

Holy Cross School: A Catholic Voluntary Academy

Parsonwood Hill, Whitwick, Coalville LE67 5AT

Inspection dates	4–5 May 2016
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 headteacher provides extremely effective leadership and, along with the assistant headteachers and governors, has rapidly improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection.
- Currently, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their different starting points. This reflects the improvement in teaching, which is good and improving strongly.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. They have a positive attitude to learning and show great pride in the presentation of their work. They are treated with kindness and respect and so are quick to respond likewise towards others.
- There is a strong sense of community in the school. Pupils say that they are well cared for and feel safe. This is supported by the views of parents.
- The curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of pupils in the school. Teachers promote a culture of safety, alongside values of tolerance and mutual respect that prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Children in the early years achieve well because of strong leadership and teaching. As a result, children are well prepared for when they begin Year 1.
- Governors take their responsibilities seriously and provide good challenge and support for the school's leaders.
- The school works effectively with other schools in the academy trust and the Coalville Family of Schools to strengthen leaders' capacity, monitor standards and continually improve teaching and outcomes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not typically outstanding. Occasionally, pupils start on independent tasks that are too easy for them before moving to more challenging work.
- In a small minority of teaching, the explanation of tasks is not always clear and pupils are unsure what to do.
- The roles of leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics are not yet fully developed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching to outstanding, by:
 - making sure that explanations are clear and pupils know exactly what they are being asked to do
 - ensuring that pupils do not spend time revisiting work they can already do and from the start of lessons do challenging tasks, especially in mathematics.

- Improve leadership and management by preparing middle leaders more effectively for taking on senior roles by monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the school. They work effectively as a team to bring about continuous improvement. They have been successful since the previous inspection in creating a culture of high expectations, in which good teaching, learning and behaviour now flourish.
- The school's plans for improvement identify the right priorities. Targets are precise so that they can be measured, and plans identify who will check and evaluate the success of the actions.
- Teachers' performance is managed well. Staff have carefully chosen targets which are challenging and closely linked to the areas identified in the school's improvement plans. Leaders check on teachers' work on a regular basis and meet to discuss how well pupils are achieving. Staff training and support has helped teachers to reach challenging targets and improve their skills in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders know every pupil extremely well. They use the information from regular assessments to set targets and to evaluate how well individual pupils and groups of pupils are achieving, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability. Programmes are set up to close gaps in knowledge and understanding and evaluations show that these pupils are now making good progress. School leaders encourage an inclusive atmosphere so there is equal opportunity for all groups of pupils, and they ensure that no one is discriminated against.
- The curriculum has been carefully designed to enthuse pupils and consolidate prior learning. It is comprehensively planned for all subjects and progression in knowledge and skills is evident. After-school clubs and enrichment activities supplement the curriculum effectively. The curriculum as a whole makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and helps them to flourish.
- Pupils commit to the school's values and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Collective worship, religious education teaching and the Christian values promoted ensure that pupils are taught to respect and be tolerant of other faiths and cultures.
- The school's use of the primary physical education and sports funding has increased the range of sporting opportunities available to pupils, and has resulted in their greater participation in sports and more competitions against other schools.
- Subject leaders with responsibility for subjects other than mathematics and English are not yet fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching in their subject areas in preparation for more senior leadership roles.
- The school runs a well organised, friendly breakfast club each morning. Pupils receive a healthy breakfast and enjoy a range of games and craft activities and have the opportunity to take part in sports activities. Pupils spoken with enjoyed attending.
- Leaders, including governors, ensure that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. Small-group support in reading, writing and mathematics, additional Year 6 revision and education welfare support for attendance have helped to ensure that these pupils make similar progress to all other pupils.
- The academy trust and cluster of local primary schools provide effective support to help to continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the accuracy and reliability of the school's self-evaluation procedures.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has become more effective since the previous inspection. They share the vision and expectations of the headteacher. They have a wide range of appropriate skills. They hold all leaders regularly to account, receiving reports and presentations from them and asking penetrating questions about how well pupils are doing and how good teaching is.
 - Governors manage the school's finances well. They understand how teachers' performance is managed and ensure that the pupil premium and sports funding have a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils and pupils' health respectively.
 - The governing body is well trained in safeguarding and fulfils its statutory responsibilities. Governors ensure that the school's culture is free from intolerance or extremism of any kind, and that pupils grow up with clear values, prepared for life in modern Britain. Governors ensure that all safeguarding requirements, including those for health and safety, are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Systems and policies to keep pupils safe are well maintained and consistently applied. All staff receive refresher training in child protection and the 'Prevent' duty at the start of each new school year. Staff work closely with parents and external agencies when needed. Parents confirm their children are safe and secure in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers have acted on the recommendations from the previous inspection and teaching has improved considerably since then and is now good. As a result, pupils are making more rapid progress.
- Teachers provide every opportunity for pupils to practise their writing and mathematical skills in a wide range of subjects. They plan activities that appeal to pupils, for example in Year 2 pupils were keen to write about the contents of chocolate bars, and Year 4 pupils composed poems based on traditional tales.
- A strong feature of teaching is the calm and purposeful atmosphere for learning. Teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils well. There are good, trusting relationships and, consequently, pupils are confident to try things out for themselves, take risks and become resilient learners. They know that their opinions will be valued and that teachers will always take time to explain if they do not understand something. Occasionally, in a small minority of lessons, the initial explanation of a task is not clear enough and pupils are unsure about what is being asked of them.
- Classrooms are attractive and orderly, with pupils' work well displayed. This gives pupils pride in their work. Key information and technical vocabulary are prominently displayed and used successfully by pupils to help them work out things for themselves.
- In the most effective teaching, where learning is most rapid, teachers have very high expectations for pupils' behaviour and attention, and ensure that no learning time is wasted. However, occasionally, pupils spend time at the start of lessons reinforcing work they find easy before moving on to more challenging tasks, especially in mathematics.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has improved considerably since the last inspection. Teachers and teaching assistants use a consistent and well-structured approach that ensures that younger pupils complete daily activities which enable them to recognise, read and write the sounds represented by different letter combinations. Pupils are able to apply their developing phonics skills well in their reading and spelling.
- Teachers make regular and precise assessments of pupils' achievement. Leaders have introduced a new system for assessment in the early years and in key stages 1 and 2. Teachers frequently work together and with teachers from within the academy trust and the Coalville Family of Schools to ensure that their assessments are accurate.
- Skilled teaching assistants are deployed well to support all pupils, but particularly those who are in danger of falling behind. As a result, these pupils make good progress in line with others.
- Pupils cooperate and collaborate particularly well. During opportunities to share ideas with a group or partner, they listen carefully to one another and discuss each other's reasoning. Teachers use questioning to probe pupils' understanding and to make them think harder, such as when Year 6 pupils had to explain the different properties of polygons and polyhedrons, using the correct terminology. Teachers have good subject knowledge and quickly clear up any misconceptions pupils might have.
- Teachers' feedback is helpful to pupils, clearly showing them how they can improve their work. The school's policy for marking and feedback is used consistently in all subjects across the school to enhance pupils' academic outcomes.
- Homework builds on learning in the classroom well and nearly all the pupils spoken to say they enjoyed doing their homework and found it helpful. Regular activities in reading, writing and mathematics extend and consolidate concepts introduced in the classroom.
- There is consistency in the way teachers plan. For example, they set clear challenges for pupils of different ability and include questions to ask, key words to introduce and what they expect pupils to be able to do. However, occasionally in some mathematics lessons, pupils start with work which is too easy before moving on to more challenging work. All the work is closely aligned to ensure it covers the requirements of the new national curriculum and age-related expectations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils say they are safe in school and they enjoy school. They feel they can approach members of staff easily if they have any worries or concerns and feel confident they will be listened to and appropriate action taken.

- Through the school's programme of personal, social and health education and visits by the police and a cycle safety organisation, pupils learn how to stay safe in different situations, including when using the internet, mobile phones and social media.
- All staff know the pupils well and so any specific care and welfare needs are well met in classes and in the playground.
- Pupils are proud of their school and develop as well-rounded individuals who are increasingly independent, resilient and keen to help each other out at work and play. They listen to others' opinions and show respect for each other. Pupils are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors and are confident when speaking to adults.
- Pupils have good opportunities to keep themselves fit and healthy, with regular physical education lessons and a good range of sporting activities after school. Through the well-planned curriculum pupils learn about the importance of healthy-eating choices. Older pupils have designed a menu for a special afternoon tea to celebrate the Queen's official birthday in June and plan to invite local, older residents to this event.
- The guidance pupils are given through assemblies, personal and social education and the Christian ethos of the school prepares them well for life in modern Britain and gives them a good understanding of British values. Pupils are generous in supporting the work of charities at home and overseas.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Their positive attitudes to learning contribute to their good progress.
- Pupils are considerate and supportive of each other and conduct themselves well in the playground, in the dining area and around school; movement is orderly and calm in corridors. In lessons, they settle to work quickly and only lose concentration when they are not challenged enough or are unclear about what to do.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They appreciate the rewards they get for positive behaviour and achievements, and understand that there are consequences for unacceptable behaviour. Both the pupils and parents value the 'marvellous me' text messages celebrating their children's achievements in school.
- Most parents, staff and pupils responding to the Ofsted online questionnaire, and the school's own questionnaires, agree that pupils' behaviour is good.
- Most parents are supportive in ensuring that their children attend well and are punctual to school. Attendance is average, with the proportion of pupils regularly absent being below average. There have been no exclusions from the school this academic year or in the previous year.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils of all ages and abilities are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics because leaders have improved the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Procedures to check pupils' progress are more rigorous and reliable and teachers are making effective use of this assessment information to set challenging targets for pupils. Information about how well pupils are doing is checked frequently to ensure that pupils at risk of falling behind are identified quickly and supported appropriately.
- The well-presented, high quantity of quality work in pupils' books, alongside their responses in lessons, confirm that most pupils are achieving well and are successful learners.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics screening in 2015 was a little below that recorded nationally. However, the current cohort are making good progress and are in line to achieve considerably higher outcomes, reflecting good progress in their reading and writing skills.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet pupils' needs and interests and prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain and for the next stage of their education. Pupils are also making good progress in subjects other than literacy and numeracy, such as history and science, through good planning and ample opportunities to write.
- In 2015, pupils' attainment in writing was in line with the national average at the end of key stage 1. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level at the end of Year 6 was in line with the national average; however, the proportion reaching the higher level 5 was a little lower than average. The school has focused on raising standards in writing in all year groups. Writing seen in pupils' books and on display, together with current assessment information shows a significant improvement. By the end of Year 6, pupils write confidently and competently.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics. They regularly practise number calculations, which gives them a very secure framework of knowledge and skills. In 2015, attainment was in line with national averages at the end of both key stages.

- Pupils progress well in reading. Year 1 pupils read accurately and fluently with expression and spoke of their enjoyment of reading. Older pupils were keen to talk about different authors and explain how they could get lost in a story when they were reading for pleasure. In 2015, attainment in reading was in line with the national average at the end of Year 2 and significantly above the national average at the end of Year 6. English grammar, spelling and punctuation were also significantly above national averages in 2015.
- Historically, the most-able pupils performed better in reading and mathematics. However, current school assessment information and work seen in books confirms that the most-able pupils across the school are well challenged and achieving highly in writing as well as reading and mathematics.
- The majority of pupils who have special educational needs or disability are making good progress as a result of well-planned intervention activities.
- The school has been successful in closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. Staff have targeted resources carefully to meet these pupils' personal and academic needs and so they achieve well. The additional pupil premium funding is used well to support their progress.

Early years provision

is good

- The majority of children enter the early years with knowledge, skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age. As a result of thorough planning, well-structured learning and close monitoring of progress they make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Leadership and management of the early years provision are effective. The early years leader has a clear vision and has identified and acted on areas for development. She has high expectations and has secured significant improvements in children's achievements.
- There are too few children who have special educational needs or disability, or who are disadvantaged, to make meaningful comparisons between their progress and the progress of other children. The progress being made by all groups of children is being recorded effectively by adults to ensure good progress is being made.
- Teaching in the early years is now consistently good. Staff know the children's individual next steps and set the right challenges so children progress. They use thought-provoking questioning to promote dialogue and extend language through explanation. Excellent relationships between adults and children underpin the effective learning that takes place.
- The inside area provides children with rich opportunities to learn from self-chosen activities, as well as planned group sessions. This year there has been a particular focus on the teaching of early literacy and numeracy skills which are now a particular strength of the setting. The vast majority of children are on track to reach a good level of development when they finish the Reception class and are well prepared for Year 1.
- The curriculum is broad and interesting, with effective opportunities to learn. The available space in the outside area is used creatively to further enhance learning. During the inspection, some children were writing action instructions for a game, accurately applying their phonics knowledge. Others were fully engrossed, working together mixing 'sand-concrete' and building a wall in the building site role play area.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good. They enjoy playing and learning alongside each other and share resources sensibly. This is because adults have high expectations and clear, well-established routines are in place.
- Parents are engaged in their children's learning and contribute to the learning journals. They are kept well informed about their children's progress. They have positive views about the experiences that are offered and the progress their children are making.
- The early years team ensures that all safety and safeguarding arrangements are robustly applied. Children are safe and secure at school.

School details

Unique reference number	138297
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10011732

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gillian Weaver
Headteacher	Siobhan Minford
Telephone number	01530 832799
Website	www.holycrosswhitwick.co.uk
Email address	sminford@whx.leics.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 April 2014

Information about this school

- Holy Cross School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. It has a full-time Reception class and six further single-year-group classes.
- Most pupils are of White British background and the remainder come from a wide range of ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club.
- The school is part of The Blessed Cyprian Tansi Catholic Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils working in 14 lessons, or parts of lessons, all of which were seen jointly with school leaders. They looked at work in pupils' books, work displayed on the walls and they attended a class assembly. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, in the playground and as they moved around the school. They also listened to pupils read in Year 2 and Year 6.
- Among the documents scrutinised were school improvement plans, records relating to pupils' behaviour, safety and attendance, and minutes from governors' meetings. Inspectors evaluated the school's information regarding pupils' learning and progress as well as curriculum plans. Inspectors also looked at all the information available on the school website.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders, teachers, four governors, including the chair of the governing body and a director from The Blessed Cyprian Tansi Catholic Academy Trust.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and asked them for their views on the school. Inspectors also listened to some pupils read.
- The views of parents were taken into account by analysing the 38 responses to the online Ofsted survey, Parent View. Inspectors also met with parents informally as they delivered their children to school at the school gate.
- Inspectors visited the breakfast club during the inspection.

Inspection team

Lindsay Hall, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Graham Boyd

Ofsted Inspector

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