

St Cross Catholic Primary School

Upper Marsh Lane, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire EN11 8BN

Inspection dates

10–11 January 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' administration of some aspects of their safeguarding procedures is not consistently sharp. Leaders and governors do not check the effectiveness of their systems routinely enough. Although pupils are kept safe, these inconsistencies do not reflect the good safeguarding culture in the school.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is too generous. They have not taken enough account of how pupils are achieving throughout their time at the school.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This is because teachers do not consistently set them work that is challenging enough. This is resulting in not enough pupils achieving the higher standard of which they are very capable.
- Leaders are not rigorous enough in ensuring that the checks that they make about the quality of teaching evaluate the progress that pupils are making. They have not ensured that pupils are making quick enough progress in every year group, particularly in key stage 2.
- The quality of teaching across the curriculum subjects is not consistently good enough to develop pupils' wider skills. Pupils are not provided with regular opportunities to write, or apply their mathematical skills sufficiently, in other subject areas aside from English and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The provision in the early years is good. These children get off to a good start in their primary education.
- There is effective support for the small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The leader reviews this provision thoroughly.
- Pupils are very happy and their behaviour is good both in and around the school.
- School leaders provide well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils have positive relationships with each other and adults, based on strong Catholic values.
- Some teaching is more successful in helping pupils to make quicker progress from their starting points in mathematics and English.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - rapidly improving the administration around safeguarding so that it accurately reflects the strong practice in the school
 - ensuring that leaders' and governors' checking of safeguarding systems are more routine and thorough
 - sharpening leaders' monitoring of teaching so that it takes more precise account of pupils' progress.
- Raise the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that pupils receive consistently good teaching in all curriculum subjects
 - increasing the amount of opportunities for pupils to apply and practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum
 - providing more opportunities for the most able pupils to deepen their knowledge and develop skills so that they can reach the higher standard by the end of key stage 2.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Although the headteacher and governors are effective in keeping pupils safe, they have not ensured that the thoroughness and detail of the school's administrative systems reflect the secure knowledge, understanding and culture of safeguarding that permeates throughout the whole school. Moreover, leaders' and governors' checking of this administration has not been sharp enough.
- Despite seemingly strong attainment by the end of Year 6, leaders have not intervened perceptively enough with each year group to ensure that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Consequently, despite leaders' obvious commitment to pupils' achievement, not enough pupils achieve the high standard they are capable of by the end of key stage 2.
- Leaders, including governors, are overly generous in their evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's provision. In their self-evaluation, leaders focus too much on what actions are being taken, rather than the difference it makes. As a result, although leaders have a general understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school, leaders' actual judgements about the school do not accurately reflect the current position of the school's performance.
- Staffing turbulence since the previous inspection has inhibited leaders' ability to make sustained improvements in the quality of pupils' education. Leaders have sought creative ways to manage the unavoidable staff changes, and the challenges to recruit staff. However, this has contributed towards slowing the school's improvement journey. Although staffing is now more stable, past upheaval has had a detrimental influence on pupils' progress, which is currently variable.
- Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not fastidious enough. Too often, leaders have not taken enough account of their checking of pupils' progress when making judgements about the effectiveness of teaching. Consequently, some teachers do not consistently demonstrate in their teaching, learning and assessment that they are sure about what good progress looks like, and how pupils will make quicker progress from their starting points.
- Teachers do not use the school's feedback policy consistently well enough so that pupils can make the necessary improvements to their work, or develop their understanding. Where the policy is not applied appropriately, pupils do not always know how well they have done and what they have to do to improve their work. This results in slower progress over time.
- Support and challenge for teachers who are not performing to the standards set by the school is in place and, in some cases, effective in making a difference to the progress pupils make. However, not all teaching is improving quickly enough to make the difference it needs to.
- Not all curriculum subject leaders have yet developed sufficient confidence and expertise in checking accurately the quality of teaching, and its impact on pupils' learning and progress. This means that leaders do not accurately know how well pupils are attaining and progressing in all subject areas.

- Coverage of all curriculum subjects is not yet consistently good across the school. Inspection evidence from looking in pupils' topic books shows that, while there are some good examples of work in religious education, there is less evidence of pupils developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in other subjects, including science. While subject leaders plan focused weeks for various subjects like science, this is not appropriately providing pupils with enough regular opportunity to demonstrate that they are achieving well in other curriculum subject areas over time.
- Leaders use the pupil premium funding to support the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils well. The assistant headteacher oversees the monitoring of this spending effectively. As a result, the few disadvantaged pupils, including those most able disadvantaged, achieve at least in line with other pupils nationally.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength of the school. The school embraces the Catholic faith and core values, and ensures that pupils develop an appreciation of fundamental British values. For example, a group of pupils linked their understanding of democracy to their role in voting for members of the 'green team'. Pupils learn in a calm and purposeful environment built on mutual respect and trust for each other. Pupils are growing in their understanding of the value of different religions and cultures. One pupil commented that 'it is okay to be different'. A group of pupils talked about how 'we are all treated equally and it's important to be respectful of each other'.
- The primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively to ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have full access to sporting activities, both in school and through extra-curricular clubs. Participation levels in clubs are good. The subject leader for physical education (PE) uses her good subject knowledge to ensure that teachers receive training, and help to deliver the PE curriculum. Teachers are now more confident in their ability to teach PE effectively.
- Parents are happy with the school. Their overwhelming view is that the school is well led, their children do well, and all the parents who contributed towards the Ofsted Parent View, text service and school surveys said they would recommend St Cross to another parent. One parent said: 'The school is run with great care towards all pupils and families; it's a very nurturing school with solid values. Everyone is made to feel part of a team, constantly striving to give our children a wonderful learning experience, run by a dedicated team.'
- Local authority advisers provide advice, support and opportunities to verify assessment information in the early years, and to the mathematics and English subject leaders. This is helping to increase these leaders' knowledge and understanding.

Governance of the school

- Although governors demonstrate that they are aware of their statutory responsibility and duty to keep pupils safe, they do not sufficiently check or challenge leaders about the rigour and preciseness of the systems and processes in place.
- The governing body is ably led by the relatively new, proactive chair of governors. However, despite governors' keenness and diligence, they are not yet consistently demonstrating that they are confident in their understanding of the information that they receive about the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' rates of progress

across the school. As a consequence, they currently accept too readily the information presented to them by senior leaders.

- Governors fully understand the link between performance and pay progression. Present arrangements for the annual review of the headteacher's performance are appropriate and supported externally.
- Despite the small number of disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, governors effectively monitor the additional funding for these groups of pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attain well from their starting points.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Although the detail is not always thorough enough in the formal recording of safeguarding information, it is evident that safeguarding is given a high priority by the headteacher. The headteacher gives very willingly of her time and resources, to all families. Very often, this is to the detriment of recording the detail, which is resulting in the lack of rigour in the paperwork.
- Processes for the recruitment of staff are compliant with current legislation. Leaders closely follow the safer recruitment guidelines, ensuring that all relevant checks are completed at the point of employment.
- Staff receive appropriate child protection training at the start of each academic year, together with regular updates received nationally, and from the local authority. This includes information about radicalisation. Inspection evidence, gained from talking to staff, shows that they are all alert to any potential safeguarding issues, and if in any doubt they refer the concern appropriately and immediately.
- Staff are fully trained to be alert to signs of concern and aware of the range of potential risks pupils face, including exposure to extremist views. They know the processes to follow and who to speak with if they are worried. Safeguarding is part of weekly staff meetings, which helps to keep pupils' safety at the forefront of everybody's mind.
- Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe in school. Adults teach the older pupils strategies for keeping themselves safe, especially when using the internet, through the curriculum. Pupils know who to speak to if they are concerned and are confident that an adult would listen, and help them.
- Relationships with parents and carers are positive and underpinned by a huge amount of trust. The headteacher has a good knowledge of all pupils, and demonstrates compassion and empathy, particularly to more vulnerable families. This culture is disseminated throughout the school because staff understand this ethos as a part of their school. As a priority, staff provide support for families facing particularly challenging circumstances. One parent said: 'If you need help outside of school, the headteacher always does her best to make sure you get it. Time is taken no matter if you are dealing with behaviour, family problems or just had enough. As parents we have the full support and guidance of the wonderful headteacher and all staff.' As a result, pupils are cared for and parents feel that the school keeps their children safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is inconsistent. It is not always rigorously focused on ensuring that pupils make quicker progress from their starting points. For example, for reading in 2016, the proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected progress from their entry point in Year 3 was significantly below the national average. As a result, pupils' rates of progress are not consistently good in all year groups and for all subjects.
- Over time, teachers are not routinely ensuring that they challenge the most able pupils in their classes effectively, to attain well from their starting points. Assessment information is not used well enough by all teachers to identify the next steps in the most able pupils' learning, and teachers' expectations of what these pupils should be achieving are too low. The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, often waste valuable learning time completing tasks that are too easy for them, or that are unnecessarily repetitive. As a result, too few of these pupils fully achieve the high standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not check pupils' learning with sufficient rigour in some classes and therefore miss opportunities to adjust activities to meet pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils' learning slows on these occasions, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Evidence in pupils' topic books shows that the quality and frequency of teaching of other curriculum subjects are inconsistent. The amount of pupils' work is minimal in some classes, and does not demonstrate that pupils develop specific subject skills well enough. The exception to this is religious education, where pupils regularly demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils do not consistently receive opportunities to show what they can do. There is limited evidence of pupils applying their basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics in their topic work, and few examples of extended writing over periods of time. Pupils are not using their skills well enough to deepen their knowledge and understanding, particularly in mathematics. Consequently, pupils do not consistently make enough progress from their starting points, particularly in key stage 2.
- Teachers' use of the school's target-setting system is inconsistent. Consequently, where teachers are more confident to set targets, pupils can talk about their progress and next steps. However, teachers use targets in various ways and where their use is not effective, pupils do not understand what is expected of them. They are very unsure about what their written targets mean.
- While teachers work hard, their actions do not always make a difference to how well the pupils are achieving. For example, diligent teachers are often creating attractive resources which are not focused enough on the learning that pupils need to develop. As a result, some teacher actions do not focus enough on pupils making the progress they should.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. When pupils read, they were able to use their knowledge of phonics to try unfamiliar words during reading sessions. Pupils showed that they had a good understanding of what they were reading, and used evidence from texts to support the answers they gave. The school's focus on reading is evident

in the environment, where all teachers are creating high-profile, exciting reading areas. Across the school, reading is promoted on displays and in the homework that pupils receive.

- Mathematics teaching is stronger throughout the school. This is because teachers are more confident in their approach to making sure that activities set are fit for purpose, and meet the pupils' individual needs on a more consistent basis. However, not enough of the most able pupils are achieving the higher standards.
- Pupils' books show that teachers systematically teach the specific features of different types of text in English. Pupils are given the chance to apply their punctuation, spelling and grammar skills within their independent writing, and to edit their own, and each other's, work. However, this is not yet well developed in other subjects.
- The small proportion of disadvantaged pupils from middle- and lower-attaining starting points learn well. This is because teachers know their individual needs and, under the effective guidance and support of the assistant headteacher, ensure that additional support is targeted well to help them with their work.
- The support programmes in place to provide additional help to the small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are having a positive impact. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making at least expected, and in many cases good, progress from their various starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement because, although leaders demonstrate the care they provide for pupils, the recording of all safeguarding matters does not support and reflect the nurturing culture of the school.
- Even though pupils are keen to learn, not all adults routinely deepen and extend pupils' skills. Pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of how to make certain they improve, or how to challenge themselves to do so. Work in books shows that many pupils are compliant and complete the tasks they are set. There is little evidence of pupils independently aspiring to challenge themselves to make better progress. As a result, they do not make the progress they could.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. The curriculum includes teaching about e-safety and how to stay safe online. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about fire drills and knowing the purpose of them, and what to do. Pupils' perceptive awareness of safety was highlighted to the inspectors by pupils mentioning a concern they had about a small hole in the fence that could get bigger, and consequently become a hazard.
- Pupils are very aware of the different forms that bullying can take. They report that they are 'not allowed to be a bully'. Pupils say that there are no incidents of bullying at St Cross. They feel well supported and know that help from all staff is readily available should the need arise. Older pupils are very proud of their roles as 'peacemakers'.

Pupils are trained to provide peer mediation with any low-level issues that occur.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Adults have very positive relationships with all pupils and demand high expectations of behaviour and conduct. Leaders make sure the behaviour policy is applied consistently. Pupils say they understand the systems in place. They feel these are fair and used appropriately. The school is a happy place in which to learn.
- During the inspection, pupils demonstrated that they are friendly and welcoming to visitors. They display exemplary manners. Their sensible behaviour in school helps to create a calm, purposeful environment. Where the school has identified that pupils may need additional support to help them to manage their own behaviour, effective provision has been put in place, and appropriate actions taken.
- Breaktimes are characterised by friendly play and sharing of play resources. Older pupils regularly support younger children. Year 6 pupils take all their responsibilities seriously and are proud to be the oldest pupils in the school.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They listen well and settle quickly to the work that teachers set them. Even when activities are not well matched to their needs, pupils try hard to do the right thing, and complete the work set causing very little disruption to others.
- Historically, attendance has been below the national average over time. This is particularly so for persistent absence, specifically for the more vulnerable pupils. However, leaders' relentless focus, and monitoring of this, is ensuring that the trend is continuously improving. As a result, recent attendance information shows that the school attendance and persistent absence rates are now more broadly in line with the national average.
- Parents who completed the Parent View survey, and contributed to the Ofsted text service, said that their children were happy at the school, and that there were no issues with pupils' behaviour. One parent said, 'The staff have high expectations of how children behave, and the children follow the rules so that they are all happy.'

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, from pupils' individual high starting points on entry into key stage 2, the proportions of pupils making consistently good progress have not been high enough in reading, writing and mathematics. Published achievement information shows that progress has not been strong enough for individuals across the school.
- In 2016, although pupils' attainment in Year 6 for reading, writing and mathematics was at least at the national average, pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally from the same starting points for reading. Additionally, not enough pupils made rapid progress to attain the higher standard of which they were capable.
- Leaders acknowledge that, too often, the most able pupils are not challenged well enough. Older pupils often have to complete work that demands the same level of knowledge and skills, rather than deepening understanding and challenging them to

think differently. Consequently, progress slows. Work in pupils' books confirms that standards are continuing to improve, but that the most able pupils are still not achieving as highly as they could.

- Over the last three years, results in the Year 1 national phonics screening check reflect good outcomes for phonics achievement. The proportion of pupils meeting, and exceeding, the expected standard confirms that achievements in early reading and phonics are well above the national average. In the early years and key stage 1, children and pupils master reading skills quickly, and read with increasing fluency and understanding.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. However, far fewer higher-attaining pupils achieved 'greater depth' in their learning, indicating that progress for the most able pupils in key stage 1 was also not as good as for other classmates.
- Past small numbers of disadvantaged pupils mean that the statistical significance of their results is difficult to assess and cannot be reported upon without identifying individual pupils. However, detailed school analysis does consistently indicate that, overall, disadvantaged pupils' needs are well met. As a result, they achieve well compared to other pupils nationally.
- The school ensures that the small numbers of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. They have detailed, individualised learning plans that identify clear steps of progress. Effective deployment and support from teaching assistants, under the precise guidance of the assistant headteacher, ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points.
- By the time Year 6 leave St Cross, the fact that their attainment is at least at national average or above indicates that they are well prepared for their next stages of education. Though this is the case, pupils at St Cross could leave the school attaining higher than they currently do, and this means pupils could be even better prepared for secondary school.

Early years provision

Good

- The leadership of the early years leader, and the headteacher's input to support this, is good. Leaders effectively ensure that the Reception children are catered for well, both in terms of their basic skills and personal development. The early years leader is enthusiastic and committed to improving further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the early years, and has an accurate view of what to do next.
- Generally children start Reception with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. They make good progress during their time in Reception, benefiting from teaching that is purposeful and creative. Staff work well together to support and extend children's learning. Consequently, Reception children are being well prepared for Year 1.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good and they get on, learn and play well with each other. Relationships between adults and children are warm and positive.

Staff ensure that children's safety and well-being are given a high priority and all statutory welfare requirements are met.

- Children settle quickly into well-established school routines. They know what is expected of them, for example when working and playing together, and when listening and responding to staff. As a result, there is a calm but purposeful learning environment which children enjoy being a part of.
- Children quickly learn to develop their imagination, independence and curiosity. Adults' high-quality questioning successfully develops children's thinking. This is evident within the environment, as well as in teacher-led sessions. The teaching staff are astute and perceptive in their observations. They make accurate assessments of children's individual needs and plan activities to develop strengths, as well as supporting areas of need.
- The early years leader and staff team have ensured that the effectiveness of the early years is increasing. In 2016, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was just above national average. This represents good progress from children's starting points, and confirms that standards in the early years are consistently at the national average or just above, year on year.

School details

Unique reference number	117483
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023426

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cate Company
Headteacher	Kathryn Hall
Telephone number	01992 467309
Website	www.stcross.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@stcross.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 July 2012

Information about this school

- St Cross Catholic Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- Over half of pupils are White British.
- There is a higher proportion than average of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not, or believed not to be, English is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across all year groups during the two days. Lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher and the two assistant headteachers.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the two assistant headteachers, curriculum subject leaders, the governors, including the chair of governors, and local authority representatives. Inspectors also took into account the 14 staff responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors evaluated documents, including the school's own evaluation of the school's performance, the school improvement plan, minutes of meetings, reports on attendance and behaviour, and records related to pupils' safety, academic attainment and progress.
- Inspectors spoke informally with groups of pupils, looked at pupils' work in lessons, scrutinised samples of work in different subjects across different ages and abilities, and listened to pupils read. The one response to the confidential pupil questionnaire was also taken into account.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in class, and at break and lunchtime and around the school.
- Inspectors took account of 27 comments received on the Ofsted text message service, analysed 74 responses from the parents' online questionnaire, Parent View, and looked at results of the school's own recent surveys.

Inspection team

Tracy Fielding, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Simon Webb

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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