



Holy Family Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104454
Local Authority Knowsley
Inspection number 286947
Inspection date 30 January 2007
Reporting inspector Lesley Traves

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hall Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Cronton, Widnes
Age range of pupils	4-11		Cheshire WA8 5DW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 4243926
Number on roll (school)	194	Fax number	0151 4203177
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Vincent Kelly
		Headteacher	Mrs Janette Cook-Hannah
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Holy Family is an average sized primary school situated in a generally socially advantaged area. However, about half of the pupils come to the school from other neighbouring areas and from a wide range of social situations. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is low. Most pupils come from a White British background and speak English as their first language. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a very small number have a statement of special educational need. The school has increased by a quarter in the last few years. It has a larger than average number of pupils who join the school after the usual starting point in the Reception class. The school has achieved the Activemark, Artsmark, Investors in People and the Healthy Schools Awards.

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, which provides good value for money. This matches the school's view of itself. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. The school provides the highest quality care, guidance and support for its pupils, and this is the cornerstone of their outstanding personal development. One of its main aims is, 'to provide a secure, happy and friendly environment' in which children are able to 'develop into confident, independent learners'. It fulfils this aim exceptionally well. Pupils are mature, confident and self-assured. They are able, for example, to take the lead in an assembly, teaching others about the need to protect our planet. The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' emotional development. As a result, relationships are very strong and behaviour is exemplary because pupils understand the feelings of others and learn how to sort problems out. This has been a priority as the school has welcomed and successfully included many new pupils in the last few years and its main aim is to help them settle as quickly as possible. The view expressed by one family - 'Holy Family provides a caring environment in which the children are encouraged to grow and learn. We are delighted to be able to send our daughter to such a lovely school' - reflects the opinions of many others and captures the essence of the school very well. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of its work. They particularly appreciate the strong links the school creates with them and the way in which they are supported in helping their children to learn. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and this is demonstrated by their very good attendance and the energy and enthusiasm they show for their work. They enjoy the many sporting and creative arts activities on offer to them, which help them to develop their individual talents well. The school makes particularly good use of its partnerships with other organisations to support this aspect. Pupils are learning what it means to be good citizens of their own community and the wider world through their work towards becoming an 'Eco School' and their support for a school in South Africa.

Good teaching enables pupils to achieve well and reach above average standards by the time they leave. Children make a strong start in the Reception class, building well on their individual skills and abilities. They make great strides in their personal development. Good progress continues through Key Stages 1 and 2. By the end of Year 6, pupils do particularly well in science and in English. In mathematics, boys do exceptionally well, but girls sometimes lag behind them. The school checks pupils' progress very thoroughly indeed and, because of this, any dips in performance are quickly identified and remedied. Improving the achievement of girls in mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 2, is a current priority for the school. Some strategies have been put into place which are starting to have an impact. However, the school recognises that there is more to be done here, for example, to ensure that girls take a more active part in the shared, oral parts of mathematics lessons. The school focuses strongly on how pupils learn best and teachers are constantly striving to use teaching methods that engage all pupils and accelerate learning. This is working particularly well in motivating boys to write. Teachers make skilled use of their assessments of pupils to match work closely to their varying abilities; this has a strong impact on learning. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good and sometimes

exceptional progress because of the highly skilled support they receive. Pupils enjoy lessons and learn well because the curriculum is well designed, with their needs and interests at the forefront. The wide range of stimulating activities on offer engages them effectively.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and new deputy headteacher are already working closely as a team, setting a clear direction for future developments. A significant strength is the way in which the headteacher creates opportunities for staff, parents and governors, as well as pupils, to fulfil their potential. This is a real learning community. The school evaluates itself rigorously and thoroughly. Consequently, it knows its strengths and areas for development very well indeed. No stone is left unturned in pursuit of continuing improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of girls in mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and reach above average standards. In four out of the last five years, pupils at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 have reached significantly above average standards. There are sometimes fluctuations in test results from year to year, although challenging targets are usually met and sometimes exceeded. These fluctuations are often the result of the differing numbers of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each year group. For example, over a third of the 2006 Year 6 class had learning difficulties. These pupils make good progress, with some doing particularly well to achieve average levels in the national tests. On entry to the Reception class, children have skills that are as expected for their age, although the full range of ability is represented. They get off to a strong start, making the best progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This stands them in very good stead for future learning. They build well on this good start through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 because the school is particularly adept at identifying what they need to do to move forward. Any dips are quickly identified and action is taken to remedy them. For example, boys at Key Stage 1 were not performing as well as girls in writing. The reasons for this have been thoroughly analysed and swift action taken, which is now paying dividends in the faster progress being made. The school has recently identified a dip in girls' achievement in mathematics in the middle years of Key Stage 2. This has become a top priority for action.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They flourish in response to the high quality care they receive, developing as mature and independent young people who show respect for themselves,

others and the world in which they live. Very strong relationships with staff and with each other underpin learning exceptionally well. Pupils really feel that their mission statement, 'We play together, pray together and learn together' is fulfilled. They report that they feel safe in school because 'everybody gets on together and we learn how to deal with any problems.' Those who have joined the school more recently talk about how much effort the whole school community made to help them settle down and 'fit in'. Pupils are really keen to learn and have excellent attendance, they say, because of the way staff make lessons challenging and fun, with lots of practical activities. They play a key role in school development, through the work of the school council, which takes the lead in getting things done, like improving the range of play activities at lunchtime.

Work towards the Healthy Schools Award has been instrumental in developing pupils' understanding of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle and stay safe. They are keen to choose healthy meals at lunchtime and are currently engaged in improving the range of healthy snacks provided at breaktimes. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives because of the good basic skills they acquire, their well developed computer skills and their ability to work with others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well in response to good teaching. Sometimes lessons are outstanding because they have an extra sparkle, as in a literacy lesson where the teacher made excellent use of the poem 'The Highwayman' to engage pupils and stimulate their ideas. Both boys and girls were totally hooked and, as a result, the following discussion was deep and thought-provoking. Throughout the school, staff are making good use of training they have received to identify the ways in which different pupils learn best, and tailor activities accordingly. Lessons often have a practical, problem-solving element which challenges and motivates pupils, so accelerating their learning. Computers and interactive whiteboards are used creatively to draw pupils into the lesson and encourage independence. A key strength is the knowledge teachers have of pupils' progress and the way they use this to pinpoint the next learning steps for them. Teaching assistants provide high quality support for those with additional learning needs, enabling them to be fully included and make good progress. Sometimes, in mathematics lessons, girls can be passive when it comes to answering questions and they let the boys take over, which limits their progress. Teachers have a growing awareness of this issue and are starting to take steps to address it, such as ensuring more thinking time before answering questions, to give girls a better chance to formulate their ideas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and rich. It meets the needs of the pupils well, ensuring that groups such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with particular gifts or talents are well supported and challenged. The Foundation Stage curriculum ensures a good balance between activities the children have chosen to pursue themselves and those more closely directed by staff. The school has worked hard to make the curriculum interesting, challenging and relevant, through linking subjects together. This is helping pupils make good connections between different aspects of learning and enabling them to use skills gained in one area to support another. For example, music and art are often used creatively to stimulate writing. A strong feature is the way the school has used work towards gaining nationally recognised awards such as Activemark and Artsmark to develop and enrich learning. As a result, pupils have many good quality opportunities for physical development and to express themselves creatively. This has had a strong impact on achievement and standards, for example in art, where pupils produce work of high quality. Good use is made of links with other schools and agencies and with the local community. These extend learning still further, through theme weeks and taking part in local cultural events. The school is currently seeking ways in which the provision for girls in mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 2, ensures that they consistently make the best possible progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care for pupils is outstanding. The school successfully creates a warm, family ethos which supports both personal and academic development very well indeed. Thorough and appropriate procedures are in place to ensure health and safety, good risk assessments and safe recruitment of staff. Pupils are confident in the knowledge that staff are there to listen and support them should any problems arise. They know they are highly valued as individuals and that their views are taken into account. Parents are also very confident that their children are well looked after. They greatly value the support they receive through regular meetings and workshops, which enables them to help their children at home. Pupils who are vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enabled to become successful learners because of the support from skilled teaching assistants, who work in close partnership with teachers. Support for pupils' emotional development is a priority and has brought great benefits in enabling pupils to better understand themselves and take account of the needs of others. This work has often been particularly successful with those joining the school after experiencing difficulties elsewhere. The work of the learning mentor and local authority support services is adding to this already strong picture. Academic progress is tracked carefully so that accurate targets are set for groups and individuals and support or challenge provided, as necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has set a very clear direction for the work of the school. As a result, staff and governors are strongly committed to improvement and work enthusiastically as a team to bring this about. The school has moved forward at a good pace since the last inspection. In particular, teaching and provision in the Reception class are now significantly stronger than they were and children here are making good progress. The school has a thorough and detailed plan to underpin its future developments, based on rigorous monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of its work. As a result, staff and governors know the strengths and weaknesses well and the priorities for action are the right ones. There is a very sharp focus on pupils' learning and the standards they achieve, set alongside the firm commitment to ensuring the highest standards of care and personal development. A new deputy headteacher has recently been appointed from within the school. She understands the context of the school well and there is already good teamwork in evidence between the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. For these reasons, the school has good capacity for further improvement. A key strength is the school's successes in developing the skills and talents of staff, parents and governors as well as pupils. This has a good impact upon learning and is recognised through the achievement of the Investors in People award. Subject coordinators are leading their areas well. Although some have only recently taken over their roles, good support is ensuring that they develop the appropriate skills. Governors give strong support and fulfil their responsibilities well, using their individual expertise in key areas such as personnel and finance. They are effectively involved in planning future developments and act as critical friends.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I recently visited to find out how well your teachers are helping you to learn and enjoy school. Thank you very much for welcoming me and being so polite and helpful. I enjoyed talking to you and especially enjoyed the Eco Team assembly. I learned a lot! The prayers you had written were beautiful.

I was really pleased to hear that you like your school very much. I am glad you find your lessons interesting and that your teachers make them fun. I agree with you that you go to a good school and that all the staff are good at helping you to do your best. All the staff take care of you very well indeed and I was pleased that you said you feel safe in school and always have someone to talk to, if you have a problem. I was particularly pleased that you get on so well together and help any new children to settle in well. Your behaviour and manners are excellent and you should be really proud of yourselves because of this. I have asked your teachers to do one thing to make the school even better; that is to help the girls, especially some of the older ones, to do better at maths. You girls can help with this by making sure you always join in and answer questions. Boys, you can help too by encouraging the girls to have a go at answering more often!

Thank you once again for helping me. I hope you continue to work hard and enjoy learning at Holy Family.