

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Gautby Road, Bidston, Birkenhead, Merseyside, CH41 7DU

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school has been recognised and awarded for ensuring that all pupils have equal access to learning, and staff, governors and a group of dedicated parents pull together to ensure that all pupils make at least good progress and are well cared for.
- The proportion of pupils making better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics is significantly above average. Attainment is rising sharply at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2.
- The quality of teaching is much improved since the last inspection and in the overwhelming majority of lessons is good.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- The school is effectively raising levels of attendance, which are rapidly improving.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, as is their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are exceptionally eager to learn.
- The headteacher is very committed, and has led improvements in teaching effectively. Highly respected, staff and parents describe her as 'very approachable', and 'always visible'.
- Governors are fully focused on improving pupils' achievement, and are fully involved in the life of the school. They are well aware of the challenging circumstances for some pupils and are determined that the school should make a difference to the lives of all pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' attainment, despite improving at a good pace, remains below average.
- Learning activities are not always challenging enough particularly for the most able. Teachers' questions are not always sharp enough to make pupils think.
- Marking does not always make it clear to pupils how to improve their work.
- Resources and activities in mathematics are not always interesting enough to capture pupils' interest and accelerate their progress.
- Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to practise their reading and mathematical skills in other subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, including parts of lessons, as well as the teaching of small groups of pupils and sessions aimed at helping pupils to learn to read through understanding the links between letters and the sounds they make (phonics teaching).
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Years 2, 3, 4, and 5, and held discussions with pupils from across the school. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised during lessons.
- There were too few responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to consider. Inspectors held informal discussions with parents at the beginning of the school day, held a meeting with parents and took account of 17 questionnaires completed by members of staff.
- A meeting took place with the school's education consultant and a telephone discussion took place with a representative from the local authority school improvement service. A meeting was held with four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Various school documents were examined. These included the school's development plan and review of its own performance, data on pupils' progress, external school evaluations, records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of the governing body meetings, records of pupils' attendance, behaviour records and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Terry Bond

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is triple the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school receives additional funding through the pupil premium for almost all pupils. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school has a very small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Since the last inspection, the school has been reorganised and now has a middle management tier as part of its structure. A number of new governors have been appointed, including the Chair of the Governing Body. A number of new staff have been appointed, including a newly qualified teacher.
- The school runs a breakfast club and a range of after-school activities.
- In July 2013 the school achieved the Inclusion Quality Mark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the level of pupils' attainment so that it is at least in line with the national average by:
 - ensuring that lessons include work that is always hard enough, particularly for the most able, and that adults' questions are probing, making pupils think hard and work things out for themselves
 - checking that marking tells pupils how to improve their work, and that time is given for pupils to think about teachers' comments and make corrections
 - providing as many opportunities as possible for pupils to apply their reading and mathematical skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring resources and activities in mathematics capture pupils' interest and help them to make faster progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is good from their very low starting points. They are making good progress in their current learning. Standards are rising rapidly and are higher than at the time of the last inspection.
- Children enter the Nursery class with exceptionally low skills in most areas of learning. Their language and communication skills are especially weak. However, well trained caring adults ensure that they make good progress. Despite this, only about a third of pupils enter Year 1 having attained the level of development expected for their age.
- Progress is good in both Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are now making much faster progress than they have done in the past. This is also true of pupils in Key Stage 2 but many in this key stage have to make up lost ground because they did not learn well enough in earlier years.
- In 2013, pupils' attainment in national tests was below average at both Key Stages 1 and 2 but rising sharply. The attainment of pupils in currently Year 6 in reading and writing, while still below average, is continuing to improve.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 1 is improving and this is helping pupils make better progress in their reading and writing. However, in 2013, Year 1 pupils still struggled to reach the required standard in the national phonics screening check.
- The school has done much to foster in pupils a love of books, and to encourage them to read regularly. Year 3 pupils who read to inspectors were very proud to demonstrate that they knew the difference between fiction and non-fiction books and could define words such as 'glossary', and 'index'. As a result of the school's efforts, pupils are making good progress in reading. However, they still have too few opportunities to practise their reading skills when working in other subjects.
- The school's data show that currently pupils make good progress in mathematics in all year groups, and that Year 6 pupils, for example, are on track to reach their challenging targets by the end of the year. As a result, attainment in mathematics is now much closer to the nationally expected level. However, as with reading, pupils are not given enough chances to develop their skills of mathematics when working in other subjects.
- The school's many small-group and one-to-one teaching activities are targeted and specifically tailored to develop pupils' skills and improve their attainment. These activities helped to ensure that in 2013 at the end of Year 6, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieved similar standards to others in this group nationally, and made good progress.
- No valid in-school comparisons can be made between the performance of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium, and those who are not. This is because in 2013 all pupils in Year 2 were entitled to this support, as were all but three of the 22 pupils in Year 6. In 2013, the progress made by pupils known to be eligible to free school meals was much higher than that made by similar pupils nationally. Currently, these pupils are less than one term behind similar groups of pupils nationally in English and mathematics.
- Data show that over the last two years there have been some variations between the performance of boys and girls. Currently, girls are ahead of boys in some year groups. However, teachers check carefully when planning lessons that they are of equal interest to boys and girls, and as a result, the performance of boys is improving.
- Although in some lessons the work set for the most able pupils is not hard enough overall, by the time they leave Year 6 they make good progress. They benefit from small-group teaching activities, including specially developed creative writing workshops, which accelerate their progress. Those pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they enjoyed writing and demonstrated a good use of descriptive language during lesson observations.
- The school has few pupils from minority ethnic groups, and very few speak English as an

additional language. However, subject leaders regularly monitor the progress of pupils from all these groups, however small. The school's current data show that minority ethnic pupils are making at least good progress overall.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teaching observed during the inspection was good. A full check on pupils' work over the last year showed that teaching overtime is good.
- Good teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that children get off to a good start in a stimulating and well managed environment in which children work well together.
- The overwhelming majority of teachers make it their business to ensure that pupils enjoy learning and this ensures they work hard. This was the case in a very exciting Year 6 English lesson where the teacher asked pupils to think about and describe a fantasy landscape. Pupils took up the task with gusto and were challenged throughout the lesson to make their sentences as complex as possible. At the end of the lesson, pupils shared sentences such as 'the dark cave let small particles of light in from the colourful mountains and snowy sea'.
- Innovative methods often provide pupils with learning that is just what is needed to capture their attention. For example, in a good mathematics lesson taught with three groups of pupils of different abilities, the lower ability pupils were engaged in a very stimulating activity as they danced outside in their hats and coats while using pairs of ribbons to copy the shapes of numbers demonstrated by their teaching assistant. They thoroughly enjoyed their learning and made good progress in forming numbers.
- However, not all lessons are this challenging and do not always sustain pupils' enthusiasm for learning. In some, tasks are not sufficiently well matched to pupils' abilities, especially those for the most able, and pupils are not consistently required to either think hard about what they are learning or find things out for themselves. Questions encourage discussion but are not always sharp enough to make pupils think.
- Many pupils who spoke to inspectors indicated that mathematics was their favourite subject. However, too few examples were found in pupils' books of mathematical activities where resources and activities were stimulating enough to clearly engage pupils' interest and help them to make faster progress. Limited evidence was seen of pupils practising their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Teachers are careful to ensure that all pupils' work is marked and up-to-date. However, a few teachers do not make it clear how to improve work and then ensure pupils act upon advice.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are very proud of their school, and say that the best thing about it is 'the learning, teachers and friends'. Pupils' behave well in and around the school, during play and in lessons. Pupils' behaviour is not outstanding because some pupils can be 'off-task' when they are not fully engaged in learning.
- They are very sensible and well behaved during lunchtimes, and older pupils like to take on board responsibilities, such as acting as play buddies for their younger school-mates.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils who spoke to inspectors were of the opinion that behaviour is good most of the time, and that bullying is rare. School records concur with this, as do the views of staff and parents.
- All pupils indicate that they are very confident to go to adults if they have any concerns. As one pupil put it, 'if there are problems, teachers always sort them out, if it's something really bad it goes to the headteacher and is put in the blue book'.
- Older pupils have a strong sense of social justice and are aware of most forms of prejudice and

discrimination. One pupil noted that, 'it's wrong to say nasty words to someone of a different colour.... it would break their heart inside'.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Younger pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they almost always feel safe, and that they know they can always talk to adults during breaks and at lunchtime.
- Older pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe while using the internet. They are fully aware that cyber-bullying can take place on social networking sites, through mobile phone messaging services, and on hand-held games. When Key Stage 2 pupils were asked what advice they would give to Key Stage 1 pupils on how to stay safe while using the internet, all agreed that they should 'never reveal passwords to anyone, and never talk to anyone unless you know them'.
- All pupils are taught through personal, social and health education and assemblies how to cross roads safely, to take care on Bonfire Night and never to talk to strangers.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, supported by very able senior and middle management teams, active governors and committed teachers and staff, is determined to continually improve the school. Leadership and management are extremely strong, but not outstanding because pupils attainment is not yet good enough.
- Senior leaders have worked extremely hard to address the areas for improvement identified from the last inspection. The capacity of the governing body to hold school leaders fully to account has significantly improved and a well trained, effective middle leadership team is now in place.
- The school's work to develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of pupils' learning is strong, as evident in the way in which pupils care about and relate to each other.
- The school's middle leadership team know that their work has to make a difference. They are knowledgeable about their area of responsibility. Their well organised work is already helping to improve standards.
- The school is becoming more prominent both locally and regionally through sharing good practice. For example, the creative writing workshops that it has hosted for its cluster of schools on creative writing for gifted and talented pupils, were hailed as a success by all partners.
- The curriculum is good, and involves pupils well in a wide-range of enrichment activities, including weekly music workshops led by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, judo and trampoline. The school's priority of raising levels of attainment in mathematics through, for example, the daily '20 minute challenge', is beginning to impact on standards.
- Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers are appropriately trained in order to effectively execute their responsibilities. For example, the school's recently appointed newly qualified teacher is very appreciative of the mentoring and training that she receives, as is the school's special educational needs manager, who is currently in the process of acquiring her specialist qualification.
- The local authority, having worked with the school in a number of areas, including monitoring the quality of teaching, has reduced its support and is confident in the school's capacity for sustained improvement.
- The primary school sports fund has helped to improve teachers' skills in teaching a wide range of sporting activities, and developed pupils' confidence in trying new sports, including street-dance, dodge-ball and basketball.
- Safeguarding procedures are followed closely and meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very active, and work exceptionally well together. They are fully involved in the school's activities, have a good understanding of performance data, and know exactly how well the school is doing. Led by a very experienced Chair of the Governing Body, governors

know that their main priority is to ensure that pupils' attainment continually improves. The work of the school's parent-link governor is exemplary. Her commitment to running the school's mid-morning toast club, listening to pupils read and mustering the support of parents is first-rate.

- Governors know that the quality of teaching is improving because they all have class and curriculum responsibilities, which put them in regular contact with teachers. They never award pay increases or endorse promotions unless teachers achieve their targets. Governors ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged because of their personal or family circumstances. They know that pupil premium funding is making a difference through, for example, the speech and language support it funds, which is helping entitled pupils to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105087
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	431005

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Allan Rogan
Headteacher	Jane Bradley
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2012
Telephone number	0151 652 8454
Fax number	0151 652 7715
Email address	schooloffice@holycross.wirral.sch.uk

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