

Holy Cross Roman Catholic Primary School Aided

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108623
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309747
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Oglesby

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 on roll	
School	331
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Jackie Pousson
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Burns
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Coniston Road Wallsend Tyne and Wear NE28 0EP
Telephone number	0191 2007357
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Holy Cross is a larger than average primary school. Pupils come from a wide range of social circumstances, though the school serves an area identified with considerable disadvantage. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than most schools, as is the proportion known to be entitled to free school meals. The school holds several national awards, including Artsmark, Healthy Schools, Active Sportsmark and the Curriculum Award.

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 which takes outstanding care of all its pupils. Teaching is good and standards are rising. Pupils of all abilities are achieving well. They enjoy all that the school provides and make excellent progress in their personal development. Parents are rightly pleased with the school and are strongly supportive. Typical of many comments was, 'A well run school with a committed team, where children come first.'

Parents particularly appreciate the good quality work of the teaching and support staff. This is supported by inspection evidence. Teaching and learning are good, so pupils make good progress. Teaching is sometimes outstanding, and in these lessons progress is excellent. In contrast, in a small minority of lessons, pupils do not achieve as much as they could. This is because in these lessons the pace slows at times and some pupils do not feel as involved and challenged.

Some pupils, for example those who join the school late, those who speak little English or those who have disrupted family circumstances, make impressive progress. This is because of the high quality of the support and care provided for them, both by adults and other pupils.

Current standards in Year 6 are above average in English and average in mathematics and science. This represents good progress from the children's starting points in Nursery. Standards are better than they were at the time of the last inspection, and better than recent national test results. Attainment is rising, largely due to the outstanding leadership by the headteacher. She has built an effective and knowledgeable team, both as senior managers and subject leaders. Their work, in partnership with the local authority, has raised standards whilst maintaining the many strengths seen at the last inspection.

The curriculum is good. Pupils enjoy a wealth of interesting activities, both in and out of lessons. Teachers work together very well to find ways to improve learning; for example, recent changes to the planning and teaching of science and mathematics are already helping to raise standards. The school makes good use of visiting experts and non-teaching staff to offer pupils additional experiences. There is a good emphasis on helping pupils to live healthy and safe lives.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. This is because of the school's very caring and supportive ethos. Relationships are excellent everywhere. Behaviour is nearly always good; pupils say that there is almost no bullying and that any small incidents are dealt with quickly. They feel secure, valued and that there is always someone to listen. Pupils are keen to take responsibility and help each other. They leave Holy Cross as thoughtful, mature young people, well prepared for the future.

The school's strong leadership and success in raising standards, together with continued work to make teaching and learning even more effective, indicates a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and they make good progress. Many parents say how much they appreciate that their children are very well cared for, love coming to school and are making great strides. When children start school their language and social skills are well below those typical for their age. The school recognises this and uses a range of carefully planned activities to enable children to make good progress in acquiring these skills.

Nevertheless, not all children reach the expected levels by the start of Year 1. A recent focus on the development of early reading skills is paying dividends. Children enjoy these sessions and are making a good start. Regular and accurate measurement of children's progress is a strong feature and this information is used well in planning to best meet the needs of each individual child.

Teaching is good, with outstanding lessons observed in some Nursery and Reception sessions. Activities planned are purposeful and often exciting, filling children with wonder and curiosity. For example, children were thrilled when they bravely handled real squid and other sea creatures. There are excellent opportunities for learning outdoors, often using improvised equipment imaginatively. In this very calm and caring environment the children show very good levels of independence and concentration. Strong leadership and teamwork ensures that children are safe, happy and learning. There are also very close and effective links with Key Stage 1 and this leads to a seamless transition.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of lessons where learning is good, or better, by adding more pace and challenge.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. The current Year 6 group of pupils reach average standards in mathematics and science and above average in English. This demonstrates good progress because many children join the Nursery with skills well below those expected for their age. Pupils make good progress overall because teaching is nearly always good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils in the current Year 2 have reached standards in line with the national average. In Years 3 to 6, pupils continue to achieve well. Progress is particularly good in Years 5 and 6 because of effective teaching and pupils' mature attitudes to learning.

The school strives to make sure that all pupils do as well as they can. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for and make good progress. More able pupils feel that they are stretched; the number reaching higher than expected levels has increased significantly. Those learning English as their second language are also doing well because of skilled support. Girls have achieved better than boys recently, but the gap has now narrowed because the school has worked hard to improve boys' motivation.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are proud of their school and show excellent attitudes to both work and play. They respect their teachers and this leads to a calm and orderly atmosphere. Even in the youngest classes, children are learning to be independent, work with others and behave sensibly. Some pupils who find all this difficult make great strides because of the sensitive support they receive. This is greatly helped by the way pupils support each other and enjoy each other's successes. Some recent arrivals, for example, said the welcome they received made it easy to settle and make friends.

Pupils have lots of opportunities to take responsibility, for example through the effective school council or through community and fundraising events. Their recent performance for 'Holocaust Day' moved many in the audience to send congratulations. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and

cultural development is excellent. The school's work is firmly rooted in its strong links to Catholic values, whilst introducing pupils to the views and customs of other cultures through, for example, art, music, and literature. Due to the school's continuous drive to improve attendance, this is now in line with the national average. Pupils have many opportunities to enjoy physical exercise and are learning how to eat well and stay fit. They take full advantage of the healthy snack and meals service.

Pupils' understanding of the personal and emotional issues they may face in the future is very good. This, together with good achievement and positive attitudes, prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. There is some outstanding teaching in all parts of the school. In lessons there is a clear focus on both achievement and enjoyment. Teachers have high expectations both of themselves and their pupils. Work is carefully planned and often presented in interesting and exciting ways. Pupils say they enjoy lessons. They appreciate what their teachers do, for example some said 'We like the lessons, teachers explain things clearly and it makes hard work easier.'

Teaching and learning are getting even better because all staff and leaders are working together to improve. Work scrutinies, 'learning walks' and lesson observations have been helpful in identifying how teachers can make their teaching better. These have led, for example, to adjustments in the curriculum and more effective ways to show pupils what they have to do to improve their work.

In a very small number of lessons, some pupils make slower progress because they are not fully involved. This is sometimes because the work does not challenge them sufficiently, or they have to spend too much time listening.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets statutory requirements and gives appropriate priority to the key skills in literacy and numeracy. Provision in information and communication technology has recently been improved by an extension to the high quality computer suite. However, this is not yet used as fully as it could be. In lessons, interesting and well planned activities meet the needs of learners well. These help them to make good progress and learn how to work independently, as well as with others.

The recent strong focus on mathematics and science is showing promising results, with evidence of rising standards. The curriculum provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is an additional language, is good. These pupils are well supported and make good progress. Pupils say they enjoy the personal, social and health lessons because they learn how to stay safe and healthy, as well as how to get along with others. Pupils take their responsibilities, such as prefects and buddies, seriously, and make an effective contribution to the school community. The curriculum is enriched by a range of clubs, visits and visitors, including a residential visit. Good links with the local secondary schools bring many benefits, including the good provision in French.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. Parents appreciate this; typical of many comments was, 'Leaders and staff have an outstanding commitment to all the children, excellent teaching and guidance.'

The school has very good systems to ensure that pupils are safe, secure and happy. These are backed up by excellent relationships, trust and communication between staff, parents and pupils. Several parents praised the way the school listens to their concerns and goes beyond the call of duty to find solutions. Very strong links with other agencies help in this. Child protection arrangements and procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare are in place and meet requirements.

The school keeps very good records of each pupil's progress. This information is used well to make sure no one is left behind or is not making as much progress as they could. Teachers are using good strategies to help pupils to think about their own progress, for example, providing personal targets or explaining how a piece of work should be judged. Pupils like this and it is helping to raise standards, particularly in the classes where they have clear advice on exactly what to do next to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed at all levels. Excellent leadership by the headteacher has established high morale, effective teamwork and a clear focus on all-round improvement. She has created a school where both adults and pupils have opportunities to learn, try new experiences and develop their skills. She is very well supported by senior staff. This team are knowledgeable and motivated. They are fully involved in the school's accurate but self-critical evaluation and lead their subjects well. There is a determined drive to meet the school's own challenging targets. This is one reason for the recent rise in standards, though the school believes it can do even better. Governors are also closely involved and have a clear picture of the school's strengths and priorities. Led by a highly effective chair, they provide strong support, expertise and challenge. Financial management is secure and the school offers good 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?	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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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 the 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?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holy Cross Roman Catholic Primary School Aided, North Tyneside, NE28 0EP

Thank you all for being so helpful when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit, partly because you all seemed so proud of your school and were enjoying everything you did. We thought that you were right to be proud of the school. You go to a good school which takes outstanding care of you all.

We liked the way your teachers work so hard to make lessons interesting and help you understand. No wonder you are making good progress, you listen well, get involved and work hard. We also liked the way you get along together and respect all the adults. Almost all of your parents seem to be happy with the school; lots of them said how good the school is at listening to problems and helping to sort them out.

We thought that the headteacher, your teachers and governors make an impressive team, always trying to give you an even better education. Some of the best moments we had were when we talked to some of you about the school. You gave your opinions in a sensible, mature way, and you were a pleasure to talk to.

We usually make some suggestions about how the school could be even better. In your case there is only one.

- Nearly all the lessons we saw were good, and some were very special. We thought that, just now and then, you could have learned more if the teaching had moved on faster and given you more of a challenge. Some of you said you liked a challenge, so look out, some more may be on the way.

Yours sincerely

Keith Oglesby

Lead inspector