



Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104804
LEA St. Helens
Inspection number 277222
Inspection dates 23 January 2006 to 24 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Mike McLachlan CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Charles Street
School category	Voluntary aided		St Helens
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Merseyside WA10 1LN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 678319
Number on roll	202	Fax number	01744 678320
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Connelly
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr M Boyle

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	23 January 2006 - 24 January 2006	277222

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors

Description of the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is a small school. Most pupils live near the school which is situated close to the town centre where there are above average levels of social and economic deprivation. The majority of pupils enter school with social, language and mathematical skills that are well below what is usually expected for children of this age. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with statements, is below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average and of these a very small minority is learning English as an additional language. The school is a member of an Education Action Zone established to support schools in deprived areas and has the Sport England Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Holy Cross is a good school with some features that are outstanding and gives good value for money. The school clearly lives its Christian mission of 'Love, Respect and Justice'. Pupils make good progress to attain above average standards in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. They get off to a very good start in the Foundation Stage where provision is outstanding. The majority of children enter with well below average attainments in social, language and mathematical skills. Nearly all make extremely good progress and attain the nationally expected learning goals by the end of Reception. Standards of personal development are good. These standards are a direct result of the good teaching and the good care and guidance provided by the school. Teachers' marking of work, however, does not always indicate what pupils need to do to improve. The overall good curriculum and rich variety of activities available mean pupils enjoy their time in school. The curriculum in history and geography requires further development to ensure better progression in pupils' learning. The headteacher gives good leadership. He is ably supported by the senior management team, the staff and a supportive governing body and has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection. The school evaluates its performance well although more formal systems of classroom observation by subject managers, to bring all teaching in line with the best, have only recently been introduced. The improved standards, broad curriculum, particularly the improved provision for information and communication technology (ICT), and the improvements to the accommodation have resulted in a welcoming and inclusive environment. The welfare of the pupils of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds is paramount and their academic success is at the heart of all the school offers. The school has established outstanding links with other schools, industry and even universities enriching the experiences of pupils and staff alike. The school clearly has the capacity and willingness to seek further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the plan for formal monitoring of teaching and of pupils' work is implemented to raise the overall quality of teaching to that of the best.
- Improve the marking of pupils' work in all subjects so that pupils clearly know what they need to do to improve their work and reach the next level.
- Ensure there is good progression in pupils' learning in history and geography.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that overall pupils make good progress. The school judges attainment on entry to be below average. Inspectors judge that children start in the Foundation Stage with attainments in social, language and mathematical skills that are well below what are normally expected for children of this age. The outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage results in the vast majority of pupils making exceptionally good progress to attain the nationally expected goals

in personal, social, emotional and language development. Good provision in Years 1 and 2 results in pupils reaching standards that are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress overall and outstanding progress for some pupils.

The good provision in Years 3 to 6 results in standards that are above average in English, mathematics and average in science. Above average standards have been maintained for the past three years. In the Year 6 national tests in 2005, standards reached in English and mathematics were above average and standards reached in science were average. This represents satisfactory progress for this group of pupils given their above average starting point.

Inspection evidence shows that the progress in English, mathematics and science made by pupils currently in Years 3 to 6 is good. Pupils consistently reach or exceed the challenging targets set by the school in partnership with the local authority. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language are very well integrated into the school and consequently make good progress in relation to their starting points. Overall, given their prior attainment, boys and girls progress equally well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that standards of personal development and well-being are good. Pupils really enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes towards learning. They say that, 'teachers make our lessons fun and they are so kind.' The outstanding relationships that exist between pupils and staff, and amongst the pupils themselves, ensure that they are happy and confident, which is reflected in their good attendance. As a result of the caring ethos, the skilled behaviour management and high expectations shown by all staff, pupils show respect and care for others and consequently behave well. Pupils act responsibly and are keen to serve the community. For example, pupils take on the role of 'play-leaders' and 'reading buddies' to support younger pupils. Staff ensure that pupils work safely and healthy lifestyles are well promoted. For instance, healthy snacks are provided at break time. A very good programme of sporting activities also encourages pupils to exercise. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The contributions made by pupils from minority ethnic groups result in pupils gaining a better understanding about life in a diverse multi-cultural society. Pupils are aware of the importance of achieving good social and academic standards as a means to future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that teaching is good and that some teaching is outstanding. In the Foundation Stage, teaching is outstanding. Outstanding relationships and a real buzz of activity in the well-equipped and resourced area ensure that all pupils make extremely good progress. In Years 1 and 2, good and outstanding teaching leads to good progress through challenging question and answer sessions. The 'mind friendly learning' starting activities help children to get ready to learn. Teaching in Years 3 to 6 is good overall and outstanding in Year 6 where energetic well planned activities, enthusiastic pupils, skilled behaviour management and good use of pupil self assessment enable all pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to succeed. Independent and collaborative learning and basic skills are well developed throughout the school. Outstanding developments in using ICT to assist teachers' planning and to provide pupils with individual teaching programmes has considerably improved the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Assessment is satisfactory. Teachers use the assessment of pupils' work well to plan their lessons. However, teachers mark pupils work for accuracy but do not always give sufficient written advice or guidance on what pupils need to do to improve their work or what they need to do to reach the next level. Well trained teaching assistants and the learning mentor contribute significantly to supporting pupils' progress, particularly those who find learning difficult, and in helping teachers in their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree that curriculum provision is good and meets the full range of pupils needs. Information and communication technology is very successfully incorporated across the curriculum and staff use the interactive whiteboards well to plan and deliver lessons. Literacy, numeracy and the arts are strong features of the curriculum and pupils particularly enjoy sports and art activities. The current provision for history and geography is satisfactory, however the school has rightly identified the need to improve overall provision in these subjects to ensure better progression in the pupils' learning. Regular themed weeks enrich the curriculum and are well supported by parents. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including keep fit before school. The curriculum is further enhanced by a variety of visits and visitors including dance teachers and artists in residence; Spanish is also taught to older pupils. Pupils make a good contribution to the community; being involved in a range of fundraising activities for charities and through participation in musical performances. Representatives from each class are involved in an active school council. Such activities help pupils to acquire the skills they need to become effective future citizens.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that provision is good with some outstanding features. Outstanding relationships ensure that all pupils feel safe and that there is someone they would turn to if help were needed. Behaviour is closely monitored; incidents of bullying are dealt with firmly and effectively. Positive behaviour strategies are effective and the very few exclusions reflect the schools' commitment to high standards of respect. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by individual education plans. Policies on child protection are thorough and procedures secure. First aid procedures and risk assessments are robust. All pupils are exceptionally well cared for and this is a strong feature of the school. Overall monitoring of academic progress in literacy and numeracy is good and a very effective target setting and monitoring system is used throughout the school. Satisfactory arrangements exist for monitoring progress in other subjects. The induction procedures for pupils starting in nursery and transferring to secondary school are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that leadership and management are good. The headteacher, ably supported by his staff, has made significant improvements to the fabric of the school, the breadth of curriculum and enhanced the support, care and guidance so that pupils thrive in this school community. Inclusion is at the heart of this school, for example, the growing minority ethnic community has been warmly welcomed. The school has rightly focused its work on raising standards in English, mathematics and science. The school regularly evaluates its work and accurately assesses what it does well and what needs to improve. However, until recently, judgements on the quality of teaching and learning were mostly made through informal monitoring systems. The school has rightly identified that if it is to bring about further improvements in standards, a more formal system of direct monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observations and work scrutiny by senior managers and subject co-ordinators is needed. This formal system has now been introduced but it is too early to judge its impact. The school has developed many partnerships including links to industry, universities, local schools and many staff development providers. This enriches pupils' and staff skills and experiences. The school has worked hard to involve parents and seeks their views well. The school is supported and challenged by a good governing body who involve themselves well in many aspects of school. Financial management is good with reserves rightly targeted to improve the fabric of the building and maintain good levels of staffing. The leadership clearly have the capacity to bring about further improvements.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for the way you greeted us during our time in Holy Cross. We were delighted by the way you talked to us about your school and your work. It was clear to us that you enjoy being at your school.

- We think that you go to a good school, which has some outstanding features.
- By the time you leave school you make good progress in your studies and are reaching standards that are above average.
- Throughout your time in school you grow up well and become responsible and mature young people and that you behave well. We particularly like the way the older pupils helped the younger ones.
- Your teachers teach you well and you work hard with them in learning new topics. They give you many opportunities to take part in activities before and after school. However, when marking your books, it would be helpful if you have more written comments on what you need to do to improve your work.
- The staff look after you well, keep you safe and are impressed that all of you feel you can approach any of the staff if you had worries.
- The school is well led and that the staff know what to do to make the school better. It would be helpful if the staff took time to share their best ideas more widely.
- We certainly agreed with one of you who said 'teachers make our lessons fun and they are so kind.' We wish you all the best for the future.