

Simms Cross Primary School

Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 7QS

Inspection dates 27–28 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough pupils attain national standards in mathematics or English at Key Stages 1 and 2, and too few pupils attain the higher levels in mathematics and English by the time they leave Year 6.
- Although it is closing, the gap in attainment between boys and girls by the time they leave school is still too wide.
- Standards in reading, though improving, are not high enough.
- The quality of teaching overall is good, but in some lessons opportunities are not always provided for the most able pupils to achieve to the best of their ability and to find things out for themselves.
- Although improving, and in spite of the school's continuous drive to reduce absence, attendance is not as good as it could be.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is effectively led and managed by a strong headteacher. Her ambition and determination has resulted in a good improvement in the quality of teaching which is accelerating pupils' progress and raising their attainment. The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and they are polite and respectful towards each other, their teachers and visitors. Their behaviour is good because adults are clear about expected standards and consistently model these.
- The school is fully inclusive. The quality of care and support provided for pupils with autism is exceptional. Pupils are sensitive to each other's needs and all pupils, including those with special educational needs, work very well together.
- Governors are conscientious and committed; they know what the school needs to do to improve and ensure that their training is up to date.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and work hard to make sure that lessons are exciting and stimulating. Many opportunities are provided to enrich learning experiences through visits to places of interest.
- The majority of parents are pleased with the school, that pupils are well behaved, and that their children are safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons; these included two joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and observed small-group-teaching activities.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 and held discussions with pupils from across Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Meetings were held with five governors as well as key school staff including the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, literacy and numeracy coordinators and the manager for the Early Years Foundation Stage. A discussion was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Various documents were scrutinised as part of the inspection: these included the school’s evaluation of its own performance, development plans, teachers’ monitoring files, information about the curriculum, minutes of governing body meetings and those relating to safeguarding, records of behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors analysed the school’s data on pupils’ current progress, evaluated work in pupils’ books and took account of 14 questionnaires completed by staff, pupils’ and parents’ questionnaires and a letter from a parent. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to consider.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Patricia Cole

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. A much larger than average proportion of pupils is eligible for pupil premium funding. This is additional government funding provided for children who are looked after by the local authority, those from armed services families and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and no pupil speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils supported at school action is average and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is more than twice the national average.
- The school manages a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs, catering for up to 14 pupils with autism. There are two bases, one for each key stage. Pupils attend from across the Halton Borough. Pupils spend most of their time in class with their year group in the main school. The school refers to its provision as the Resource Base.
- Since the school's last inspection there have been a number of staff changes and the senior leadership team has been reorganised.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment in English and mathematics so that more pupils reach the expected level by the end of Year 6, and more do better than this, by:
 - developing pupils' higher-level problem-solving skills in mathematics
 - ensuring that all pupils are given as many opportunities as possible to practise and develop their reading skills
 - continuing to reduce the gap between the performance of boys and girls.
- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding across the school by:
 - ensuring that the most able pupils are sufficiently and consistently challenged, and given as many opportunities as possible to take the lead in their learning
 - making sure that all lesson plans and classroom activities are closely matched to pupils' wide range of abilities.
- Improve pupils' overall attendance, so that it is in line with the national average, by working even more closely with parents, ensuring that they are fully aware of the importance of regular attendance and the school's expectations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although improving well, the achievement of pupils still requires improvement because it is not yet as good as that of pupils nationally. Although there has been continuous improvement in the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 6, this is still below the national average.
- Children enter the Nursery class with skills and abilities which are below those expected for their age. They make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal, social, emotional and communication skills and in their language development. Pupils make steady progress through Key Stage 1, albeit with the teacher assessments in 2012 showing a dip in the attainment and progress of Year 2 pupils. Prompt and effective action by leaders has resulted in these pupils, now in Year 3, making more rapid progress and attaining higher standards.
- Although in Key Stage 2 achievement over time requires improvement, an increasing proportion of pupils are making good progress in this key stage.
- In mainstream classes pupils who have special educational needs, including those supported at school action plus and those with special educational needs, receive good support and good teaching which have ensured that the progress and attainment of these pupils compares favourably with similar pupils nationally. Some make better progress than similar pupils nationally.
- Pupils make consistently good progress in the resource base. Examples of outstanding support and guidance for these pupils were seen during the inspection. Their attainment often matches that of other pupils in the school and occasionally exceeds it. This has enabled most of these pupils to work well alongside their peers in mainstream classes for the majority of the lessons.
- Pupils' overall quality of reading is rapidly improving; some of the less confident readers who read for inspectors were able to use their understanding of letters and sounds (phonics) to read unfamiliar words. However, current standards in reading indicate that a lower than average proportion of Year 6 pupils are likely to reach the expected level for their age by the end of this academic year.
- The school is working increasingly well to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils, including boys and girls, and effectively tracks pupils' progress in order to identify any who may be falling behind. They are successfully reducing the gap between the progress of boys and that of girls. The school targets the small-group-teaching activities well and provides good one-to-one reading support and small-group mathematics teaching. This has ensured that boys are now progressing well and catching up on lost ground. During the inspection inspectors confirmed that boys were being taught as skilfully as girls and that both groups were enjoying and participating in lessons to the same extent.
- The success of these strategies is also demonstrated by the current Year 3 pupils who are now making increasingly accelerated progress. This is due to good teaching and the provision of additional small-group support in mathematics, using a new and enjoyable mathematics programme, and also through tailored support with guided reading. However, the good teaching has yet to compensate fully for the previous underachievement of older pupils.
- The attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in mathematics, reading and writing compares favourably with other pupils. This is because pupil premium funding is used wisely to support the same successful strategies as described above, which are raising pupils' achievement. Their performance now matches that of their peers nationally.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now consistently good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and do all they can to ensure that lessons are stimulating and interesting.
- Although few examples of outstanding teaching were observed, the impact of teaching so far this

academic year has been good. Detailed tracking and well-targeted support has ensured that an increasing number of pupils are now making good progress.

- The marking of pupils' work is of high quality. Teachers take time to provide detailed comments indicating what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils say that they often have time at the beginning of lessons to consider teachers' comments and reflect on them.
- Teachers make sure that pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve; during discussions pupils were eager to tell inspectors what they were learning and how their reading and writing has improved.
- In the best lessons, activities progress at a good pace and pupils of all abilities are fully involved. In a Year 1 mathematics lesson pupils came to the front of the class to use the interactive white board to illustrate class members' favourite animals on a pictogram. Some pupils then worked independently to create pictograms on subjects that interested them.
- However, too few opportunities are provided for older pupils to take the lead in their learning and work things out for themselves, and opportunities for involving the most able pupils in problem-solving activities are missed, especially in mathematics. This results in pupils being less confident than they should be when asked to address the whole class or work independently.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are actively involved in a wide range of activities, many of which they choose for themselves. They work well together to investigate the natural world and respond well in small groups when they practise writing their names and drawing out similarities between different letters.
- In a few lessons, activities are not different enough to ensure that all pupils are fully occupied. In such lessons more-able pupils are not fully challenged and less able pupils begin to lose interest. Pupils, especially the older ones, are not always given sufficient opportunities to practise their reading skills.
- Specialist one-to-one support given to pupils in the school resource base enables well-trained teachers and teaching assistants to ensure that those pupils with autism are fully integrated into mainstream classroom activities.
- The school operates a very effective nurture group. In one helpful group session in Key Stage 2 pupils studied different family types. At the end of the session they assessed their feelings and emotions by identifying with characters in various positions on a 'blob tree' before shaking hands and thanking their teacher.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe while using the internet and they are well aware of how cyber-bullying can occur. As one pupil noted, 'We know not to give anyone our address or telephone number and we don't accept text messages from people we don't know'. This reflects the school's strong promotion of safe practices.
- Pupils say that behaviour is good most of the time, that teachers 'sort out' any disputes quickly and that bullying is rare and always dealt with well. The school's records of any bullying and discriminatory behaviour are clear and detail how any infringements of the school's rules should be resolved.
- There is a very positive atmosphere in the school and relationships are strong. Pupils have a high regard both for their classmates and for adults and show high levels of maturity. They understand that all pupils are special and important. This is especially the case in lessons where pupils welcome working alongside classmates who have one-to-one support and may have complex learning needs.
- The school invites visitors into the school to help to develop pupils' understanding of road safety. Year 6 pupils were keen to tell inspectors about their 'bike ability' training and the skills that they had learned from members of Crucial Crew. Pupils were also very proud to inform inspectors that they could place someone in the recovery position and phone the emergency services if necessary.

- The majority of pupils behave well in lessons and have positive attitudes towards learning. Evidence in school documentation, staff questionnaires and the views of pupils and parents indicates that this is typically the case over time.
- The school works tirelessly to make sure that pupils attend school regularly and has well-established procedures to promote good attendance, including a 'traffic light' system which regularly informs parents of their child's attendance record. In addition, the school celebrates good attendance and offers awards and trophies at weekly assemblies.
- Ensuring good attendance presents challenges to the school, which it is increasingly successfully meeting. While attendance is currently below the national average, the school continues to intensify the work it does with parents to ensure that they know that good achievement can only come with good attendance. The school is currently reviewing its attendance policy and is working with a range of partners, including the local authority, to ensure that promoting and ensuring good attendance remains a priority.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, supported by a talented senior leadership team, committed staff and supportive governing body, has worked tirelessly to raise pupils' achievement. She has identified the areas where pupils are underperforming by effectively tracking each pupil in each year group. Actions put in place as a result of the information gained from this tracking have led this year to especially good improvements in the overall performance of pupils in Year 3 and of boys.
- All resource base staff have high expectations of pupils and good leadership and management ensures that pupils achieve to the best of their ability. Parents of children who have special educational needs, spoken to during the inspection, were highly complimentary about the impact the organisation of specialist teaching has had on their children. The school is currently working with the National Autistic Society to gain accredited status and to improve further teachers' skills and understanding of autism.
- The senior leadership team have led a systematic and successful drive to improve the quality of teaching, and have established a set of 'non-negotiables' which set the minimum standards that are expected of all teachers, including setting clear lesson objectives, ensuring that all lessons help pupils to develop their basic skills and ensuring that activities are challenging and appropriate for all learners. These skills are increasingly evident in lessons.
- Good leadership ensures that all teachers focus on raising pupils' achievement and that all targets are linked to the school's priorities as identified in the school development plan. Teachers only move up their pay scale when they have achieved their targets.
- Leaders have a strong commitment to ensuring everyone has equality of opportunity to succeed and is treated fairly. To this end, boys are now achieving much better than they were previously because the school has worked successfully to ensure this is the case. However, staff realise there is still work to do to reduce the achievement gap between boys and girls even further.
- The school has a good working relationship with the local authority which has supported it with staff training relating to effective use of questioning and the assessment of pupils' work. Effective local authority training has enabled senior staff to develop their coaching skills and to share best practice under the guidance of an expert practitioner.
- The school provides a wide and varied curriculum aimed at involving all pupils. Those pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they enjoy mathematics, art and English, as well as topics including ancient Egypt and extreme environments.
- Middle leaders are involved in monitoring pupils' achievement and are becoming increasingly influential in improving the attainment and progress of pupils in all year groups.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by the curriculum, which provides many memorable experiences, and by discussion sessions which focus on feelings and respect. However, pupils' understanding of cultural diversity is not as strong as it could be.

- All statutory policies relating to the safeguarding of pupils are in place and are effective.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors make sure that pupil premium funding is well spent on raising standards for those pupils who are entitled to that support. They check that teaching, including one-to-one support, is effective and that it provides good value for money. Governors receive regular reports on how well teachers are progressing in relation to their targets and ensure that they do not progress up the salary scale unless they achieve these. The governing body actively involves itself in the school's activities and has useful class responsibilities. For example, during the inspection a governor volunteered his time to good effect by working with staff and pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most governors take advantage of training to help them to fulfil their role.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111228
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	405323

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Woodroofe
Headteacher	Lesley Feakes
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2011
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