



Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105087
LEA Wirral
Inspection number 277290
Inspection dates 19 October 2005 to 20 October 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Arthur Markham CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Challis Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Bidston
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Birkenhead, Merseyside CH41 7DH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 6528454
Number on roll	218	Fax number	0151 6528454
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr P Moor
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs J Bradley

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is situated in an area of high social deprivation in Bidston to the north of Birkenhead. There are 234 children on roll aged from 3 to 11. The vast majority of children are of white British background with only a very small number from minority ethnic groups. Three children are at an early stage of learning English. The number claiming free school meals is very high. When they start in the Nursery the majority of children have a very low level of skills. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around average. While awaiting the building of their new school, staff have worked very hard to provide the pupils with clean and safe facilities in spite of the poor condition of much of the fabric of the building.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The school judges itself this way and inspectors agree. Pupils enjoy school and make good progress because teaching and learning are good. They attain standards that are close to those expected nationally overall, although standards in writing and mathematics are not high enough. A high emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of all pupils and they are cared for well and given good guidance and support. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with particular gifts or talents are supported well. Pupils' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Parents and pupils hold the school in high regard. The school provides good value for money.

Children in the Foundation Stage make a good start to their learning. Whilst they reach standards that are well below average overall, they make good progress from their low level skills on entry because teaching is good.

The headteacher has a clear educational vision and provides good leadership with a clear focus on providing good quality care and education for all pupils. She is recently appointed, but has quickly developed a strong team approach throughout the school and all staff share her commitment to improvement. The school is managed well. Monitoring and evaluation systems are well organised and the school has a clear understanding of its performance and those areas that need further improvement, although the monitoring role of coordinators needs further development. The school has addressed the issues from the last inspection with reasonable success and is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing and mathematics by raising the challenge presented to pupils and ensuring that the marking of pupils' work makes clear what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the overall quality and consistency of teaching throughout the school by making use of the examples of outstanding teaching.
- Develop the monitoring role of subject coordinators by enabling them to observe teaching in order to identify areas for development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make good progress throughout the school and reach standards that are close to those expected by the end of Year 6. Most children enter the Nursery with very low level skills, particularly in their social development and their communication, literacy and language skills. They make a good start to their learning as a result of the effective teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes, but standards are still well below average by the end of the Reception year.

By the end of Year 2 standards are below those expected nationally, although they compare well with those in similar schools. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress and achieve well overall, but in writing few pupils achieve the higher levels. Throughout Years 3 to 6 pupils make good progress and achieve well. However, standards in mathematics have declined over the last five years and are not high enough. In the 2004 national tests, whilst pupils' performance in science showed a marked improvement, performance in English and mathematics was lower than previous years. The 2005 test results show good improvement in English, but standards in mathematics continue to be below those expected nationally. The school has recognised the need to improve standards in this subject and is taking positive action to improve pupils' performance, but more remains to be done.

Close attention is given to meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, as a result they make good progress. The vast majority of pupils successfully achieve the targets they are set.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are very proud of their school. They are enthusiastic, cooperate well with each other and adults, enjoy their lessons and most work hard. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary with pupils showing respect and consideration for others. They willingly accept responsibility and are cheerful polite and helpful. Members of the school council take their responsibilities very seriously and their views are acted upon. For example, their request for games equipment for use at playtimes has been met.

The school works hard to improve attendance, which currently stands just below the national average, and has altered its holiday pattern to try to help parents.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their self-esteem is developed through their involvement in enrichment activities and the celebration of their achievements in lessons and assemblies. They gain an awareness of other religions through lessons and visits and are generous in their charitable giving. For example, the Harvest Festival food collection was distributed to the needy of the parish. Close attention is given to the development of pupils' basic skills, which will aid them when they leave school. Pupils are strongly encouraged to adopt healthy and safe life styles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good throughout the school and some is outstanding. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. The teaching of pupils in groups based on their capability for lessons in English and mathematics results in activities being generally well matched to the needs of pupils. However, in some lessons the slow pace reduces the level of challenge, particularly to the more capable pupils. Teachers clearly

explain what is to be learned at the start of lessons and ensure that pupils understand what they have to do before setting them to work. Relationships throughout the school are very good and pupils respond well to the teachers' high expectations of behaviour. Lessons are consequently well ordered and pupils listen attentively, concentrate and work productively. In some lessons, teaching assistants are not used to full effect during the opening part of the lesson, but they give valuable support to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in group activity sessions.

Teachers use formal assessment information well to inform their planning and carefully check pupils' work during lessons. They mark pupils' work conscientiously and make good use of positive comments to bolster their confidence and self-esteem, but they do not make enough use of developmental comments to enable pupils to clearly understand how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, it matches the needs of the pupils well and all statutory requirements are met. Good use is made of teachers' particular skills to widen the range of opportunities presented to pupils in enrichment sessions. The school is careful to ensure that all pupils are involved. Pupils are encouraged to develop a safe and healthy lifestyle with courses on safety, relationships and drug awareness run by a range of agencies including a local police officer and nurse. There is a broad range of extra-curricular activities both at lunchtime and after school, these include sporting activities, dance and drama. Good links with local football clubs and other organisations enhance the opportunities presented to pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The level of care, guidance and support provided for pupils is good. Pupils trust the staff and know who to turn to if they need help. Parents feel welcome in school and are strongly encouraged to become involved in their children's education. The Family Literacy Groups, where parents and children come together to support literacy skills, are well attended. Teachers know their pupils well and set them short-term targets to help them understand how to improve. Any pupils who find learning difficult are given good support. Child protection and health and safety procedures are well organised. Pupils say they feel safe in school, because the rare instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. Close attention is given to ensuring that pupils settle quickly into school and arrangements for their transfer to secondary school are good. The school's close links with outside agencies results in the provision of a wide range of help to the pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership and clear educational vision of the newly appointed headteacher is successfully developing a team approach with a determination to improving the work of the school and raising standards. Effective management procedures ensure the school runs smoothly, which is enabling the pupils and staff to cope effectively with the disruption caused by the building of a new school.

The headteacher has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas that need further development because monitoring and evaluation procedures are well organised and effective. Subject coordinators' skills in this area are being developed, but at present not enough attention is given to the observing of teaching. Close attention is given to ensuring equality of opportunity. Performance data is carefully analysed to check the progress being made by pupils in order to plan intervention for any who are underachieving. Teachers' performance management targets are linked to priorities in the school improvement plan, which ensures that the whole school works together effectively to make changes. Parents' and pupils' views are sought and information used to inform strategic planning.

Governors provide effective challenge and support to the school. A number of them have direct responsibility for an aspect of the school's work so that they can gather information and disseminate this to other governors. Whilst this monitoring role is not yet fully developed the governors do have a reasonable view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and share the staff's commitment to improvement. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

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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?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	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	3	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	3	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

As you know, two inspectors recently visited your school to find out how well your teachers are helping you with your learning. Thank you for being so friendly and talking to the inspectors. It was really interesting to listen to what you had to say. I am pleased to say that we decided that you have a good school. The things that we particularly liked were:

- the way all of the school staff take very good care of you
- the way you work hard for your teachers and they do their best to help you learn
- your good behaviour in lessons and around the school and the way you help each other
- the way you are trying to improve your writing and mathematics.

We have asked your teachers to improve three things to make your school even better. They are:

- help you to achieve higher standards in writing and mathematics by making sure that the work you are set is challenging and making comments about your work when marking it which help you to understand how you can improve
- make all the lessons interesting and stimulating so that you enjoy your learning even more
- enabling teachers in charge of subjects to check how well you are being taught.

Thank you for helping us so much while we were inspecting your school. We hope that you will continue to work hard in school and help the teachers so that Holy Cross becomes an even better school.