

Simms Cross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111228
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	331055
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jim Alexander

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	190
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 John Woodruff
Headteacher	Mrs Lesley Feakes
Date of previous school inspection	24 April 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Kingsway Widnes Cheshire WA8 7QS
Telephone number	0151 4245031
Fax number	0151 4245177

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

When Simms Cross Primary School was inspected in April 2007 it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. Subsequently, Ofsted Inspectors have made five visits to monitor the school's progress. This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized school. Pupil numbers have declined since the last inspection. Most pupils are of White British heritage although a very small number of pupils have recently joined the school that are learning English as an additional language. The school has two designated assessment unit classes for pupils with a range of learning difficulties. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises 34 children who attend the Nursery in either the morning or afternoon and 20 children in the Reception classes. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The committed, focused leadership of the headteacher, coupled with the support of the staff and parents, have been crucial factors in bringing about improvements. High quality support from the local authority has also effectively underpinned this improvement.

Pupils are well behaved and show respect and consideration for the staff that work with them, as well as for other pupils. They enjoy school and are developing increasingly positive attitudes towards their learning. Consequently, attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average. Pupils are keen to learn and motivated to do their best, particularly when lessons are practical, challenging and exciting. They demonstrate pride in their school and say that it is 'getting better all the time'. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school community.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. This is a significant improvement and a direct result of better teaching and improved ways of checking on how well pupils are doing. There is still, however, some underachievement that the school is working hard to eradicate. Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall although there are still some classes in which it should be faster. While standards are rising, they remain below average across Key Stages 1 and 2, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Teaching is satisfactory overall and improving. The best teaching is characterised by high expectations and consistent challenge for all pupils. It engages pupils and sparks their enthusiasm. Where teaching is satisfactory, expectations are generally lower and the tasks set do not always quite meet the needs of all pupils, especially when pupils are working independently. Consequently, pupils' rate of progress dips a little in these lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the two assessment units, make progress similar to others in the school because of the well-targeted support they receive.

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving as teachers increasingly plan activities that stimulate and challenge pupils. Initiatives such as 'The Big Write' have been received well by the staff and pupils. Teachers are also identifying links between subjects and these are becoming embedded in lessons. These links enable pupils to practise the skills they have developed in one subject across a range of activities. Pupils say this helps them as they have 'many more things to connect with'. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about how to keep safe and live healthy lives. As a result, they are keen to take part in the range of sporting activities available in after-school clubs.

Parents are confident that the school takes good care of their children. Indeed, care for the individual pupil is central to the life of the school. The staff work very effectively in the two assessment units, for example, to develop pupils' self-esteem and help them overcome their particular difficulties. Pupils across the school say that they feel safe and know that there is always someone to turn to if they need help.

The headteacher has set a clear direction for the future, based on a much-improved and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders and managers at all levels focus rigorously on driving up standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school has recently further developed the structure of the senior leadership team and is fine-tuning their monitoring roles. Under the very careful management of the local authority,

governance has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. Although delegated statutory responsibilities have not yet been returned to the governors, they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what still needs to be achieved. Governors have benefited from well-focused training provided by the local authority. They are growing in their understanding of how to hold the school to account for the standards achieved although they recognise that this process is not yet as rigorous as it should be. Leadership at all levels is now satisfactory and improving. The actions taken by the school have already resulted in significant improvements in key areas and, consequently, demonstrate a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle quickly into the Nursery because of effective leadership and management and skilful early years practitioners. Adults help children to achieve well in all six areas of learning in relation to their starting points, which are usually very low compared with those expected for their age, particularly their communication and language and personal and social skills. Children make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes but even so, by the time they start Year 1, few are working securely within the levels expected for their age. Nursery staff provide the youngest children with learning activities that capture their imagination and make them eager to communicate with each other. When mending a broken go-cart outside in a pretend garage, for example, children were laying the foundations of teamwork and problem solving. Children in the Nursery quickly learn classroom routines. This helps them when they move up to the Reception class. Here their play-based learning continues, although it is now punctuated more frequently by effective short and focused lessons in letter sounds and writing, for example. Children are aware of the need to cooperate with each other and behave very well. The staff meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and compile evidence to illustrate children's good achievement. Parents are welcomed and receive regular updates about the progress their children are making.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 1 and 2, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Increase the proportion of good or better lessons to enable all pupils to make consistently good progress.
- Ensure governors hold the leaders more rigorously to account for the performance reached in all aspects of school life.

A small proportion of 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

Overall, pupils' achievement in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory and this represents an improving trend. Standards by the end of Key Stage 1 are rising and although standards were exceptionally low in 2007, unvalidated data for 2008 shows that standards improved significantly overall. These provisional data indicate that by the end of Year 2 standards in 2008 were broadly average in mathematics and below average in writing, but remained well below average in reading. School data and inspection findings confirm that pupils across Key Stage 1 are now making satisfactory progress overall. In 2007, standards by the end of Year 6 were exceptionally low

in all subjects but had improved significantly from the previous year, especially in English and mathematics. School data and inspection findings show that pupils across Key Stage 2 are now also making satisfactory progress overall. Although standards across the school are below average, some year groups make more accelerated progress than others do. Consequently, a legacy of underachievement persists in some classes. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the two designated assessment unit classes for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, make progress similar to others in the school. The few pupils who have recently joined the school and are learning English as an additional language are receiving additional support from local authority support staff. It is too soon, however, to judge the impact of this support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy school and show increasingly positive attitudes to their learning. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now broadly in line with the national average. Behaviour too is improving and pupils feel confident to approach an adult if they require help or support. The number of exclusions has fallen since the last inspection. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Their appreciation of their own local culture is satisfactory and supported by an increasing number of local visits to places of interest. The school has rightly identified, however, the need to develop further pupils' understanding of life in an ethnically diverse country. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to the school community. A member of staff leads the school council and pupils are increasingly having a say about, for example, how charity events can be organised. Older pupils also help to run a recently developed tuck shop, serving healthy snacks at break time. This helps pupils' understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle as well as providing a much-needed boost to their energy levels in readiness for lessons. Improving standards mean that pupils are now prepared satisfactorily for future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The proportion of good teaching is increasing and some examples of outstanding practice are emerging. Rigorous monitoring and effective support have enabled teachers to focus more sharply on promoting pupils' learning. They plan lessons securely and set clear learning objectives for different groups of pupils in their class. Teachers have increasingly high expectations of what pupils can achieve and match work so that all groups are adequately challenged. The quality of marking has improved significantly and pupils now have a clear idea of how to improve their work. Strong relationships and effective management of pupils ensure positive attitudes and behaviour, which underpins learning well. Where teaching is at its best, lessons are stimulating and challenge pupils creatively. Expectations are high and learning takes place at a cracking pace, keeping pupils fully engaged. As a result, pupils progress rapidly and gaps in their learning are being closed quickly. Although the school has shared this good practice more widely, there are still pockets of weaker teaching. Where teaching is less effective, tasks do not fully meet the needs of all pupils, especially when pupils are working independently. Behaviour during such activities can slip. Sometimes discussion sessions at the start of lessons are interesting and challenging, but the activities that follow lack pace. In these lessons,

expectations are not high enough. As a result, pupils' progress is no better than satisfactory and consequently, a legacy of underachievement remains.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is improving as the school develops a better understanding of the learning needs of different groups of pupils. The long-term planning is good, giving a clear overview of what is being covered. The identification of cross-curricular links is becoming embedded in teachers' planning although these links are stronger and more effective in some year groups than in others. These links enable pupils to practise their skills across a whole range of different subjects. In a Year 2 project on healthy living, for example, pupils used information and communication technology (ICT) to produce graphs developing their mathematical skills, they learnt about healthy living and made and painted models of healthy meals. Each year group makes at least two visits per year to enrich their first-hand experiences. Year 6 pupils, for example, have recently been out to conduct a local river study. To improve the curriculum further the school has accurately identified the need for pupils to construct more of their own investigations in mathematics and science. The curriculum is being modified to meet the needs of the pupils who speak English as an additional language better.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The staff take good care of pupils, who confirm that they feel safe and secure in school. Pupils say that when bullying does occur, they are confident that teachers will act quickly to help resolve the problem. There is particularly strong support for pupils in the two assessment units; the staff here are well trained to meet pupils' individual needs and make good use of partnerships with other agencies. Procedures for first aid and risk assessments are in place. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils now meet current requirements and leaders are developing increasingly robust methods to monitor these procedures more carefully. The school places a particular emphasis on supporting pupils and their families through a range of activities, which are appreciated by those who take part. Academic support and guidance has improved since the last inspection and it is now satisfactory. Pupils are now clearer about their targets and how to achieve them. Teachers also correct spellings and grammatical mistakes but then do not guide pupils to do these corrections in order to learn from their errors. This is a missed opportunity for pupils to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The headteacher has led the school well through this challenging time, with determination and commitment. There is a clear drive to raise standards. Leaders also have an unyielding resolve to ensure that staff morale remains high. This has fostered a strong sense of teamwork and enabled leaders at all levels to develop their roles and bring about school improvement. The newly structured senior leadership team is currently working on a school development plan, which accurately identifies appropriate targets. Leaders have ensured that opportunities are satisfactory and improving for both the more able group of pupils and those in the two assessment units who need more structured support to access the curriculum. Provision for the few pupils who are learning English as an

additional language is, however, at a very early stage of development. A satisfactory start has also been made to auditing and planning for community cohesion, but the school acknowledges more needs to be done. Middle managers are also developing in their role and becoming increasingly adept at monitoring the work of the school and planning for future development. In September 2008 the governing body re-formed and since then its members have been developing their knowledge and understanding about how to challenge the work of the school and ensure that progress is improved further. The interim executive board, in partnership with the local authority, has been actively involved in training and mentoring the new governors as they grow into their role as critical friends. Indeed, this is an area for further development. Much has been achieved and leadership at all levels has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. The school now offers satisfactory value for money.

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

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

I am writing to tell you the judgements we made about your school following the recent inspection. First, I want to thank you for being so friendly and helpful to us. We decided that your school has improved so much that it no longer needs the extra help it has been getting. We consider that you are now getting a satisfactory education and agree that some things about your school are good.

We are impressed with the way in which most of you behave, both in your lessons and around school. We are pleased that you get on so well with each other and, when you have been upset, that you know that your teachers are there to help and encourage you. We agree that your lessons have become more fun and enjoyable and we particularly liked the way this has encouraged you to work harder. We can see that you have also been working hard to attend school more regularly – well done!

We have asked your headteacher and staff to do some things to help the school improve even more.

- We want you to do even better in all your subjects and reach even higher standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- We want all the teaching to be as good as the best, so that all your lessons are really interesting and challenging for you.
- We want governors to keep an even closer check on the school's work, ensuring that leaders help the school go from strength to strength.

You can help with some of these by attending well and always working hard in all your lessons. Most of all, keep on enjoying school and doing your best.