

Crowdys Hill School

Jefferies Avenue, Swindon, SN2 7HJ

Inspection dates

1–2 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Crowdys Hill School is a happy school where everyone gets along.
- All groups of students achieve well because they are offered an interesting and varied curriculum that meets their needs and aspirations.
- The students make excellent progress in developing their social skills. They show terrific enthusiasm for learning and their behaviour is often exemplary. They feel safe and attend regularly.
- Teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding because teachers know students' starting points well and work hard to design lesson activities at the right level.
- The school leaders carefully check up on the quality of teaching and ensure that it continues to improve.
- The school has an excellent partnership with parents who feel fully involved in their children's education.
- The school farm offers the students unique opportunities for academic and personal development.
- The governors carry out their responsibilities very effectively and have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not always have a clear understanding of their individual goals and the next steps they need to take in learning.
- Teaching assistants are not always fully effective during lessons.
- A few teachers do not always set activities at the right level for students, particularly those who are more able.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Discussions were held with a group of students from across the different areas of the school. There were discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, other governors, some parents, an officer from the local authority, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team as well as informal discussions with a number of the staff.
- There were no recorded submissions to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and inspectors took account of the school's own surveys for parents as well as of the views of 41 staff who returned questionnaires.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included the school's own information on students' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Taylor

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Crowdys Hill School provides for students with moderate learning difficulties, an increasing proportion of whom have additional complex conditions such as autism.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. Boys outnumber girls by three to one.
- Over half of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional funding provided by the government for those students in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups. All students in Year 7 are in receipt of the catch-up premium.
- Some students attend alternative courses away from the school site at Swindon College, Uplands School and Nova Hreod Comprehensive School.
- Most students remain on the school's roll from Year 7 until the end of Year 11.
- The school has been accredited with the Full International Schools Award from the British Council.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher was appointed from January 2013 and a new senior management team was appointed in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making sure that:
 - all students know their individual targets and the next steps they have to take for successful learning
 - all teachers use their information on students' progress so that lesson activities are always accurately matched to students' needs and capabilities, particularly those with higher abilities
 - teaching assistants are deployed effectively throughout lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' attainment is low because of their moderate and sometimes complex learning difficulties. However, students in all groups make good progress because of consistently good teaching over the years that fosters in them a strong desire to learn, to do their best and to succeed. Parents say, 'It's an all-round school, progress is good everywhere and especially in maths.'
- Academic success and very strong gains in their personal development mean that all students become increasingly independent as they proceed through the school and all move on to further education and training. All students gain some form of external qualification from very low starting points and most achieve their target levels.
- The school's information on the achievement of individual students shows that the rate of progress is broadly the same for girls as boys. Progress is faster the longer that students stay in the school, reflecting the long-term benefit of the academic and personal support that the students receive. Students who learn off-site make the same good progress as others. However, a few students who are at a higher level achieve less well than they could because of occasionally weaker teaching.
- Students have poorly developed literacy skills when they join the school. The school's literacy team makes sure that all students are provided with good opportunities to accelerate their reading and writing skills through annual testing, the consistent use of a guided reading scheme and one-to-one support. Students make good progress in reading and writing because of these measures and the effective and consistent programme to teach the sounds that letters make.
- Progress in mathematics is good because the subject is enthusiastically taught by specialist staff and because of a good range of resources, including exciting computer software.
- Students are really keen on the farm-based work, music and drama and they achieve well in these areas. Students make good progress in their physical development because of a strong sports curriculum featuring a good range of activities. Students are eager to try out different sports including ice skating, 'new age Kurling', and weight training. Many of these activities are provided at the local leisure centres, where they work alongside the general public. All students attend swimming lessons once a week and gain national or school awards.
- The pupil premium grant is used to provide a literacy support manager, electronic notepads for students in Year 7, pastoral support managers, subsidies for residential visits and transport for after-school clubs. All these measures have a positive impact in ensuring that all students can participate fully in all the school has to offer. As a consequence, there is no difference in the achievement of students supported by the additional funds and others in either English or mathematics.
- The impact of spending from the Year 7 catch-up funding, used to smooth the difficult transition from Year 6, is seen in the ease with which students settle in quickly at Crowdys Hill. The funding is used mainly for improving literacy and numeracy resources for these youngsters, helping them to keep up their learning from their previous schools and maintain and often improve their attendance as they gain success in their learning.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good particularly in English and mathematics, and in other subjects such as land-based studies and drama, it is often outstanding. Teachers work hard to make sure that lessons have a suitable structure and level of challenge for students of different capabilities and needs. In a few cases, the lesson activities are not pitched at the right level for students with higher ability and this hinders their learning and progress.
- Classroom staff give students plenty of encouragement but also correct any inaccuracies or misunderstandings, so that they are able to learn well. As a consequence, students almost

always show enthusiasm for learning and remain on task for long periods of time. Teaching assistants are generally confident, with a wide range of skills, and most work well as part of the classroom teams. In a few classes, the teaching assistants are not always sufficiently alert to the needs of the students and do not fully occupy themselves, for example, by assessing students against their individual learning goals, especially in whole-group discussions.

- The best taught lessons have a high level of challenge that generates an excitement in learning and teachers support students well so that they try new experiences and extend their thinking. This was the case in a very powerful history lesson about the First World War, when the students had to compare the experience and physical qualities of an artillery horse with one of the school's Shetland ponies. The students loved measuring and making life-size drawings of the horses and were given dramatic photographs of the wartime battlefields, so that they excitedly annotated the drawings with creative written responses.
- Most teachers plan their lessons very carefully making good use of accurate assessments of students' starting points in skills and understanding. They group students carefully to help them to learn in the most effective way. However, teachers do not always refer to students' individual learning targets in lessons, so that the students are not always sure of the next steps they need to take to move forward quickly.
- The school farm makes a unique contribution to school life and teachers make full use of the excellent opportunities the farm offers, as well as the school's training flat, for learning basic skills and work routines.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Crowdys Hill School is a happy school where all are on good terms with each other. The students who met with an inspector say they enjoy coming to school, especially for the farm work, sports, choir and drama, and feel safe at all times. This reflects in their attendance, which is above that seen in special schools nationally, and any unexplained absence is followed up quickly by staff.
- There are no permanent exclusions and hardly any fixed-term exclusions. Bullying is extremely rare, but students do understand what bullying is. They know about cyber bullying and the potential risks when using the internet.
- The school's records and students' and parents' views show that there is very little disruption to lessons, and that behaviour is typically excellent. Parents say, 'It feels like a family here. The children are helped immensely to grow emotionally and maturely.'
- Students' behaviour in the lessons observed across all subjects and year groups was almost always exemplary, especially when the teaching was of a high standard. Students frequently demonstrate kindness to each other, helping out without being asked and listening to each other's comments. They were confident in answering questions and reading out loud when asked to do so.
- The school rewards individual students for excellence in behaviour through its merit points systems. Each week a student is singled out publicly for celebration in assembly and given a prize for exceptional effort. Students work hard to achieve these rewards and prizes.
- Students are given the opportunity to assess their own efforts verbally in some lessons, and the school rightly plans to formalise this process throughout the school.
- Although behavioural incidents are rare, where students find learning difficult, staff take speedy and efficient action. The school puts in place individual plans and support strategies that fully involve parents, where this is warranted. Often the strategies include daily phone calls between home and school to report how the day has been.
- The school's farm provides excellent opportunities for students' social and spiritual development through teaching the students to recognise the importance of giving regular attention and commitment when caring for other beings. The students learn about the importance of work routines and cooperation and apply this well in the classroom.
- This extremely positive picture of life at the school comes about because the school puts the interests and well-being of students at the very heart of its work, and all staff take great care

that the students are looked after at all times.

- The governors and senior staff make sure that all staff have a comprehensive training on all aspects of safeguarding, including a very high standard of safety training in the care and management of the animals in the farm.

The leadership and management are good

- The recently appointed headteacher has brought a freshness and new enthusiasm into the school, carrying on the good work as seen at the last inspection and successfully addressing the issues that were identified. The school has strengthened senior and middle leadership significantly by appointing very capable new senior staff.
- The new leadership team and governors express high expectations of success and a clear vision of the way forward. They have set a strong foundation for the future through the actions they have already taken.
- They have established new procedures in order to improve the quality and reliability of the checks on the students' developing skills. This means that when planning lessons teaching staff can now refer to much more accurate information on the students' different starting points and the levels that they have achieved.
- The senior leaders have directed training activities when they have identified weaker teaching through their close monitoring of lessons. They have a very good understanding of how to judge the quality of teaching. Middle leaders receive effective support, encouragement and training so that they play a full leadership role, for example, in checking the quality of teaching in the different subjects.
- The school fosters excellent relationships with parents and other partners, including local colleges and a school in Zambia. Students are always accompanied if they are taught off site, and careful checks are made on the quality of teaching and learning that take place. The international partnership strongly supports students' cultural and creative awareness, and large striking murals adorn the buildings greeting visitors and celebrating the link.
- The school is committed to being as inclusive as possible so that each student feels valued and robustly tackles any discrimination or underachievement. Neighbouring schools send their own students for lessons on the farm where they perceive a benefit, and this gives Crowdys Hill students an additional opportunity to learn alongside their mainstream peers.
- Parents say that they feel that the school is well led and managed and that they and their families are very well involved and supported by the school through workshops and frequent, regular communications by texts, emails and the website.
- The school has methodical procedures for preparing students long in advance for moving to the next stage of learning, usually at a local college, and parents feel reassured by this. The school is considering the possibility of providing its own sixth form in order to address the needs of the increasing number of students with more complex needs such as autism.
- The varied and interesting curriculum is well designed to foster students' self-confidence and promote their joy of learning often through creative and practical activities such as the choir and knitting club. The activities that are provided promote the learning, health and well-being of the students and are relevant to both their current and future needs and aspirations. Students speak fondly of their experiences during the residential visits where they learn to be independent and resilient.
- The local authority offers 'light touch' support, reflecting its positive view of the capabilities of the senior staff and governors to keep up the drive to improve further. The school has ample capacity to do this.

■ The governance of the school:

- Members of the governing body are very committed to supporting and challenging the school, and carry out this responsibility very effectively, through regular classroom visits as well as by interrogating reports from the headteacher. These activities combine to give governors an

accurate picture of the students' progress and of the quality of teaching. The performance management of the headteacher is carried out rigorously and governors have a secure overview of how teachers' pay links with classroom performance. The governors understand well what financial and personnel resources are required to take the school forward. This includes scrutinising the impact of the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding. They give full regard to the well-being and safety of students, and treat all safeguarding very seriously. Governors have received recent training on performance management and lesson observations.

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	126549
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	426799

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	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Lake
Headteacher	Mags Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2011
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