

Cramlington Hillcrest School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122383
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380460
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Michele Crichton

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	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Joynson
Headteacher	Colin Gibson
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. She visited six lessons and six teachers were observed. Meetings were held with groups of staff, students, staff from outside agencies and the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including those relating to self-evaluation, the curriculum, students' progress and safeguarding. The views expressed by parents and carers in 28 questionnaires were also considered along with questionnaire responses from members of staff and students.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. She looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school.
- The consistency of positive outcomes for all students regardless of gender, age, behaviour or subject.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers in ensuring self-evaluation, school improvement and positive outcomes for all students.

Information about the school

All students at Hillcrest School have a statement of special educational needs. The school provides predominantly for students with moderate learning difficulties, many of whom have complex learning needs. In September 2011, a very small minority of pupils joined in Year 7 with additional social, emotional and behavioural needs. All students are of White British heritage and all speak English as their main language. There are three times as many boys than girls. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are a small number of students who are currently in the care of the local authority. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained its range of quality marks and has added Investors in People and Work Life balance accreditations.

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

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Parents and carers predominantly agree and their positive views are reflected well in the comment, 'I am very happy with my child's progress since joining Hillcrest. My child's confidence has grown and is much happier. The improvement is massive and very pleasing.'

Good teaching, assessment procedures and carefully tailored learning programmes, all students make good progress from their individual starting points. This is regardless of gender, age, subject or need. However, the use of resources and activities is stronger in mathematics than in English. Additionally, a wider profile of students' needs have challenged some staff to ensure their provision fully engages and motivate all learners. Good behaviour and above average attendance, together with students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, prepare them well for their next stage of learning. The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are of the highest quality and are outstanding. Students feel valued and safe because they have good relationships with staff throughout the school and as a result of effective safeguarding procedures.

Students enjoy and benefit from a range of interesting and relevant activities is available to all and which promotes a good curriculum. Additionally, there are many experiences and opportunities available to them through the wealth of associates that the school has with other schools and colleges in the locality. These add well to students' adoption of a healthy lifestyle and to their willingness to contribute effectively to the school and local community.

Leadership and management are good. The school is well led and managed by staff who are committed to students' continual improvement. The capacity for continued and sustained improvement is good. Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school's strengths and where more improvement is needed. The partnerships the school has forged with a range of agencies, other schools and learning environments to enhance pupils' opportunities for learning and work, are outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learning activities and resources consistently motivate students to learn well in English by:

- limiting the use of worksheets
 - widening the range of activities and resources used in lessons.
- Develop further the skills of staff to meet the changing profile of students' needs by:
- providing additional staff training
 - utilising the excellent partnerships Hillcrest has with other schools/colleges
 - holding regular discussions with all students and all staff
 - more regularly monitoring and evaluating the actions taken regarding these discussions.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students respond well to the positive and calm atmosphere that pervades the school. They make good progress overall in their lessons when measured against their individual starting points. They predominantly enjoy their learning and attendance is above average. The majority of success learners have is achieved in accreditations at Entry Level, BTEC and ASDAN awards, or in a range of subjects, for example, catering, construction and health and beauty care. A very few more-able students gain success in a limited number of GCSE subjects.

Pupils build on their prior learning and benefit from the cumulative effect of good quality teaching. For example, this was demonstrated in an outstanding Key Stage 4 mathematics lesson. Students were highly active in their own learning as they blended previous number skills with those currently being acquired. They used a range of resources, strategies and techniques to find solutions to problems. The activities motivated students well and all were eager to join in. The students' enjoyment at being successful in their learning was obvious. However, activities and resources used in English across the school are not consistently of a wide enough variety. In a few lessons, students complete the same types of activity repeatedly, which detracts from their enjoyment of the subject and lessens their motivation to learn. Behaviour can sometimes lapse when activities are not fully interesting and engaging. However, behaviour is good overall and, in the majority of lessons, it makes a strong contribution to students' learning.

Students have a good understanding of a range of factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle. This is achieved, for example, in accessing a range of mental health, drug and alcohol specialist support and all students participating in a range of sporting activities, such as, swimming, basketball and football. Students say they feel safe in school and that they can talk to members of staff if they need to discuss their worries and concerns. This supports the positive ethos in the school. Fund raising events take place regularly to benefit charities, both locally and those further afield. Students ensure month on month that they raise sufficient funds to maintain the sponsorship of a village in Kenya. They achieve this through, for example, by holding tombolas and by baking and selling buns.

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are sometimes outstanding, occasionally satisfactory but good overall. This is because the majority of staff carefully plan, resource and teach interesting and engaging lessons that are specific to the needs and interests of students. Most staff use assessment information well to monitor progress and to set challenging learning targets. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, predominantly in English lessons, it is because too many worksheets are used or because too many similar resources and the range of activities are often limited and repeated. Additionally, some staff have yet to adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of students with more challenging behaviour.

The curriculum is good across both key stages and basic skills are well promoted. Individualised learning programmes are in place and this ensures that each student, regardless of their needs, achieves and develops well academically, socially and emotionally. For example, personal programmes, for the potentially most vulnerable students, ensure that they understand the value of living healthily, gaining independence and how to keep themselves safe. Other students learn a variety of practical skills through links with colleges or other providers. For example, through completing construction or catering courses. Additionally, GCSE courses and examinations are available to the students more suited to this type and level of learning.

All staff contribute significantly to the high quality care, guidance and support. Additionally, well-established and extremely effective links with a range of agencies are sensitively used throughout the school to best meet the needs of students and their families. Very successful partnership working ensures that transition arrangements are also highly effective in settling students securely into their next stage of learning. The school has worked diligently and consistently with pupils, parents and carers and a wide range of agencies to improve attendance rates. A

¹The 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.

variety of very well coordinated and evaluated strategies have been employed by the staff which have resulted in attendance rates rising year on year over the past three years.

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?

All leaders are reflective and focused on moving the school forward. They have a clear vision for the future and have identified appropriately the school's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the recent changing needs of students entering the school have quickly resulted in changes in staffing, resourcing and the curriculum. Positive outcomes are already emerging although these have not yet had time to be fully embedded in the school's work.

The governing body is both supportive and evaluative of the school in all aspects of its work. Safeguarding procedures are well met. All staff training regarding safeguarding is up to date and all adults who work with students are checked to ensure their suitability to do so. Site security, school resources and buildings work are monitored and evaluated regularly. The governing body completes a self-evaluation to ensure its skills and knowledge is sufficiently robust to challenge and support the school.

A strong commitment to the individual lies at the heart of the school's ethos and this ensures that equality of opportunity is well promoted. It does this by effectively tailoring each student's programme of learning to capitalise on their strengths, whilst ensuring appropriate support in other areas. The school works effectively to promote cohesion within the local community. This also extends to wider communities and to global connections. The school has a close and positive relationship with parents and carers. This is sustained through regular newsletters, face-to-face meetings and a weekly report detailing the achievements of their child.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

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

The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
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Views of parents and carers

Almost all the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were extremely positive about the school's provision and the outcomes students achieve. Particularly favourable elements were the comments relating to the teaching in the school and the school helping to support learning. A small number of parents and carers were concerned about the progress children make and the school taking account of their suggestions and concerns. These were brought to the attention of the school and judgements about students' overall progress and the school's engagement with parents and carers are included elsewhere in this report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cramlington Hillcrest 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 inspector received 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 42 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	46	12	43	1	4	1	4
The school keeps my child safe	16	57	11	39	0	0	1	4
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	68	7	25	2	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	46	10	36	3	11	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	19	68	6	21	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	57	8	29	2	7	2	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	50	10	36	2	7	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)	11	39	13	46	1	4	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	57	10	36	1	4	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	50	12	43	1	4	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	57	8	29	3	11	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	15	54	10	36	2	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	61	8	29	2	7	1	4

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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.



23 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Cramlington Hillcrest School, Cramlington NE23 1DY

Thank you for making me so welcome when I inspected your school recently. It was lovely to meet and talk with you and I really enjoyed seeing you behave well in your lessons and other activities. I also saw virtually everyone in the school because of your good attendance. It is very clear that you enjoy school and feel safe.

Hillcrest is a good school and has some outstanding aspects. You are very well cared for, guided and supported and you told me how much you appreciate this. The wide range of schools, colleges and others partners that your school has links with is also extremely good. Again, you told me how much you enjoy catering, health and beauty courses for example. You also said that these experiences were making you more independent and confident, as well as improving your literacy and numeracy skills. You make good progress in your learning because you are taught well. Sometimes your resources and activities in English lessons are not as interesting as those in mathematics. I have asked the staff to ensure that these are more enjoyable and help you to want to learn and always behave well.

The headteacher, staff and governors work well together to make sure the school continually improves, and that they respond well to any changes. Please could you tell them whether all your lessons are interesting and what the school is like for all of you once they have made some more changes, I think it would really help your school to become even better.

I know that you will do all you can to help your teachers and I wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely

Michele Crichton
Lead inspector

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