

Croft Academy

Croft Street, Walsall WS2 8JE

Inspection dates	14–15 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, while rising, remain too low. This is because, over time, pupils' progress has been hampered by variations in the quality of teaching, especially across key stage 2.
- Since the previous inspection there have been many changes of staff and this has restricted the pace of school improvement.
- Over time, teaching has not built carefully on pupils' existing knowledge and skills. This means that pupils have reached upper key stage 2 with gaps in their understanding in some subjects. These gaps prevent them from reaching the standards that they should.
- Currently, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply key literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful ways.
- In lessons, pupils get on with their work but some lack the confidence to express themselves or ask questions.
- Pupils' work is often untidy or careless and this causes them to make mistakes.
- The numerous changes in leadership have created uncertainty within the school community. Current leaders are providing stability and are capable and ambitious. They understand the school's position, but are still developing systems to gather detailed information about the school's work.

The school has the following strengths

- Provision in the early years is good. Children do well when they first start school.
- The support provided for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is commendable.
- Arrangements for keeping pupils safe at school work well. Pupils behave well and staff are attentive to pupils' and parents' welfare. Pastoral support is strong and responds quickly to needs.
- Phonics (letters and sounds) teaching in the early years and key stage 1 is effective.
- Leaders and governors have appropriate plans in place to improve teaching and raise standards. They have already made some tough decisions in order to bring about change for the better.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that:
 - teaching is planned at the right level for pupils' current level of understanding
 - pupils take care with their work so they do not make unnecessary mistakes
 - teachers check carefully how well pupils understand the work they are given in lessons and then make adjustments if necessary so the work is not too hard or too easy
 - staff continue to learn from the most effective teaching within the school, the federation and across the academy trust, and get the support they need to develop their practice.
- Continue to strengthen the impact of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the precision of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning
 - developing the school curriculum further so that pupils can practise and develop their key literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful ways.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the multi-academy trust has put new leaders in place. Together, an executive principal and principal lead a capable and ambitious team and there have been numerous improvements. In particular, the early years provision has been strengthened further, the quality of teaching is improving and standards in the younger year groups are rising. Nevertheless, leaders have yet to bring about a sustained improvement in standards in key stage 2.
- During this inspection, the two key senior leaders presented an articulate and aspirational vision for the future of the school. Other leaders and staff also voiced their belief and confidence in the school's current leadership, and explained that there was a strong sense of team spirit. Everyone on the staff knows what the school is aiming to achieve and feels that their contribution is valued and worthwhile. In short, there is a shared vision. At this point in time, however, there is still more to be done to improve the quality and accuracy of information that leaders gather in order to bring this ambitious vision to fruition.
- Specifically, while leaders have routines in place for checking on teaching and learning, some of the information they gather lacks precision. For example, some shortcomings in teachers' assessments of pupils' work or variance from school policy when planning pupils' future work had been missed by leaders. Consequently, their own evaluation of how much the school has improved since the previous inspection is not quite as well informed as it ought to be.
- Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are guided by worthy values that help them to understand and get along with others both now and in the future. However, pupils do not acquire all the key numeracy and literacy skills they need in order to make the most of future opportunities. Leaders are aware that the curriculum needs further development so that pupils can practise and develop the skills learned in one subject in another. Currently, pupils do not always understand the relevance of some of their lessons.
- Having said this, the curriculum does provide pupils with a breadth of experience and, increasingly, helps them to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the wider world. Pupils recently went on a trip to Wales, for example, where they learned about mountains and enjoyed the beach. Soon, pupils will be going on a train journey to visit a historical site. Within school, they take part in 'different days' when they are introduced to a day of themed activities that inject variety and an opportunity to try something new. They enjoy these activities and gain a lot from them. During this inspection, pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a whole-school entrepreneur week when they made and sold products and took decisions about how to spend the profits. This enthusiasm is something leaders are keen to develop across all areas of learning.
- The primary school sport funds are put to good use. The sport funding is used to employ specialist sport teachers who organise sports activities in school and at after-school clubs. Pupils also get the chance to take part in tournaments and some pupils act as sports leaders, whereby they use their skills to lead and teach other pupils. This recognition of talent helps to motivate pupils and builds self-esteem and respect for others. The pupil premium is also used appropriately but, so far, has had a limited impact on boosting academic standards.
- After taking on the school in 2012, the multi-academy trust was slow to get to grips with the changes needed at the school. Since the 2014 inspection, the trust has kept a closer eye on the school and introduced more rigorous accountability systems. It has provided some high-quality training and facilitated the sharing of effective practice. This is starting to pay off. Early years staff at Croft have provided guidance to other schools, and other staff are benefiting from training at local and national venues.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors ensure that statutory duties are met and have demonstrated the ability to make tough decisions when needs be. They understand the school's context very well. They are alert to the challenges it faces and have been involved in overseeing staff changes. Records from their meetings show that they do seek answers to their questions about standards and the quality of teaching. They also make visits to school to find out about teaching and learning and to check that safety measures are operating correctly.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. In fact, safeguarding is a strength of the school's work. Rigorous procedures for checking on the suitability of staff and visitors are in place and staff know what to do if they have a concern about a child. All records relating to staff and pupils are kept properly and securely. The work of the school's family support worker helps enormously with communication between home and school. This serves to ensure that information relating to pupils' safety and welfare is picked up quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved but a few weaknesses remain. In particular, some teaching does not build carefully on pupils' current level of understanding. In some classes, teachers plan lessons without checking what pupils need to learn. Within lessons, pupils do not always understand what they are doing or the purpose of the skills they are learning. This can cause them to become confused or to lack confidence in class.
- In recent times, there have been many changes of staff and, inevitably, this has disrupted the flow of teaching and learning, particularly in key stage 2. Staff arrangements have become more stable since September 2015, teaching is becoming more consistent and planning for progression across the school is more organised than it used to be. Consequently, progress has accelerated and standards are rising. Even so, the pitch of teaching is not always quite right because checks on learning lack precision.
- Sometimes, pupils are given the same task regardless of their different abilities so that some struggle while others cope quite easily. At other times, pupils understand what they need to do and get on with their work in an obedient and conscientious manner but do not seem to realise the purpose of the skills they are practising. When observed in class or spoken to by inspectors, for example, pupils could talk about what they had done but many could not explain what they had learned or why certain skills and knowledge were useful. This happens more in upper key stage 2 than elsewhere.
- There is some very effective teaching in the school and instances when pupils do apply the skills they have learned in meaningful and relevant ways. In key stage 1, for example, Year 2 pupils were seen applying what they had learned about persuasive language in order to persuade a teaching assistant to visit certain iconic landmarks in Britain. They engaged in animated discussion with eager excitement and the teacher was able to make accurate assessments of how well they understood and whether they could use the skills they had been taught the day before. In addition, this simple but effective activity helped to broaden their general knowledge and their awareness of life in other parts of our country.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is frequent and consistent and, in the main, helps pupils to move on in their learning. The standard of pupils' presentation of work in their books, however, is very variable. Inspectors came across several instances where pupils' careless presentation and recording of work caused them to make mistakes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- When evaluating this aspect of the school's work, inspectors found many strengths especially in the school's work to promote pupils' welfare. In this aspect there are features of exceptional practice and impact. Nevertheless, inspectors reached the judgement of requires improvement overall because it remains the case that too many pupils lack the confidence and resilience to make the most of their educational opportunities. In part, this is due to the disruptions to teaching and learning that have been a feature of older pupils' key stage 2 experience. Pupils themselves told inspectors that they felt they had been 'messed about' by the many changes, and inspection evidence lends some credence to this view. However, this is not the whole story. In lessons, teachers could still do more to listen to pupils' views and challenge and inspire them to apply their skills in creative, purposeful and interesting ways.
- As already stated, the school's attention to pupils' welfare cannot be faulted. Staff go out of their way to help pupils and their families. If a problem presents in school, staff members take steps to find out and understand what is happening at home. The family support worker and learning mentor, for instance, display a keen interest in pupils' backgrounds and do all they can to make pupils, parents and families aware of the support available at school or locally.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe at school is effective. Bumps and knocks do happen on the busy playground but these are attended to promptly and properly. Pupils are taught about how to manage everyday risks and display a very good understanding of how to stay safe online and what to do should bullying occur. Pupils and staff report that bullying can happen occasionally but all agree that it is unacceptable and not tolerated at school. When it has happened, it has been challenged and stopped.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors described school staff and leaders as approachable and friendly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct around the school, on the playground and in lessons is good. They understand the school rules and, most of the time, most pupils follow them. During this inspection, no poor behaviour was observed and school records and conversations with staff, pupils and parents did not highlight any concerns about pupils' behaviour.
- Attendance at school, which has been below average in the past, has risen. Last year it was close to average and, in the current academic year to date, it is on track to be in line with that seen in most other schools. A few pupils arrive late, but this is not a regular occurrence and the school's routines for checking on unexplained absence are efficient.
- Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and help others when they can. There are courteous relationships between pupils and staff, and classrooms are clean and tidy. School staff notice pupils' good behaviour and reward it. Pupils in all classes value the 'dojo' reward points they receive and show pride in belonging to house teams. All of this helps to promote high expectations and respect for others.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Academic standards at the end of key stage 2 have risen since the previous inspection but are still not good enough for the pupils at this school. In part, this is because of shortcomings in previous teaching so pupils have not acquired the key skills and knowledge they need. However, some current teaching still does not meet pupils' needs with sufficient precision and this is holding pupils back.
- There is no doubt that academic standards are on the up. In the early years, children make good progress and the progress of current pupils in key stage 1 is much more consistent than it used to be. Consequently, more and more pupils in Years 1 and 2 are reaching age-related expectations or above in reading, writing and mathematics. This is good news and indicative of the rising standards coming up through the younger year groups.
- In key stage 2, progress is more erratic. Some pupils are doing well, but a significant number are still not reaching the standard that they should by the end of Year 6. Last year's key stage 2 test results were better than the 2014 results, but were still some way below the national average. This year, assessment arrangements have changed so it is harder to make a direct comparison with previous years. However, about two thirds of pupils in Year 6 are working at age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics with one third below age-related expectations. Inspectors' checks on work in books and conversations with key stage 2 pupils revealed that many still have gaps in their knowledge and skills, and this is limiting their academic achievement.
- The teaching of phonics in the younger classes is effective. Year after year, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been close to the national figure. Pupils of all ages show an ability to sound out unfamiliar words and there are well-understood routines for reading in school. At times, pupils are given reading material that is too hard for them and rely on others to help them make sense of the words. This allows the capable readers to practise their comprehension skills but knocks the confidence of those who find reading difficult.
- Like many other pupils, the most able pupils make erratic progress. In some areas of learning, such as calculations, inspectors found examples of above-average standards. In other aspects, such as shape, data handling or written work, standards are lower. These pupils, especially in upper key stage 2, are hindered by a legacy of teaching that has not built up their key skills in different areas of learning. Currently, teachers are working hard to make up the lost ground but there is still more to do.

- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability receive increasingly effective support. The wide range of needs, some of which are quite complex, means that the rates of academic progress vary, often quite considerably, from one pupil to another. However, specific learning needs are identified early and appropriate support is put in place. Indeed, there is a well-organised programme of extra support which includes one-to-one or group teaching led by well-trained teaching assistants, counselling for emotional or behavioural needs, and expert input from a number of different visiting specialists. All of this helps to assist pupils' progress and their ability to make the most of school. The school's work in this area is a strength.
- More than half the pupils at the school are classed as disadvantaged. There is little difference between their achievement and that of others in the school. For both groups, academic standards are some way behind those of other pupils nationally. Having said this, it is worth noting the relatively high mobility in the school. Last year, for example, only 17 out of the 28 pupils who took the Year 6 tests in English and mathematics had been on the school roll throughout Years 5 and 6. Analysis of the results shows clearly that those pupils who had been at the school the longest did better than those who had recently arrived from elsewhere, particularly in mathematics.

Early years provision

is good

- The vast majority of children start in Nursery with a level of knowledge and skill below that typical for their age. In addition, many speak little or no English when they first come to school. They receive good-quality support and teaching that meets their needs, and soon settle into the school's routines. Consequently, they make good, and in some cases rapid, gains in their early learning.
- Historically, the early years part of the school has a track record of success that has been recognised by previous inspections. Since the 2014 inspection, the provision has strengthened further and the proportions of children reaching a good level of development before the start of key stage 1 have risen year after year. This year, it is 55%, which is still a bit below last year's national figure but represents considerable progress from children's starting points.
- This continual improvement has been driven by good leadership and effective teamwork. All staff demonstrate a thoughtful understanding of how young children learn and provide kind encouragement while setting high expectations for their conduct and manners. As a result, children behave well, learn to cooperate, and show interest in others and their learning.
- The classroom and outdoor environments are very well resourced with plenty of activities and equipment to keep children occupied productively. There are many opportunities for creative play and discovery in the different 'learning lab' areas. Outside, big equipment and well set out spaces prompt children to develop their physical skills and allow their imaginations to take flight. The class rabbit, Spot, is the centre of much attention and provides a focus for children to develop their caring skills and interest in life.
- The early years area is secure and supervision is good. Safety checks are carried out on a daily basis and staff training is up to date. In fact, staff from the early years provision at Croft Academy have provided training and guidance to staff from other settings. A pride and enjoyment of learning and in school life is clearly evident in this part of the school.

School details

Unique reference number	138420
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10012427

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Harper
Principal	Mark Davis
Executive principal	Paul Edgerton
Telephone number	01922 720689
Website	www.croft.walsall.sch.uk
Email address	postbox@croft.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 July 2014

Information about this school

- Croft Academy is similar in size to the average primary school. The number of pupils on roll has grown since the previous inspection.
- The vast majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and many speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at the school is above the national average. The term 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to describe those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority. These pupils receive additional support from pupil premium funding.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average.
- The school offers morning or afternoon early years provision for Nursery-age children and full-time early years provision for Reception-age children.
- In 2015, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Croft Academy is part of the Elliot Foundation Trust and is federated with Kings Rise and Rough Hay primary schools. An executive principal leads all three schools and a school principal is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of Croft Academy.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes of staff, including school leaders.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all year groups. Several of these observations were carried out alongside school leaders. Inspectors also attended a school assembly, examined pupils' work in books and on display, and considered school test and assessment information.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour, and the school's procedures, at the beginning and end of the school day, at lunch and breaktimes, and when pupils were moving about the school site.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, senior and middle leaders, three governors, and the regional director and chief executive officer from the multi-academy trust.
- By the end of the inspection, there were six recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and one written comment. Inspectors also took account of the school's own survey of parents' and staff views. Inspectors talked to some parents at school and also talked to a group of staff about what it is like to work at the school.
- A number of school documents were examined. These included information about pupils' achievement and evaluations of the school's performance. Records relating to governance, support from the multi-academy trust, staff performance management, behaviour, attendance, safety and safeguarding were also scrutinised. The school's website was also checked.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector
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Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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