

Cromwell High School

Yew Tree Lane, Dunkinfield, Tameside, SK16 5BJ

Inspection dates 14–15 October 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Extremely strong leadership at all levels is focused on creating a school where students can do their very best.
- Governors provide effective support and challenge because they are very involved in the life of the school and are extremely well informed.
- Students have a very wide range of ability but all of them are extremely well supported so that they can make the most of their talents.
- Good progress is true of key subjects including English and mathematics but applies equally to wider areas, for example, music and art, and life skills that promote independence and transition to adulthood. This is largely due to the school's extremely engaging curriculum.
- Effective teaching helps students to develop an appreciation of the needs of others and to understand that people hold a range of beliefs and views. This is well supported by links with a school in Gambia.
- Many students arrive with potentially challenging behaviour. A detailed behaviour policy, along with staff who are skilled in implementing positive behaviour plans, means very little learning time is lost. Over time, students learn to take greater responsibility for their own behaviour and understand the consequences of poor behaviour.
- Everyone gets on well together and there is a mutual respect. There is no evidence of bullying and students say that if there was an incident, they would only have to tell a member of staff and things would be sorted out at once.
- Parents and students all agree that the school is a very safe place. Great care is taken to ensure that students are also safe when they are out on trips and visits, including residential ones.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work as very effective teams in every class. They are extremely committed and many take on training and support roles that help colleagues develop their skills.
- Staff use detailed information on the progress of their students to ensure that they are fully challenged in order to make the maximum progress from their starting points. They constantly look for students to have gained new skills and, wherever possible, engage students in self-assessment of their work and progress.
- Excellent professional development has seen the quality of teaching rise since the last inspection and this has resulted in an already good school becoming an outstanding one.

Information about this inspection

- Many lessons were observed during the inspection. Seven of these were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, leaders of key subjects or areas of school life, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Although there were not enough responses to trigger an analysis of parents' views through the online Ofsted Parent View survey, parents' views were gathered from an analysis of the 37 responses to the school's own questionnaire, which is based closely on Parent View. Parents who were visiting the school were also spoken to and their views sought.
- Inspectors met with a group of students, and took opportunities whenever possible to talk to students in lessons and around the school in order to gather their views and opinions.
- The views of staff were gathered from the staff questionnaire and from discussions.
- Students' work was looked at during lessons and a sample was examined in detail as part of a focused scrutiny of work. Some students also read to an inspector.
- Inspectors also looked at a range of written documentation including information on students' progress and development, teachers' planning and assessment, the school's view of its own performance and development planning, and a range of policies and procedures including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Cromwell High is a secondary school for students with severe learning difficulties. In addition, a sizeable number of students have profound and multiple learning difficulties, or an autistic spectrum disorder.
- As a short-term response to a temporary drop in numbers, the local authority has this year placed a small number of students with more moderate learning difficulties in order to sustain the student numbers in the school.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who therefore qualify for support through the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority.)
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The school is based in buildings adjacent to Astley Sports College, with which it shares a campus.
- Since the last inspection, there have been changes in the composition of the leadership team; new leaders of Key Stages 3 and 4, English and mathematics, and for behaviour support, have joined the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop a process by which students' wider learning and preparation for adult life can be effectively targeted and measured, and ways in which this can link directly to the development of the new Education and Health Care Plans that will support their progress as they become young adults up to 25 years of age.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The experienced headteacher brings a drive and determination for excellence to everything that the school does. Since the last inspection, he has been joined by a largely new leadership team. Each member has a very clear role and responsibilities for which they are held to account, including the leadership of key subject areas. They are very successful and there is a focus on ensuring that every student achieves the very best of which they are capable.
- This same determination is seen throughout the school. Staff are highly motivated and professional. Elements of leadership are provided by staff at all levels; for example, the lead in promoting the effective use of symbols for helping more profoundly disabled students to communicate is taken by a teaching assistant. There is a range of similar opportunities for staff to act as 'learning champions', working with colleagues in promoting their specific expertise.
- Highly effective monitoring of teaching, assessment and planning provides clear evidence of teaching and learning of the highest standard. It has enabled leaders to raise the quality of teaching since the last inspection.
- This monitoring underpins a very effective staff performance and appraisal system. All staff have challenging annual objectives linked to students' achievement and progress. Staff training is regular and of a high quality. Teachers are aware of the direct link between their performance and any increase in pay.
- There is a focus on constant improvement. For example, the school has identified that its current systems do not measure with pinpoint accuracy the success of students' wider learning in gaining life skills or working towards independent living. This makes the process of supporting students in their transition to college and then into adulthood good but not yet outstanding.
- The range of subjects taught engages students very effectively and supports academic progress, often through themes or topics. The Key Stage 4 element of increased opportunities to develop effective skills for life stands them in good stead for their future and supports students well in their preparation for life after school and in modern Britain.
- A range of activities strongly support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' artwork is enhanced through an artist in residence, while music supports many pupils, especially those with an autistic spectrum disorder. The ways in which students help, support and encourage each other are very impressive. This is especially evident in the annual residential trip for students.
- The school's work to measure its own performance is detailed and accurate. It leads to effective priorities for continuing to move the school forward.
- Many parents are actively involved with the school. Responses to every element of the parents' survey were exceptionally supportive, reflecting the excellent relationships between school and home.
- There are also strong partnerships with a range of professional agencies that provide effective support in meeting the health and educational needs of students. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust and reflect the strength of relationships with other agencies in seeking to ensure the safety of young people.
- The local authority is aware that this is an extremely effective school and therefore feels that only light-touch support is necessary.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very effective in carrying out all its duties, including those for safeguarding. Governors challenge senior leaders to ensure high-quality provision and to promote equality of opportunity for all. Governors are frequent visitors; they know what is going on in the school because they find out for themselves. Similarly, they have a firm grasp of spending, including an understanding of how the pupil premium is allocated and the impact that it has on individual progress. They fully understand the links between teachers' performance and pay, and the process, should it be needed, to tackle underperformance. Challenging targets are set to monitor the performance of the headteacher, and are checked regularly. Governors have a good understanding of the data on students' progress so they can challenge leaders effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Many enter school with very challenging behaviour but this is managed exceptionally well so that virtually no time is lost to learning because of bad behaviour. The behaviour policy is skilfully and consistently applied by all staff and, over time, students come to learn how

to control their own behaviour and understand why poor behaviour is not acceptable.

- Students really love their learning because it is pitched at just the right level for each of them. They show a thirst for learning which enables them to make outstanding progress over time. This was reflected in the way a class being observed came in from enjoying break but was very quickly ready and engaged in learning. There was engagement, focus and concentration right from the start.
- The school prides itself on the very small number of pupils it has had to exclude. All the parents who completed the questionnaire said that the school ensures good behaviour and that their children feel safe.
- Students get on very well together and with adults around the school. As a result, there is exemplary behaviour and positive relationships, not only in lessons but also around the school throughout the whole day, including at break and lunchtime. A very positive element of school life is that lunch is taken in the adjacent comprehensive school's canteen, helping to foster very positive relations between the schools and their students.
- Students say there is no bullying but if any kind of behaviour incident occurs, they just tell an adult and it is dealt with quickly. They have been told in lessons about the different types of bullying, including bullying on the internet and social networks and that based on prejudice.
- Attendance is above average for secondary schools. The school has worked hard to improve this since the last inspection and parents are contacted as soon as a student's attendance drops below 95 per cent.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Care is taken to analyse the risks involved in any situation and to ensure that students are kept safe. Students are supported in developing the best possible understanding of risk they can and adults work to ensure the school is always safe.
- Any behavioural incidents, including the need to use restraint, are logged immediately in detail and analysed carefully to look for any patterns. Care is taken to ensure parents of the students involved are always informed and aware.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- In every class, teachers and their teaching assistants work as extremely effective teams to support the learning needs of every student. As a result, students are very well challenged and supported, and it is this practice that lies behind the outstanding progress that students make. It reflects the school's strong commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.
- All planning is extremely thorough and addresses individual students' needs. It takes into account all the information that teachers have of their progress and achievement. There is a constant focus on progress and supporting everyone to reach their challenging end-of-year targets. Whenever possible, students are also encouraged to reflect on and be proud of their own achievement.
- Progress data are gathered by teachers and maintained in a file for every student. When progress towards targets is not matching expectation, a range of short-term interventions can be put into place. These help students to get back up to speed. At present, the range of such support available is rather greater in English than it is in mathematics. There is a focused pupils' progress meeting between every class teacher and a senior leader every term and teachers are held accountable for the progress of their students.
- Students respond very well to the very high expectations of them that staff set. These consistently high expectations help students to make exceptionally good progress across the whole range of subjects and topics that are taught. This is equally true of progress in English, communication and mathematics as it is in wider learning, for example in gaining practical skills at venues out of school, such as at a local farm.
- Marking of work is detailed or, for those students who cannot write, a clear record of individual achievement is kept. There is a very high level of consistency in the way the marking policy is carried out. It enables teachers to gather clear evidence of progress over time, even where this is measured in very small steps. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in monitoring progress across all areas of learning.
- Good questioning of the students who are able to respond tests accurately their understanding of the work being covered and identifies where further help might be needed.
- Staff work equally effectively with those students who have no speech by competently using signing or symbols to help to communicate. They support students in using a range of methods of communication, such as the use of switches and other electronic devices to respond. The achievement of all students, including those with profound levels of learning difficulties, has risen since the last inspection. This is due in no small measure to the improved quality of teaching since that time.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- While the learning difficulties of students mean that the standards they reach are low, they often make exceptional progress from their individual starting points whatever the nature of their difficulties. Using figures produced to measure the progress of students in special schools, it is clear that an extremely high percentage are making progress well above that expected across the country as a whole in English and mathematics. They learn exceptionally well, eventually being well prepared for the move to college.
- The school has taken great care in allocating the additional resources from the pupil premium. Individual support is based on a needs analysis. An action plan identifies spending and monitors its impact. It is clear that this has been effective in accelerating progress in English and mathematics of those who receive help. There are now no consistent differences in the performance of these students and that of others.
- Detailed analysis is made of the progress being made by identified groups of students, such as male/female, or those from different ethnic backgrounds. Because the focus of learning is so individualised to meet specific needs, there are no differences between any such groups.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a greater emphasis on the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). This has helped students who are capable to develop their skills quickly and learn to read. Students who read to an inspector said that they enjoyed reading and, from their discussions, it was clear that they have a good understanding of the stories in their books.
- The most able students are very well challenged to reach their potential. This includes support from the positive links with the adjacent mainstream comprehensive school. When it is possible, students from Cromwell High take courses alongside mainstream students. This has, on occasion, enabled them to gain GCSE passes in woodwork and BTEC qualifications in food technology.
- All students are expected to leave school with externally accredited qualifications, which is often, and rightly so, a source of pride to students and their families. The main qualifications are those at Entry Level or from the range of certification provided by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).
- Great care is taken to ensure that assessment of work is accurate. In school, subject leaders work with staff to help them ensure that their judgements are right. The school is also an active member of the Greater Manchester Special Schools group, which meets to compare the standards of work done by students in their schools and agree the levels of achievement that they reflect. This gives great confidence that the assessment of achievement in the school is correct.

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	106279
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	447927

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	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Albert Hatton
Headteacher	Andrew Foord
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2011
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