

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Charles Street, St Helens, Merseyside, WA10 1LN

Inspection dates 27–28 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
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 good school.

- 'We are more focussed in our work now,' said a pupil and another said 'lessons are now fun'. These are accurate descriptions and an indication of the vast improvement the school has made in the last year.
- Pupils, particularly in Year 2 and in Years 4 to 6 make quick progress because they are shown precisely what they need to do to improve. Teaching in these year groups is consistently good and often outstanding.
- Pupils' writing is a strength and is of a very high quality.
- Pupils' standards in reading and in mathematics by the end of Year 6 are above average. Given that pupils start in Nursery with skills that are well below those expected for three- and four-year olds, they make good progress.
- Teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes has improved and is now good.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in most lessons and at break and lunchtimes. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying and of how to stay safe.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- The main reason behind the significant improvement since the previous inspection is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. She is relentlessly focussed on making sure there are no excuses for weak teaching, for slow pupil progress and for any aspect of the school being less than good.
- Governance has improved significantly. Governors have responded well to training and to the high expectations of the headteacher.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching in two year groups requires improvement.
- There are differences in attainment between some groups of pupils.
- Although there has been considerable refurbishment of the school, more needs to be done to provide: a better library, better indoor and outdoor classrooms for Nursery and Reception, and better information and communication technology (ICT).

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 16 lessons in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, history and physical education. An inspector also visited a range of phonics lessons (letters and the sounds they make) to find out how well pupils are taught to read. An inspector observed some sessions where teaching assistants listened to pupils read and a session helping pupils with their grammar in their writing. Inspectors also observed four lessons alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils and spoke to pupils at breaks and lunchtimes. An inspector met with some members of the governing body, teachers who lead subjects and other aspects of the school's work (middle leaders), and met a representative of the local authority.
- There were only four responses to Ofsted's on-line survey (Parent View) so inspectors took into account the 39 responses to the school's own survey of parents.

Inspection team

Allan Torr, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kirsteen Rigby

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is likely to be of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Pupil premium is government money allocated to schools to support the achievement of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are in care and looked after by the local authority, and those pupils whose parents are members of Britain's armed forces. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium at Holy Cross is over a third which is above the national average.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The school works with Pace, a pupil referral unit in St Helens, to provide alternative provision to support a pupil with behavioural difficulties.
- The school provides extra support for pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs (school action). The proportion of pupils at this 'school action' stage is average. The school works with others to provide professional expertise for pupils with special educational needs (school action plus). The proportion of pupils supported in this way is below average.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils with a declared disability or statement of special educational needs.
- The school manages an after-school club which formed part of this inspection.
- In 2012, the school met the floor standards which are the minimum attainment and progress expected of pupils by the government.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Close the gaps in attainment between groups of pupils in each year group and subject by:
 - carefully targeting pupil premium money to improve the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals further so that it matches or exceeds that of non free school meal pupils
 - carefully targeting support and good teaching by all adults to raise the attainment of boys to match that of girls.
- Improve teaching so that it is all at least good by:
 - targeting improvements to the year groups in which teaching is less than good and creating individual teacher action plans for improvement
 - making use of the good and outstanding teaching already in the school
 - making sure the teaching of ICT is at least good and ICT is used well in other areas of the curriculum
 - establishing more opportunities for creative arts in lessons such as art and drama
 - making good use of a refurbished library to develop pupils' reading further
 - refurbishing the indoor and outdoor spaces in Nursery and Reception to improve provision further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Nursery with skills and levels of development, particularly in speaking, that are well below expected levels for three- and four- year olds. They make good progress and leave the Reception class having caught up to where they should be for five-year-olds. In one lesson, Reception pupils made outstanding progress. They sang songs and answered the register in Spanish and German and then walked impeccably to the ICT suite to work on individual mathematics programs. They confidently donned ear phones, located their individual file names and carried on from their previous learning and used the program to build on their own mathematical skills and understanding quickly.
- Pupils make good progress across the school and achieve well. Progress is slightly uneven because it slows in two year groups but then speeds up in Year 2 and Years 4-6. Although standards were below average in 2011, they rose significantly in 2012 to be above average.
- Pupils' writing is a strength. Rarely have the inspectors seen such high-quality, well-presented writing. In one excellent example, pupils reflected and wrote about the impact of the terrorist attack on athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. The structure of the writing, use of vocabulary, and explanations in the paragraphs were outstanding. Similarly, in Year 5, pupils thought about and wrote reflective discussions about whether punishment in Tudor Times was too severe. Again, the structure, presentation, use of vocabulary and writing styles was of extremely high quality.
- For the last two years, in Key Stage 2, boys have made better progress than girls and far better than boys' nationally. In a few classes however, boys' attainment lags behind that of girls.
- Pupils who are supported through pupil premium money make good progress and in 2012 this group made outstanding progress and better than other pupils. The gap between this group and other pupils widened in 2012 in English mainly because non free school meal pupils attained high levels. In a few classes, despite making good progress the pupil premium group of pupils attain slightly lower than other pupils do, but the gap has started to close.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Senior leaders make sure the most skilled teachers and teaching assistants teach the least-able pupils to help them have the best chance of making better progress. Teachers use individual reading support for pupils, targeted support in using grammar for writing, and individual mathematics programmes in the ICT suite to help give personal teaching to pupils. In 2012, pupils with special educational needs made outstanding progress. This is, in part, due to excellent teaching but also because senior leaders and teachers refuse to make excuses for these pupils' lack of progress and expectations for this group are as high as for all other pupils.
- Pupils from Reception to Year 2 learn to read in a progressive way in a dedicated time each morning. They quickly pick up skills in how to read unknown words by breaking the word down into sounds. They make good progress. Pupils read widely and often and have responded well to events such as visiting authors to inspire them to read. One of the reasons why they make such good progress is that adults hear them read frequently. Pupils said they are heard reading at least daily and sometimes twice a day.
- Pupils said that they read at home but there are limited opportunities to take library books home or to extend their range of reading further because of a lack of library facilities at the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and since the monitoring visit in the autumn term. There is still some unevenness and some teaching still requires improvement.
- Teaching in Nursery and Reception has improved. In one example, in the Nursery, all areas of learning were based on developing pupils' skills and understanding about shape. The session was good because all adults were focussed on developing each child's knowledge about different

shapes. Activities inside and outside included making shapes in playdough; writing the names of shapes; using paints to make repeating patterns; using shapes on the computer to make pictures. Pupils could choose the activity and choose to extend their ideas. As a result, children made good progress in their knowledge and understanding about shape. This is an improvement because previously pupils were doing different things and so their learning was disjointed and ad hoc.

- Improvements in the quality of teaching in Nursery and Reception are hampered slightly by the design and layout of the classrooms and outdoor spaces which need refurbishment. In addition, some of the resources, for example, the ICT equipment, need modernising and extending.
- A key feature of better lessons is teachers' very high expectations and high level of pupil activity. Pupils are involved throughout the lesson, they get frequent chances to explain their ideas and their thinking to partners and they complete challenging tasks.
- Also in better lessons, pupils take some ownership and responsibility for their own learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, about plotting points on a grid using co-ordinates, pupils could decide whether they understood the concept well enough to take the most difficult problem-solving activity; whether they needed a little more practice and take a medium level problem-solving activity; or whether they were unsure and needed an easier problem to solve.
- Pupils have the chance to respond to the teachers' marking. In writing for example, teachers indicate where there are spelling or grammatical errors and pupils respond by correcting them. Teachers also sometimes ask them to re-write a section to improve it or to think of some better vocabulary or pose them a further challenge. Pupils, as a consequence, have a detailed understanding of precisely what they need to do to improve each piece of work and are continually challenged to improve.
- Teaching across most subjects is good. In a Year 2 physical education lesson the teaching was outstanding because it enabled pupils to make rapid progress in their sequencing of gymnastic moves; made explicit and well thought-out links to improving pupils' speaking; and enabled pupils to identify and control any risk factors.
- There are, however, some missed opportunities in some lessons to use ICT because of the limitations of having a timetabled computer suite. Pupils said they would like more art and creative lessons such as drama.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In most lessons, pupils behave well. They are polite and responsive to teachers, keen to learn and attentive. Similarly, other adults such as lunchtime staff, teaching assistants and visitors that come to the school indicate that pupils behave well and this is managed well by teachers. In a few lessons however, when the teaching is dull and lacks challenge, pupils are quickly distracted and mess about.
- In a guided reading lesson in Year 5, the teaching was outstanding, pupils were in rapt attention and their excellent behaviour helped them to make rapid progress. The teacher's use of a quiet voice and very positive relationships with pupils created a highly positive atmosphere for learning.
- At break and lunchtimes, pupils are polite to staff, mix and play well together. Girls and boys for example, play football together and support each other.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying and confirmed there is very rarely any intolerant language because of someone's race, sexuality, gender, disability or appearance. Pupils felt safe from cyber-bullying and had a good understanding of how to stay safe when using social networks and new technology.
- Pupils also have a good understanding of how to stay safe, for example by learning about fire safety, water, bicycle, road and rail safety. They also have a good understanding about the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse.
- Pupils' attendance is around the national average and the proportion of pupils who are absent for a large proportion of their education is falling. The school is now working hard to improve punctuality.

The leadership and management are good

- At the helm of and the main driver of the improvements to the school has been the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. She has relentlessly pursued and tackled weaknesses in the school. She accepts no excuses for pupils not making the progress they should and has led from the front in improving the quality of pupils' writing and reading by helping all teachers meet her high expectations.
- There is a very strong link between the appraisal of teachers and their pay. The headteacher makes no apologies for reminding teachers that their salaries are paid for by tax-payers and for holding them to account for the quality of their teaching. The performance management system, however, is supportive and teachers have opportunities to be trained, work alongside others, observe other teachers and get advice about how to improve. Many of the teachers are new to teaching and are open to advice from others and are self-critical and keen to learn.
- The local authority has provided effective support and guidance and has helped many of the inexperienced teachers to improve their teaching. It has guided and supported the headteacher effectively in her mission to raise the quality of the school. They have trained governors on how to use data about pupils' performance to improve the school. As a result, governors have a better knowledge about how to compare different groups of pupils and how to judge pupils' performance against the national averages.
- Leaders at all levels are accurate in their judgements about the quality of teaching and about the quality of what the school does. They check on teaching and pupils' progress frequently. This ensures that the school's capacity to keep improving is embedded throughout the school.
- Senior leaders and most staff have created a highly positive culture and ethos in the school in which professional relationships are the norm. They actively tackle all forms of discrimination and make sure there is equality regardless of gender, sexuality, faith, and ethnicity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many opportunities, particularly in their writing, to reflect upon complex and difficult issues.
- The curriculum is well-thought out and usually interesting. There are many opportunities for pupils to ask and research their own questions, and there is a relentless focus on reading, writing and mathematics across all subjects. The curriculum for ICT could be improved by making sure ICT is integrated into most lessons across all subjects. Pupils mentioned there is not much time spent on art or on creative subjects such as drama.
- Systems to protect pupils (safeguarding) are good. Pupils who are looked after by the local authority make good progress because teachers have high expectations of them and the plans to look after them are effective. Levels of supervision are high and staff manage the behaviour of pupils with behavioural difficulties well.
- **The governance of the school** is good. It has improved significantly since the previous inspection because governors have been trained well by the headteacher and the local authority in how to challenge and support the school and how to be critical. They now have the professional expertise they need. They share the headteacher's vision and have started to monitor the impact of their own contribution to the school. Governors are now linked with classes and with subject leaders to enable them to have a better understanding about the quality of teaching. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school but as yet are not as fully involved in improvement-planning or self-evaluation as they could be. They have an oversight over finances and have taken difficult decisions in tackling underperformance of some teachers. They have

started to make sure that the salary and the promotion of teachers are based on their performance over time. They have started monitoring the impact of pupil premium on the achievement of pupils but this is at an early stage.

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	104804
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	399643

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	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Grainne Spencer
Headteacher	Maureen Matthews
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2012
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