

# Croft Community School

Greencroft Road End, Annfield Plain, Stanley, County Durham DH9 8PR

## Inspection dates

20–21 October 2015

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have been too slow to tackle the areas identified as in need of improvement at the last inspection, particularly in increasing the challenge for most-able pupils.
- Leaders do not track the progress of most-able pupils as a specific group. As a result, they do not know if these pupils are being challenged sufficiently to achieve their best.
- Leaders have an inaccurate view of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning over time. Leaders check teaching, teachers' planning and pupils' work books, but until recently they have not focused well enough on the difference that teaching is making to pupils' progress from their starting points.
- There are examples of high-quality teaching that inspires and energises pupils to try their best but this is not always the case. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment require improvement.
- Not all teachers use the information they have about pupils' current abilities to plan activities matched to their diverse learning needs. This means work set is too hard for some and not hard enough for others. When this happens pupils' concentration wanes.
- Governors do not hold leaders to account robustly enough for the impact of their work. They have not ensured that leaders report effectively on the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school. Consequently, governors cannot tell if gaps exist between these two groups and, if there are gaps, whether these are narrowing over time.
- Governors have not ensured that the child protection policy on the school's website is up to date. At the time of the inspection, the policy did not take account of the Department for Education's statutory guidance for either 2014 or 2015.

### The school has the following strengths

- The very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are progressing well in both their learning and development.
- Pupils attend regularly and behave well. They are polite and friendly and speak enthusiastically about how well they get along with each other. They demonstrate qualities of empathy for, and respect of, others' needs and points of view.
- Pupils, with their diverse and complex needs are well cared for and supported. This, along with the close attention paid to their social, moral, personal development and training in life skills, enables them to become active participants in school life and beyond. They are effectively prepared for the colleges they move onto at the age of 16.
- The new headteacher has quickly set systems in place to drive the school forward.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement further; particularly for the most- and least-able by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations of what their pupils can do
  - making certain that teachers always use the information they have about pupils' current skills, knowledge and understanding to provide activities that move pupils on quickly from these starting points
  - sharing more widely the good practice currently in school
  - ensuring that teachers' marking and feedback help pupils to know what they are doing well, identify mistakes, give time to correct them, and also help them to know what they need to do next to improve their work
  - making sure that handwriting, spelling and grammar are routinely checked in written work across subjects.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - making good use of the skills of middle leaders in supporting the headteacher to drive improvement
  - making certain that improvement plans contain precise timescales and targets against which leaders and the governing body can check impact
  - making sure that leaders check regularly and robustly the progress made by all groups of pupils in order to take urgent action to tackle any identified underachievement and stretch those who could do better
  - ensuring that leaders' observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work focus on the difference teaching is making to the progress of pupils, and then taking action where needed
  - ensuring the governing body carries out its statutory duty in keeping the school's website compliant with the Department for Education's requirements
  - increasing the robustness of performance management procedures to hold teachers and leaders to account for pupils' achievement and the impact of their work
  - working closely with the local authority to secure the recruitment of high-quality, permanent specialist staff with expertise in meeting the needs of the increasing proportion of pupils joining the school with an autistic spectrum diagnosis.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### requires improvement

- Leaders' evaluation of the school's work has been too optimistic. It has not been grounded in robust analysis of the impact of actions taken. The school improvement plan has too many priorities with few targets against which to measure success of the underpinning actions. It is hard for governors to know what is the most urgent priority or what successful completion of the actions will lead to.
- Reports to governors have been too descriptive with positive assertions merely repeated from one report to the next. For example, reports identify that disadvantaged pupils entitled to the government's pupil premium funding achieve as well as their peers. Governors do not receive reports that specifically identify the achievements of disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils, in a form that enables them to know that this is the case. Inspectors were unable to compare the achievements of these groups of pupils for the same reason.
- The new headteacher has a strong vision and ambition for Croft to be a centre of excellence. His aspiration is to ensure that pupils achieve their very best, personally, socially and academically. He aims to build on the strengths of the school's good-quality care by developing wider therapeutic programmes to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils attending the school.
- The headteacher quickly gained the full commitment of staff and governors to this vision. He is working effectively with middle leaders to build their skills in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and teachers' use of assessment. Middle leaders' views of lessons jointly observed with inspectors reflected inspectors' views accurately: that learning in lessons is not consistently good.
- New assessment procedures to ensure systematic checks on pupils' progress in every class and key groups, with regular reporting to governors, have been introduced but it is too early to see the impact.
- Staff report a step-change in the culture and atmosphere in school. They say the headteacher has brought a sense of urgency to the school's improvement. Pupils report, 'He is strict but fair, fun and very approachable.' Staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey are equally positive. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school too. Virtually all who responded to the Ofsted survey think their children are safe and well cared for. The care and support provided to pupils are strengths.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision is good. The leader's careful checking of what children are doing means that staff can build on what children already know to develop tasks and games that help them move on in the different areas of the curriculum from their very low starting points.
- Leaders' actions to improve the curriculum are making their mark: the curriculum is good. Pupils speak enthusiastically about lessons like 'forest school'. Staff report on how these lessons are adding to pupils' enjoyment of school, their improving attendance and interest in lessons overall.
- Appointments of subject specialists mean that pupils can take a wider range of subjects and qualifications: for example, in physical education and art. Some older pupils attend college one day a week or attend a local secondary school to take lessons in English and mathematics for their GCSE qualifications. The numbers taking and achieving entry level 3 qualifications and GCSE qualifications have increased.
- The curriculum is enriched suitably with visits out of school and breaktime activities where staff model play and social communication well. Wider opportunities in the curriculum and beyond the school day help pupils to understand, and to take part actively, in the local and wider British community.
- Effective advice and guidance to older pupils help them move on to their chosen college foundation courses. For some pupils who achieve the higher qualifications identified above, this may not be the most suitable option for them. However, all stay on and complete their courses successfully.
- The local authority has provided valued support to the headteacher through the programme for new headteachers and by brokering a mentor headteacher from Villa Real school. However, leaders have not been well served by local authority reports that continue to endorse the school's overoptimistic view of its effectiveness. Reports are not based on detailed evaluation of pupils' achievements as the school has not until recently gathered regular information about some key groups.
- **The governance of the school**
  - This requires improvement. Governors are visible in the school and visit regularly. They know the key strengths of the school are the care and support provided. They know that improving provision and outcomes for the most-able pupils has been a priority, and responded by appointing specialist teachers and changing the Key Stage 4 curriculum. However, governors have not been able to check the impact of this work as they do not receive specific, regular information about the achievements of this group. This is also the case for Key Stage 1 and most Key Stage 2 class groups. This means that governors do not know how well pupils in many classes have been doing

over time. Reports on the school's use of the government's pupil premium funding and sports funding are on the school's website but do not explain clearly enough the impact of this funding. Governors have not received reports on the use of the Year 7 catch-up grant. They have not ensured that performance management arrangements for staff are robust or completed in a timely way.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Despite weaknesses in keeping all required information on the school's website, governors ensure that they carry out safeguarding responsibilities robustly. They make sure that arrangements for pupils' safety and care in school, and when out on a wide range of activities and visits, are secure.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**requires improvement**

- Teachers plan carefully for each lesson, often identifying the different steps pupils will take in their learning. However, this information is not always used well once the lesson starts. Observations and reviews of pupils' books show pupils are too often given the same work, despite the planning and wide range of abilities and ages in each class. Pupils try hard to tackle their work but this means that progress for some is not as fast as it should be, particularly for the most able and least able.
- Improvements to the quality of teaching have been hampered by the significant number of temporary teachers and teaching assistants. Not all teachers have a good enough grip on what their pupils can do. Consequently, expectations are sometimes too low.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject keep pupils on their toes. Pupils are inspired by the work set and make good progress in their learning and skills as a result.
- Most teachers provide written and spoken feedback to pupils in lessons. In the best examples, feedback is precise, with teachers giving pupils time to respond to questions or comments. This helps pupils to understand whether their work is correct, or what would make their work even better. Leaders are currently working with staff to ensure that all teachers' feedback is as helpful as the best.
- Daily reading practice and phonics lessons (teaching about the sounds that letters make) are steadily improving the reading and writing skills of pupils. Pupils speak willingly about the books they are reading. Not all teachers routinely check spellings in pupils' work books or ensure that their handwriting and presentation skills are being developed consistently.
- Typical of all lessons observed are the good relationships between pupils and their teachers. Pupils say they value the support of the adults and the small class groups which mean they can have help when they need it. Occasionally, teaching assistants do too much of the work for their pupils so it is hard to know whether the pupil has mastered the skills or achieved well in the learning activity.
- Relationships between children and staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage are first rate. The teachers' meticulous attention to meeting each child's specific needs and developing their routines and expectations of classroom life helps them settle into the day's work quickly. Children are keen to try their best and they respond well to the carefully spoken or signed instructions and guidance of staff. A wide range of well-planned stimulating activities and sensory experiences encourage children's enjoyment and curiosity. Actions taken are helping children to prepare for the next steps in their development.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**is good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils report they are well looked after and the 'adults are there to help you'. Their view is endorsed by parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. Parents' written comments were all highly positive. One parent summed up the views of a number when she said, 'The pastoral care my child receives is amazing.'
- Support to pupils in times of need is strong. Case files show staff know well the individual needs of each pupil. Records indicate the strategies or actions staff take to help pupils in their school lives or when they or their families are facing difficulties. They show how closely staff work with other agencies to make sure the right support is provided in a timely way.
- In assemblies and lessons pupils gain a good understanding about different faiths and cultures.

Activities like forest school and outdoor education build well pupils' self-esteem and teamworking skills.

- Lessons including the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) and the personal, social, health, citizenship curriculum, along with pupils' work as part of a 'Rights Respecting School', ensure that pupils understand the values at the heart of British society including right and wrong and the rule of law.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. It is not outstanding because occasionally pupils' attitudes to learning wane when teaching is not as effective as it should be. Behaviour incidents are meticulously recorded and any concerns tackled through carefully managed individual behaviour plans. However, there is no evaluation of this information to enable governors or leaders to understand the impact of interventions on the behaviour of groups or individuals over time.
- Pupils behave well in class, in the yards at break-time and at lunchtimes when they happily eat and chat with their friends and staff. They are well supported to manage their own behaviour. Lessons are generally calm and purposeful. Staff are adept at managing the more complex behaviours of pupils. This is helping some of the most challenging pupils to stay in school and continue their learning.
- Sensitive work with pupils having a difficult day means that they do not disrupt the learning of others and are quickly able to rejoin their learning activities. The positive impact of teachers' skills can be seen in the low proportion of pupils who are temporarily excluded. None is permanently excluded.
- Pupils say they enjoy school and they come to school regularly. Their improving attendance rates pay testament to this. Attendance rates are nearly the same as in mainstream primary and secondary schools, and are consistently above the average for special schools.
- Pupils are effectively taught about risks to their own health and safety, and about risks from social media including using the internet. They speak very perceptively about how they value, accept and respect pupils' differing views and qualities, and say that everyone 'gets on with each other'. They report of occasional bullying but that things get sorted very quickly because adults are always on hand.

## Outcomes for pupils

## require improvement

- Work in pupils' books, information about pupils' achievements and observations of learning show that pupils' progress is not consistently good. Books do show that most pupils work diligently and generally complete their work. However, the work set is sometimes too hard for some pupils and too easy for others, which means that progress in lessons is not always brisk enough.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well planned, particularly indoors, to enable children to make good progress in their learning and development from their very low starting points. Outdoor provision is adequate. Leaders want it to be as stimulating as that found inside and are making plans to enhance it.
- Partnerships with parents are strong. Photographs of and commentary on children's experiences are carefully gathered into their learning journals. They provide a showcase for children's work, the fun times enjoyed and the good, albeit small gains they make in their learning over time.
- Improvements in the Key Stage 4 curriculum are ensuring that virtually all pupils leave school with some qualifications. These include functional skills accreditations and some GCSE qualifications. In summer 2015, five pupils gained a grade C to G in their English GCSE examinations and three gained a grade C or D in mathematics. This represented good progress from their low starting points on entry to school. Pupils achieve well in art and they say they thoroughly enjoy this subject.
- The targets teachers set for their pupils are not always challenging enough. This means that while pupils make steady gains in their learning, not all are challenged to do their very best. For example, current targets for progress are based on pupils making five steps in their learning in a year (using a nationally recognised system often used by special schools). While this measure may be challenging for pupils with significant learning needs, it is not sufficiently challenging for most-able pupils who are already working at levels well above the range within this system.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114340
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10006612

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special school
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	101
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kevin Meredith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Simon Adams
<b>Telephone number</b>	01207 234547
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.croftcommunityschool.co.uk">www.croftcommunityschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:croftcommunity@durhamlearning.net">croftcommunity@durhamlearning.net</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15 March 2012

## Information about this school

- Croft Community is a maintained special school catering for pupils who have cognition and learning difficulties (moderate learning difficulties) and pupils who experience communication and interaction difficulties, including pupils with an autistic spectrum diagnosis (ASD). A small proportion also have social and emotional or mental health needs.
- The school is small in size and well below that of the average maintained school. The number of pupils attending is increasing as the school is expanding its provision for ASD pupils.
- The school was called Hare Law but changed its name when it moved from its former premises to the current fully refurbished premises that was previously a secondary school in Annfield Plain in summer 2015.
- The school's ample-sized fields are licensed by the community and plans are afoot to enable some of the school's building to be used by the community outside the school day.
- More than half of the pupils are known to be entitled to pupil premium funding. This is well above that found nationally for mainstream schools, but not for special schools. (Pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils entitled to free school meals, or who are looked after by the local authority.)
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan (EHCP)
- The headteacher took up his post in September 2015, the same time that the school opened to pupils on the Croft site.
- The numbers of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are too low to report on in a separate section. Aspects of this stage are threaded throughout the report.
- At the time of its last inspection the school was judged to be good.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed learning in 16 lessons. Twelve lesson observations were carried out jointly with senior or middle leaders. Inspectors also heard some pupils reading in lessons.
- Inspectors spoke formally to two groups of pupils on day one and informally to pupils at break and lunchtimes and in lessons throughout the two days.
- They held meetings with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders and some staff, a group of three governors and a representative from the local authority's education development service.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's evaluation of its own work, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information on pupils' attainment and progress, and safeguarding documentation.
- The inspectors took account of 25 parental responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and eight responses to Ofsted's staff inspection questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Margaret Farrow, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Nick Whittaker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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