

Cramlington Hillcrest School

East View Avenue, East Farm, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 1DY

Inspection dates 13–14 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Students do not make sufficient progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 and as a result do not achieve well enough in external exams.
- Provision in the sixth form requires improvement. The options and qualifications available do not meet the needs of all students.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good. In some classes, expectations are not high enough. The most able students in particular, are capable of doing more in lessons. They are not always provided with sufficiently challenging work to enable them to make good progress.
- Disruption and changes to the leadership team in the last twelve months have adversely affected the overall effectiveness of the school.
- The school's systems for keeping a check on students' progress and judging the effectiveness of its work are not organised well enough.
- Leaders do not share information on progress fully with the governing body which limits their contribution to school self-evaluation.
- The school's plans for improvement do not use clear measures of students' progress to provide accurate self-evaluation and judge the impact of actions.
- Teachers do not consistently check that students have understood the learning in lessons.
- Not all teachers provide regular, helpful comments when marking students' books. Students do not always know what to do to improve their work and so they make slower progress.
- Behaviour is not consistently good. Recently introduced strategies to improve behaviour are yet to show an impact. The poor attitudes and lack of motivation of a few students prevents them from learning successfully.
- The attendance of a few students remains low and slows their progress, despite the school's efforts to engage with them.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher is deeply passionate and has clear plans to drive the school forward and ensure the best possible outcomes for the students at Hillcrest.
- The newly formed leadership team have strengthened the overall management of the school. Staff morale is high and staff are working as a team to move the school forward.
- The majority of the students value the good relationships with staff and other students which helps them settle, learn and achieve.
- Learning support assistants provide good support for individual students. They work well with teachers and have a thorough understanding of their role in supporting students with complex needs and promoting their progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 9 lessons, 2 of which were joint observations with the headteacher. All teachers and class groups were observed. In addition, inspectors made a few short visits to observe students in small group support sessions
- I. They also reviewed the work in students' books. and heard students from Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 read.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, representatives of the governing body, and had a telephone call with local authority representative.
- Inspectors spoke informally to students in lessons and around the school, as well as having two more formal meetings with groups of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a range of documents including: the school's own information about students' progress; planning; the monitoring of learning and teachers' performance; organisation of the curriculum; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information, how the money from pupil premium is spent, and the minutes of governing body meetings.
- There was insufficient response to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to allow any analysis, but inspectors took account of the comments and views recorded in the school's Parent Questionnaire – June 2014.
- Inspectors also took account of the 13 responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Peter Bailey, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Frank Cain

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hillcrest is a secondary special school catering for students with complex needs, the majority relating to social, emotional and behavioural needs. The proportion of students with mental health issues is increasing. All students are supported by a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of the students are of White British heritage.
- A large proportion of students is boys.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, is well above average. The pupil premium is funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most students start at the school in Year 7. However, students are admitted to the school at any time of the year.
- The majority of students come from Blyth. Some of the older students travel to school independently, but the vast majority are transported to and from school.
- The school is an active partner in the Cramlington Teaching School Alliance and has links with the University of Sunderland for Initial Teacher Training.
- The school makes use of an alternative off-site provider, Skills4U.
- In September 2014, the school extended its student age range to 11 to 19 and the first cohort of post compulsory-aged students on the school roll started.
- The current headteacher took up post in September 2013.
- The governing body has been awarded the Governor Mark status

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in all subjects so as to raise achievement by:
 - rigorously analysing the information on students' progress and attainment, relating to different groups of students, including the most able, in order to check that they are being appropriately challenged, and to deepen their learning in all subjects
 - ensuring that there is consistent and useful feedback in books and files so that students know exactly how to improve their work
 - teachers regularly checking that students' understand the topics covered
 - reviewing the range of qualifications in the sixth form, to ensure that they meet the needs of all students, particularly the most able, in order to prepare them better for their future lives.
- Improve leadership and management by :
 - ensuring that the school's self evaluation is more precise and that procedures to help the school judge its effectiveness are based on informative data and high quality analysis of the progress of all groups of students
 - ensuring the governing body receives a more rigorous analysis of students' outcomes, so that governors can monitor progress more effectively and provide a higher level of challenge and support to school leaders.
- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
 - ensuring that the recently revised code of conduct is understood by all students and applied consistently by all staff
 - improving the collection and analysis of information about behavioural incidents to inform actions to improve behaviour and reduce the level of exclusion
 - continuing to engage hard-to-reach students to improve their attendance rates
 - ensure that information about students' previous attendance and behaviour is recorded on entry into school, so as to obtain a base line on which to judge improvement.

- Improve provision in the sixth form by:
 - reviewing the range of qualifications in the sixth form, to ensure that they meet the needs of all students, particularly the most able, in order to prepare them better for their future lives
 - establishing permanent leadership arrangements for the sixth form provision
 - working with students to who have poor attendance to re-engage them in learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management **require improvement**

- Leadership and management require improvement because instability in the leadership team over the past 12 months has meant there has been insufficient support for the newly appointed headteacher in ensuring a good quality of education and moving the school forward. The actions taken to address identified areas for development have not yet resulted in improving students' achievement, and raising the overall quality of teaching to at least good.
- The school's systems to check on students' progress are not yet strong enough to provide the information needed to check whether planned improvements have resulted in individuals and groups of students making improved progress.
- The local authority has provided support to the school but has lacked rigour in challenging the school in raising outcomes for students.
- The headteacher is passionate, and displays an unrelenting determination to steer the school in the right direction. She is deeply committed to the education, care and well-being of all the students in the school and to ensuring that they have the best possible opportunities to succeed.
- Her dedication is infectious and she is now ably supported by the recently appointed acting deputy headteacher. They have established a shared purpose in ensuring that there is a continued improvement in order to become a good school. The newly formed senior leadership has the confidence of parents, students and staff in their capacity and ability to drive the school forward.
- Whole-school systems and procedures to develop teaching, measure students' progress, and manage students' behaviour have been introduced. However, it is too early to see the impact of these initiatives in improving outcomes for the students.
- The sixth form was established because the school identified that some of their students with more complex needs who left school at the end of year 11, were not able to sustain their placement at college.
- The headteacher has clearly identified the priorities for improving the school. However, the school development plan is not sufficiently focused and lacks measures of impact on students' progress and timescales to enable the school to judge how well its plans are progressing.
- The curriculum has been improved with the introduction of projects that interest students and develop their skills in enquiry and collaboration. Curriculum enrichment activities offering students choice, alternative providers, and life skills options ensure a broad, balanced curriculum which meets the individual needs of the students.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social cultural development is promoted effectively. The school is actively involved in the local community, raises funds for local charities and has links with a homeless project. Democracy is actively promoted through students' involvement in the school council and participation in the decision-making process over major issues in school. The rules of fairness and respect for others underpin the revised code of conduct. The school prepares students for life in modern Britain effectively.
- The school successfully engages with students' families of the, even when they are hard-to-reach. The most recent parents' evening and 'Exhibition Day' were well attended. Ninety per cent of parents attend the students' annual reviews. The responses to the latest Parent/Carer questionnaire (June 2014), were very positive and expressed satisfaction with the school. All considered the school was well led.
- The headteacher has successfully developed links other local schools in the Cramlington Village Teaching Schools Alliance. This has created regular opportunities for staff to develop new skills, involving off-site visits and training, in order to enhance the school's drive to improve.
- The headteacher has refined the system of performance management so it is now more robust and linked to teachers' standards. Judgements about teachers' work are closely linked to students' achievement and school development. Regular reviews of performance have begun, but because this process has not been established long, it is too early to identify its impact.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and are managed effectively. The knowledge and skills of staff are kept up to date through regular and rigorous training.
- A greater rigour in the monitoring of teaching and learning indicates that the school leaders are being effective in supporting teachers to improve. Weaker teachers are being supported effectively and three teachers have undertaken the Outstanding Teacher programme.
- The headteacher is developing a culture of sharing good practice which is proving successful in improving teaching across the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very committed and supportive of the school and keen for greater success.

Governors have a wide range of experience and bring considerable skills and expertise to the role.

- Governors understand how to use the information about the school's performance and have procedures in place for keeping the work of the school under review. However, the information that they receive is not sufficiently detailed and lacks statistical information relating to students' progress. This limits the scope for governors to make secure judgements and to hold the leadership to account. They recognise that procedures for collecting and analysing data need improving. .
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's finances and manage them well. They are aware of the impact of decisions about the use of pupil premium funding and how gaps in students' achievement are closing.
- The governing body ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fully in place, meet statutory requirements and are effective in ensuring students' safety, including when they attend the off-site provision.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- Students' attitudes to learning are inconsistent across the school because policies and procedures are not always applied consistently by all staff.
- Some incidents of disruption occur in classrooms but are generally well managed with minimal disruption to the lesson.
- Students' conduct is better in the sixth form and more consistently good than in the rest of the school.
- Students in all phases of the school express some concerns about behaviour in the school, but they said they were confident how staff manage behaviour.
- Most staff consider behaviour has improved, but this is not the view of all staff.
- Staff promote a caring approach where all students are valued. They enjoy spending time with students which communicates positive attitudes between staff and students. As a result, the students' conduct and behaviour at break and in the dining room is calm and orderly. In general relationships are strong and improving.
- Students' arrival and departure from school is well structured and supervised.
- Exclusions of students are high and the school is working hard to reduce this. It has introduced intervention support groups and individual support plans for identified students in an effort to reduce the number of exclusions. The school is yet to see the impact of these actions.
- The breakfast club is well attended and gives a good start to the day for the students that use it.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. This is because students throughout the school have expressed concerns about bullying in the school.
- Staff meticulously record incidents in an anti-bullying log. The school is seeking, with some success, to reduce incidents of 'name-calling' and has set up anti-bullying support groups and organised assemblies on themes such as: 'Show racism the red card', and Anti-Bullying Week.
- The poor attendance of some students has a negative effect on the amount of learning that takes place. The school has put in place a variety of strategies, involving outside agencies, to re-engage these students and ensure their personal safety during school hours.
- Leaders do not document the students' attendance and behaviour records from their previous schools and lack clear measures to judge improvements.
- Students say that they feel safe in school.
- Most of the parents who responded to the Parent Questionnaire believe their children are safe and happy in school.
- Safeguarding policies are in place, staff identity checks are rigorous and references followed up in detail. Staff training is regular and thorough.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not enabled the students to make good progress over time. Teaching has improved and there is more good teaching. However, the legacy of weak teaching in the past has adversely affected students' progress and attainment.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not consistently good, because policies and procedures are not applied consistently by all staff.
- In some lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations for what the students, especially the most able, can achieve. Students' resistance to work is sometimes accepted too readily and they are not challenged or given alternative ways to try new things.
- Marking varies in quality. Teachers' written comments too often lack precision and do not tell the students how to improve their work. Students are not given sufficient opportunities to respond to the teachers' written comments. In the best examples, marking is sharply focused, teachers suggest ways to improve and give time for students to make corrections.
- Teachers do not consistently check that the students have understood their work before moving on to the next task. This means that they cannot be sure that students have grasped the knowledge and skills they need.
- Where teaching is good, teachers' expectations are high, and students are challenged to reach higher levels. In a Year 11 science lesson, the students were quickly settled and became fully engaged in their learning because expectations were clearly understood and the work was pitched at just the right level. Consequently, students made good progress.
- In one lesson with students from Years 7 and 8, the teacher's practical approach helped them concentrate, co-operate and stay on task. The bread-making task taught students how to measure ingredients and to learn the meaning and spelling of key words such as 'kneading'.
- In a literacy lesson, pupils listened intently and followed the text as a teacher read to the class. They were also confident to read aloud with the teachers helping to decode difficult words. Students' progress in reading is accelerating but writing is an area which requires improvement.
- Students who find literacy and numeracy difficult are offered additional help. For many students this extra support meets their learning needs, particularly in literacy.
- Teachers and learning support assistants share information about learning targets and they know the students well. Their strong relationships help students to stay on task and try things they find difficult. Learning support assistants support learning by questioning students carefully, encouraging them to stay motivated and help in managing their behaviour, particularly the less able.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students have a wide range of attainment on entry into school and the complexity of students' need is increasing. The majority are working at a level well below national expectations. Many lack self-esteem and join the school later in their secondary school life. Many find it difficult to engage with learning.
- Achievement requires improvement because too few students have made expected progress from their individual starting points, particularly the more able.
- The low expectations of the small proportion of higher-ability students, limits their academic achievement.
- An increasing number of pupils are making and exceeding the progress expected of them, especially in literacy. However, low attendance and some disruptive behaviour in the classroom have an adverse impact on achievement.
- The development of literacy skills has been prioritised this year. A teacher has been working effectively with identified students to develop their reading using letters and their sounds. During the inspection, students read enthusiastically, said they enjoyed reading, and eagerly talked about their favourite authors.
- Students educated off-site in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form develop social and emotional skills which prepare them for work and independence. However, the school has no evaluation of the impact.
- All pupils leave school with an entry level qualification in literacy and numeracy, and a limited number are entered for GCSE in mathematics. However, no students are entered for the higher grades.
- The care and respect given to the students contributes to students' good social and emotional development. Students successfully improve their social skills and the way they manage their own behaviour which are valuable achievements for later life.
- Senior leaders' analysis of achievement does not show how well different groups of students perform. As a result, leaders and governors are not able to judge how effectively resources are used to support all students and so ensure equal opportunities.

- In 2014 the attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 4, who are supported by pupil premium funding, was above that of other students. In other year groups students supported by pupil premium funding are making better progress than other pupils in numeracy and writing, but not in reading.
- Most students have made good progress since starting in the sixth form and evidence in their books and files indicates that most are on track to achieve their targets.

Sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Leadership in the sixth form requires improvement.
- The new sixth form has only been running for one term and currently has ten students.
- The school's aim is to provide a supportive environment that meets the needs of individuals so they can progress to college, work, an apprenticeship or independent living. However, it is too soon to judge progress towards these outcomes for the current students.
- At present, permanent arrangements for the leadership and management of the sixth form have yet to be established. Attendance is currently 70% which is lower than it is in the main school. The majority of students attend well and enjoy coming to school, but the figures are adversely affected by two students that are currently non-attenders. The school is employing a variety of strategies involving outside agencies to re-engage these students in their learning.
- Students have the choice of a personal programme consisting of a range of accredited courses in maths, English, ICT, personal and social development, vocational options and work placements. However, in discussion with the students, they feel that these options are not specifically tailored to equipping them for their preferred destination on leaving, and so would not provide them with the opportunity of employment or further study in areas to which they would be suited.
- The students commented that they wanted to continue at school, 'to get better grades and go to college' and 'to be more confident for the next steps'.
- High expectations of behaviour are conveyed to students in the sixth form and they have responded appropriately. They are polite, well mannered, and generally friendly. Students commented: 'teachers are kind and fair', 'staff are great - you can share a joke with them', and 'I like coming to school – I have friends here'.
- Inspection evidence, including scrutiny of work in students' books, indicates that during the short time the sixth form has been open, teaching is having a positive impact on students' learning.
- The students in the sixth form have a common room and wear different coloured sweat shirts to identify their status in school, which they value.

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	122383
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	447765

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Joynson
Headteacher	Andrea Mead
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2011
Telephone number	01670 713632
Fax number	01670 713920
Email address	admin@hillcrest.northumberland.gov.uk

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