

Simms Cross Primary School

Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 7QS

Inspection dates

7–8 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- School leaders, including governors, have failed to arrest a considerable decline in pupils' progress and attainment since the last inspection. By the time they leave key stage 2, pupils underachieve significantly.
- The progress of current pupils from their starting points is weak. Expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are too low.
- The quality of teaching over time is weak. The information from teachers' assessments has not been used effectively. This means that teaching is not sufficiently focused on weaknesses in pupils' learning.
- The curriculum across all key stage is not fit for purpose. As a result, pupils make slow progress across a wide range of subjects, especially reading and writing.
- Middle leaders have not used their knowledge, skills and experience well enough to assist the new headteacher to urgently improve the school.
- Leaders have not used the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to best effect. These pupils lag behind their peers in their attainment and attendance.
- Pupils' attendance is well below the national average and shows no signs of sustained improvement. Too many pupils are persistently absent from school.
- Behaviour is poor. Pupils struggle to concentrate in class and too few take pride in their work. Rates of fixed-term exclusions are well above the national averages.
- Children in the early years do not achieve well. Leaders do not review the quality of provision with enough accuracy to identify where improvement is needed.
- The newly appointed headteacher has not had enough time to address endemic weaknesses in teaching or in many of the school's systems and procedures.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have prioritised safeguarding, including improving site security. There are clear and effective procedures to ensure that pupils are safe.
- The recently appointed headteacher and governors have an accurate picture of the school's position. Their plans for improvement are well focused.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - the curriculum properly equips pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need across a range of subjects to enable them to be successful in the next stage of their education
 - there is an appropriate focus on giving pupils opportunities to practise and improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills across the whole curriculum
 - middle and senior leaders gain the skills required to support the headteacher in bringing about rapid school improvement
 - additional funding is used well to improve the academic outcomes and attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND, including those pupils who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND (specially resourced provision).
- Improve the quality of teaching in all key stages so that pupils' outcomes, across a range of subjects, improve rapidly by:
 - providing training for staff to improve their teaching knowledge and skills so that they effectively promote pupils' good progress across the curriculum
 - ensuring that there is greater consistency in the approach to teaching reading and writing, so that pupils are not confused by different approaches or left with gaps in their learning
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information effectively in order to plan lessons that match the needs and abilities of different groups of pupils, including those with SEND
 - ensuring that teachers and teaching assistants have consistently high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving pupils' attendance and reducing the high levels of persistent absence
 - reducing incidents of poor behaviour and the higher than average exclusion rates by ensuring that the needs of pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour are met more effectively
 - improving pupils' attitudes to learning and ensuring that pupils take more pride in the work that they produce.

- Improve children's achievement in the early years so that they are better equipped with the skills needed for their learning in Year 1 by:
 - making sure that teaching in the early years is of a consistently good standard
 - providing children with clearer routines and expectations that support their learning across all areas of the curriculum.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Over time, school leaders, including governors, have not taken action swiftly enough to address the areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection report. As a result, all aspects of the school's work have declined from being good to now being inadequate.
- Instability in leadership has contributed to the decline in the quality of teaching, and in pupils' progress and attainment. The school has had four headteachers in three years. In 2017, governors did not make appropriate plans following the unexpected departure of the substantive headteacher. Because of this, support from the local authority arrived too late to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes in 2018.
- The newly appointed headteacher, supported by new governors, has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has identified what needs to be done and has produced sharply focused action plans to tackle the school's most pressing weaknesses. Nonetheless, these actions are in their infancy, which means that there is little compelling evidence of sustained improvement at this time.
- The development of middle leadership has been ineffective. Some subject leaders new to post have not had the training or the time to develop their leadership skills. More experienced leaders have not planned the curriculum effectively or checked on pupils' progress well enough in their areas of responsibility. As a result, teaching across all key stages and in a wide range of subjects is weak and pupils underachieve considerably.
- The local authority has provided support for the leaders of English and mathematics, but this is at a very early stage. Areas for improvement have been identified and work has begun. However, it is too soon to assess the impact on pupils' outcomes.
- The school has experienced several staff absences and changes over the past two years. Though often beyond the control of leaders, this has nevertheless disrupted pupils' learning, particularly for those pupils with SEND, including those pupils who attend the specially resourced provision. Leaders have not monitored closely enough the quality of provision that these pupils receive or the impact of the additional funding that is granted to the school to support the learning of this group. As a result of weak oversight and poor teaching, these pupils make inadequate progress.
- The process of securing additional support for some pupils with challenging behaviour slowed down owing to the lack of accurate assessment information in school. For three years, this resulted in a high rate of exclusions.
- The school's curriculum is poorly planned and lacks cohesion. This hinders pupils' progress in a wide range of subjects. Pupils' books show that they do not have enough opportunities to develop either subject-specific skills or to practise and improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum. As a result, too many pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils say that they enjoy the opportunities that they have to go on school trips that enhance their learning. These have included visits to a local museum, as part of pupils' learning about the Second World War, and to see the wildfowl at a wildlife sanctuary.

- Over time, the use of pupil premium funding has not been effective. Until recently, leaders and governors have not paid enough attention to whether or not their plans to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were working. Assessment information shows that this funding has had too little impact on the achievement or attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils.
- The use and impact of the primary school physical education (PE) and sport premium to improve PE provision is ineffective. For example, at the end of the school year in 2018, only half of the pupils in Year 6 were able to swim the expected 25 metres or use a variety of strokes. There are a limited range of after-school clubs which promote pupils' physical skills and involvement in sporting activities.
- Leaders have reorganised the school environment to improve pupils' safety and ensure that the school day runs smoothly. The environment is bright and attractive, with many displays of pupils' work reflecting the school's values of tolerance and equality. Pupils learn about democracy and freedom of expression. Despite weaknesses in the curriculum as a whole, the school is contributing well to pupils' understanding of British values and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- For too long, governors failed to hold leaders to account for the clear and sustained decline in the school's effectiveness. This failure was, in part, because governors did not receive reliable information about the school's performance from school leaders.
- The appointment of some new governors in 2017, including a new chair of governors, proved to be something of a turning point. From this point onwards, governors recognised the school's decline and challenged leaders about their performance. The governors worked with the local authority to appoint an interim headteacher.
- The work of the governors has been more robust and detailed since the arrival of the new headteacher and chair of governors. The governing body now consists of additional governors who have a range of skills that enable them to carry out their roles effectively. For example, recently, some governors have used their expertise to support school improvement by agreeing strategies to improve attendance. It is, however, too soon to see the impact of recent improvements in the work of governors.
- Although there have been improvements in the effectiveness of governance, some significant weaknesses remain. Governors do not have a clear understanding of the impact of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and parents and carers confirmed this.
- Governors and leaders have made sure that all arrangements for the care and protection of pupils are appropriate. They have established a culture of safeguarding and made sure that policies are effective.

- Staff are vigilant and well trained to identify pupils who may be at risk of harm. They report concerns promptly and recent changes to the recording system mean that leaders are kept well informed.
- The family support worker provides effective support for vulnerable pupils and their families. There are good links with welfare agencies and community services to provide a swift response when it is needed. However, this quality support has not made enough of a difference to pupils' attendance rates.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time is weak. Teachers have not been supported well by leaders to improve their teaching skills and knowledge. Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve have been low. A combination of these low expectations and inaccurate assessment information across the school has affected how well the needs of different pupils have been identified and met.
- The local authority supported teachers to improve the accuracy of their assessment at the end of the summer term in 2018. The subsequent data produced by teachers shows that the proportions of pupils who are acquiring the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in reading, writing and mathematics is very low in all year groups.
- Changes to the teaching of reading and writing have resulted in confusion for staff and gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. For example, there have been three different approaches to the teaching of handwriting in three years. Consequently, too few pupils have developed a fluent, legible writing style by Year 6. Pupils' progress and attainment in writing are further hindered by a lack of opportunities to write at length in English lessons and across the curriculum.
- Pupils are too seldom sufficiently challenged in mathematics. Pupils' books show that there has been recent improvement in the quality of pupils' work. However, the tasks set are sometimes too simple, especially for the most able pupils. Pupils have limited opportunity to apply their mathematical skills when studying other subjects.
- Pupils lose concentration when work is too easy and this hinders their progress. Additional support for pupils who need it, including the small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, is not consistently effective and tasks do not match their abilities. Teachers do not check often enough whether pupils understand what they need to do. Teachers rely too heavily on pupils to support each other.
- In some classes, pupils say that they do not have the opportunity to change their reading books often enough and that the adults do not check how well they are progressing with their reading. Similarly, adults' checks on the computerised reading programme that pupils use have not been consistent. Leaders recognised too late that this system was not supporting pupils well enough to gain all the skills that they needed to become fluent readers.
- Long-term staff absence and changes of leadership have adversely affected the quality of support that pupils with SEND, including those pupils who attend the specially resourced provision, receive. This has significantly limited the progress and attainment of this group of pupils.

- Some teachers make good use of support staff to encourage pupils to improve their work and to think deeply about their answers. However, this is not consistently effective. At times, teaching assistants limit pupils' independence by not encouraging pupils to think for themselves.
- While the overall effectiveness of teaching over time is weak, inspection evidence indicates that there are some pockets where practice is more effective. For example, some teachers use questions effectively to check pupils' understanding and to deepen their thinking, such as when asking pupils to justify their answers when talking about a text they are reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils do not consistently develop positive attitudes to their learning or take pride in their work. In pupils' books, work is too frequently poorly presented or not completed. Too many pupils lack self-motivation and the determination needed to be a successful learner. This has a negative impact on the progress that they make.
- Most pupils say that they feel safe and are confident that adults will help them if they have a problem. They say that bullying does not happen often and, if it does, it is quickly sorted out. Some parents, who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and talked to inspectors did not consider that the school deals well with bullying.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and identify risks, including when online.
- There are appropriate opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Displays around the school and the work in pupils' books show that they learn about other faiths and cultures. Good attention is paid to diversity. For example, in Year 6, pupils explore how it felt to be Jewish during the Nazi occupation of France, deepening their understanding of discrimination.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Pupils are friendly and polite to visitors. They typically move around school safely. Most of them are respectful towards their teachers and each other. However, this is not consistent in all classes. Most pupils are quick to respond when encouraged to work on practical tasks but slow to offer contributions when asked questions.
- Some pupils become bored and easily distracted, especially when listening to each other or when they do not find activities interesting. On these occasions, they lapse into silly, off-task behaviour which slows both their own learning and that of others. This is particularly the case when adults do not intervene quickly enough.
- Pupils' attendance has been well below the national average for at least three years and shows no signs of sustained improvement. The proportion of pupils who are

persistently absent is more than twice the national average. A high proportion of pupils with SEND or who are disadvantaged miss too much school.

- The school's system for recording behavioural incidents has very recently been updated. Before this, the school did not consistently analyse records and leaders were not monitoring incidents closely enough. They did not know if their work to support pupils' personal development and welfare was successful.
- Rates of fixed-term exclusion remain high. The school's actions to meet the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour have not been effective.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Over time, far too few pupils have made sufficient progress to enable them to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Standards across the school have been habitually low.
- In the past two years, pupils in Year 6 made slow progress in reading and writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics improved in 2018, with a greater proportion reaching the higher standard. Nevertheless, fewer than half of all pupils reached the standard expected for their age in mathematics by the time they left school. Only a quarter of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined. This means that three quarters of the pupils who left Year 6 last year were not well prepared for their move to the secondary phase of education.
- In the 2018 national assessments in key stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was also below the national average. This has been the case for three years. Similarly, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below the national average for three years.
- Current pupils make weak progress from their different starting points. This is evident in pupils' books and from the school's own most recent assessment information. Gaps in pupils' learning and weak teaching mean that most pupils are not developing knowledge, skills and understanding quickly enough in a wide range of subjects. Pupils' development of subject-specific skills in areas such as geography and history is poor.
- Pupils do not develop their writing skills well enough over time. Pupils' books show that they have not, for example, strengthened their grammatical accuracy, spelling and correct use of punctuation sufficiently well and they frequently repeat the same mistakes.
- Leaders have introduced a new approach to the teaching of mathematics which is beginning to make a difference to pupils' enjoyment of learning. However, often, pupils' poor reading skills are holding them back from understanding instructions and interpreting mathematical vocabulary.
- The school's high proportion of disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to that of their peers in most classes in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the standards that this group reach by the end of key stage 2 are well below those of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. There is no sign of this gap diminishing or of any sustained improvement in academic outcomes for this group of pupils.
- School leaders do not monitor the support for pupils with SEND and who access the specially resourced provision closely enough to know whether it is helping pupils to

make progress. Expectations for this group of pupils are very low. Adults do not encourage pupils to be independent and very few make the progress that they should.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Children start school with skills and abilities which are generally below, and sometimes well below, those that are typical for their age. However, the quality of teaching in the early years is not good enough to help children make the progress required to enable them to catch up quickly. As a result, by the time they leave the Reception class, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is below the national average. This means that most children start Year 1 without the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed.
- Leadership in the early years has been inconsistent and ineffective. Disputes between staff and changing responsibilities have negatively affected the quality of provision and the progress that children make. Leaders have now resolved issues that caused instability.
- In the past, leaders have not accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the provision in the early years. With support from the local authority, leaders have a better understanding of what needs to be improved and improvement plans are more focused. However, it is too early to see the impact of these plans.
- Most children behave well and enjoy playing together. However, they do not always know the routines and expectations. Learning is hampered because activities lack challenge or purpose. This was evident in the Nursery class when children were using the newly refurbished outdoor provision. They did not have the skills to pedal the tricycles and were unclear about sticking to the boundaries of the cycle track. Adults' instructions did not provide enough direction to enable children to learn quickly.
- Staff strive to ensure that children feel valued and welcome in school. Most parents who spoke to inspectors were positive about the support their children receive from staff. They said that their children have settled quickly and enjoy school.
- Statutory welfare and safeguarding requirements are met in the early years. Staff are vigilant about children's safety and effectively promote their health and welfare.

School details

Unique reference number	111228
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10045924

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Mrs Dee Denton
Headteacher	Miss Gillian Rowlands
Telephone number	01514 245031
Website	www.simms-cross.co.uk
Email address	head.simmscross@halton.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 June 2014

Information about this school

- Simms Cross is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and the proportion of pupils with SEND are above the national averages. There are currently three pupils who have education, health and care plans and there are five others who are awaiting assessment.
- The school receives support brokered through the local authority.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher and three new governors have been appointed.
- The school has a specially resourced provision, supporting up to 14 pupils who have autism spectrum disorder.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in each class.
- Inspectors examined a range of pupils' work in mathematics and writing, and from across the curriculum.
- Inspectors heard pupils read, both individually and during class activities.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils formally in groups and informally around school.
- Inspectors spoke with some parents at the start of the school day and took account of the views of 23 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also considered the views of 17 staff who completed the staff survey.
- Inspectors made observations of pupils' behaviour during lessons, at playtimes and when pupils were moving around the school.
- Meetings were held with three governors, senior leaders, middle leaders, pastoral staff and local authority representatives.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and its areas for development.
- Inspectors looked at attendance and behaviour records.
- Inspectors reviewed the safeguarding documentation and considered how this related to daily practice, as well as speaking with staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Cathy Parkinson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Janette Walker	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Curtis	Ofsted Inspector

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