

Crosshill Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119858
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	358635
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roger Harling
Headteacher	Mr Mike Hatch
Date of previous school inspection	13 July 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. Nine lessons were observed, taught by nine teachers. Meetings were held with parents, students, members of the governing body, staff and representatives of local secondary schools and of the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation provided by the school, including analyses of students' progress, the curriculum, work completed by students and policies concerned with safeguarding. The questionnaire returns from 17 parents and carers were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact of the school's specialist technology college status on students' learning.
- The work of leaders and managers in monitoring the work of the school.
- The partnership between the school and other schools and the benefits to students.
- The effectiveness of the school's work in promoting community cohesion

Information about the school

Crosshill provides for students of secondary school age with complex learning difficulties. Nearly all students live within Blackburn with Darwen. The range of students' learning difficulties is wide and includes the categories of moderate learning difficulties, social emotional and behaviour difficulties, physical disabilities and autism, often in combination. All students have, or are in the process of acquiring, statements of special educational needs.

Most students are boys and from White British backgrounds. However, about a third of students are girls and a growing proportion of students, currently around 25%, are from Pakistani backgrounds. A high proportion of the students, almost half, are known to be entitled to free school meals. About a third of students are classed as children-in-need, including 10 who are looked after by the local authority.

The school was one of the first schools in the country to be given specialist technology college status, over 10 years ago. It has many awards for its work and achievements, including Healthy School status. There is an e-learning centre on site, providing modern conference facilities for use by the school and the community.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Crosshill is a good special school with many outstanding features. Students achieve well and their personal development is excellent. The school leads the way in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. Students achieve particularly highly in ICT and success in this subject makes a major contribution to preparing students for the world of work and for further education. Working in partnership with other local secondary schools and sixth forms, Crosshill has removed many of the artificial distinctions between mainstream and special education, opening its doors to students from mainstream schools for whom it can provide well and enabling those of its students who are able to study courses in mainstream schools.

Staff provide outstanding care, support and guidance for students at every stage of their secondary education, from before they join, working with primary schools, and in their transfer to further education, employment and training. During their time at the school, staff provide a crucial link between students, parents and carers and the many external agencies from health and social care who are involved in supporting the students (and their families) with their learning difficulties. Staff do this very effectively.

The school has a very welcoming, family ethos and provides a safe learning environment of high quality. Teaching is good and the assessment of students' progress and its monitoring has improved considerably. Students of all backgrounds and abilities make the same good progress and parents and carers testify to the students' enjoyment of school and their developing confidence and maturity. More students take a broader range of examinations than ever before and, year on year, attain better results and qualifications.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. That in Key Stage 4 is well-matched to students' needs and to providing them with a wide range of academic and vocational courses and work experiences. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 has a clear emphasis on the core skills of literacy, numeracy, science and ICT and there is good enrichment of learning: for each class there are excellent opportunities for students to make residential visits to places near and far and develop their life skills.

There is scope for improvement in teaching and in the curriculum, particularly within Key Stage 3. Teachers and support staff know students very well and are clear about the levels at which they are working. However, the learning needs of students vary widely in each class and at present, learning objectives are not sufficiently focused on exactly what each student needs to learn next, or shared with them. In the curriculum, teachers are moving towards a more creative approach to linking subjects and working on themes that interest and engage students but development is at an early stage.

The school is excellently placed to continue improving. Monitoring and evaluation have improved since the last inspection and leaders and managers have an accurate view of

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what is working well and where further improvement is needed. The governing body has improved its challenge and support for the school, not least because of its involvement in getting the best deal for the school and its students in the preparations for the move to a new campus, where the school will be co-located with two mainstream secondary schools in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to ensure it is as innovative, relevant and engaging as it can be while continuing to provide opportunities for the development and practise of the core skills of literacy, numeracy, science and ICT.
- Refine planning in Key Stage 3 to ensure for each lesson, students at different levels have precise learning objectives that relate to their next steps in learning. Ensure that students are fully aware of what they need to do to succeed.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' attainment on entry varies considerably according to the level and complexity of their learning difficulties. However, it is usually very low. Over time, attainment on entry is falling as students enter with more complex needs. By Year 11, all students have made good and sometimes outstanding progress. All parents and carers responding to the questionnaire were pleased with the progress their children made. All students go on to further education, employment or training when they leave Crosshill. Over time, students take a broader range of examinations and have greater success in achieving better grades. Whereas students used to take entry-level GCSEs, they now have success in full GCSEs, or their equivalent, in English, mathematics, science, and art. Students have most success in ICT and also do well in vocational courses studying the media and hospitality and tourism.

In lessons observed, students generally made good progress. They enjoyed their work, had good attitudes to learning and were supportive of each other. They enjoyed being challenged, such as in a Year 8 lesson learning French and a Year 10 lesson analysing the results of a survey into breakfast habits. Behaviour is generally good in lessons and around school but overall students' have made excellent progress in improving their behaviour and attitudes considering that some of them have been excluded in the past from previous schools. Where students have behaviour difficulties, these are very well managed.

All aspects of students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are exceptional. Developing students' resourcefulness, resilience and independence is a major part of the school's work and it is very successful. Students feel exceptionally safe; they have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy life, particularly with regard to exercise and food; they take real responsibility in school and play a major role in decision-making; and, the life skills they develop prepare them very well to play a fulfilling role in adult life. Parents and carers spoke with feeling about the transformation of their children during their time at the school, from nervous, anxious children lacking in confidence to independent and out-going young people who mix easily with others of their age.

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Attendance, at 91%, is lower than that at most secondary schools. However, for each student with several absences, the school can point to medical and other reasons for the absence, including late transfer from mainstream schools where the student had failed to attend at all. The school employs all available strategies to promote attendance. It is very successful. Students who previously were non-attenders regularly come to school, and attendance rates for those without extenuating circumstances are very high (96%) and even higher (98%) for students looked after by the local authority in foster care.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

The relationships between all staff and students are exceptionally positive. The level of care is excellent and each member of staff knows each student well. These features are at the heart of what the school does really well and result in a very positive family ethos, very evident to visitors to the school and community users of the e-learning centre. The excellent relationships lead to lessons and exchanges between staff and students that are full of warmth and good humour. Staff reflect the cultural diversity of students, providing good role models for students and bilingual support when required. Behind the scenes, staff work hard and effectively to ensure transitions to and from the school run smoothly and they act as the focal point and facilitator for over 40 different agencies from health,

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social care and the voluntary services involved with the students and their well-being. These partners hold the work of the school in high regard.

Teaching in lessons is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work together well in close teaching teams. Lessons have clear overall learning objectives and students have targets to work towards. There is a focus on learning basic, core skills and the students have recently made significant progress in their reading. Information and communication technology was used very well by teachers in all the lessons observed and students are very proficient in ICT, for example, using devices to record their understanding of lessons and relaying information directly to the teacher's interactive whiteboard to give immediate feedback on their level of confidence with new work. However, improvement in teaching is required to meet the different individual needs of all students in the class, particularly in Key Stage 3. At present, although teachers assess students' work thoroughly and know students' learning needs, learning objectives for lessons are too imprecise and detailed next steps are not shared with students.

The school's curriculum is rich, broad and balanced. Naturally, at Key Stage 4, it is geared towards students' choices in examinations but throughout the school there are many opportunities to broaden the experience and promote the students' confidence, self-esteem and life skills, especially through outdoor activities. At Key Stage 3, although the curriculum is broad and balanced, teachers are working towards making the curriculum more relevant for students, promoting the development of core skills within projects and themes that have interest for students. This initiative is at an early stage of development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leaders and managers have achieved a great deal in realising an ambitious vision for the school. The promotion of technology has placed the school at the cutting edge of ICT in special schools, achieving recognition at national and international levels. Through very effective partnership work in 14-19 education, leaders and managers have broken down the traditional demarcation lines between mainstream and special education provision. Students from Crosshill regularly attend other schools and colleges for courses and, tellingly, students from mainstream schools attend courses at Crosshill, where provision and expertise are of high quality. Staff also cross the boundaries, teaching in mainstream settings.

The school and e-learning centre run very smoothly and efficiently, because of a highly-skilled and dedicated administrative staff. The monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the school is rigorous. Teachers are held to account for their students'

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progress. The governing body is increasingly skilled and effective, challenging senior staff to account for the school's results and playing an active role in lobbying for the best interests of Crosshill in the new school. Teaching and learning have improved but there remains scope for further improvement and more opportunities for middle leaders to make an impact. However, a large proportion of senior management and school time has been deployed recently in preparing for the move to the new campus, inevitably diverting some attention from internal issues.

Arrangements for safeguarding are excellent and the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination with great effectiveness. Its partnerships with parents and carers, and with the whole spectrum of schools and children's services, are outstanding in their quality and impact and the school is held in the highest regard by all its partners. Community cohesion is promoted very well. The school is a powerful force in promoting a harmonious society and active at community, national and international levels. To date, however, it has not evaluated the impact of its work. The school provides excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers, including foster parents, were unanimous in their praise for the school and what it does for their children. Most were entirely happy with the academic progress they make and all felt their children were in a much better position to face the world than they were on entry to the school. They felt the students' confidence and ability to mix with others was due to the outstanding way in which staff nurtured and encouraged their children and raised their self-esteem. Inspectors read and heard several moving testimonies to the school's effectiveness and sense of family. One foster parent described how one of the children joined the school refusing to read with his 'head down' but was

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now proud of his achievements. Another wrote to explain how the school had shown parents and children that having a disability did not mean you could not achieve and was not a barrier.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Crosshill Special 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 17 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 67 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	78	3	17	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	14	78	3	17	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	94	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	83	2	11	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	72	4	22	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)	10	56	6	33	1	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	61	5	28	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	78	3	17	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	83	2	11	0	0	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



15 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Crosshill Special School, Blackburn, BB1 2HR

You may recall inspectors from Ofsted visited your school towards the end of the school year. We mainly saw Years 7 to 9 as Year 11s had left and most Year 10s were on a residential in the Lake District. We came to see how well you were getting on. This letter is to let you know what we found. Thank you to all those students who talked to us during the inspection. In particular, a big thanks to the Year 10s who talked to me via a video link from Hawkshead.

We judged your school to be a good school with many outstanding features. Crosshill is a very special place. Your parents and carers told us how happy they are that you came here. Mr Hatch is very proud of how well you do in your examinations. The technology you have at the school is very impressive. A lot of thought, time and effort has gone into making the school a safe and stimulating place to learn – we were very impressed by the quality of displays teachers have put up to celebrate all your achievements. You have a wonderfully supportive staff; no wonder you enjoy school and learn well. Crosshill is a secondary school with a family feel because everyone knows each other so well. We think your preparation for the world of work is excellent. We heard how well you do when you join other schools for lessons, such as at Our Lady's and St John's, and St Wilfred's, and also how you welcome students from other schools to learn at Crosshill.

As we watched lessons and talked to your teachers, we could see you are taught well and have a rich and varied curriculum. However, we felt that you would benefit if teaching was even more precisely targeted to your individual learning needs and for teachers in Years 7 to 9 to rethink how the lessons can be made even more relevant to your interests. You need to be involved in these developments.

The school faces a period of great change. The move to the new campus next year marks a major milestone in the school's history and will present you, the students, and the staff with both new challenges and opportunities. We believe that the school is in the best possible shape to face the future.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for that future.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Padgett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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