

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115168
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311863
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Maria Coles

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	213
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Cath Scanlan
Headteacher	Miss Sue McGuiggan
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tracyes Road Southern Way Harlow CM18 6JJ
Telephone number	01279 424452
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average, popular Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Luke and Holy Cross and the Church of Assumption. Most of the pupils come from White British backgrounds. The numbers of pupils for whom English is an additional language has increased since the last inspection and is now in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. The school has achieved 'Healthy Schools' status and has an Active Mark.

There is an onsite pre-school managed by a private enterprise.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School provides a good education for its pupils. There are outstanding elements in the care and support, which contribute well to the 'friendly and caring community environment' so many parents comment on. The school is good at putting its Catholic beliefs of valuing and caring for all into practice through its good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and its good links with parents. These elements coupled with good quality teaching in most classes leads to pupils' good personal development. Pupils are happy because of their good relationships with adults and their friends. They enjoy their learning when teachers involve them and make it fun. The school does much to enrich the pupils' learning through a wide variety of clubs and activities. Behaviour is good overall and is managed well by staff.

Achievement is good for most pupils. The usual pattern is for pupils to join the Reception class with standards that are below those usually expected and leave this stage of education with standards that are close to nationally expected goals. There are variations in this pattern from year to year, partly due to variations in teaching and in 2008 in particular, problems with high teacher turnover. Progress is good overall, although it is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1, where standards in 2008 in literacy and numeracy were lower than previous years.

Despite these variations, there are clear signs of improvement across the school. The school's good tracking systems are enabling them to monitor progress and attainment for all groups of pupils more effectively. It also helps teachers to identify which pupils need support or challenge and to put into place appropriate interventions to help them improve. The school's good leaders and managers show no complacency and are active in tackling areas of weakness. Good whole school systems for evaluating performance provide a clear and accurate picture of how the school is improving. Monitoring of curriculum areas by subject leaders to find out how well pupils are taught and how much progress they make is inconsistent. Governors are supportive of the school but have not yet developed their roles effectively enough to call the school to account for its actions. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with higher standards for the older and more able pupils, better achievement and some improvement in attendance. This track record provides convincing evidence of leaders and managers' good capacity to take the school further in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The provision is good because the Reception class is well led and managed. The classroom and outdoor accommodation provide a bright and effective learning environment and are used well for activities. For example, during a numeracy session, some children were able to work indoors with an adult, while others took part in a range of outdoor activities that improved their number recognition well. The level of care and welfare provided for the children is outstanding and they are clearly very happy at school. This is helped by the close links with the pre-school that shares the school site and by the good induction arrangements for new children. The good teaching and high levels of care result in good achievement. Children make good progress in all areas of learning and by the time they leave the Reception class most have reached normally expected goals.

Teaching is good because lessons are well planned and resources are used effectively. Staff have good relationships with the children. Good opportunities are found to observe and assess

children. Observations are used to build up a good understanding of how well children are progressing and to plan further activities to ensure effective learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement of pupils in Key Stage 1 in literacy and numeracy.
- Improve the skills of subject leaders in monitoring the impact of their curriculum areas on pupil' progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body in holding the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter school with levels below that expected for their age. In previous years standards were above average in writing and average in mathematics by the end of Year 2. In 2008, standards in writing and mathematics were below average, although reading has remained broadly average. By the end of Year 6, there is an upward trend in results and pupils are achieving standards that are slightly above average. There is an improvement in the numbers of pupils reaching higher levels, which was an issue for the school to address following the last inspection. There is better progress in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress in line with other pupils. Those who need specific help benefit from detailed steps for learning which are reviewed regularly and supported well in classes, so that progress is maintained well

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school places great importance on the personal development of pupils and works hard to ensure that they all feel valued. As a result, pupils have good attitudes towards school and can explain what they enjoy. Spiritual, moral and social development is well supported through a range of activities. The school provides a good understanding of a range of other faiths while keeping a strong Catholic ethos, which the parents see as a major strength. There are plans to develop further pupils' experiences of different cultures through food, music, drama and art. Attendance is satisfactory and the school works hard to encourage parents not to take holidays in school time. Most pupils behave well in and around the school. Occasionally, behaviour is inconsistent where the teaching is less effective. A wide range of extra curricular sporting activities contributes to pupils' good understanding of a healthy lifestyle. A new school council has been elected and past councils have had a good impact on provision outdoors. A prefect system gives some of the older pupils a good opportunity to take responsibility. By the end of Year 6, pupils are acquiring good basic skills and qualities that will equip them for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons observed during the inspection were variable but of good quality overall. In the best lessons, teaching was exciting, stimulating and maintained pupils' interest fully. In these lessons, teachers knew their pupils' needs well and planned relevant tasks to meet them effectively. This meant that the less able were well supported and the more able were challenged. Learning and progress were thus maximised. Occasionally, where work was not well matched to pupils'

varying abilities or when the pace of the lesson was either too slow or too fast, pupils lost interest and progress was limited. Teaching for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Individual targets for pupils are appropriately set in English and mathematics; these are tracked well and modified to meet changing needs. This is particularly so for older pupils. Marking is variable. Where it is used effectively, it helps pupils to understand what they know, and what they have to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good curriculum is in place that meets all statutory requirements. There is an appropriate focus on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills although the curriculum at Key Stage 2 has had a better impact on progress than in Key Stage 1. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in work. A comprehensive programme of personal, health and social education contributes to pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils' enjoyment of learning is enriched through their eager participation in a range of clubs such as football, netball, crafts and gardening. The development of the school's grounds and environmental area contribute well to pupils' learning. When used effectively, a recently introduced topic approach is helping pupils to understand links between subjects, which is also increasing their enjoyment. The curriculum is enriched further by visits to places of interest and visitors into school. For example, the Year 6 residential trip to France gives pupils an opportunity to practise the French they are learning at school. Strong community links have been forged through the local church and priest. Pupils attend and contribute to services, for example, the choir will often sing in church. The priest is a regular visitor and contributor to school assemblies.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Some aspects of personal care and support for pupils are outstanding, which is much appreciated by parents. All safeguarding arrangements are met. Child protection, and health and safety arrangements are robust. Pupils are well supervised at all times including lunchtime, where they have good relationships with the midday supervisors. Supervision is also good in the after-school and breakfast clubs. Pupils explain that bullying is very rare and they know adults will sort out any problems. As soon as a pupil might be falling behind in their work, they are supported promptly. This ensures that they make good progress. However, the recent introduction of a range of assessment methods is yet to be consistently applied across all classes. The use of academic guidance is not quite as strong as pupils' pastoral care. Teachers' marking of pupils work does not always tell them what they do well or what they have to do next to improve. Target setting has improved since the last inspection and pupils are more aware of standards expected of them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher gives clear direction to everyone, coupled with the use of challenging targets leading to improvement in standards. This has been particularly effective in raising performance in Key Stage 2. There is a variable picture of leadership throughout the school with subject leadership being more effective in some curriculum areas than in others. Nevertheless, the senior management team have a clear understanding of the schools strengths and weaknesses.

They identify what needs to be improved and put into place appropriate strategies to get there. This is reflected in the prompt action and support taken with the Year 2 class during the last academic year. This minimised some of the shortfall in standards so that their progress in reading was maintained. The governing body is supportive of the school and play an active part in events. They are not yet as effective in posing questions that hold it to account.

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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 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?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

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

25 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Harlow, CM18 6JJ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school, answering all our questions and showing us how well you all work and play together.

We think that your school is a good school. It is a caring place where you all feel valued and are looked after very well. We liked your environmental area and know that you enjoy it too. We know that you are happy and like your school and your teachers because lots of you told us so. We think that most of you make good progress in your learning. In 2008 tests and assessments, those of you in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 made better progress than those in Years 1 and 2. Ms McGuiggan is a good headteacher and she is working hard with staff to make progress in Years 1 and 2 even better.

We would like you to help as much as you can by working hard and making sure that you come to school every day. You cannot learn if you are not in school. We would also like the school to do some other things to help you. These are:

- Raise standards in literacy and numeracy and the progress you all make in Years 1 and 2.
- Improve the way that senior teachers watch over the work that you do.
- Help the governors to ask lots of questions so they can check that everything is as good as it could be.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Maria Coles

Lead inspector