistic future aspirations.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher leads the school confidently and is totally committed to meeting pupils' needs as effectively as possible. The school is fully supported by the governors' significant contribution to its direction and improvement. They take a very active interest in the work of the school and in pupils' welfare. The school's provision is constantly and rigorously evaluated and this contributes significantly to setting the appropriate priorities for improvement. Monitoring and a substantial programme of staff training ensure teaching and learning are of the highest quality. A substantial amount of data on pupils' performance is gathered using a variety of tests and through assessments tracking progress over time. However, the analysis carried out of the data is not providing a complete picture of pupils' performance and in some instances fails to register the substantial progress pupils have made.

The headteacher's vision is shared by all staff with the result that leaders throughout the school perform outstanding roles in managing and improving the work of the school, the Foundation Stage, further education department and boarding provision, in particular. Staff expertise is used very effectively to support the parents of pupils and mainstream schools who have pupils with physical disabilities.



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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Special School, Lincoln LN1 3TJ

Many thanks to you all for your warm welcome, interest and helpfulness when we visited recently to inspect your school. We also want to extend a special thanks to those pupils who met with an inspector to share their views of your school.

It did not take us long to find out that your school is outstanding. This is because:

- your headteacher and all of the staff have done a fantastic job of providing you with a first class education
- all of the staff really impressed us with their expertise and hard work in helping you learn and make progress
- you are making really outstanding progress in gaining the skills, independence and qualifications that will give you every chance of success when you leave school
- you are keen and confident enough to cope well with the everyday demands of life
- you behave very well and keep yourself and each other safe
- there are lots of activities, clubs in particular, which help you enjoy school, stay fit and healthy
- you are always helpful in school and contribute wherever and whenever you can.

You have played an important part in your school being really excellent. You have contributed many good ideas through the school council on how to make it even better. There is not a lot we are recommending to your headteacher to improve your school. However, we have said the school should review how it uses information about your progress to ensure it is as accurate and helpful as possible.

We both wish you all the very best for the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector