

Holy Cross Church of England Primary School

Belmont Road, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 1BP

Inspection dates

19–20 April 2017

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's committed and determined leadership has had a significant and positive impact on the rate of improvement in the school since her appointment in April 2016.
- The headteacher and governors have secured substantial improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment during the past year.
- Effective teaching ensures that pupils learn well in all year groups. Pupils make better progress in their learning than at the time of the previous inspection. As a result, pupils' outcomes are rising across the school.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points during the early years. By the end of Reception Year children are well prepared, with the knowledge and skills needed to learn successfully in Year 1.
- The school's warm, hard-working and inclusive atmosphere ensures that pupils feel valued, respected and safe.
- Pupils are friendly, polite and keen to do well. They are proud of their school and their achievements. Pupils' good behaviour makes a strong contribution to their learning.
- The governing body plays an increasingly effective role in the school's performance. Governors provide good support and challenge for school leaders.
- Teaching does not yet deepen and extend the most able pupils' learning fully enough. As a result, the most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- Some pupils do not attend regularly enough to achieve well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure pupils' outstanding outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teaching extends and deepens the most able pupils' learning and understanding more effectively
 - pupils attend regularly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher knows what needs to be done in the school to improve its performance. Since her appointment in April 2016, she has lost no time in developing the quality of teaching, learning, behaviour and leadership, building on the good start made by her predecessor.
- The headteacher and her team have secured substantial improvements in the quality of teaching. Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning are much higher than at the time of the previous inspection and teaching builds well on pupils' starting points. As a result, pupils are increasingly well prepared for the next stage of their education at the end of key stage 2.
- The headteacher has taken staff and governors with her on the school's journey of rapid improvement during the past year. Staff and parents recognise the school's increasing success. One parent commented, 'The headteacher is leading the school into an exciting future', a sentiment widely shared among parents, staff and governors.
- Subject leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. They have in-depth knowledge about the most effective teaching practice in their subject specialisms and give teachers good advice about how to support pupils' differing needs.
- The inclusion leader has established robust systems to check that support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is making a positive difference to their learning and personal development. Additional funding is used well.
- Leaders use training effectively to support teachers' and teaching assistants' professional development. They meet regularly with teachers to check and discuss pupils' progress, and to plan extra help for pupils where needed. The assistant headteacher plays an increasingly influential role in helping teachers to improve their practice.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding well to support the small number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group. For example, disadvantaged pupils who need extra help with their learning benefit from individual and small-group teaching in English and mathematics. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their classmates in school and to other pupils nationally.
- School leaders have developed and extended the curriculum since the previous inspection to increase pupils' interest in learning. For example, they have introduced more opportunities for pupils to participate in activities in the school's grounds and its wooded area. This has strengthened pupils' enjoyment of school. Visits and themed weeks, such as 'science week', contribute well to pupils' motivation to learn.
- Leaders have focused successfully on improving pupils' thinking, learning and language skills during the past year. As a result, pupils of all ages tackle activities with growing confidence, and express themselves with increasing clarity.

- School life contributes well to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's religious ethos underpins teaching and learning and provides pupils with a secure framework for their behaviour and actions. For example, pupils are quick to think of the feelings and needs of others. One pupil's comment illustrated the school's success in developing pupils' respect for people from different backgrounds when he said: 'I like this school because people who have harder backgrounds and tougher lives are treated equally to everyone else.' Pupils participate respectfully during assemblies and regularly add their thoughts and prayers to the school's 'prayer corners' around the school.
- Teachers give pupils regular opportunities to debate thought-provoking and topical issues such as liberty, democracy and the role of Parliament. Pupils discuss the school's values and British values sensitively and perceptively.
- Leaders make very good use of primary school sports premium, offering a wide range of options to engage pupils in physical activity. The physical education leader and specialist teaching assistant are committed to involving as many pupils as possible in sports, commenting, 'It's all about having fun and being healthy.' Their enthusiasm is clearly infectious, with increasing numbers of pupils participating in clubs and events, both in school and in the local community. Pupils say they have been able to try out activities for the first time, such as badminton and table tennis, and enjoy learning new skills. Teachers and teaching assistants develop their practice by observing specialist sports coaches teaching physical education.
- School leaders and governors are acutely aware of the need to improve pupils' attendance to ensure that pupils achieve well. Leaders take every opportunity to remind parents of the importance of regular attendance. The inclusion leader works closely with the headteacher, local authority and agencies to support pupils and their families. Leaders' insistence that pupils attend regularly is beginning to pay off, with small improvements in attendance during the past year.
- Leaders, staff and governors are committed to playing their part in moving the school to the next stage in its development. They are ambitious for the school's future and determined to ensure that pupils of all abilities achieve well. Leaders know that the most able pupils should achieve more in their learning and have suitable plans in place to develop this aspect of the school's work.

Governance of the school

- Governors share the headteacher's determination to provide the best possible education for all pupils. Their understanding of their roles and responsibilities has improved substantially since the previous inspection. They hold school leaders rigorously to account for pupils' achievement and ask increasingly searching questions about the quality of teaching and learning.
- Governors have reviewed and restructured their work to ensure more efficient and effective use of their time. For example, governors' visits to the school are focused more sharply on the priorities for improvement and on whether developments are raising achievement.
- Governors regularly complete safeguarding training and are confident about what to do should a concern arise.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Rigorous and efficient safeguarding procedures provide a secure framework for staff, pupils and parents.
- The headteacher, governors and local authority representatives work together closely and regularly review and update policies to reflect national requirements. The school secretary works diligently to ensure that recruitment checks are completed promptly and fully. The school site is attractive, tidy and maintained to a good standard.
- Regular and thorough training ensures that staff are alert to pupils' needs. They are clear about what to do if they have any worries about pupils' safety. Leaders respond seriously and proportionately to any safeguarding concerns. They work closely with agencies, such as health specialists and children's services, whenever necessary to ensure pupils' safety.
- The school's successful focus on developing pupils' ability and willingness to talk about their ideas and feelings has strengthened pupils' safety. Pupils say they feel safe and secure in school. All parents and staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire agree with this view.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Substantial developments in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection have secured marked improvements in pupils' progress in a wide range of subjects. Teachers have much higher expectations of pupils' potential to achieve well, and are more knowledgeable about how to move pupils' learning forward.
- Good-quality mathematics teaching ensures that pupils are well equipped with key numeracy facts and skills. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to think through their ideas and to put their learning into practice when solving mathematical problems. This ensures that pupils develop a secure understanding of mathematical concepts.
- In English, teachers give pupils frequent opportunities to read a wide range of books and to write for different purposes and audiences. As a result, pupils enjoy reading and write with increasing confidence.
- Improvements in phonics teaching during the past year have halted a decline in the results of the Year 1 phonics screening check. Consistently well-organised, engaging and confident phonics teaching ensures that pupils learn fundamental reading skills well.
- Teaching assistants provide warm encouragement and effective support for pupils of different abilities, including those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants help pupils to develop useful learning skills during lessons, such as using a number square successfully to solve mathematical problems, so that pupils are not always reliant on adult support to complete the work set.
- While better teaching has secured impressive improvements in pupils' learning, teaching does not yet deepen and extend the most able pupils' learning and understanding fully enough.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are interested in learning and work very well together. The school's successful focus on improving pupils' thinking and speaking skills means pupils talk about their learning with increasing confidence. They talk to adults and to each other about their work eagerly, and listen carefully to their classmates' ideas.
- Pupils feel that adults in school value their views. This helps them to feel secure. One commented, 'You can talk to teachers if you have a worry and they take care of it very quickly', while another said, 'Adults in school are very supportive.' All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire feel that pupils are happy in school.
- Pupils say that their teachers often speak to them about a wide range of safety issues. They like listening to visitors, such as the community police officer, when they talk about the steps pupils can take to keep safe. Pupils have a sensible view about what they can do to make sure they are safe, including when using the internet.
- Pupils enthuse about the wide range of sporting opportunities offered in school. They like learning new skills and enjoy meeting pupils from other schools when participating in sports tournaments and competitions.
- The school's breakfast club provides a warm, welcoming and relaxed start to the school day for those who attend. Pupils of all ages enjoy chatting to each other while they eat breakfast and play.
- Pupils' attendance rates have been consistently lower than the national average for primary schools for several years. The headteacher and inclusion leader have focused relentlessly on improving pupils' attendance during the past year with signs of success. However, some pupils do not attend regularly enough to achieve well. Leaders and governors are acutely aware of the need to build on recent improvements in pupils' attendance. They continue to work closely and effectively with parents and agencies.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well during lessons, playtimes and when moving around the school.
- Parents, staff and pupils say that behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. Most parents who completed the online questionnaire feel that pupils are well behaved.
- Pupils say their teachers encourage them to be friendly and to respect others. Pupils enjoy playing games together and catching up with friends during lunchtimes. They eat their lunch sensibly in the dining hall and follow the school rules.
- Pupils say that there are rarely any concerns about bullying and that teachers and their headteacher quickly sort out the very few incidents which occur. This view is supported by the school's meticulously maintained records.

- During the past year, leaders and teachers have focused on developing pupils' ability to persevere when they find work difficult. However, while pupils are increasingly confident about tackling challenging tasks, some tend to give up too easily and lose focus when the work is more demanding.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The quality of pupils' learning has improved substantially since the previous inspection. Pupils make good progress from their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, standards in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects are rising in all year groups.
- In 2016, pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics were above average at the end of key stage 1, and in line with national averages at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils say they like the changes made to mathematics teaching during the past year. They enjoy thinking about how to use their mathematics knowledge to tackle activities of increasing difficulty. During the inspection, many pupils in key stage 2 were engrossed in focused discussions with each other as they worked systematically through mathematics problems to reach successful solutions.
- Pupils make good progress in developing reading skills, including the use of phonics. The results of the Year 1 phonics screening check were in line with national averages in 2016. By the end of Year 2, all pupils had achieved expected standards, including the small number of disadvantaged pupils in the year group. Pupils of different abilities speak enthusiastically about favourite authors and about the books they are reading.
- Pupils learn how to use vocabulary to write effectively for a wide range of purposes and audiences. For example, they write perceptively about festivals and beliefs in religious education lessons, and describe experiments clearly in science.
- While improvements in teaching mean pupils of all abilities are making better progress, the most able pupils do not yet achieve as well as they should in English, mathematics and other subjects. In 2016, the proportion of pupils working at the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 was below average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have sustained good-quality teaching and learning in the early years since the previous inspection. The proportions of children achieving a good level of development are consistently in line with national averages. This ensures that most children are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to do well during the next stage of their education in Year 1.
- Further improvements in the quality of teaching and in children's learning during the past year mean that more children are on track to achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception Year in 2017. The small number of disadvantaged pupils in the early years make the same good progress as their classmates.

- Children in the early years are happy, settled and secure. They are keen to learn, busy and behave well. Children join in enthusiastically with activities and lessons. Good relationships between the children in the early years and the older Year 1 pupils contribute to the positive atmosphere in the classroom. Parents are pleased with the way their children have settled into school life during Reception Year.
- The early years leader makes sure children have plenty of opportunities to write and to enjoy books. Effective phonics teaching gives children the key skills they need to read and write successfully.
- Leaders regularly check how well children are learning and use this information to make any necessary changes to teaching and activities. For example, during the past year the early years leader has focused particularly on improving boys' writing skills – with evident success. Children's work, such as their recent writing about 'The enormous turnip', illustrates how well teaching is building children's literacy skills and reflects their positive attitudes to reading and writing. Girls and boys make equally good progress.
- Adults make good use of advice provided by specialist agencies, such as speech therapy services, to support children with additional learning needs. Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make significant gains in their learning as a result.
- The assistant headteacher provides effective leadership for the early years. During the past year, she has developed and extended activities to reflect all aspects of learning and to appeal to children's interests. As a result, children are even more engaged with learning than previously and making better progress. However, as in other year groups, the most able children do not always learn as well as they should.

School details

Unique reference number	114562
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10024501

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beverley Blanch and Sandie Boniface (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Cathy Dart
Telephone number	01825 762336
Website	www.holycross.e-sussex.sch.uk
Email address	office@holycross.e-sussex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–22 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is higher than that found in most schools.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average.
- The school provides full-time early years provision in a mixed-age class of Reception children and Year 1 pupils.

- The school has a breakfast club which was included in this inspection.
- There is a privately run nursery on site which is inspected separately.
- There have been several changes in headship since the previous inspection. The current headteacher was appointed in April 2016.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in 11 lessons or part-lessons, including seven observed jointly with the headteacher. She also visited the school's breakfast club.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, the school secretary, parents and pupils. She met with three governors, including the two chairs of the governing body. The inspector also had a discussion with a local authority representative.
- The inspector took account of 18 responses to Parent View. In addition, she considered the views expressed by parents who spoke with her informally at the start of the school day. The inspector also took account of 16 responses to the staff questionnaire and 11 responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- The inspector observed the school's work and considered a range of documents including safeguarding policies, the school's improvement plan and information about pupils' progress and attendance.
- The inspector looked at a sample of pupils' work provided by the school, as well as looking at pupils' work during visits to lessons. She also listened to a Year 1 and a Year 6 pupil read and talked to them about their books.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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