

Holy Cross CofE Primary School

Ruth Street, Oldham, Manchester OL1 3EZ

Inspection dates 1–2 December 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school has improved since the last inspection. Senior leaders have sought advice and training from other schools and have used this well.
- Senior leaders have accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. The actions they have taken are improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Staff, including several new appointments, are a fully committed team. They share the ambition of leaders and governors to make Holy Cross the best it can be.
- Governors have worked hard since the last inspection to ensure that they have the high levels of skills and knowledge to help the school move forward. They challenge leaders and hold staff to account.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good and are strengths of the school. The very effective pastoral support systems ensure pupils are safe and well cared for. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils work and play well together.
- Good teaching and a well-planned curriculum capture pupils' interest, so they work hard and make good progress.
- All groups of pupils make good progress across school from their different starting points. Children in the early years get off to a good start. As pupils move into Key Stage 1 they start to catch up with pupils nationally and by the end of Year 6 the attainment of almost all groups is broadly in line with the national average.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers in the early years are not systematically gathering evidence about learning and using it to inform children's next steps.
- The use of precise success criteria in planning and assessing writing is constraining the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils follow these criteria too closely at times, forgetting to apply their basic skills.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in reading as in other subjects. Younger children do not develop their skills in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) quickly enough. Further up the school time is not always used as effectively as it could be in reading lessons. As a result not all pupils across school are making the accelerated progress that they need to catch up with other pupils nationally.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on improvements in the early years by ensuring:
 - teaching staff regularly gather information about individual children’s learning and use this information to plan their next steps
 - all adults know the next steps for the different groups so that they can use every learning opportunity to even better effect.

- Continue to accelerate progress and raise standards in reading across the school by:
 - developing a more systematic and structured approach to teaching phonics across early years and Key Stage 1
 - ensuring that time and resources are used to better effect in reading lessons so that every pupil makes progress
 - providing all pupils with access to high-quality texts, including books and authors they might not choose to read themselves, which they can take home to read.

- Further raise standards in writing by:
 - encouraging teachers and pupils to be less reliant on using precise success criteria in planning and assessing writing, allowing pupils more freedom to select the devices they feel will improve the overall effectiveness of their writing
 - making sure that pupils build on what they have already learnt, particularly vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, and that basic mistakes are eliminated.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is good

- The school has greatly improved since the last inspection. It is well led and managed by a headteacher and senior leaders who are eager to take good advice and learn from other schools and specialists. Leaders have embraced the support and guidance offered by the local authority and governors in particular have benefited from the training they have received. The senior leadership team use their complementary skills and experience well to move the school forward. With the support of rapidly improving middle leaders and a stronger governing body, leaders have ensured that issues from the last inspection have been addressed.
- Leaders have accurately evaluated what the school does well and what needs improving. Effective action plans are in place, for example to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning in the early years, and these are already bearing fruit. The proportions of current children in the early years on track to achieve a good level of development are much improved.
- Since the previous inspection, a rigorous system for checking the quality of teaching has been put in place. Evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' books and analysis of progress information has enabled leaders to provide appropriate training and support so that teachers continually improve their practice. Leaders are aware that in the drive to raise standards further they need to review some of the approaches used by the teachers to ensure that they maximise progress in all subjects for all pupils.
- Systems to manage the performance of teaching staff are closely linked to school improvement priorities. All staff are set ambitious targets which set out a clear expectation that no pupil is allowed to fall behind. While teachers are supported effectively to achieve their targets the headteacher does not shy away from difficult conversations when staff do not meet the high standards demanded to ensure the pupils make good progress and catch up quickly.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional help and support. Additional teaching staff help pupils, when they do not grasp new learning, to catch up quickly so that they keep up with their classmates. The well-regarded Family and Community Link Worker works with pupils and their families to remove barriers to learning and is absolutely committed to ensuring every pupil has the best possible chance to succeed. Most recently he has been meeting with families whose children are regularly late to school to help them improve punctuality. A number of families have taken advantage of the popular breakfast club to help get the day off to a good start.
- Senior leaders make good use of the physical education (PE) and sports funding. Pupils' levels of participation have increased as a result of the extensive range of activities on offer after school, such as the gymnastics club. Pupils enjoy taking part in competitions and are proud of their successes, such as progressing to the regional basketball finals this year.
- Christian values are a golden thread running through the school. These values, which the pupils know and understand well, are key to the sense of family which staff, governors, pupils and parents all cite as a strength of the school. Year 1 have recently been thinking about what the different values such as fairness, trust, empathy and love mean to them. The school ethos committee, which is chaired by the vicar and includes pupil representatives, actively promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school. They recently hosted a visit from the Director of Education for Manchester Diocese.
- Leaders have developed a broad and balanced curriculum which prepares pupils successfully for life in modern Britain. Pupils' experiences are enriched by the artists, musicians and poets who have visited school as well as a bilingual member of staff who teaches French and specialist sports coaches who deliver PE. Teachers make good use of opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their basic skills across the curriculum; for example pupils wrote, illustrated and published their own story books 'The Way Home' and 'Mr Collin Beetleman's Big Adventure' as part of a local community project.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate the workshops which help them support their children's learning and feel well informed about how their children are progressing. They find staff warm and welcoming and quick to deal with any issues.
- The school has a good relationship with the local authority and has benefited from the support and training it offers.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has demonstrated much improvement since the last inspection. It has successfully addressed the area for improvement, ensuring all new governors receive appropriate training. As a result, governors have a thorough understanding of what the school does well and where there is still work to be done. They are confident to provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to school leaders.

- Governors share the ambition of senior leaders in wanting every child to leave Holy Cross as well prepared for the next stage on their journey as possible.
- Governors ensure that pay progression for staff is linked to pupils' progress. They oversee the school's sound financial management and hold leaders to account for the achievement of pupils. They are confident to seek advice from the school improvement partners and other experts such as the local authority's human resource team when they need it.
- Governors' regular visits enable them to see for themselves current strengths and weaknesses. This complements the information they get through their own data analysis and reports from senior leaders about the impact of teaching on outcomes for pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The staff leading on safeguarding are a strength of the school and ensure that policies are adhered to. Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained and that there is a thorough induction for new staff joining school. Parents, pupils and staff who spoke to inspectors are unanimous in their view that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- There have been improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Teaching staff value the programme of training and support put in place by senior leaders and this is having a positive impact on the outcomes of pupils. They find the peer coaching very helpful in making improvements to their planning and teaching.
- The new assessment and tracking system, underpinning the school's curriculum, ensures that teachers and pupils are in no doubt about expectations for learning in English and mathematics across school. Teachers use information from assessments effectively so that time is used well in lessons as work is pitched appropriately for each aspect of mathematics and English. Teachers swiftly intervene to support those pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Often this support is put in place on the same day. Pupils find pre- and post-topic assessments in mathematics helpful. They enable pupils to show what they already know and can do before starting a new unit of work and measure their learning over the course of that unit.
- Teachers ensure pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to practise their writing. Teachers choose topics for writing which interest and enthuse pupils. Books clearly evidence the impact of these opportunities in making sure pupils make good progress and achieve well. In Year 5, pupils have written a paragraph for a travel brochure using information they had researched about one of the American states. In Year 2, pupils produced some high-quality pieces of writing sharing their learning about the *Titanic*.
- However, the use of precise success criteria for writing tasks does not enable pupils to select the devices which best suit their piece of writing and leave out those which add no value. As a result pupils' composition skills are not as well developed as they should be. Moreover, the focus on the precise success criteria means that all too often pupils are making basic spelling, grammar and punctuation errors which are not addressed in teachers' marking.
- Pupils enjoy reading and the books they are given by their teachers are well matched to their abilities. They read with fluency and have comprehension skills appropriate for their age. Key Stage 1 pupils use their phonics knowledge well to decode unfamiliar words. Younger pupils do not always acquire their early reading skills quickly enough and older pupils do not always select books that challenge them to extend their skills. Moreover, teachers do not always ensure that tasks enable all pupils to make good progress in reading lessons. The recent changes to how reading is taught in Years 5 and 6 are already having a positive effect on progress.
- Pupils enjoy learning and have a thirst for knowledge. The well-thought-out curriculum provides pupils with interesting and exciting learning experiences. Year 3 enjoyed reading a description of a mythical creature. They worked hard using watercolours to paint the creature using the information in the text to ensure it was accurate. In a French lesson pupils were very keen to practise holding a conversation in French with their partner.
- Teachers follow the school's marking and feedback policy ensuring that pupils are clear about the extent to which they have met their learning objective. In classes where teachers use marking and feedback to provide pupils with additional challenge to deepen their understanding, pupils benefit from the opportunities to refine and improve their writing and grapple with more tricky problems in mathematics.
- Senior leaders have identified questioning as an area for improvement across school and have ensured that all teaching staff have received training and are putting this into practice in their classrooms. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson the teacher used questioning well to develop a dialogue between pupils about

the nets required for different three-dimensional shapes.

- Parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about homework. They appreciated the support school gives them to help their children's learning at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The effective pastoral team ensure that pupils are well cared for and that they always have someone to talk to whenever they need to. They have created a safe haven in the 'Hummingbird Room' where pupils can go whether they need time to talk or time alone.
- Pupils are polite and welcoming. They are proud of their school and were keen to talk to inspectors about the subjects they enjoy studying, as well as the range of extra-curricular activities they can take part in. Pupils in the choir are particularly looking forward to carol singing for residents in a local care home and performing at Manchester Arena in Young Voices 2016. Other pupils talked about how much they enjoyed attending the different clubs, including gymnastics.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Staff and parents agree. The Christian values which are threaded through the life of the school ensure that pupils work and play harmoniously. The ethos committee ensure that these values are championed all the time and no one is in any doubt as to their importance at Holy Cross. Pupils show respect for their classmates' different faiths and cultures and are understanding of each other's different needs. The pupils who spoke to inspectors were adamant that everyone feels included and 'no one is mean to each other'. Pupils have absolute confidence in staff dealing with the rare incidences of bullying. The school has ensured that pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe, including online.
- The school's most vulnerable pupils are provided for extremely well. Effective systems ensure that all concerns are followed up thoroughly. The Family and Community Worker and Child Wellbeing and Safeguarding Leader are dogged in their determination to ensure every child's needs are met and families are well supported. Their work is very highly regarded by their colleagues, parents and pupils.
- The pupils are very keen to help those less fortunate than themselves and take part in a number of different fund-raising activities such as a Christmas Jumper Day for Comic Relief. They support their local community through litter picking and making donations to the food bank.
- Pupils enjoy learning about life in modern Britain. Pupils in Year 3 set their classroom up as the House of Commons and held a debate to learn about how the parliamentary system works. Pupils wishing to be elected to the school council have to write a manifesto; these are anonymised and their classmates hold a secret ballot to elect their representative. The school council carefully considers the views of pupils across school when deciding how best to spend the money they are allocated.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are courteous and polite towards each other and their teachers. They ensure that everyone is listened to and their views are respected.
- Most pupils conduct themselves sensibly both in class, around school and on the playground. They understand the behaviour system and know what will happen if they make the wrong choices. Pupils are keen to please adults in school so that when, on occasion, pupils become restless in lessons or run along the corridor, they quickly respond to instructions.
- Any incidents of poor behaviour are reported online by teachers and this information is used effectively by senior leaders and pastoral staff to identify patterns and trends and ensure that support is put in place quickly for any pupil. The needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties are met very effectively. There has been a steady decline in the incidence of exclusions. All staff are very thorough in following up any parental concerns and complaints. Records relating to behaviour are thorough and all incidents followed up.
- Hard work and persistence by the pastoral team ensures that attendance is steadily improving, especially for disadvantaged pupils and boys. Attendance has got off to a good start this term and the pastoral staff are tackling head-on the poor punctuality of some pupils. They are meeting parents face to face to resolve any issues. In addition, the school has recently established a breakfast club to encourage pupils to get to school on time. The numbers of pupils attending this club are rising rapidly and for those pupils it is having a positive impact on their attendance. However, attendance still remains below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- The quality of pupils' work in books and on the walls, in lessons and in the school's most recent assessment information indicates that pupils make good progress and attainment is at least average in a range of subjects. Leaders have accurately identified areas for improvement and their actions have been effective in tackling underperformance.
- Teachers are still addressing the legacy of underperformance. However, senior leaders and teachers do not use this as an excuse. The new curriculum design together with the assessment and tracking system ensure that all pupils are working at or above the levels expected for their age. Any pupil who is at risk of falling behind is immediately targeted for additional support, usually before the next lesson.
- As a result of the actions taken by leaders current pupils are making good progress across school. The high-quality provision for those pupils who are at risk of falling behind, as well as the increased challenge for more-able pupils, particularly through the use of graduate success criteria for each lesson, ensures that pupils are making good progress across the school.
- Despite pupils starting Key Stage 1 with literacy and numeracy skills below those typical for their age, they make good progress so that by the end of Year 2 they are achieving broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of current pupils attaining above age-related expectations is rising.
- The strong focus on improving pupils' skills and knowledge in writing and mathematics has paid dividends. The training and support for teaching staff has ensured that they have secure subject knowledge for the year group they teach and work provides the appropriate level of challenge for most pupils. As a result current pupils are making rapid gains in their mathematical knowledge and skills. However, if pupils are to become successful writers leaders must ensure that the systematic and structured approach they have introduced to teach writing ensures that pupils build on their learning from previous years. For example, pupils at the top end of school use expanded noun phrases and parentheses but sometimes misspell high-frequency words and omit capital letters for names.
- School leaders have quickly addressed the dip in outcomes in reading. They identified the reasons for this and have already put a comprehensive action plan in place. Changes to the planning and delivery of reading lessons have already secured improvements and school data evidences that the proportions of current pupils working at age-related expectations is increasing. For example in Years 5 and 6 whole-class reading sessions are ensuring that many more pupils are on track to meet and exceed the expected standard by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Senior leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is used to good effect. Disadvantaged pupils historically achieved below other pupils nationally in the early years. As a result of a high focus on securing basic literacy and numeracy skills these pupils make good progress through Key Stage 1, narrowing the gap with pupils nationally. Carefully targeted intervention including high-quality pastoral support to remove any barriers to learning, including poor attendance and punctuality, means that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Highly skilled teaching staff ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported from their earliest days at Holy Cross. This ensures that they learn quickly and within a short space of time overtake their peers by the end of Year 2. At Key Stage 2 the rapid progress made by these pupils ensures that they continue to keep up with the progress of their peers.

Early years provision

is good

- Leadership and management of all aspects of early years provision, including teaching and learning, is good. The recently appointed early years leader has a firm grasp on the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and her plans for improvements are well thought out. Since taking up post she has revitalised the learning environment. As a result, children actively and enthusiastically engage in interesting activities.
- Adults skilfully plan activities which build on the children's enthusiasms; enabling the children to develop their communication and language skills. Children were fascinated by a woodland display, asking questions such as 'Where do we find worms?' and 'What do badgers like to eat?' However, adults miss some opportunities to move children's learning on as they do not know what the next steps are for all of the groups of children.
- Children get off to a good start because staff ensure that the children quickly settle in and that their individual learning needs are swiftly addressed and support provided. Children who are in the early stages of learning English benefit from the small-group, focused activities led by a language specialist.

Inspectors observed children enjoying building sentences to describe some toy animals.

- All children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils make good progress in the early years from their different starting points. The school's own records show that children currently in Nursery and Reception are making better progress than previous cohorts as a result of the recent improvements in provision, including the effective use of additional funding for those pupils who are disadvantaged, so that a greater proportion of these children are on course to attain a good level of development. Those children who recently moved up to Year 1 have settled quickly and are already confidently working within the expectations of Key Stage 1.
- Children quickly become familiar with routines in Nursery and Reception. They listen carefully to adults, follow instructions well and get along well with their classmates.
- The setting is a hive of activity. During the inspection the children were enjoying activities linked to a book the teacher had read to them. Children were enjoying finding the different birds in the trees in the outdoor area. They used the bird hide, camouflage clothes and binoculars to help them in their search. They recorded the birds they had found on a checklist, sharing their successes with the adult and their classmates. Children were enthusiastically making fat balls and hanging them in the trees to encourage more birds to visit their garden. Adults used these activities to develop the children's language skills, encouraging them to practise using new vocabulary as they talked about what they were doing. Another child was concentrating hard using her phonics skills to help her retell part of the story, ably supported by an adult who encouraged her to break up the words into the different sounds before writing them.
- Early Years Foundation Stage staff are proactively seeking the engagement of parents as partners in their children's learning. Parents value the support and advice they have been given to help their children with reading and writing. They feel welcome into the setting and good relationships support children settling into early years quickly. Parents are confident children are safe and well cared for. The home visits that are part of the transition into school enable parents to make a valuable contribution to the school's information about their child.
- Safeguarding arrangements for the early years provision are effective. Risks are managed well through the vigilance and consistent implementation of systems by staff. Reception children and parents recently had training on how to keep safe online. All statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	135720
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10002218

This inspection 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	465
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marlene Armitage
Headteacher	Paul Wardle
Telephone number	0161 770 5522
Website	www.holycrossprimary.co.uk
Email address	office@holycross.oldham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 December 2013

Information about this school

- Holy Cross is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is above the national average. The pupil premium is the additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club which is open to all children every day.
- In 2014 the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Since the last inspection two new deputy headteachers and an assistant headteacher have been appointed. There have been a number of changes in teaching staff since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching including two joint observations with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, representatives of the governing body, the school improvement partner and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, school improvement planning, assessment information and reports on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the school day and observed them during playtime and lunch. They also met formally with a group of pupils to chat about their learning and behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors heard a number of pupils read.
- Inspectors took note of displays around the school and the work in the outdoor areas.
- A range of pupils' books were checked jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents at the start of the day. Inspectors also took note of the 36 responses they received to the inspection questionnaire for school staff.

Inspection team

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