

Simms Cross Primary School

Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 7QS

Inspection dates 25–26 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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.

- Achievement is now good. Pupils make good progress, often from very low starting points, and have their needs met well.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils reach at least average levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children become enthusiastic learners in the Early Years Foundation Stage; they take these positive attitudes for learning with them as they move up through the school.
- Consistently good teaching is enabling pupils to do increasingly well in every year group.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported very well. Because of this, they make good and sometimes better progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who join the school at other than the normal time are helped to settle quickly.
- This is a happy and caring school. It provides a calm and nurturing environment, particularly for those pupils who attend the specially resourced bases. As a result, pupils achieve well given their differing abilities.
- Pupils behave well; they are proud of their school, feel safe and secure and are keen to do well. Many take an active role in the life of the school.
- The headteacher is highly ambitious for the school. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher, staff and a highly committed and increasingly effective governing body.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's performance and are clear about what needs to be done to improve it further.
- Due to the concerted efforts of pupils, parents and staff, attendance has improved from previously low levels and is now broadly average.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although teaching is good, it is not yet leading to pupils' outstanding overall achievement.
- Too few pupils reach the higher levels at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Targets in school plans are not sharp enough to allow leaders to check how well their actions are bringing about improvements.
- The presentation of work and the handwriting of some pupils are untidy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons or parts of lessons, three of which were undertaken jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work and listened to pupils read. They observed the teaching of reading skills and talked to pupils about the books they have enjoyed and those that they were currently reading.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils and inspectors spoke to pupils about their work. Inspectors held meetings with five governors. They spoke to a representative of the local authority and met with members of the school staff.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took account of 19 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own recent parent survey. Inspectors also took account of 26 responses to staff questionnaires completed during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including external reviews of the school's work, safeguarding documents, records of current standards and progress, the school's strategic plan and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. Minutes from governing body meetings and reports produced by the headteacher were also considered.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools.
- Most pupils are White British. Very few pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average. A well-above average proportion of pupils are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding is almost three times the national average. This additional funding is provided for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- A higher than average proportion of pupils join and leave the school at other than the usual times.
- The school manages a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs, catering for up to 14 pupils with autism. There are two bases, one for each of Key Stage 1 and 2. Pupils attend from across the Halton Borough. Pupils spend most of their time in class with their year group in the main school. The school refers to its provision as the resource base.
- The school has experienced some changes to staffing since the last inspection due to a number of maternity leaves.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school holds the silver Science Quality Mark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further by:
 - increasing the level of challenge so that more pupils, particularly the most able, reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics
 - making sure that teachers provide enough time in lessons for pupils to improve their work, using the advice given in marking
 - ensuring that handwriting is taught consistently across the school and that teachers and pupils expect work to be presented neatly.
- Set clear and measurable targets in development plans so that leaders can more easily check that actions are having a swift and effective impact on school improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children's skills and knowledge are well below those that are typical of their age group when they start in the Nursery class. Children's speech and language skills, in particular, are often much lower than those expected for their age.
- Children thrive in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make at least good progress from their starting points so that by the time they leave the Reception class, although their literacy and numeracy skills are still below average, they are ready and eager to keep on making progress in Year 1.
- The improvements in teaching seen at the time of the previous inspection have been built on well. As a result, progress from Year 1 to Year 6 is good overall. In 2013, the proportion of pupils making or exceeding the amount of progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with that found nationally. A similar picture exists for current Year 6 pupils and, as a result, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved and are broadly average.
- Standards in Key Stage 1 are improving in response to the improvements in teaching. Pupils now reach nationally expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- School records show that pupils in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are making more rapid progress in all three subjects during the current year. This is confirmed by inspection evidence, including work in pupils' books and the good progress seen in lessons.
- The most able pupils are doing increasingly well. This is the result of improved teaching, but school leaders know that there is more to do to increase the proportions of pupils who reach the higher levels by the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Test results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013, show that standards reached by pupils supported by the pupil premium (most of whom are known to be eligible for free school meals) were around two terms behind other pupils. The teaching groups provided, using this funding, are helping current pupils to make more rapid progress and the gaps in their achievement and that of other pupils are closing quickly.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from their starting points because of the very effective and well-planned additional adult support they receive in class and in the resource bases.
- Pupils who are in the care of the local authority and those whose circumstances might make them vulnerable are cared for extremely well. As a result, they make good progress and achieve as well as their peers.
- The significant numbers of pupils who join the key stages at random points during the school year are helped to settle in quickly. New arrivals often have additional learning needs, sometimes resulting from disruption in their education, but the school ensures that they make good progress from their starting points.
- Early reading skills are taught well. Although the proportion of pupils who reach the required standard in the Year 1 check of their reading skills is lower than average, the proportion is increasing because of the additional specialist speech and language support provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The majority of those who did not meet the standard in Year 1 are securely on track to do so in Year 2, and reading standards by the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with the national average. Pupils of all ages show genuine interest in books and enjoy reading. Older pupils take a real pride in helping other children choose books in the school library.
- The school promotes equal opportunity well and ensures that all pupils make good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching has secured and sustained improvement to pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in all key stages.
- Children are taught well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Exciting activities are planned which are strongly linked to current learning and reflect children's interests well. During the inspection, Reception children were preparing to write to the local supermarket; they wanted to find out more about different foods. To help them decide which foods they should ask about they made tally charts to discover the most popular choices. They worked with confidence and great enthusiasm and showed a good understanding of how to count and record their ideas independently.
- Pupils learn well when work is engaging and set at the right level to meet their needs. Teachers use good subject knowledge and their understanding of the levels pupils are working at to provide activities that allow good progress to be made. However, sometimes the most able pupils are set tasks that are not hard enough and, as a result, their progress slows.
- The development of the expertise and skills of teaching assistants and their effective deployment by teachers, mean that pupils work in ways that meet their particular needs well. This has accelerated the rates of progress for pupils who are working below levels expected for their age, and has enabled pupils in the resource bases to successfully access learning in class with other pupils.
- Teachers provide detailed guidance for pupils when marking their work. However, they do not always provide enough opportunities for pupils to use the advice given to make the necessary corrections or to take the steps needed to improve their work.
- Warm relationships are a typical feature of all lessons. Staff ensure that pupils who are new to the school are helped to settle well. Needs are identified quickly and new pupils become involved in all the school has to offer.
- Leaders are aware that a consistent approach to teaching handwriting is not yet in place across the school and not all teachers demand the highest quality of presentation from pupils. The lack of a neat, joined handwriting style prevents some pupils reaching even higher standards in English.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in class and around school. They are kind and considerate of each other and adults in the school.
- Pupils know and understand routines and they respond well to their teachers and teaching assistants' high expectations of their behaviour. They listen well to instructions and enjoy working together. Positive attitudes in lessons contribute well to good learning and progress. However, sometimes pupils produce untidy work and do not take enough care with their handwriting.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, for example, when using the internet. They understand the different kinds of bullying, such as cyber and prejudiced based, and say that incidents happen infrequently. If issues do arise they trust the adults to sort these out quickly.
- School rules are understood by all and pupils think that adults apply these fairly. A few pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are supported very effectively by the adults to achieve this and, as a result, little learning time is lost. Pupils understand that the needs of others may differ. As one pupil said, 'We know we are all different and we take care of each other.'
- Pupils play an active role in the life of the school. They confidently take on roles as school councillors, learning champions, road safety officers and sports ambassadors. Older pupils enjoy

helping the younger ones, for example, Year 6 pupils act as buddies to Reception children. Pupils feel that their contributions are valued and they enjoy helping others.

- The number of pupils excluded from the school is above that seen in other primary schools. However, school records show that staff work closely with parents and carers and always follow the school's behaviour policy. Partnerships with the local authority and other agencies are well-established to provide additional support for pupils. Staff ensure that pupils are welcomed back to school and make sure that no learning opportunities are lost.
- Although attendance was low in 2013, during the current year attendance has improved, and is now broadly average. Pupils who found it difficult to attend school regularly now do so.

The leadership and management are good

- The motto, 'Shoot for the moon and you will land among the stars', is displayed prominently throughout the school and demonstrates the high aspirations held by leaders and staff for the pupils of Simms Cross.
- The staff at Simms Cross work as a well-organised, effective and highly committed team. Under the determined leadership of the headteacher the school has successfully maintained its strong focus on improving the quality of teaching. As a result, the achievement of pupils has improved and is now good. The school is well placed to continue to improve.
- Senior and middle leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching. Good use is made of the information they gather to develop the skills of staff. Middle leaders have worked with local authority officers to develop their coaching skills; these skills are being used effectively to share the best practice that exists in the school. As a result, the quality of learning continues to improve. For example, the role of teaching assistants has been developed well since the last inspection. The assistants are highly skilled in supporting all pupils. They enable pupils in the resource base to take a full part in the classes in the main school, and they make a very effective contribution to learning of all pupils.
- The school has a wealth of information about the achievement and needs of its pupils and leaders meet with teachers regularly to discuss the progress pupils make. This enables swift action to be taken if pupils begin to fall behind or if their circumstances change and make them vulnerable.
- All leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths. School plans correctly identify the areas that need to improve; however, they do not always contain clear measurable targets and timescales to enable leaders to check quickly and accurately that the actions taken are having the required impact.
- The curriculum engages pupils' interest and contributes well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Information and communication technology skills are developed increasingly well; pupils enjoy the after-school code club where they can develop these skills further.
- The primary school sports funding has been deployed effectively to provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop their sporting skills and regularly participate in a variety of sporting activities.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the school and the care it provides for their children. Parents of pupils who attend the resource bases were particularly keen to talk about the way staff work in partnership with them. They appreciate, for example, the regular coffee mornings held by the school to allow parents to talk with the staff caring for their children. As one parent said, 'Staff here are unbelievably supportive; they go beyond what they have to do.'
- The local authority provides a range of support that the school values. As the school has improved the support provided by the local authority has rightly decreased.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, have good understanding of how the school is doing compared to national

performance data because they receive regular, accurate and comprehensive reports from leaders. Governors gain first-hand views of the school and they are able to hold the school rigorously to account.

- The governing body makes sure that the checks on staff performance are thorough and that leaders and teachers are set challenging targets linked to pupils' progress and school priorities. The teachers' pay structure is firmly linked to the progress made by the pupils in their care.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are checked regularly by governors. The governing body are fully informed about how the pupil premium funding is spent and the difference it is making to this group of pupils.

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	111228
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	442368

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Woodroffe
Headteacher	Lesley Feakes
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2013
Telephone number	0151 424 5031
Fax number	0151 424 5177
Email address	sec.simmscross@halton.gov.uk

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