

Simms Cross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111228
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	288896
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Madeley

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jackie Peck
Headteacher	Mrs Lesley Feakes
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002
School address	Kingsway Widnes Cheshire WA8 7QS
Telephone number	0151 4245031
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized school. Pupil numbers have declined since the last inspection. Most children are White British and live close to the centre of Widnes. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is very high. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exceptionally high. The nursery class offers either a morning or an afternoon session to any child over the age of three years and almost all of them later transfer into the school's Reception class. The school has an assessment resource base for 12 children aged from four to seven years and another resource base for 12 junior-aged children who have moderate learning difficulties. The school has an exceptionally high percentage of children with a statement of special educational need. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Inspection findings do not support the school's judgement that it provides a satisfactory education for all its children. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its children an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Significant improvement is required in relation to children's progress and standards in English, mathematics and science, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and leadership and management. The school gives inadequate value for money. The school's self-evaluation is accurate in that achievement and standards and teaching and learning are inadequate and that children's personal development is satisfactory; it is inaccurate in respect of other judgements because insufficient account is taken of the impact on children's learning.

Staff and governors have only recently developed a full understanding of children's inadequate progress and that their test results are very low. This lack of understanding has resulted in low expectations of what the children are capable of achieving. Consequently, teachers provided insufficient challenge for pupils in lessons. Until very recently there was no system for collecting data on children's progress and evaluating the impact of teaching on children's learning, which further hampered progress. Some statutory requirements are not being met. Subject management and the management of the school's provision for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream are inadequate. As a result, most children do not achieve well.

Governors have not held the school to account for this inadequate progress, particularly through Key Stage 2. The newly appointed headteacher has identified what needs to be done to remedy this situation and is beginning to introduce measures to bring about improvement. However, governors and subject managers do not have sufficient experience or training to provide the support she needs to improve the school quickly enough. The management and provision for children in the two resource bases are satisfactory.

Children's attainments when they start in the nursery are very low but they get off to a good start in that class because effective teaching meets their needs well. Children quickly adjust to school routines but their speech and vocabulary remain a weaker area, despite the good efforts of the staff to improve them. Satisfactory teaching in the Reception class enables children to build steadily on this good start. Standards at the end of the Reception year have risen steadily over the last three years. However, by the time they enter Year 1, many children fail to reach the standards expected for their age, particularly in language development, and they have a significant amount of ground to make up. Children's progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 is inadequate because teachers do not expect enough of them. They do not use assessment information well enough to plan lessons that meet the needs of children of all abilities, or to enable them to build systematically on their skills. Consequently, by the end of Year 6, standards are very low in English, mathematics and science.

The curriculum is inadequate. It does not fully meet the needs of all children, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the main school and the more able. Some of the requirements in information and communication technology have not been taught. Aspects of children's care, guidance and support are inadequate. For example, there are some omissions in statutory requirements, absence is not rigorously checked and, until very recently, children

did not know how to improve their work. Children's personal development is satisfactory. Their contribution in and around the school, particularly the work of the school council, is good. Children like their school, but this is not always reflected in their attendance. In most classes, they have a positive attitude to learning. However, they are not well equipped to make the most of secondary school because their basic skills are very poor.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve children's rate of progress in English, mathematics and science, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Raise teachers' expectations of what children can achieve and improve their use of assessment to plan work which matches children's needs.
- Ensure that the curriculum is planned effectively to meet the needs of children of all abilities and gives them opportunities to use and develop their literacy, numeracy and computer skills.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in raising standards and achievement.
- Improve children's attendance.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance in ensuring that statutory requirements are met and that the school is held to account for its performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

In Key Stage 1, results in the 2006 national assessments were significantly below average, as they have been for the last five years. There have been some slight improvements, due to a greater emphasis being placed on the teaching of letter sounds. This has helped to raise children's reading and writing skills, but these have not improved quickly enough.

The school's results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science were very low in 2006. They continued the downward trend, which started in 2003. The main reason for this is inadequate teaching, which fails to ensure that children make the progress they should. The governing body set targets which were reasonably challenging, but they were not met in 2006. Standards observed in the English and mathematics books of the current Year 6 are also very low.

Most children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the main school make insufficient progress because class teachers do not use the children's individual education plans [IEPs] effectively to plan appropriate work for them in lessons. Children taught in the resource bases make satisfactory progress because, here, staff make effective use of the IEPs to ensure the children's needs are appropriately met. They do particularly well in their personal development, because staff establish a calm atmosphere in which suitably challenging tasks can be completed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. They enjoy coming to school, although levels of attendance are below average and declining, despite the school's effort to improve them. Their behaviour during the inspection was satisfactory and most children were well mannered. They are friendly to new children joining the school and effectively include children from the resource bases when they join together in lessons. Children say that they feel safe from oppressive behaviour, but a minority of parents

have significant concerns about the behaviour of some children. In the Foundation Stage children quickly learn to share toys and play sensibly. Staff here encourage independence, for example at snack time when children select and prepare their own snacks. Older children make a good contribution to school life as play leaders, road safety leaders and through the effective work of the school council, which has initiated projects such as 'the blue wall' anti-bullying programme. Most children know how to keep themselves safe and understand that a healthy diet and regular exercise contribute to a healthy life style.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

In Key Stages 1 and 2, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what children can achieve. Senior and middle leaders have not held them sufficiently to account for the progress that children make. Teachers do not plan work that will help children move from one level to the next in their learning. Assessment data is not used effectively, so tasks set are insufficiently challenging, especially for more able children. Class teachers do not make enough use of the IEPs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to plan work that fully meet their specific needs. Consequently, the pace of learning for all is too slow. However there are some signs that the quality of teaching is starting to improve, albeit quite slowly. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage and in the resource bases. Work here is well matched to children's needs. Children in the nursery enjoy the very practical nature of the tasks they are given. In other classes, teachers create a calm working atmosphere, which allows children to learn. Praise and rewards are being used well to raise children's sense of self-worth. Both children and teachers are becoming more familiar with the recently introduced system of target-setting, which is giving children a standard to aim for. However, there is still more to do to consolidate this work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum does not fully meet the needs of the children. There is an emphasis on English and mathematics lessons, which fail to have sufficient impact on children's learning and take time away from other subjects. Teaching time is not always used effectively to promote children's learning. For example, the last half hour of the day in some Key Stage 1 classes is wasted because children cease meaningful tasks and start to tidy away long before the bell rings. The curriculum is not planned effectively to ensure that children's skills, knowledge and understanding are built upon systematically. There are far too few planned opportunities for children to practise and develop the skills learned, for example, by using literacy and numeracy in different subjects. The provision for extra-curricular activities, visits out of school and visitors to the school is adequate, though the older children, and some parents, say they would like more sports clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Some of the school's systems for caring for children are inadequate. For example, not all who have responsibility for child protection have been fully trained and the school does not consistently check why children are away on the first day that they are absent. In other respects

children are adequately cared for, leading the vast majority of parents to feel that their child is kept safe at school. Parents also consider themselves well informed about their child's progress through good annual reports and meetings with teachers. When children's IEPs in the main school are reviewed parents and children are not fully involved. This restricts the help and support that their parents can give. Teachers' marking has been inadequate up until very recently. A new method of marking is helping children to understand how they can improve their work. Many of them are also motivated by the very new system of individual learning targets and are starting to work hard to achieve these, but neither system has been in place long enough to have an impact on children's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher has made an appropriate start in identifying the many significant weaknesses that need to be addressed. She has ensured that staff, governors and parents understand that standards and achievement are not good enough and must be improved. Some changes have been made. For example, data on children's progress is now being recorded through the year and teachers have started to be held accountable for the progress the children in their classes now make. Some systems have been introduced to improve teaching. Teachers' planning has been reviewed and guidelines, which stress the need to prepare tasks which meet children's learning needs, are now being used. All these initiatives are in the early stages of development and their effectiveness is yet to increase children's progress. The pace of change is slowed because subject managers are not sufficiently familiar with how to check teaching and learning in their subject or interpret data and thereby support to the headteacher in moving the school forward. However, parents say that they are happy with the changes that have been made recently. The governing body does not meet its statutory responsibilities with regard to the curriculum, racial equality and teachers' performance management policies. The governors have not held the school to account for children's low standards and inadequate progress.

Annex A

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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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.

Annex A**Leadership and management**

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Simms Cross Primary School, Widnes, WA8 7QS

Thank you for making us warmly welcome when we visited your school recently. We listened carefully to what you had to say about your school and used your views when coming to our judgements. It is good that you enjoy school and do your best for your teachers. We think that you do a lot for each other in class and across the school and we were especially impressed by the work of your school council. We agree with your headteacher that you could make more progress and reach higher standards in the end-of-year tests. We also think that the curriculum is not good enough. This means that your school is not giving you a good enough education. We have placed your school into 'special measures', which means that your headteacher and governors will get additional help to improve the school for you. Inspectors will return to check that the school is making progress. We want the school to:

- improve teaching so that you get tasks in lessons that challenge you and enable you to make better progress;
- make sure that you learn all the subjects of the National Curriculum and get chances to practise your literacy, numeracy and computer skills in different subjects;
- improve your attendance;
- make sure that the school follows all the government's regulations.

You can help your school by attending regularly - if you are not at school you can't learn! You should also continue to work hard at trying to reach your learning targets.

We enjoyed our visit. You were all very helpful and we were also delighted by your good manners. We wish you and the school well for the future.