

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104804
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	377130
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2012
Lead inspector	Margot D'Arcy

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J Connelly
Headteacher	M Matthews
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Margot D'Arcy
Drew Crawshaw

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons taught by eight teachers. They made shorter visits to intervention sessions led by teaching assistants for pupils with special educational needs and/or pupils who need additional support with aspects of their work. Meetings were held with five groups of pupils, school staff, the vice-chair of the governing body, a parent and two representatives of the local authority. Inspectors listened to groups of pupils read and evaluated a range of pupils' work. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and evaluated a range of documents. These included school self-evaluation and improvement plans, monitoring reports, the school's assessments of pupils' attainment, safeguarding documents and the headteacher's reports to the governing body. They attended one assembly. Inspectors analysed 36 questionnaires from parents and carers and others completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Currently there are no disabled pupils; the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. Early Years Foundation Stage provision comprises one part-time Nursery class and a Reception class.

The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics. It holds a number of awards, including Investors in People, Sport England Active Mark, Becta information and communication technology (ICT) accreditation and the Primary Enterprise Learning Award.

The school has been part of the local authority's Raising Achievement Programme since the summer of 2009. Since the previous inspection the school has experienced a number of staffing issues. The current headteacher took up her appointment in September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement in reading, writing and communication.

- Pupils' achievement in English is inadequate. By the end of Year 6 standards of attainment in reading and writing are lower than average and too many pupils, including children whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and those with special educational needs, have not made the expected progress. In the autumn term of 2011 the school identified this as a key priority. As a result of the action taken so far improvements are evident, but consistently good practice in the teaching of reading, writing and communication is not yet embedded fully across the school.
- All pupils are achieving well in mathematics. This is due to consistently good teaching of this subject and the provision of a stimulating curriculum that captures pupils' interest, gives them plenty of opportunity for practical work, to solve problems and to apply what they have learned to real-life situations.
- Teaching is satisfactory. However, there are differences in the quality of teaching between English and mathematics. Mathematics is taught well but in English the quality of teaching varies. Some good and outstanding teaching of English was observed during the inspection, but in some classes opportunities are missed to promote reading, writing and communication skills. The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is inconsistent.
- Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous to visitors. They say that they feel safe in school and generally get on well together. In lessons, pupils work together amicably and show respect to teachers and other adults. The majority of parents and carers feel that behaviour is good and that the school deals effectively with any rare cases of bullying.

- The headteacher is a driving force for improvement. Since her appointment she has dealt successfully with some significant staffing issues and strengthened the quality of teaching. Most senior leaders and managers are developing their roles effectively, as are subject leaders. Together with the school's success in improving pupils' achievement in mathematics, this shows that the school has the capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' learning and progress so that it is consistently good or better in reading, writing and communication by:
 - improving the quality of teaching of reading, writing and communication so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school
 - ensuring a consistent, effective approach to the teaching of phonics, particularly through the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, including from support staff who lead intervention groups or listen to pupils read
 - ensuring that the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills is promoted across the curriculum by all staff
 - ensuring that literacy lessons and resources stimulate pupils' interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment of reading and writing
 - ensuring that there are sufficient professional development opportunities to enable all teaching and support staff, to teach reading, including systematic phonics, writing, speaking and listening accurately and well
 - ensuring that the literacy subject leader plays a more significant role in improving the school's provision and pupils' achievement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' attainment in English is lower than average and pupils do not make the progress expected. By contrast, attainment in mathematics is better than average. The 2011 unvalidated test results and pupils' current work and skills show that the gap between attainment and progress in English and mathematics has widened. It was the equivalent of nearly two terms behind the national average in English but a term ahead in mathematics. Significant improvement in attainment in mathematics, including at the higher Level 5, has occurred in response to the school's concerted effort to raise achievement in this subject following a year-on-year decline. Conversely, the 2011 test results in English reflected a sharp decline in attainment and progress in both reading and writing following a gradual improvement. Pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and those with special educational needs did not achieve as well as other pupils in the school or the same groups nationally; in mathematics pupils from these groups often achieved as well as other pupils in the school and much better than pupils in the same groups nationally. Nevertheless, the school has had some success in narrowing the gap between the performance of these different groups of pupils in English. Raising achievement in English was identified as a key priority last term and improvements are beginning to occur. However, while good and better teaching of reading and writing in some classes is enabling pupils to overcome previous underachievement, in other classes learning and progress are still not rapid enough to ensure pupils achieve as well as they should by the time they leave Year 6.

By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment in reading has generally been assessed as above average. However, after implementing a more rigorous assessment system last year, the school assessed attainment in reading by the end of Key Stage 1 as low. While inspection evidence reflects a more positive picture for the current Year 2 pupils, not all pupils, including weaker readers, have a secure understanding of letter sounds and how to blend these to read. Weaknesses in pupils' understanding and application of phonic skills are evident in other year groups. By the end of Year 6 attainment in reading is below average.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage staff provide some good opportunities to develop children's literacy skills. For instance, Nursery children listened very carefully to musical excerpts and the sounds made by instruments. In trying to describe these, the teacher extended their spoken language well. Reception children enjoy books, learning about letter sounds and experimenting with writing in role-play, for example in the class 'Chinese Restaurant'. From starting points that are mostly below age-related expectations on beginning Nursery and Reception, the children thrive in the exciting environment and develop very good attitudes to school. They make mostly good progress in developing early literacy and numeracy skills and develop well personally, socially and emotionally.

Lessons and pupils' work shows that throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, all groups of pupils make good progress in mathematics. Pupils are eager to take on challenges and solve problems. A notable number of pupils in Years 5 and 6 are working at levels higher than those expected for their age. Learning and progress in lessons and activities focusing upon improving reading, writing and communication skills vary. Some pupils make good progress and develop skills in writing in different genres, such as poetry, recounts and argumentative writing. Others do not make enough progress because work is insufficiently challenging, the pace of learning is too slow and phonic skills are not always taught well enough or often enough. The quality of learning and progress in literacy-based intervention activities is mostly good. Pupils from minority ethnic groups progress at least as well as others in mathematics and English. Pupils who are at an early stage of learning English make good progress in English language acquisition.

The views of most parents and carers reflect that they are happy with how their children are achieving. While inspection findings confirm parents' and carers' views of good achievement in mathematics they show that pupils are not achieving well enough in English.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching seen in lessons and activities during the inspection ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. However, this has not always been the case and past weaknesses led to underachievement. Teaching has improved, particularly in mathematics where it is now consistently good. While most parents and carers are happy with the quality of teaching their children receive, inspection evidence shows that although improved teaching has raised achievement in mathematics, in English the quality is variable. Pupils' workbooks reflect this variability, as do pupils' views about what teaching is typically like in English and mathematics and how well they learn and enjoy work in these subjects.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, the best teaching, including in English, is characterised by a brisk pace, challenging activities, teachers' high expectations for work and behaviour, interesting content and good use of humour to engage pupils. In these lessons pupils show unwavering interest, are keen to contribute their views and discuss work with their friends; they cannot

wait to begin work to show what they can do. During the inspection, examples of good and better teaching that enabled pupils of all abilities to make good progress included:

- writing a 'fast poem' using a formula that reinforced their understanding of grammar and imagery in language, and incorporated good opportunities to discuss language with their friends
- using a story they had written previously to construct a play script reflecting characters, speech, narration and stage directions
- using problem-solving strategies and knowledge of number facts and operations to find fractions of quantities and numbers.

In these lessons, teaching made a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In less effective lessons, teachers talked for too long, which left little time for pupils to write, or rushed their input, missing opportunities to consolidate learning and assess pupils' understanding. Activities with the potential to develop reading and speaking skills were unexploited and letter sounds were mispronounced by some teachers and support staff. Sometimes work was not matched well enough to pupils' needs, which particularly limited the progress of more-able pupils.

Curriculum planning for topic work includes the identification of some good opportunities to promote literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. During the inspection some very good examples of this were seen, for instance when Year 4 pupils wrote arguments for and against recycling. However, in places there is still a preponderance of worksheets which do little to promote literacy skills. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is too variable. Some is of a very high standard and linked to pupils' improvement targets but some is superficial. Comments in pupils' reading records at Key Stage 1 are cursory and do not provide sufficient detail of where improvement is needed. Pupils have targets for numeracy and literacy but, while some know exactly what is needed to reach the next level of attainment, others do not and are unsure of their targets.

Some good adaptations have been made to the curriculum to provide support for lower-attaining pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who are learning to speak English. Support staff generally provide good help for these pupils in small group sessions or in class to enable them to be fully involved in lessons. Some effective use is also made of teaching assistants to promote the progress of more-able pupils in mathematics.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage teaching is mostly good. Ongoing assessments of children's learning inform the planning of activities for individuals and groups and provide effective support to guide staff's intervention in children's play to take learning forward. The indoor environment is highly stimulating and engages children well in a variety of worthwhile learning experiences. Opportunities to learn outdoors are regular and resources reflect potential for learning across all areas. However, the quality of adult intervention to promote children's learning and language development outdoors varies. Some is good, but occasionally adults do not interact sufficiently well with children to extend their vocabulary or move learning on.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' standards of behaviour are good. Pupils say that most of the time behaviour is good and that there is not much bullying or name-calling. They say that they feel safe at school and have confidence in the staff to sort out any behaviour problems that occur. In the

playground play can be boisterous but good-natured and pupils socialise well together. They are well-mannered and have a clear understanding of right and wrong. The majority of parents and carers feel that the standard of behaviour is good and that instances of bullying are dealt with effectively.

During the inspection behaviour in lessons was mostly good. In mathematics lessons and well-taught literacy lessons and topic work, the pupils were captivated and showed very good attitudes to learning. Conversely, in some literacy lessons where teachers talked for too long or the work was not particularly interesting or challenging, pupils' growing lack of interest and enthusiasm was clearly evident, although they were compliant and did not misbehave. In discussions, pupils showed very different attitudes to learning in mathematics and English. Most were clear that they liked mathematics better. Typical comments included 'because it's fun', 'we do lots of different things in maths', 'it's exciting and you always learn something new', 'we play games'. While some pupils expressed a preference for writing stories and reading, many expressed very negative comments about these activities and felt that they did not learn well in them. Nevertheless, most felt sure that behaviour remained good in all lessons. Pupils' books reflect that most take pride in their work and present it neatly.

Pupils' attendance is broadly average and most are punctual. The majority of pupils enjoy school and make a good contribution to it and the wider community. Pupils engage in fundraising events to support various charities and were keen to explain their roles as junior road safety officers and how they are promoting sustainability through recycling. They recount particularly memorable experiences such as visits to the museum in Liverpool, learning about the history of their school and local community, making an advert for a local radio station and podcasts for the school's own radio station. They thoroughly enjoy learning Spanish and are eager to show off their skills in this.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is resolutely focused on improvement. Her introduction of a whole-school tracking system soon after her appointment ensured that staff and governors had a clearer picture of how well pupils were achieving. This has been key in providing greater rigour in assessing pupils' attainment and progress and has underpinned actions for improvement. Her high expectations of staff and astute monitoring of the quality of teaching has led to improvements in teaching.

The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders continue to be developed, reflecting significant strengths in some areas but scope for improvement in others. The deputy headteacher plays a key role in the very good pastoral support provided for pupils and is a good role model for teaching. Similarly, the leadership and management of mathematics, which were a focus for improvement last year, are very strong. The leadership and management of literacy are less effective. Since the need to raise achievement in this subject became a key priority in autumn 2011 the headteacher has assumed many of the responsibilities for planning and monitoring improvements and the impact is already being seen. However, not enough responsibility and accountability for improving provision and pupils' achievement is, as yet, devolved to the subject leader. There has been no significant recent professional development for staff, including support staff, in the teaching of reading and writing. Staff training for teaching phonics occurred some time ago and not all of the staff who are currently teaching pupils to read have received this training.

The curriculum is satisfactory and developing. After a thorough audit in September 2009, some good improvements have occurred. The curriculum for mathematics has improved significantly with a move away from a reliance on structured schemes to the provision of challenging and exciting activities that fascinate pupils and enable them to view mathematics as fun and useful to their everyday lives. Opportunities to better promote literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum have been identified but there are too few planned opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills. There is improved planning for topics across year groups and the introduction of a 'research curriculum' has generated enthusiasm from pupils and provided some good opportunities to develop reading and writing skills. Other improvements to support the raising of achievement in reading and writing, including the redevelopment of the school library, are planned or in the early stages of development. The organisation and implementation of the programme for teaching phonics are not sufficiently rigorous. The school's curriculum and thought-provoking assemblies make a particularly good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils' progress is assessed regularly and assessments are increasingly accurate. This effectively supports the school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities, including those for keeping pupils safe, caring for their well-being and tackling discrimination. Governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses is satisfactory and they are developing skills in challenging the school and holding it to account. School self-evaluation is mostly accurate. Since her appointment the headteacher has been successful in securing improvements in a number of important areas. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and has the necessary capacity to improve.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, St Helens, WA10 1LN

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when we came to inspect your school. We appreciated how you shared your views about your work and what it is like to be a pupil at Holy Cross, and enjoyed listening to some of you read.

It was good to hear how much you enjoy learning Spanish, ICT and working with artists. You should be very proud of the contribution you make to your school, for example by promoting recycling and road safety, and of the fundraising activities you undertake in support of others.

We were impressed with your behaviour and how hard you work in lessons. Many of you said how much you enjoy mathematics. From the mathematics lessons we saw and the work in your books we could see that you are progressing well in this subject. Some of you said that you enjoy reading and writing but it was clear that many of you do not view work in these areas as positively as you do in mathematics. We know that your headteacher and the staff have already identified that they need to do more to help you improve your skills in reading, writing and communication and a good start has already been made. However, we want to be sure that this continues so that you enjoy lessons in English much more and that all of you achieve as well as you should in this subject. Therefore we have given your school a notice to improve. This means that other inspectors will return to your school soon to check on how much improvement is being made.

All of you can help by trying hard with your reading and writing, reading more at home and continuing to behave well and come to school regularly and on time.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Margot D'Arcy
Lead Inspector

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