

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103474
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308333
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Graham Sims

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Murrall
Headteacher	Jackie Deasy
Date of previous school inspection	11 September 2006
School address	Laburnum Drive Walmley Sutton Coldfield B76 2SP
Telephone number	0121 6752158
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is an average sized primary school. The great majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and almost all are from Catholic families. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are above average, and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities is below average.

At its previous inspection in September 2006, the school was given a Notice to Improve. Since then, it has experienced significant staffing difficulties. At the time of this inspection, the headteacher had been in post for a year, the assistant headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and one class teacher for just two weeks.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has been through a turbulent period over the last 12 months but, under the determined leadership of the headteacher and better oversight of the governing body, has emerged as a stronger school, which now provides its pupils with a satisfactory quality of education. Since the previous inspection, leadership and management, pupils' achievement, and the quality of teaching have all improved and are now satisfactory. These changes and a good start to the new school year, with a new senior leadership team, a united staff team and a common sense of purpose, indicate that there is sound capacity for further improvement and for building on the strengths which already exist within the school.

The school has many able pupils, and standards are above average from entry into the Reception to the end of Year 6. Over the last year, pupils have made good progress in some classes but in others progress has been adversely affected by the absence of staff for part of the last year. The situation has been handled as well as circumstances allow and the school now has a full complement of staff who demonstrate strong commitment to the school. There are still differences in the quality of teaching from one class to the next, but the inadequate teaching which was noted at the time of the previous inspection has been all but eradicated. Pupils' achievement in mathematics in Years 3 to 6, while satisfactory, is not as good as in English and science, but the right actions have been taken to identify where improvement is needed and to provide appropriate training and resources for staff to strengthen provision in this core subject.

Pupils' good personal development and the good pastoral care of the staff are reflected in the happy atmosphere throughout the school, the good standard of behaviour, high levels of attendance, and the good relationships between staff and pupils. Outside the classroom, pupils are confident and self-assured. Within the classroom, however, many are hesitant to contribute their own ideas or to ask their own questions. Teachers are trying hard to encourage pupils to become truly independent learners, but too much of the teaching in the past has hindered this development. Not enough opportunities have been provided within the curriculum for pupils to use their initiative, undertake investigative work and so make the best use of their undoubted talents and skills. A good recent development has been the much stronger focus on providing better academic guidance through the marking of pupils' work and involving pupils in the assessment of their own work, but the new systems have yet to become fully established in all teachers' practice.

The headteacher has shouldered significant burdens over the last year, but has provided the school with a clear sense of direction. She has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need to be developed, and staff are well aware of these too. Leadership has been strengthened as a result of a clearer mandate for subject leaders and the formation of a new senior leadership team. Management has been strengthened through a more rigorous process of checking on the quality of teaching and pupils' work and progress. Because of some of the difficulties of the last year, some parents have, rightly, expressed their concerns about the school. However, the changes which have been implemented and the support which staff are now giving to the school's new sense of direction should provide these parents with confidence in the school once again.

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class and by the time they start Year 1, many exceed the goals set for children of this age in most areas of learning. Almost all others are working comfortably at the expected levels. The weakness with regard to writing, highlighted in the previous inspection, has been eradicated and more able children now reach standards in line with their abilities. In recent months, the overall planning of the curriculum and the indoor environment have improved significantly, but not enough has been done to improve the quality of day to day planning or the opportunities for children to learn outdoors. As a result, the range of opportunities available for children to learn through enriching self directed activities is somewhat restricted. The teaching of children in small groups and as a whole class is satisfactory. The school now keeps a careful check of children's progress term by term which provides staff with an accurate understanding of what children can do when they start Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of pupils in Years 3 to 6 in mathematics.
- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching by following the good practice which is evident in some classes and embedding the new initiatives to provide pupils with clearer guidance on how they can improve their work.
- Improve the quality of day to day planning and the use of the outdoor environment for children in the Foundation Stage.
- Provide more enriching opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to use their initiative, develop their ability to ask questions and become more self sufficient learners.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils of all abilities achieve satisfactorily, although their progress through the school has been somewhat uneven. Last year for example, the school's assessments show that pupils made good progress in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6, but pupils in Years 3 and 4 had periods when their progress was disrupted because they did not have continuity of teaching.

Children enter and leave the Foundation Stage with above average skills for their age. The 2007 national test results at the end of Year 2 saw a continuation of the high standards reached in previous years in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in Year 6 also reached high standards in English, mathematics and science, reversing the downward trend and inadequate achievement of the year before. A much larger proportion of pupils exceed the nationally expected levels at the end of Years 2 and 6 in all subjects than in most schools, thus indicating that the school has successfully addressed the criticism of the previous inspection that it was not challenging the more able pupils sufficiently.

Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make least progress in mathematics, but the school has identified the aspects of mathematics in each year group where performance is weakest, and is starting to rectify these.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils are polite, behave well and show consideration for others. They relate well to each other and to the staff and contribute willingly to the smooth running of the school through undertaking a range of responsibilities. They also contribute well to the wider community through the school's strong links with the church and through their fund raising activities. Because the school is a well ordered community, pupils feel safe and they also show good understanding of how their behaviour can affect the safety of others. The contents of many lunchboxes, sensible choices at lunchtime, and the consumption of fruit at breaktime indicate that pupils have a good awareness of the importance of a healthy diet. Enthusiastic participation in sporting activity also contributes well to their adoption of healthy lifestyles.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, as indicated by their above average attendance, but their response in lessons often lacks enthusiasm. They comply willingly with what they are asked to do but, too often, they are passive learners. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the future world of work through their good literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, their ability to work well with others, and their social confidence. However, they are not sufficiently willing to use their creativity and initiative and to take greater responsibility for their own progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There has been much improvement recently and the quality of teaching is significantly better than it was at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers manage their classes well and develop good relationships with their pupils. Good support is available for the small proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/ or disabilities . Good teaching is evident in a number of classes, where a sense of urgency and challenging tasks help pupils to make good progress in their learning. More robust systems for assessing pupils' work and keeping monitor of their progress have helped staff to plan appropriate work for the pupils and ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged. In a few classes, however, staff are still not entirely comfortable with the process, at times setting work which is too easy and at others work which is too hard for the pupils. In the Foundation Stage, the development of children's writing skills has improved and there are sound opportunities for children to learn together as a whole class and in small groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The teachers provide thorough coverage of the curriculum in all subjects, with the result that pupils complete an impressive amount of work over the course of a year. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use their initiative when tackling a piece of work or to develop their creative and investigative skills. As a result, pupils are very good at doing what they are directed to do, but do not sufficiently develop their ability to learn independently. In their planning, teachers do not always see the connection between what they are teaching in one subject and what pupils are learning in another, thereby missing opportunities to enliven

their teaching. The formal curriculum is enriched by a satisfactory range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. Good attention is given to pupils' personal development, and this enables pupils to be well informed about health and safety issues. Provision for ICT has improved significantly over the last year and pupils greatly enjoy the opportunity to use the interactive whiteboards in the classrooms and the new computer suite.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

A warm, caring, Christian atmosphere permeates the school and contributes much to pupils' personal development and their happiness in school. Major improvements have been made over the last year to make the school more secure. Pupils comment appreciatively on these new arrangements and express their confidence in the staff, saying there is always someone to whom they can turn for support. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements have also improved and are good.

Academic guidance is satisfactory, but improving. Learning from the weaknesses identified through examining pupils' work over the last year, good new systems have been introduced for setting targets which pupils understand, for involving pupils in the assessment of their own work and for providing feedback to pupils when marking their work. However, these changes are very new and have yet to become established in teachers' practice and thus have a measurable impact on pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's dogged determination in the face of many difficulties over the past year has led to many improvements and enabled the school to start the new school year in a much stronger position than it was in at the time of the previous inspection. A new senior management team started in September 2007 and subject leaders now have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Good systems to keep a regular check on the quality of teaching and pupils' work have been implemented. A rigorous system for monitoring pupils' progress each term now enables staff to see if any pupils are underachieving, and there are better procedures for providing support for these pupils. Long term absence of staff has been a significant problem for parts of the last year and has adversely affected the progress of some pupils. Although the staffing situation has not yet been fully resolved, the school has made the best possible arrangements for the start of the school year to ensure pupils enjoy continuity of teaching. Governance has improved and governors now have a much better understanding of the school and of their role in holding the school to account.

The headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and its areas for development. One of the most important changes is that staff now share this understanding and are working together as a team to make improvements. The school now needs time to embed its new procedures and ensure that they all have a positive impact on pupils' achievement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

20 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Sutton Coldfield B76 2SP

My colleague and I enjoyed our recent visit to your school and would like to thank you for your welcome and for talking to us. Your school has improved a great deal in recent months and is now providing you with a satisfactory education. These are our main findings.

- You are all making satisfactory progress and many of you achieve high standards in your work.
- Some of you do not make as much progress in mathematics as you do in English and science.
- You are polite, well behaved and considerate of others.
- You enjoy coming to school and are happy to do what your teachers ask of you, but some of you are reluctant to ask questions and contribute your own ideas.
- The quality of teaching has improved and challenges you a lot more than before.
- The staff take good care of you and now keep a careful check of how much progress you are making.
- The headteacher has worked hard to make improvements and has ensured this year has got off to a good start.

To help the school become even better, we have asked the staff to:

- help you improve your weak areas in mathematics
- ensure you all receive good teaching and know how to improve your work
- help those of you in Reception to have exciting activities to choose from and the opportunity to work and play outdoors more often
- provide all of you with more opportunities to investigate, to use your initiative, and develop a real interest in learning

You can help make Holy Cross even better by trying your hardest, becoming as interested as possible in your work and contributing your own thoughts and ideas. We wish each one of you every success and happiness in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Graham Sim Lead inspector

Annex B



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Graham Sim
Lead inspector