

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Gautby Road, Bidston, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH41 7DU

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2018

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Despite improvements in 2018, leaders have not been effective in raising outcomes for pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. They remain below the national figures at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- In the early years, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what children can achieve. As a result, activities do not routinely meet children's needs effectively.
- Although attendance is improving, it is still below average. This has led to gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- A lack of focus in the teaching of phonics, grammar, punctuation and spelling in the past has led to gaps in pupils' knowledge. This hinders progress in their written work.
- Variations in the quality of teaching, and teachers' subject knowledge, have a negative impact on teachers' ability to develop pupils' knowledge and skills effectively.
- In some year groups, teachers do not routinely use assessment information effectively to identify the next steps in pupils' learning. As a result, activities do not meet pupils' needs effectively. Pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable, particularly in writing.
- Leaders have designed a new curriculum to more closely meet the needs of pupils. However, it is too soon to measure the impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding in subjects other than English and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher's evaluation is honest and accurate. She has effectively taken swift actions to bring about positive changes for improvement.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. They make good progress from their starting points.
- Strong relationships between adults and pupils contribute to pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- Governors contribute effectively to the leadership of the school. They have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the opportunities leaders provide. They are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management further by:
 - embedding the changes to teaching of writing and raising expectations of what pupils can achieve by the end of each academic year
 - ensuring that teachers have sufficient training and guidance to improve their subject knowledge across a range of subjects
 - building on the improvements in attendance so that pupils attend school regularly.
- Improve the quality of teaching and progress so that a greater proportion of pupils attain as well as other pupils nationally by ensuring that teachers:
 - have skills and knowledge across the range of subjects
 - use assessment information accurately and ensure that activities match pupils' ability and build on their prior knowledge
 - promote pupils' phonic, grammar, punctuation and spelling skills and knowledge effectively in their writing.
- Improve the quality of the early years further by ensuring that teachers use assessment of children's learning and development to ensure that activities meet their needs effectively and a higher proportion are ready for Year 1.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes in staffing, including at a senior level. A short period of instability led to a decline in standards in 2017, which was identified by the local authority and support was provided to the previous leaders of the school. The appointment of the present headteacher at the start of the academic year has brought about much-needed stability, and staff morale is high. She is supported well by the newly appointed senior leadership team. Governors and staff share her drive to improve standards in the school quickly and raise expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Leaders' honest and accurate evaluation has identified the key priorities for improvement. Leaders' detailed action plan shows that appropriate strategies are in place to bring about much-needed change. Despite early signs of improvement, it is too soon to measure the impact of the actions on outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching to identify gaps in teachers' subject knowledge. The training that staff receive is starting to improve their practice effectively. However, variations in the quality of teaching remain.
- Middle leaders ensure that staff receive training to improve their specific subject knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. They work with other professionals and colleagues in other schools to share good practice and ideas. Although there are signs of improving progress for current pupils, this has not yet had an impact on pupils' outcomes at the end of each key stage.
- The changes leaders have made to the way mathematics is taught are beginning to improve progress for current pupils. However, changes to the teaching of writing are proving to be less effective. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in writing are variable. There are considerable gaps in pupils' learning linked to their application of spelling, grammar and punctuation skills. More time is needed to embed the changes to the way writing is taught so that a higher proportion of pupils are producing written work at a standard similar to pupils of a similar age nationally.
- The leadership of support for pupils with SEND is effective. The focus is on inclusion, and staff receive training so that they meet pupils' needs well, including pupils' social and emotional development and their well-being. Support staff are deployed effectively. As a result, pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders, including governors, ensure that the additional funding for the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to support pupils' social and emotional development and promote their positive well-being. Leaders work well with a range of agencies, professionals and charities to provide training and additional guidance so that pupils and their families have the help and support that they need.
- The additional funding for physical education (PE) and sport is used effectively to provide support for teachers to improve their skills. Pupils benefit from a range of activities, including multi-sports and football. They are beginning to enter competitions with other schools locally.

- Leaders have a clear vision for the development of the school's curriculum. Leaders, including governors, have a good understanding of the barriers to learning and have developed a curriculum that provides rich and meaningful opportunities for pupils to raise their aspirations and expectations of what they can achieve. The curriculum is designed to build on pupils' prior knowledge and provides opportunities to refine their skills in a range of other curriculum subjects, for example geography, history and art. However, the implementation of the curriculum is in its infancy and it is too soon to evaluate the impact on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding in curriculum subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a wide range of activities, for example residential trips to develop their resilience and visitors to school who teach them how to cook healthy meals on a budget. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors commented positively about the improvements in communication and engagement with the school, for example regular coffee afternoons with the headteacher. They welcome the opportunity to be involved in activities to help raise funds, and workshops so that they know how they can help their children at home.

Governance of the school

- Under the new leadership of the school, the governing body has gained a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for further improvement. Governors have the knowledge and skills that they need to hold leaders to account effectively. They share leaders' high expectations and are proud to be part of the school and its place in the local community.
- Governors use their knowledge to review the impact of action plans. They visit the school regularly to check the detailed information that they receive from the headteacher by talking to staff and talking to pupils about their work.
- Governors attend regular training to ensure that they are up to date with new initiatives. They are aware of their statutory duties. Governors understand and fulfil their responsibilities relating to safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures in place for the protection of pupils are understood well by staff. Training ensures that staff have a good understanding of how to identify potential signs of abuse and neglect. Any concerns are acted upon appropriately. All records relating to safeguarding are meticulously maintained.
- Leaders work closely with several external agencies, charities and other professionals to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils and their families receive appropriate help and guidance.
- Checks are in place to ensure that all adults in school are suitable to work with children; this includes volunteers who help in school regularly. Checks are in place to

check on the safety of pupils absent from school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, instability in teaching has hampered pupils' progress. Improvements are emerging. Teachers' previously low expectations due to a lack of understanding of the knowledge and skills that pupils need are beginning to improve. Focused training and guidance in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics are having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching across the school. However, a few variations remain. At times, teaching is not strong enough to overcome the gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge from previous weaker teaching.
- Teachers work with other colleagues and professionals to share expertise, including with colleagues from another local school. This has been particularly successful with the teaching of mathematics. Mathematics is taught systematically across the school, with opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of number systems, build fluency and solve problems with increasing accuracy. This has led to improving progress for current pupils, particularly in key stage 2.
- Changes to the way writing is taught are not fully embedded. Teaching and progress are hampered by variations in teachers' subject knowledge.
- Where assessment information is not used accurately to identify the precise gaps in pupils' learning, pupils do not apply their grammar, spelling and punctuation knowledge effectively. Occasionally, activities do not meet pupils' needs well. This means that the level of challenge for some teachers' activities do not provide enough challenge and support. Consequently, pupils do not make the strong progress they need to succeed, particularly in writing.
- Training for staff ensures that phonics is taught consistently from Nursery. However, it is too early to see the impact of the changes to the way phonics is taught in pupils' own writing in key stage 1.
- Teachers have fostered a love of books well. Pupils enjoy reading the high-quality books teachers have carefully selected. Pupils are beginning to decode words with increasing accuracy. The books that they read match their phonic knowledge appropriately. Parents who spoke to inspectors commented positively on the progress their children are making with their reading.
- Training for support staff ensures that they can help pupils catch up quickly, particularly disadvantaged pupils. They model spoken language effectively, which is improving pupils' accuracy and confidence in their phonic skills and knowledge, particularly in key stage 1.
- Support staff use questions effectively to encourage pupils to expand their ideas and refine their explanations. They are deployed well to support pupils with SEND, either in small groups or individually, to ensure that their needs are met effectively. This has a positive impact on the good progress that they make.
- Positive relations fostered by staff have led to pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Respect for each other is actively promoted and modelled by adults. This has created a calm and focused working environment in which pupils learn.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils feel valued. They know that adults care about them and will listen to them when they have any concerns or worries.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when they are not in school, including online. Visits to school from charities, and well-thought-through assemblies and workshops, provide pupils with information about what to do if they need help.
- Pupils are aware of the importance of being healthy and understand the importance of eating sensibly. Visits to school by a local chef teach pupils the knowledge and skills to produce healthy meals on a budget in a fun and exciting way. Cooking workshops for parents are very popular.
- Leaders provide an exciting range of enrichment experiences to raise aspirations and expand opportunities for pupils, including visitors from the local community and residential trips. Pupils are proud of the fundraising they do for local charities and supporting their local community.
- Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take, including homophobic and racist bullying. They are confident that if bullying did happen, it would be dealt with quickly by leaders and staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' attendance remains persistently below the national average, despite improvements this academic year. An increasing proportion of pupils who have been persistently absent from school are beginning to attend more regularly. Historically, poor attendance for some pupils has hindered pupils' learning and the progress pupils make. However, this trend is beginning to reverse.
- The introduction of the new behaviour system has raised expectations of how pupils conduct themselves throughout the day. The behaviour policy is understood well by pupils and implemented consistently by staff. Pupils treat each other with respect and care about their friends. Pupils who have struggled to control their behaviour in the past are given the help they need to make the right choices.
- Pupils' behaviour and positive attitudes in classrooms support their learning. They are attentive, respond well to instructions and are willing to work hard. They play amicably together most of the time.
- Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously as members of the inclusion committee and subject leaders, as well as role models for the younger pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have been below the national averages for

the past three years. Despite improvements in 2018, particularly in pupils' progress, in the past pupils' progress and attainment were not good enough. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have not been high enough.

- Attainment for pupils in key stage 1 was not high enough in 2017. Although there were improvements in national assessments in 2018, pupils' attainment remained below the national figures. However, inspection evidence shows that there are signs of improvement in most year groups across the school for current pupils.
- In mathematics, attainment is beginning to improve, including for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in key stage 2, because of improvements in the quality of teaching. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils currently in Year 6 are making good progress from low starting points at the end of Year 5.
- Although improvements in the quality of pupils' written work are not as strong, pupils show an understanding of how to write in different styles and for different purposes. However, progress has been hampered by a legacy of weaker teaching and low expectations. Gaps in pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation knowledge hinder the quality of their written work.
- The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is below the national average. Pupils' work shows that they struggle to apply their phonic skills accurately in their independent writing. Although the teaching of phonics is now more systematic, it is too soon to measure the impact of the changes on progress.
- In Year 2, pupils who did not meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check receive the help that they need individually or in small groups. They are catching up quickly and becoming more confident and competent readers.
- Assessment information and work in pupils' books indicate that the support and guidance that vulnerable pupils receive enable them to achieve as well as their peers. Pupils with SEND are making strong progress from their starting points because of the help that they receive.
- The implementation of the new curriculum is in its infancy. There are variations in the amount and quality of work covered in other curriculum subjects. Pupils' work shows that pupils' progress is improving. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of the new curriculum on pupils' knowledge and understanding in other curriculum subjects, for example history.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- A small proportion of children attend the Nursery each morning. Most children attend other nursery settings or have no prior experience of education before they start school in Reception. Leaders' positive relationships with the other early years providers ensure a smooth transition into school. Parents who spoke to inspectors commented positively on how quickly their children settled into school.
- Although leaders have a good understanding about how young children learn, they have not been fully effective in ensuring that teachers build upon children's prior knowledge and understanding when they enter Reception. Consequently, expectations of what children can achieve are not high enough to ensure that progress is

consistently good and an increasing proportion of children are ready for Year 1, particularly disadvantaged pupils.

- Leaders have accurately identified that poor language and communication skills are a key barrier to successful learning for the majority of children. Training for staff from other professionals ensures that they have the knowledge to support children effectively. As a result, although overall teaching requires improvement, there are several strengths. Support staff use questions well to encourage children to expand on their ideas and refine their explanations. For example, in the outdoor area, children were digging for shapes buried in the sand and describing the shapes and their properties with increasing accuracy. Staff modelled the correct language clearly and corrected any mispronunciations sensitively.
- Teachers gather assessment information from a range of sources. However, they do not routinely use this information to identify accurately the next steps in children's learning. Consequently, activities do not provide sufficient challenge to improve children's progress. As a result, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for children to extend their skills, particularly in writing. Teachers encourage children to enjoy number, for example using the 'maths monster' to mess up the number line. However, they do not always build on children's knowledge effectively to develop their mathematical understanding further.
- Leaders quickly establish positive relationships with parents through visits and workshops to 'stay and play' with their children throughout the year. Leaders provide opportunities for parents to work with their children in school and learn how to develop children's early language and communication skills further at home, particularly in Nursery.
- Strong positive relationships between adults and children ensure that children are happy and enjoy school. Leaders have developed a well-resourced and welcoming environment that promotes children's social and emotional development well. Children behave well, help each other and play harmoniously together.
- Positive attitudes to learning are fostered effectively by adults, and early years is a pleasant place to be. Children are eager to learn, for example children were helping each other to create shapes accurately using the resources in the craft area.
- Leaders ensure that the welfare statutory requirements are met. Staff are vigilant and understand the procedures for safeguarding. They encourage children to play safely, particularly when outside, and to care for each other.

School details

Unique reference number	105087
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10045794

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	146
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Allan Rogan
Headteacher	Clare Higgins
Telephone number	0151 652 8454
Website	www.holycross.wirral.sch.uk
Email address	schooloffice@holycross.wirral.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29–30 January 2014

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is more than double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is three times the national average
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast club and a range of after-school activities.
- The school holds the Inclusion Quality Mark.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2018.
- A section 48 inspection took place in January 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching, and pupils' learning and behaviour. The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined inspectors on some of these classroom visits.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at playtimes. Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils and heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of staff. Inspectors also met with three members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding. They took account of school information about pupils' outcomes and scrutinised pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day. They took account of the three responses to Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses from staff and pupils to Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

Amanda Stringer, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Nadine Carroll

Ofsted Inspector

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