

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104804
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	324107
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Marie Cordey

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)	202
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 J Connelly
Headteacher	Mr M Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Charles Street St Helens Merseyside WA10 1LN
Telephone number	01744 678319
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This small school is close to the town centre and draws pupils from a variety of backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and a small proportion is of minority ethnic background. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average and the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. Early Years Foundation Stage provision includes one, part-time Nursery class and a Reception class. The school holds many awards, including Healthy Schools, Activemark for its sport provision and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Pupils say that 'it must be really good because we can't think of anything to make it better'. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children and their parents are made to feel welcome and this helps children to settle into school life quickly. Central to the school's character is its strong focus on pupils' academic and personal development. Pupils are encouraged to believe in themselves, as well as to think of others. Their strong commitment to healthy lifestyles is reflected in a healthy, sensible approach to diet and by taking sport and exercise very seriously. Pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good, because they themselves are respected and appreciated. In turn, they understand and appreciate people from different walks of life and are active fundraisers for national and international charities. Pupils relish their involvement in local, parish, national and international communities. Parents' positive attitudes towards school are reflected in typical comments, such as, 'Brilliant school. Well done' and 'I like everything about this school. They do all they can for my children'.

The quality of teaching is good overall and, because of this, pupils achieve well. Effective tracking of pupils' performance means that, overall, work is adapted to meet individual needs. Consequently, pupils meet their increasingly challenging targets. Following a decline in standards in 2008, Year 6 pupils are back on track to attain above average standards in English, mathematics and science. This includes significant improvements in the numbers of pupils attaining at the high levels. Not all teaching is good or better and this affects the consistency of pupils' achievement. Progress slows occasionally, when pupils repeat similar work and are less involved in their learning.

The school takes good care of its pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The good curriculum supports the achievement of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to good effect, to improve basic skills, particularly in writing, and to develop pupils' independence and computer skills. Parents and pupils appreciate the 'very good after school clubs', including the parent and child craft project, community arts and a vast array of different sports activities.

Good leadership and management have driven the school forward since the dip in standards last year. Self-evaluation is satisfactory, however, the school does not check in enough depth that all pupils are achieving as well as they should. Governors are very involved and supportive. They have consciously and conscientiously sought to challenge the school's performance since the previous inspection. They are not afraid to ask difficult questions and develop their knowledge and expertise by attending regular training courses. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection and the school provides good value for money. Improvements in standards, particularly in writing and for pupils in Years 5 and 6 demonstrate good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's starting points in the Nursery class are below the levels expected for their age. They progress well, to attain levels broadly in line with those expected by the end of the Reception Year. A range of well-prepared activities encourages children to explore and enjoy their learning

and they are eager to play and learn through games, role-play areas, computers and craft activities. They are delighted to learn a modern foreign language and respond enthusiastically to their teacher's request to 'get our hands ready to twinkle'. They proceed to sing 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' in Spanish! Provision is planned well and ensures that each child has equal access to the resources available. The outdoor space for play is comparatively small, nevertheless, staff make good use of this space and the available resources. As a result, children enjoy exploring and playing together. Good quality teaching and learning stems from good leadership and management that is focused closely on children's progress and personal development. Children become increasingly confident and secure, because of the good care for their welfare. Good support from skilled and enthusiastic teaching assistants builds trust and children make good progress in their social development. Children are cared for well and requirements regarding their welfare, health and safety are fully met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning to ensure that it is all good or better, leading to higher standards and consistently good achievement.
- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels check rigorously that all pupils are achieving as well as they should and take decisive action to improve the quality of the school's work, where necessary.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

An overall trend of above-average standards and good achievement in Key Stage 2 was halted in 2008 by a dip in standards and achievement, largely because of lower standards in English, particularly in writing. The school has successfully raised standards in writing through concentrating on linking the learning in different subjects and encouraging pupils to write about their own experiences. For instance, an activity called 'Shriek Mania' involved all Year 6 pupils in designing, publicising and merchandising a range of products to encourage the public to visit a fairground attraction and enjoy a new roller coaster ride. This was sponsored by the local chamber of commerce and pupils thoroughly enjoyed improving their persuasive, descriptive and analytical writing. Currently, pupils in Years 1 to 2 make good progress in all their subjects. Standards at the end of Year 2 are broadly average in writing and above average in reading and mathematics. Pupils' performance in mathematics in Years 1 to 6 is a consistent strength, because of the school's focus on teaching, assessment and relating the application of mathematical skills to pupils' lives. There are no significant differences between different groups of pupils' achievement. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress, because of the skills, knowledge and effective deployment of the school's support staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school, are well behaved and form good relationships with their teachers and with each other. They know how to keep safe. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility and are proud to represent the views of other pupils who elected them. The school council has been instrumental in improving playground equipment and introducing re-cycling boxes around the school. Pupils have a keen sense of fair play and strong beliefs about justice and a 'caring society,' as they put it. They celebrate our diverse culture and enjoy learning about different

faiths. Attendance is broadly average and the school has developed a variety of strategies to help to improve it, with the help of the local authority. However, attendance is adversely affected by the taking of holidays in term-time. Good preparation for pupils' future includes close liaison with local schools in the 'creative learning community', effective skills in ICT, numeracy and literacy and above-average speaking, listening and social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most teachers' high expectations mean that pupils are well-motivated and expected to think for themselves. Both teachers and support assistants plan work skilfully to challenge and stimulate pupils and ask searching questions to extend pupils' learning and their leadership skills. Consequently, pupils appreciate how relevant their skills are to everyday life and how useful they are for their futures. Occasionally, teaching is less challenging and pupils spend too long on one task. Their progress is not as rapid, because they are not as highly motivated, or involved in their learning. Teachers mark work regularly and most pupils are aware of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work, through clear targets and increased involvement in assessing their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is rich and increasingly varied. Pupils' personal, social and emotional development is intrinsic to the curriculum and helps to improve the standards they reach in all their subjects. A recent, still-developing approach enables pupils to link their learning in different subjects, particularly in ICT, which has led to improvements in pupils' research skills and in their writing. This has yet to have an impact in all classes. Pupils enjoy and appreciate learning about life in other countries and are very aware of their responsibilities as citizens of this country. The school makes good provision for competitive sports. Despite being a small school, pupils have many successes in competitions of which they are very proud.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language are identified at an early stage and provided with support that is matched well to their personal and academic needs. Children are well-prepared for starting school in the Nursery and this continues for each stage of their school lives, helped by links with the home and with neighbouring schools. Procedures for safeguarding and child protection are in place and meet current government guidelines fully. 'My child has been very happy at Holy Cross and has thrived in a positive and caring environment', said one parent. Academic guidance has improved since the previous inspection; detailed advice enables pupils to edit their own work, assess others' work and make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher inspires loyalty, because of his good relationships with staff and pupils. School self-evaluation is honest and mostly accurate. As a result, the headteacher, senior leaders and governors share a picture of how the school should develop. Self-evaluation has led to more effective monitoring of the school's performance and improved standards. The school is aware of the need to evaluate its work more rigorously, so that all pupils achieve as well as they can. Equality of opportunity for all and the elimination of discrimination are central to the school's character and the school's promotion of community cohesion is good. Good links with the parish, the local community and outside agencies promote pupils' personal development and well-being.

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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?	2
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	3
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	2
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**

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, St Helens, WA10 1LN

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school. Many of you made a point of speaking to us and, in particular, I would like to thank the pupils who came to meet with an inspector to share their views about school life. You played a big part in making the inspection so enjoyable and I would like to share with you what I found out about your school.

Yours is a good school. You learn well because you enjoy it and your work is above average in all subjects. You have done a lot of work to improve your writing and it is now so good that you have succeeded in persuading me if there were a roller coaster called 'Shriek Mania' I would definitely want to have a ride on it.

Your enthusiasm and skill in sports help you to be very healthy indeed. Even though yours is a small school, you take part in lots of sporting competitions and do very well in them. Well done! You enjoy coming to school and enjoy what the school has to offer. You raise lots of money for charity, at school and in the parish.

Children in the Nursery and Reception classes settle down quickly and make good progress when they join the school. They are cared for well and made to feel welcome by you.

I have asked your headteacher and teachers to check the work of each of you so that you do as well as you can and don't slip back in your work. I have also asked them to make all teaching good, so that you make good progress in all your classes and reach even higher standards. I know you will enjoy the challenge.