

Holy Cross Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114562
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338400
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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 of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jill Daly
Headteacher	Mr Richard Hall
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited eight lessons and met with pupils. A sample of pupils' English, mathematics and science work was also evaluated. Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, and eight governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a variety of documentation, including: the school's development plans; and curricular planning and policies. Information about safeguarding was evaluated. Inspectors received and analysed 27 parental questionnaires, 88 pupil and 16 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in helping boys to do as well as possible and for all children to have high quality outside learning experiences
- how well the school meets the needs of the most able pupils in writing, mathematics and science
- how well middle managers are developing their roles
- whether the curriculum is as creative and exciting as possible.

Information about the school

Holy Cross Church of England Primary School is a small school. Pupils almost wholly come from White British backgrounds although a few come from different heritages; most often this is Asian. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. Pupils come from varied social circumstances; fewer than average receive free school meals. The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' needs most often relate to speech and language difficulties and dyslexia. Children start school at the age of four and join the Early Years Foundation Stage in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The school has four other classes; each of these has pupils from two year groups. Since the last inspection, the number on roll has fallen. The current headteacher took over the leadership of the school in 2007 and will leave at the end of December 2009.

The school has gained the Healthy School award, the Quality Mark for improving standards, an award for financial management and has Dyslexia Friendly status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Holy Cross Church of England Primary School is a satisfactory school that has been improving quickly under the leadership of the current headteacher and through the work of the strong team of staff and governors. Pupils enjoy school, behave well and show a keen interest in learning. Attainment is average and achievement is satisfactory overall. Within this, pupils do especially well in English and history due to increased visits, improved teaching and high quality first-hand experiences, which make learning exciting.

Pupils are well cared for, happy and show a keen sense of awareness of what it is to be a good citizen. They contribute much to the community through fundraising and singing. Close links with the local church help the school to have a family feel. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is particularly strong. Pupils know about Christian, Jewish and Muslim beliefs. They do a satisfactory range of multicultural work and enjoy learning about world issues. As a result, pupils show respect and empathy for others.

There are several reasons why the school has a good capacity to improve, but at the core of this lies the ambition of staff and governors to help pupils to do as well as they can. Leaders' actions are helping to improve the outcomes for pupils. In particular, standards have risen since the last inspection by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. This is because leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the school well and firm action is taken to improve provision. Leaders have focused well on reading and writing by making the curriculum and learning more purposeful and challenging. As a result, standards in English are now above average.

Good plans are in place to lift attainment in mathematics and science from average so that they at least match that found in English. Teachers are modifying their 'Talking for Writing' initiative, which has been so successful in helping to improve English, to help raise standards through 'Talking for Mathematics'. This is correctly linked to more real-life problem-solving skills, which are currently underdeveloped, especially for the most able pupils. A new leader has been appointed for science and plans are correctly underway to develop the quality of scientific investigation. This is especially important in enabling more pupils, especially the most able, to reach higher levels in their work.

Due to possible redevelopment of the school and limited funds in the past, the Early Years Foundation Stage outside learning area has not developed well enough to meet children's needs. Leaders now correctly have this as a priority for development. Currently, the youngest children are not always consistently well challenged in their learning and there are missed opportunities to ensure that boys achieve as well as girls.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - providing an exciting, purposeful and well-resourced outside learning environment
 - making sure that learning activities are always challenging
 - ensuring that boys develop their learning more quickly so that they achieve as well as girls.
- Give pupils, especially the most able, more opportunities to do in-depth investigations in science, so that by July 2010 more pupils reach above average standards in their work.
- Widen opportunities for pupils to do real-life mathematical problem-solving activities, especially the most able pupils, so that by July 2010, more pupils attain above average skills in their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children join the school showing the skills and knowledge that are typical for their ages. They make satisfactory progress. In the past, pupils' progress had been uneven between different year groups; this is now more consistent, as learning is almost always at least satisfactory and often good between Years 1 and 6.

Pupils value the changes to the curriculum to make the 'learning journey' more fun and this helps them to gain a firm basis of basic academic skills for the future and develop a good understanding about how to be safe and healthy.

Although learning and achievement are satisfactory there are particular strengths in English. In the 2009 national tests, over half of Year 6 reached the higher Level 5 in their work. This is being sustained as is evident in their writing about 'Forgiveness' and 'Loneliness', which showed how they explore their inner feelings in a sensitive way. English work contributes much to pupils' good overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. In one lesson, pupils wrote highly descriptive news reports about the Second World War, based on their visit to Newhaven Fort, meetings with senior citizens and from their research. Learning culminated when pupils cooperated very well during filming, editing and improving their reports. Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are rapidly improving with the recent provision of high quality resources. In mathematics and science, pupils are developing a secure core of basic knowledge and skills but in mathematics, pupils' ability to apply these to real-life problem solving is not yet developed as well as it could be. This is especially so for the most able pupils, as seen when they were working on percentages and fractions. In science, higher ability pupils are not being challenged consistently well to clarify their ideas and gain a deeper scientific knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language achieve similarly to other pupils. Leaders are working diligently to

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help girls and boys to do equally well overall, although there is some variation in outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Lessons are carefully planned and organised to help pupils to learn in different ways and there is an increasing emphasis on learning through real-life experiences, although this is much stronger in English and history than in mathematics. Music is well promoted and pupils' singing is outstanding as is evident in the three-part harmony performance during the Christmas production of 'Doughnut the Donkey'. Much of the curriculum is exciting but there is too little excitement and challenge and too few opportunities for individual investigation in both mathematics and science. Teachers fully understand that pupils need plenty of opportunities to talk through their ideas before writing, as was evident when pupils read and discussed the vocabulary in a Jamaican poem about 'Granny'. This helped pupils to understand how to extract meaning from different texts well. The intensive 'Rapid Reading' and extra letters and sounds (phonics) support has helped standards to rise in reading.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Teachers often mark pupils' work well, so that they know how to improve, but the quality of this is not yet consistently good across the school and pupils are not acting well enough on teachers' comments to lift skills; for example, in science. Well-tailored support, including that given by teaching assistants, helps pupils to develop their skills and grow in confidence. The needs of vulnerable pupils are well met and the provision is greatly enhanced by links with parents and support from other professionals.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has developed many aspects of provision well in the school since he took over the leadership of the school. There has been a rigorous focus on improving teaching, with some previously inadequate teaching in Years 1 to 6 being eradicated. The teaching in English, history, music and ICT has improved considerably. As a result of a clear vision, high expectations, teamwork, good development planning and good assessment of pupils' needs, the school demonstrates a clear capacity to improve. Governors have secured a robust plan of action to maintain the thrust for good, continuous development when the headteacher leaves the school. Although a permanent headteacher is not expected to take over until mid 2010, an experienced headteacher is already working with the school during the transition period and other senior leaders have shown themselves to be at the forefront of many school developments and these are well on track to continue. Middle managers have developed their roles well, so that there is a shared sense of responsibility for improving standards and achievement. All leaders have clear plans in place to build on the work already started to bring about improvement. Staff show, as they said, 'a real sense of being on the same wavelength to help lead improvements'.

Leaders ensure that pupils are well cared for and this underpins their quickly improving achievement. Safeguarding procedures are promoted satisfactorily.

Governors have developed their roles well and have a good range of skills. They show a strong commitment and ambitious ideas for improvement. They regularly work with staff and parents in evaluating the school's strengths and areas for development. Firm action has been taken to recover from a high overspend in the budget. Finances have been well targeted at developing reading, mathematics and ICT resources together with extra adult support for pupils in classes.

Equal opportunities are promoted satisfactorily and are quickly improving. The needs of

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pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are met effectively overall and there has been some good training to help ensure that there are equal opportunities for dyslexic pupils. There is clear attention now being given to developing provision for the higher attaining and talented pupils and it is a focus for further development, which is well underway.

Community cohesion is satisfactory, with strengths in the way that the school helps the local community to work together, for example through links with the church and fundraising for 'World Vision' projects. Governors and staff are working to raise the profile of multicultural work as part of the revised curriculum and this is well underway, for example, by purchasing more resources to enhance provision.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children benefit from a very warm welcome when they start school. They settle quickly and happily and play well together. Activities are usually suitable but sometimes children, especially boys, can get restless and lose concentration when activities are not meeting their needs and interests well enough. Although achievement is satisfactory, the lack of an exciting outside learning area hampers better achievement. This is a factor in why boys do not do as well as girls overall. As a result of satisfactory teaching, children gain a secure understanding of basic skills, such as counting, letters and sounds, reading, writing and in the development of their knowledge of the world. However, there are missed opportunities to challenge children by spontaneously building on their emerging learning. The writing area in the classroom is dull and does not inspire children to experiment with writing to very best effect. Creative activities are

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improving and children enjoy dressing up and role play, as seen when they made up a lively story about visiting Father Christmas at his grotto. However, this lacked real excitement due to limited resources.

Children start school showing skills and knowledge that are as typically expected for their age. Until recently they went into Year 1, with lower than average standards, which showed that too many children had underachieved from their starting points. In the last year, standards rose considerably and children now go into Year 1 with broadly average skills, although boys' progress is not as strong as that of the girls. As a result of satisfactory leadership, the leaders are working to improve provision. They know that there is more to do and are keenly working on plans to make provision better.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents, who returned the questionnaire, agree that their children enjoy school and pupils' behaviour is good. Parents have confidence in the work of the school and agree that their children are doing well overall, although a few feel that they are not making enough progress. Inspectors found that progress is satisfactory overall but there is room for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to be more consistently challenged and for higher ability pupils to be doing better still in mathematics and science. Parents have confidence in the teaching and the care given to pupils. They say that largely they feel that the school is well run and staff take account of their views. Parents, however, are concerned that the current headteacher will be leaving soon, as he will be missed. Parents can be reassured that governors have put suitable plans in place to ensure continuity in leadership until a new headteacher is permanently appointed and there is a good capacity for improvement because of the teamwork and skills of governors and staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holy Cross Church of England Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 27 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 160 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	78	4	15	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	70	8	30	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	59	9	33	1	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	59	9	33	2	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	63	9	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	52	12	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	44	15	56	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	11	41	12	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	52	12	44	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	44	11	40	1	4	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	37	14	51	1	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	16	59	9	33	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	59	9	33	1	4	1	4

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Cross Church of England Primary School, Uckfield, TN22 1BP

You may remember that two school inspectors visited your school just before the Christmas holidays. We are writing to tell you what we found.

You go to a satisfactory school. This means that most things are suitable for you. You are very friendly, helpful and behave well. You enjoy learning and caring for others. Congratulations for helping to raise money for World Vision so that children who do not go to such a nice school as you may have a better future. You are looked after well and you get on well with your teachers and other adults. Activities and clubs are becoming much more exciting and teachers work hard to make most lessons interesting, which is making learning more fun. We thought that your work on the Second World War was very good and we were impressed by the way that you have been filming news reports. Some of your writing is especially good and shows a great deal of thought. Please keep up your good reading and research.

Your teachers, and all of the adults do a good job and they want to do even better for you. We have asked them to do the following important things.

- Give the youngest children, in the Reception class, an exciting outside learning area. Also, we want them to make sure that the adults help the children to think as hard as they can so that they learn new things as quickly as possible.
- Give all of you more opportunities to do exciting science investigations and real- life problem solving in mathematics. This is especially important for those of you who find learning easy so that you have the chance to work on developing higher level skills.

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school. Lastly, keep working hard and thank you for inviting the inspectors to see your superb Christmas play about 'Doughnut the Donkey', the singing was fantastic; we call this 'outstanding'.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons

Lead inspector

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