

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104633
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	324081
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	127
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	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Doyle
Headteacher	Mrs E Holleran
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Fontenoy Street Liverpool Merseyside L3 2DU
Telephone number	0151 2369505
Fax number	0151 2334237

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than average. It is situated in an area of high social and economic disadvantage. A much higher than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified with social or emotional vulnerability or as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A small number of pupils are of minority ethnic heritages. A few of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises of children in the Nursery and Reception age ranges. The school has gained the Activemark Award.

There is a day nursery on site, which is run by a private provider and did not form part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This vibrant learning community in the heart of the city provides an outstanding education for all who are fortunate to attend. It permeates, through dynamic leadership, outstanding curriculum provision and excellent partnerships, a celebration of cultural heritage which nurtures a sense of belonging and social identity. As a result, pupils, many of whom experience significant barriers to their learning in terms of their social and emotional vulnerability or additional learning needs, make outstanding progress in their personal and academic development. The vast majority of parents are supportive of what the school does for their children and a comment typical of many is, 'They really identify specific needs, skills and talents in each child and do all they can to nurture them.'

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. When they begin school in the Early Years Foundation Stage, their skills are extremely low, and well below expected levels, particularly in their social, speaking and listening skills. Children make rapid progress during this stage because of the close attention staff pay to their personal development. All groups of pupils continue to enjoy and learn in exciting and stimulating learning environments and although standards by the end of Year 2 are below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, pupils have acquired a thirst for learning and the development of vital skills such as of enquiry and decision making. The outstanding all round achievement of all groups of pupils continues in Years 3 to 6 where mixed-aged classes help to promote and challenge pupils to reach the best of their ability. Standards attained in Year 6 are broadly average in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their exemplary behaviour and tangible enjoyment of school is reflected in good levels of attendance. Pupils are enabled to really believe, as they sing in their choir, 'I can be anything I want if I can just believe in me.' This is lived out in their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are extremely attentive to each other's needs. This is the product of the outstanding care, support and guidance they receive. For instance, pupils who have been excluded from other schools are embraced and quickly settle within this inclusive environment. The same attention is paid to all pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities consequently make similar outstanding progress to their classmates.

Because teaching is lively, child-led and challenging, the quality of pupils' learning is outstanding. Teachers deliver an innovative, outstanding theme-based curriculum focused on developing skills which enable pupils to lead healthy and safe lifestyles. Because of this, skills such as debate and discussion, promoted through programmes such as 'Socially Speaking', enable pupils to become confident, articulate communicators who are very well prepared when they leave for the next stage in their learning.

The quality of leadership and management, at all levels including governance, is outstanding. Teamwork and a shared belief in giving every pupil a first class education are never off their agenda. Governors constantly challenge the school to consider, through highly reflective self-evaluation, improving learning opportunities for all pupils. Because of this, the school has an outstanding capacity to improve and provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children begin the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are well below those expected at this age and particularly low in their social, communication and creative skills. High quality teaching, excellent links with parents and extremely supportive and caring adults ensure children settle quickly. They make rapid gains in their speaking and listening skills because adults provide an excellent combination of tasks which are adult led, for instance daily sessions which focus on developing children's knowledge of letters and sounds, and those children choose for themselves. Excellent links within the locality, accompanied by activities chosen by the children, give them the opportunity to explore and investigate indoors and outdoors and thus enrich their social and creative skills well. For instance, children are captivated and excited when Mr X leaves clues which children have to deduce. These fire children's imaginations and extend their thinking, speaking and writing skills very effectively. Consequently, they want to write and share their thoughts. When they move on to Year 1, the skills of most children remain below the typically expected levels. However, given their very low start, this represents outstanding achievement. Children are very well cared for and parents agree saying, 'I couldn't think of a better school for my child to go to.' Leadership is outstanding. The manager has an in-depth knowledge of how well children progress. Ongoing observations of children at play are collected by all adults. These are highly reflective and informative and used effectively to plan children's next steps in learning.

What the school should do to improve further

The school has an extremely clear view of how it can continue to develop. There are no further areas for improvement that the school has not already identified in its school improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

From levels of skills which are low and well below those typical for their age when they enter the school, pupils achieve extremely well because the teaching of basic skills is outstanding. Many pupils overcome significant barriers within their learning to reach broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science by Year 6. The progress they make in their learning within the other subjects they study is equally impressive. Pupils' achievement has risen steadily since the last inspection. All groups of pupils, including the vulnerable and the more able make outstanding progress in their learning. This is because staff provide a very close focus on developing pupils' personal skills alongside their academic skills. As a result pupils become independent learners who are very keen to succeed. Pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language rapidly grasp essential language skills and make very good progress. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same outstanding progress as their classmates. Cohorts do vary considerably, especially in terms of the proportion with additional needs or joining the school at other than the normal time. Current school checks on assessment information demonstrate that all pupils are on course to exceed their challenging targets set in English, mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are proud of their school and say they feel that their views really matter. Consequently, they thrive in an extremely caring and stimulating environment. Pupils eat healthily, keep fit and understand that healthy lifestyles are important. Breakfast club followed by 'wake up shake up' gives pupils a daily healthy start to the day. Healthy lifestyles are developed through a wide range of sporting activities, such as the weekly swimming lessons enjoyed by all pupils from Years 1 to 6. Attending conferences such as 'Your Choice' extends pupils' understanding of personal safety. Pupils remark how well their worries and concerns are dealt with and made easier by, 'teachers who really care for us'. They thrive on responsibility, such as acting as playground buddies or 'Phys Kids' who promote confidence and participation. Pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language benefit particularly well from these links, feeling welcomed and fully included in all the school has to offer. A wider awareness of their impact on local and global issues is evident in pupils' understanding of sustaining the environment by developing a strong awareness of green issues such as recycling and climate change. Enterprise days and links with schools locally, within different socio-economic areas of the United Kingdom or through a partnership with a school in Africa, extend pupils' life experiences and knowledge of culture differences very effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The outstanding progress pupils make in lessons is the result of the outstanding teaching they receive. All staff work hard to make certain that any obstacles to learning are eliminated. Corridors and classrooms are alive with stimulating displays. Pupils are clear about each lesson's purpose and eagerly engage in well thought out inspiring activities. Pupils' excellent behaviour allows learning to proceed at a lively and challenging pace. Thought-provoking questions are used to broaden thinking and understanding. Pupils work in groups with collaboration and learning is enjoyed by all. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the more vulnerable and those at an early stage of learning English as an additional language are expertly managed by a talented team of staff. Teachers' constructive assessment of pupils' work ensures pupils have a clear idea of what needs to be done next. Tasks are matched precisely to pupils' ages, interests and varying abilities. For instance, in the Year 2/3 class, while developing slogans and a design for a new chocolate bar ahead of their class visit to a factory where chocolate bars are produced, information and communication technology is used very effectively to show advertisements from the past, which prompt pupils to reflect with thoughtfulness on healthy lifestyles, gender and dialect differences which need to be considered when producing their advertisements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils comment very positively on their enjoyment of the practical activities which they experience during, for example, English, mathematics and science weeks where practical investigations bring their learning to life in a meaningful way. Skills of enquiry, discussion, debate and decision making are interwoven into each project pupils study. For instance, pupils in Year 5/6 watched and made notes from the inauguration speech of Barack Obama, reflecting

on the key features of a persuasive speech which they consequently used when writing their own speeches for their 'Narnian Newsnight' presentation. Provision for pupils' personal development, within the curriculum, is highly successful, particularly in its effect on pupils' respect for the personal feelings of others. Special programmes for pupils who find learning difficult or who are learning English as an additional language are very effective in enabling these pupils to meet success in their learning. First-hand experiences of other cultures, beliefs and religions prepare them exceptionally well for life in a diverse world. French is taught throughout the school and pupils quickly become fluent in the speaking and understanding of another language. Residential visits and an excellent range of after-school activities add purpose to pupils' learning experiences in music, sport and the arts, while extending opportunities for them to show initiative.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

A parental comment sums up why pastoral care is outstanding: 'Without the kindness, care and support we have received from the staff we would not have got through these terrible times.' Safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements. Health and safety arrangements, including risk assessments, comply with statutory regulations. Pupils' academic guidance is exemplary. Their work is marked consistently and effective use is made of this to guide pupils in the next steps needed to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and supported very well. Staff provide focused support for pupils who are learning English as an additional language. This contributes very well to their outstanding progress. A sequence of very effective actions since the last inspection to improve attendance includes working with the education welfare officer to reduce the number of persistent absentees and introducing rewards for high attendance. This has had a marked impact on reducing persistent absence. Learning logs form a very effective link with parents as pupils complete these at home as revision and reinforcement of their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. Expectations of what can be achieved are extremely high and focus on continual improvement and equal opportunities for each pupil's academic and personal development. Within this small school, teachers have a wide range of responsibilities. They manage these extremely well and all staff, including administrative personnel, share an enthusiasm and commitment to extending their talents and skills for the benefit of the pupils. The school has accurately identified strengths and areas for continued improvement, although judgements made in its self-evaluation are sometimes too cautious. Governance is excellent. It is self-critical and reflective and enables governors to challenge and hold the school to account in equal measure. There are extremely close ties with all parts of the community and the school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding. Together, this provides an outstanding capacity for continued and sustained improvement.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

I thoroughly enjoyed inspecting your school and appreciated your warm, friendly welcome. I was extremely impressed by the happy family atmosphere and of how each one of you is eager to do as well as you can. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to some of you, hearing you sing in your choir practice and seeing how much you enjoy your lessons, playtime and lunchtime with your friends.

You go to an outstanding school. These are some of the things the school does very well.

You are taught exceedingly well and receive outstanding care, support and guidance. You make outstanding progress in lessons and your behaviour is excellent. I was very impressed with your responsible attitude and the way you consider each other's feelings often before your own.

You thoroughly enjoy the many interesting activities arranged for you. Your school's leaders are determined to continue to improve your school, so that you all continue to do as well as you possibly can. You are exceptionally well looked after and your headteacher and staff work extremely hard to make certain that no one is left out. Your parents are very pleased with your progress in school.

You all have an important part to play in continuing to make sure your school remains outstanding. You can help by continuing to attend regularly, listening very carefully to the advice of the staff and by working as hard as you possibly can. This will help you continue to achieve well and reach even higher standards.

Thank you for helping me with this inspection. I hope the school will keep building on its strengths.