

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113487
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311293
Inspection date	4 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Lee

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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Wollstencroft
Headteacher	Paul Cotter
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	2 Beaumont Road St Judes Plymouth PL4 9BE
Telephone number	01752 225420
Fax number	01752 252293

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated in detail the following issues:

achievement in Years 3 to 6

the achievement of the more able pupils

the effectiveness of new developments in the curriculum.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, other staff, pupils and governors, and from the parental questionnaires. Lessons were observed and school self-evaluation and other documentation and samples of pupils' current and previous work were analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified.

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Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds but there is a steadily increasing proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. Polish, French, Cantonese and Filipino are the most common first languages of those pupils who are at an early stage of English language acquisition. A significant number of pupils join or leave the school at times other than the start of the school year, mainly in Years 3 to 6.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its success is founded on the headteacher's excellent leadership and the inspiration he provides to all members of the school community. This has created a strong sense of teamwork, with staff, governors, parents and carers working closely together to provide pupils with a high quality of education. Pupils and adults flourish in this environment. Pupils of all abilities make excellent academic progress and show outstanding personal development. The adults develop professionally and spiritually. The Catholic ethos promotes a care and concern for individual well-being that is central to the school's effectiveness.

Pupils' outstanding achievement is reflected in the high standards being attained. These are significantly above those expected in each age group throughout the school. The progress made in the Foundation Stage is exceptional and the school is now achieving a consistency in the progress in later years that has not always been present in the past. There is a downward trend in children's attainment when they start in the Foundation Stage. For the last two years attainment at the beginning of Reception has been below typical levels because of particular weaknesses in children's communication and language skills. Prior to this, attainment on entry was broadly average. The exemplary provision in the Foundation Stage gets children off to an excellent start. They make tremendous strides in their language development, ending the stage at the levels expected by the start of Year 1. In other areas of learning, most of the children exceed the expected levels but any who have not reached these levels continue the Foundation Stage curriculum into Year 1. This is good practice, matching provision to needs, which is a key principle applied throughout the school. Progress in Years 1 and 2 has been consistently impressive for a number of years and continues to be so. Assessments at the end of Year 2 have shown standards to be well above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. The current Year 2 pupils are maintaining these levels.

Progress in Years 3 to 6 has shown some variation between year groups in the past, although the school's results in national tests in Year 6 have generally been at least above national averages. The 2007 results were a clear improvement on the previous year and the current Year 6 pupils are on track to do even better. This means they will exceed the challenging targets set for them. Pupils' work in English, mathematics and science is of a high standard, with more than half the class working at the higher-than-expected Level 5. This is outstanding achievement by a group that has changed significantly in the last four years. A significant number of more able pupils have left the school, several incoming pupils have had learning difficulties and several have English as an additional language and have arrived with little or no spoken English. The rate of pupils' annual progress across Years 3 to 6 is now consistently excellent. This has been achieved by the development of rigorous procedures for regular checking of pupils' progress in English and mathematics and a prompt, successful response to any evidence of pupils failing to make expected progress. This is one of the many strengths in learning and teaching, both of which are outstanding.

Recent staff professional development has focused on ways to improve the quality of pupils' learning. This has paid dividends not only in improving achievement but also in fostering a love of learning that shines through when pupils talk about their work and how much they enjoy it. Pupils are successful learners because teachers plan tasks that are carefully matched to individual pupils' needs. Lesson plans are constantly being revised in the light of how pupils have responded and progressed in previous lessons. Pupils have clear targets for improvement of their literacy and numeracy skills. They know these targets well and they are fully involved

in talking to their teachers about how well they are progressing towards achieving the latest targets. The effectiveness of this approach is seen in the practice of writing conferencing, where pupil and teacher review work and discuss its strengths and areas for development. This is resulting in high quality writing of which pupils are rightly proud. Such academic guidance exemplifies the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the school.

Pupils' enjoyment of school and all that they do there, as well as their excellent behaviour and the high quality of their relationships with one another, are just some of the many features of outstanding personal development and well-being. Pupils delight in the opportunities they have to express their views about school, to take on responsibilities and to contribute to school improvement. The current Playground Project exemplifies these opportunities. Following a programme aimed at developing the leadership skills of the School Council, the councillors are now taking a leading role in organising a whole-school, week-long project designed to improve the playground spaces and develop them as 'learning areas'. Pupils work in mixed-age groups on activities planned by the pupils themselves. All staff and many parents and governors work alongside the pupils on a wide range of activities. These include the creation of large mosaics, gardening projects, the invention of mathematical games using playground markings, and the celebration of the school as a multicultural community through the painting of flags of pupils' families' countries of origin. The planning of these activities has enabled teachers to incorporate many opportunities for pupils to apply and develop literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.

English, mathematics and science are strong areas of the good curriculum that the school provides. Priority has been placed on curriculum development as the school recognises a need to develop provision in other subjects. Planning of these other subjects is not based securely enough on the long-term progression in skills that pupils should be learning. This means that teachers do not have a firm basis for checking if pupils are achieving as well as they should. The school has made a start with its aim to make the full curriculum exciting and relevant to all pupils' needs. An exciting development is the trial in Years 1 and 2 of basing the planning of topics and learning activities on the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage curriculum. This has quickly proved stimulating for both pupils and staff. In other respects, the curriculum is used very effectively to develop key features of pupils' personal development. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of healthy lifestyles and knowledge of safe practices in and out of school. Their very good basic literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills, along with their mature social skills and experience of enterprise activities, contribute considerably to their future economic well-being.

The school's outstanding leadership and management are seen at many levels. A very able senior leadership team supports the headteacher superbly. Both individually and collectively, senior staff's expertise is moving the school forward very successfully. This has led to the local authority nominating the school as a centre of excellence in several areas of its work. The school benefits greatly from the challenge, support and guidance of its excellent, very knowledgeable governing body and the members' contribution to strategic planning. The school knows itself well, involves everyone in evaluation of its work and identifies clearly the action needed to improve pupils' achievement and the quality of provision. It has an excellent capacity for further improvement. Management adapts well to changing circumstances, such as the increasing numbers of pupils with English as an additional language. The investment in resources and staff training, as well as excellent partnership with external agencies, has resulted in high quality support and the pupils' outstanding progress. These pupils are currently talking excitedly about their forthcoming 'sleepover' in Plymouth Central Library. This exemplifies what one parent meant when saying that 'this is a school that goes the extra mile for its children'.

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Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children settle quickly into school life as a result of the excellent liaison with families before and after their children start school. High quality teaching and learning and the exciting, well-planned curriculum enable children to become confident learners who make outstanding progress. There is a strong focus on children's language development and, in addition to small group teaching of basic literacy skills, each of the many structured play experiences is used as an opportunity to use language and develop social skills. The classroom is a very attractive, stimulating learning environment and the many, constantly changing displays of children's work reflect the importance placed on celebration of children's achievements. Their progress is checked constantly in all areas of learning and all staff are successfully involved in the recording and evaluating of the children's achievements. The teacher provides teaching assistants with detailed guidance on the purpose of activities and what they should look out for in children's responses. There is a well-planned balance of indoor and outdoor activities, taking advantage of good outdoor areas, which have been improved greatly since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the curriculum in subjects other than English, mathematics and science, identifying in the planning the long-term progressions in the skills and knowledge pupils are ready to acquire.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

5 June 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Plymouth PL4 9BE

Thank you for making me welcome in your school and for talking to me so willingly. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing you at work. You told me how much you enjoy going to school, and I think you have an excellent school that is very successful in helping you to learn. The school does many outstanding things. This is what I particularly appreciated:

- You are making excellent progress in your work.
- By the time you reach Year 6, many of you are reaching standards in English, mathematics and science that are well above average.
- Your behaviour is excellent, and this makes your school a friendly, pleasant place where everyone helps one another. This was very obvious when I saw you working on the Playground Project activities.
- In addition to your excellent School Council, many more of you have responsibilities around the school that you carry out very well, and this helps the school run smoothly.
- Teaching is excellent and your teachers work hard to plan interesting things for you to do in your lessons. This is helping you to learn very well.
- All the adults look after you very well and make sure that you are safe and get help whenever you need it.
- The school is led superbly by your headteacher, and all the adults, including the governors, work very well together to improve it.
- I have one recommendation to help your school to get even better:
- When the teachers make the changes they are thinking about in non-core subjects, make sure that what you have to learn is carefully planned to show how it builds on what you already know and can do.

I hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make Holy Cross Catholic Primary School to be an even better school.

Yours sincerely

Colin Lee Lead inspector