

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Charles Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA10 1LN

Inspection dates

28–29 November 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' use of the school's assessment systems has not had a good enough impact on pupils' progress.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching have been slow and have not yet had the desired effect on improving outcomes for some pupils. Teaching is not consistently strong across both key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 is weak as too few pupils achieve the expected standard or greater depth.
- Recent improvements in the teaching of reading have not yet had a strong impact on pupils' progress in key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Learning is not routinely planned to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met.
- Teachers do not consistently stretch and challenge pupils to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not always use their time effectively in lessons and pupils' progress is slow.
- Middle leaders do not have enough impact on for the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress in their subject areas.
- Pupils do not consistently display positive attitudes to their learning.
- Too many pupils are regularly absent from school and, as a result, they miss out on learning opportunities.

The school has the following strengths

- The personal development and welfare of pupils is a high priority in the school. Pupils are given the support they need to develop positive attitudes to their learning.
- Leaders' recent actions have begun to improve progress, particularly in writing. Leaders recognise, however, that more needs to be done.
- Children in early years make good progress. They are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- The partnership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher is contributing to improvements in writing and mathematics in key stage 2.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 and key stage 2, by:
 - ensuring that assessment is used effectively in classrooms, so that all pupils are challenged in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers maintain high expectations, so that pupils work with positive attitudes and engage in learning effectively.
- Improve the attendance of pupils and reduce the numbers of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that teachers and leaders use the school's assessment systems rigorously to improve pupils' learning and progress
 - ensuring that all leaders are fully accountable for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
 - building capacity in leadership across the school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, staffing changes have had a negative impact on leaders' ability to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This has affected outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2. There has been a decline in standards since the previous inspection. For example, progress in reading is very weak. There have, however, been improvements in writing in key stage 2.
- Staffing is now more stable and improvements in teaching are being accelerated. The work of senior leaders in sharing good practice effectively is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The pace of change needs to be accelerated further, so that recent improvements, for example in the teaching of mathematics, have a strong impact on pupils' progress and more pupils achieve greater depth.
- Leaders and teachers have not used the school's assessment system effectively to improve pupils' learning and progress or to evaluate the work of the school. Until recently, leaders have not had an accurate and comprehensive understanding of pupils' attainment and progress because information has not been shared.
- Leaders understand the current strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have plans to tackle underachievement and there is some evidence of the impact of these plans. Current pupils' progress is improving slowly. Differences in outcomes for groups of pupils are now being targeted more carefully. As a result of leaders' plans, the numbers of pupils across the school achieving the expected standard is now improving. For Year 6 pupils there has been improved progress, leading to an improvement in the numbers of pupils achieving greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Middle leadership requires improvement. Middle leaders do not have enough impact on learning and progress in their subject areas. Senior leaders have plans to improve the quality of middle leadership, but they are not yet implemented.
- The effect of staff turbulence has hindered the pace of improvement to secure good progress consistently across the school. The establishment of a stable staff has been difficult for leaders until recently. However, teachers spoke of the effective support they have received to improve their teaching.
- Leadership of special educational needs and early years is effective. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate support. For example, intervention groups are provided to improve pupils' writing, and as a result of this, good progress is made.
- Parents are supportive of the school. They spoke of their 'amazing' school, where any issues are dealt with quickly. The majority of parents who offered their views were positive about the school and staff. In particular, parents appreciate the support they receive for pupils who have special needs and/or disabilities. They spoke about leaders who 'go the extra mile' for their child.
- Leaders provide many opportunities for parents to support their children in learning. Parents spoke positively of the online support available to help their children in

mathematics. Other parents enjoyed the opportunities the school gave to attend reading sessions held every morning. Parents who have recently arrived in Great Britain spoke positively about the progress their children had made since arriving at the school.

- Leaders have been successful in raising standards in phonics. The numbers of pupils achieving the expected standard have risen rapidly to be in line with the national figure. This improvement was maintained in the most recent outcomes for the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Leaders and staff emphasise respect for others. Pupils are keen to help and support each other and also people in the wider world. This is clearly seen in the pupils' fundraising efforts. Teachers promote diversity through their planning of the curriculum, displays in classrooms and books available for pupils to read. For example, during the inspection, early years children were making challah bread. This was part of their work when learning about other faiths. Leaders and staff effectively promote British values through assemblies and activities such as mock elections for prime minister.
- Leaders are beginning to target the use of pupil premium funding carefully. They now measure the impact it is having on outcomes. The use of intervention groups is now more fully embedded and is beginning to have a stronger impact on current disadvantaged pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders have sought external support in raising standards. This has been effective in improving writing skills in key stage 2.

Governance of the school

- Governors are supportive of the headteacher but do not act as a cohesive group. Governors are aware of the challenges the school faces and spoke of the 'times of turbulence' that have had a negative impact on the school's outcomes. They said that the difficulties they have faced affected their ability to work closely with the school and provide effective challenge. Governors are aware of the need for the school to improve and have themselves requested support from a national leader of governance.
- Governors are passionate about the school and their desire to improve it for their pupils.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the importance of preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. They see this as a very important feature of their work.
- Governors discharge their safeguarding duties with care. They have attended training, including the 'Prevent' duty training. As a result of this training, governors understand their responsibilities more clearly.
- Governors have not ensured that the school's website fully meets requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is effective because the school has created a culture of quickly responding to need wherever it is seen. As a result, pupils are well cared for and nurtured carefully.

- Adults are very aware of the needs families can have and work tirelessly to develop links with outside agencies. For example, the school quickly identifies pupils who are young carers and gets those pupils the support they need. In addition, the school supports the 'Young Carers' organisation in its fundraising efforts.
- The safeguarding lead is vigilant in seeking advice where it is needed. Records are thorough and useful in getting the right level of support for pupils. Staff are fully aware of how they refer their concerns to the designated safeguarding lead. Staff training about safeguarding is up to date. Staff know whom they must refer any concerns to.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because teachers do not use assessment rigorously enough to inform their planning of lessons. Some pupils are not stretched and challenged. When teachers do provide challenge, progress is more rapid. For example, in Year 6, pupils have been given challenging mathematical work that is now having a positive impact on their learning.
- Some pupils do not engage in their learning because the level of challenge is not appropriate to their needs. This is particularly the case for most-able pupils, but can sometimes be seen for other pupils when work is too hard.
- Some teachers do not realise quickly enough when pupils do not understand their work or need help to move on in their work. As a result, progress is slowed and time is wasted.
- Teachers do not routinely identify those pupils who have less positive attitudes to learning. This makes it harder for teachers to ensure that such pupils' progress is as fast as it could be.
- Teachers display good questioning skills that help children to develop their understanding of concepts. For example, in Year 4, a writing activity chosen to develop comprehension skills was highly effective. The teacher's questioning ensured that all pupils understood the task and were engaged in their learning.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to explain concepts clearly and improve skills. In Year 3, pupils' progress was good because the teacher ensured that pupils' reasoning was discussed and explained when mistakes were made.
- Teachers emphasise talk and improving pupils' knowledge of language. Teachers make best use of opportunities that arise to discuss language and ensure that pupils' understanding is improved.
- Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop their writing and communication skills across the curriculum. For example, in Year 6 history books, pupils had written in role as an evacuee. They had also used Second World War artefacts to develop their historical research skills. They were then able to write notes about their discoveries. In Year 3, pupils had written in role as the archaeologist, Howard Carter, in their Egyptians topic.
- Homework is set appropriately. Pupils have regular opportunities to practise their skills and reinforce learning at home.

- Pupils are now benefiting from the sharper focus on reading. Pupils have weekly access to the school library. Pupils talk about their love of books. Their reading journals show that they are now reading at home more regularly. Pupils write book reviews and these are shared with other pupils. Pupils in Year 6 explained how they recommend books to each other. They explained the reading competition in the school to reach the target of reading 25 books by the end of next school term. Current progress in reading is benefiting from this enthusiasm for books. In Year 2, pupils read with fluency and expression and use their phonics skills well. They were able to discuss who their favourite author is and explain the titles of books written by those authors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff work hard to support pupils when they need it. They identify pupils who need support rapidly and seek appropriate help by liaising with a variety of external agencies.
- Pupils are encouraged to care for each other and all adults model behaviour that shows care and concern for others. Pupils are considerate members of their community and good citizens because the caring ethos of the school contributes positively to the personal development of pupils. Displays throughout the school promote the message of the importance of thinking of others.
- Pupils take pride in their work and are proud of their school. They feel safe and are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including internet safety. They explained that they have 'worry' boxes in their classrooms that are checked every week. Pupils say that they do not call each other names but, if it happens, it is dealt with quickly.
- Pupils say that their teachers always encourage them to do their best. They know that reading is very important and that it is an important focus for the school.
- Pupils are encouraged to be knowledgeable about other religions and cultures throughout the curriculum. Displays around school show the school's work to develop pupils' understanding of diversity in the wider community. This work is successful and, as a result, the school is very welcoming to pupils who arrive in school without any spoken English language. Pupils settle quickly and are well supported.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because some pupils do not have consistently positive attitudes towards learning. As a result, progress is slower for some pupils than it could be.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well around school, although occasionally behaviour on corridors needs to improve.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved now, and in classrooms in particular there is a calm and orderly atmosphere. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. Behaviour logs show that the school's actions have been successful in reducing behavioural incidents that cause concern. Exclusions are used only when necessary.

- Pupils are polite and friendly to everyone. They are confident and respectful to visitors in the school. Pupils play and interact with each other positively on the playground. Staff supervision of pupils is vigilant.
- Most pupils value their education but there are a small number of pupils who are regularly absent from school. Leaders challenge and support parents but their actions have not yet had the desired impact.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils across the school do not make consistently strong progress in reading. Progress for most-able pupils in key stage 2 is also weaker in mathematics. Attainment in key stage 1 is also weak, as too few pupils achieve both the expected standard and greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading and mathematics is lower than for non-disadvantaged pupils. As a result of this, some pupils in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 do not develop secure knowledge, understanding and skills to prepare them for the next stage of their learning.
- Pupils in key stage 2 now make better progress in their writing. However, disadvantaged pupils do not make as much progress as non-disadvantaged pupils and fewer achieve the expected standard. This is, however, an improvement since the previous year.
- Attainment in mathematics in key stage 2 at the expected standard has improved and is now in line with national figures.
- Leaders have not used assessment data to target where pupils need intervention, support or challenge. Recent improvements in the tracking and analysis of data are showing an improving picture across the school.
- The success of leaders' efforts to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils has been variable in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, in key stage 1 in 2017, in reading and mathematics, fewer disadvantaged pupils attained the expected standard or greater depth when compared to other pupils nationally. Although standards rose for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017, they remained below average when compared to other pupils nationally. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attained greater depth in writing was in line with that of other pupils nationally.
- Pupils' achievements in phonics have improved greatly and are now in line with the national figure. This improvement has been sustained over time.

Early years provision

Good

- Outcomes in the early years have risen and are now close to the national figure. Children make good progress because of effective leadership and teaching.
- The leader has planned and taken action that has ensured that children develop good learning behaviours. For example, her analysis of children's needs helps her to ensure that all staff promote language across the Nursery and Reception classes. Talk

between adults and children is a constant feature of the setting.

- The early years leader's planning for improvement is effective. Many children start school with skills that are typically below those expected of their age and there is a high proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite this, the early years leader has ensured that children make good progress in their learning, including those children who are disadvantaged. This is because she is rigorous in ensuring that plans are shared with all staff. She also ensures that all staff receive appropriate training and support. However, there is a difference between boys' and girls' outcomes. The early years leader is aware of this and is taking action to improve outcomes for boys. The outdoor area has been developed to engage boys in active learning. For example, children were building towers of different heights and adults were supporting and questioning them as they tried to find the best way of building the tallest tower. Children were keen to solve the problem and worked cooperatively.
- Children display good attitudes towards learning. They persevere when they find something difficult, they are confident when trying out activities they are unfamiliar with and listen carefully to adults. For example, children persevered when making challah bread. They kneaded and shaped the bread although they found this difficult.
- Adults challenge children in their thinking. For example, children were asked what would happen to the ice they found outside if they took it inside. Children discussed the possibilities and took the ice inside to investigate further because they were encouraged to find out what would happen.
- Reading is promoted through sharing books and also by developing children's phonic knowledge. Children paint and draw letters independently in their play because there are many opportunities provided for mark-making and writing. Opportunities for such work, however, are not as evident outdoors.
- Teaching is good because learning is part of every activity, whether it is planned or spontaneous. Adults seek to maximise every opportunity available to encourage children to think, talk and learn. For example, the fruit that was available for children to eat had words written on the skin. Children were encouraged to use their phonics skills before peeling their fruit.
- Children's behaviour is good because of the positive relationships between adults and children. Adults' careful behaviour management techniques have an effective impact on children's ability to make the right choices. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Partnerships with parents have been actively promoted by early years staff. Parents spoke highly of the opportunities they have to stay and play and read with their children. Parents are encouraged to share information about their child and do so often. This positive partnership is contributing well to children's good progress.
- Staff have effective partnerships with external agencies so that children can be better supported when this is needed.
- The curriculum is well planned and children have exciting opportunities to develop their learning. For example, children were very engaged when they were making a wormery and discussed with the adult what they would need. Regular daily activities also have a positive impact on children's progress. For example, when children prepared their healthy snack they were offered opportunities for developing their number skills by

counting the fruit. Adults effectively questioned children, for example, asking children to add 'one more'.

School details

Unique reference number	104804
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10037792

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Theresa Butler
Headteacher	Maureen Matthews
Telephone number	01744 678319
Website	www.holycrossprimarysthelens.co.uk
Email address	holycross@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about the content of the curriculum or the attendance record at governing body and committee meetings over the last academic year.
- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school met the government's floor standards in 2017. These are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning throughout the school. Four observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and one with the deputy headteacher. In addition, inspectors scrutinised pupils' workbooks, took part in a series of short visits to lessons, discussed reading with a group of pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 and listened to them read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the chair of the governing body and two other governors, the local authority representative and the diocesan representative, the headteacher and other senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, school improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, information about teachers' performance and external reviews of the school. An inspector reviewed the contents of the school website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day and met with a group of parents. There were seven responses expressed by parents through Parent View. Staff completed six returns to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, which were considered during the inspection.

Inspection team

Christine Howard, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Dimeck	Ofsted Inspector

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