

Croft Community School

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

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2017

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The headteacher has created a culture of high expectations and introduced systems to monitor and improve the school's performance. However, systems are too new in their implementation to have had the desired impact.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent across the school and between English and mathematics. Teachers do not always use the school's assessment information consistently to plan lessons or set targets to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Subject leaders check teachers' planning, and are involved in the moderation of pupils' outcomes. However, subject leadership is not sufficiently well developed to have had the necessary impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Performance management arrangements of staff are insufficiently rigorous. They do not precisely link teachers' targets to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.
- Leaders' plans for the use of pupil premium, sport premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding do not have precise outcome measures. This limits leaders' ability to evaluate fully the impact of their spending decisions.
- There have been a significant number of staff changes and a number of posts are filled by staff on short-term contracts. The new leadership team is not yet complete. Such factors have hampered the headteacher's actions to implement new systems and develop consistent practice across the school.

The school has the following strengths

- The review of governance following the last inspection has had a positive impact. It has resulted in a new group of governors with a clear understanding of their role in school improvement. Governors now hold the headteacher to account effectively.
- Pupils are well cared for and supported by a strong and committed staff team. Pupils' personal development and welfare are good, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively.
- Children in the early years provision make good progress as a result of a well-structured programme and learning environment.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to raise the achievement of all pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers use the school’s assessment information effectively to plan lessons that meet the needs of all learners
 - leaders and teachers use the school’s progress tracking information to set, and regularly review, challenging targets for the most able pupils
 - there is greater consistency between subjects and across key stages by identifying successful teaching and learning and sharing good practice across the school.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - developing the role of subject leaders so that they support the headteacher and senior leaders in their quest for school improvement by contributing to the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
 - improving the precision of performance management arrangements to ensure that all teachers and leaders are held to account for their pupils’ progress
 - evaluating the impact of changes to the curriculum to check whether these are having a positive impact on pupils’ progress, outcomes and behaviour
 - ensuring that the plans for the use of additional funding include precise improvement targets that enable leaders to accurately assess the impact of their spending decisions
 - taking urgent action to fill staff vacancies as quickly as possible.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers, including governors, have established a clear and ambitious vision for the school. The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas of weakness. He has introduced systems to monitor and track the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. However, these changes, alongside recent changes to the curriculum, have not, as yet, been embedded. As a result, pupils' progress, pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are variable across the school.
- Following a recent staffing restructure, the headteacher is establishing a new leadership team. This process is not yet complete. At the time of inspection, two middle leaders had not started. The vacancies in the leadership team are preventing the school from making the rapid progress necessary to improve pupils' outcomes. The significant number of staff changes over the last year, and the use of supply staff on short-term contracts, particularly in the primary department, have contributed to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.
- Subject leaders check teachers' planning, review pupils' work and moderate pupils' outcomes with teachers, including teachers in other special schools. However, the role of subject leaders is not fully developed. As a result, subject leaders do not have the necessary impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The headteacher has clarified to staff what is meant by 'good progress' when evaluating the progress pupils make. The headteacher and senior leaders assess pupils' progress against their starting points. However, teachers do not always use this assessment information to evaluate the impact of their work on pupils' learning and progress. Subject leaders do not use this information to challenge teachers when pupils are not making expected progress and teachers do not revise end-of-year targets when pupils are making better-than-expected progress.
- Teachers' performance management arrangements are insufficiently linked to the national teachers' standards. Performance management targets do not include outcomes which reflect teachers at different stages in their career, or the different responsibilities of teachers, middle and senior leaders.
- Leaders have used additional funding, such as pupil premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding and the sports premium, to improve the breadth of the curriculum and to provide individual support and interventions. For example, pupil premium funding is used to extend the curriculum through 'ready to learn' lessons, Year 7 catch-up funding is used to deliver interventions and the primary sports premium is used to develop pupils' water confidence and swimming abilities. However, leaders' evaluation of the impact of this funding is imprecise as spending plans do not include measurable improvement targets.
- The school's curriculum covers a wide range of subjects. Classroom learning is supported well by educational visits. For example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about their swimming lessons, football matches with other schools, a rock climbing trip and a recent visit to Beamish Museum. A good range of extra-curricular activities support pupils' personal development. Pupils are able to attend a range of after-school clubs, for

example drama, physical education (PE) and film clubs. There is a strong focus on PE and outdoor activities. Pupils value the climbing wall in the sports hall and the recently introduced programme of annual residential visits.

- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum as a result of an increase in the number of pupils with complex needs, including those who have an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis, that have joined the school. One outcome of the review has been the introduction from the beginning of term of daily 'ready to learn' lessons. The school has used the knowledge of a visiting occupational therapist to match pupils to appropriate lessons, such as sensory integration activities. Staff and pupils speak positively about these lessons and staff commented that there has been an improvement in pupils' behaviour. The impact of this change has yet to be evaluated in detail.
- Leaders have made changes to the key stage 4 curriculum to improve the outcomes for pupils. As a result, pupils now follow courses with a wider range of accreditations. Year 11 pupils now leave school with results that more accurately match their abilities and prepare them more successfully for post-16 education and training.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers for two key stage 4 pupils. Contact with the alternative providers confirmed that the pupils attend regularly, are making good progress and are being prepared effectively to move to post-16 education and training. The school contacts the alternative providers each morning to check the pupils' attendance.
- Staff speak with enthusiasm about their work with pupils, their commitment to the school and the support provided by the headteacher and senior leaders. They understand the challenges that the school faces and consider that the school has improved under the leadership of the headteacher. Staff speak with pride when they say that they are part of the 'Croft family'.
- The majority of parents speak positively about the school, the leadership of the headteacher and the support that staff provide for their son or daughter. They value the contact with staff, the small classes, daily communication through home-school diaries and that the pupils are known as individuals. One parent said: 'The staff are very knowledgeable and supportive of my child's needs. The pastoral care my child receives is amazing. [I] can't thank the staff enough.'

Governance of the school

- Following the last inspection, the local authority supported the school to review the work of the governing body. As a result of this review, governors have a clearer understanding of their role in supporting the school's improvement.
- There has been a substantial change in the membership of the governing body during the last 12 months. Governors have carried out a self-audit and, as a result, recruited governors with skills in finance and personnel management to improve their work.
- Governors have developed new systems and ways of working. Governors are developing links with subject leaders; they visit school regularly to meet senior and middle leaders and talk to staff and pupils. As a result of these actions, governors have improved their understanding the school's strengths and areas for development.
- Governors are committed to improving their skills through training. The headteacher organises an annual governors' conference where governors discuss a range of school

issues, for example school improvement, self-evaluation and pupils' progress.

- Governors hold the headteacher to account effectively. Governors challenge the headteacher about the school's performance, the impact of changes to the curriculum and trends in pupils' behaviour and attendance. Governors have set precise and measurable performance management targets for the headteacher.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are clear and confident about their responsibility to keep children safe, and who to talk to if they have any concerns. Staff value the annual training and regular refresher updates provided by leaders.
- Governors have established a link governor for safeguarding. Recruitment panels include members with safer recruitment training and all governors have completed online safeguarding training.
- Pupils are confident that they can talk to staff if they have any concerns and they say that they feel safe in school. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online in information technology lessons, through the personal, social, health, citizenship and economic (PSHCE) curriculum and in assemblies.
- Leaders understand the risks that pupils face in the local community, for example through radicalisation. They have promoted democracy and respect for others through the PSHCE curriculum and the work of the school council.
- Staff use an electronic system to record low-level concerns about pupils. This information is reviewed regularly throughout the day by senior leaders. Staff know that senior leaders are available to discuss concerns. Comprehensive records are stored securely and demonstrate that the school works effectively with other agencies to promote the safety and well-being of pupils.
- Leaders have ensured that detailed risk assessments are prepared for out-of-school visits. These are checked by a senior member of staff and then by the headteacher before the visit takes place. Individual risk assessments are prepared for those pupils with medical needs or who need support with their behaviour.
- Leaders work determinedly to improve attendance and reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions. School tracking systems record that attendance is improving and staff report that there has been an improvement in behaviour following the curriculum review. This improvement is evident in the school's behaviour records. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good. The headteacher and senior leaders have defined an understanding of what good progress means. This is not yet fully understood or used by all teachers. As a result, not all teachers use the school's

assessment information effectively to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils and to ensure that pupils make good progress from their varied starting points. This leads to a variation in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school and between subjects.

- There are differences in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics and English in the secondary department. For example, in a key stage 4 mathematics lesson pupils were set challenging work about probabilities. The teacher matched the work closely to pupils' different starting points and used questions effectively to check pupils' understanding. In another mathematics lesson, at the start of a new activity, the teacher checked pupils' knowledge and understanding, using increasingly challenging questions. As a result, pupils made good progress.
- In key stage 3 English lessons, the work did not match the starting points of all pupils. In one lesson, a reading and comprehension activity was pitched at the most able. Not all pupils were able to contribute to the lesson because the work was too hard for some, and therefore they did not make good progress. In another lesson on similes, work was not pitched at a level that matched the abilities of most of the pupils in the group. The teacher used questions which were not matched to the pupils' understanding. This slowed the pace of learning.
- The teaching of phonics is inconsistent across the school. Where progress is good, teachers have high expectations, understand what good progress means, and use assessment systems effectively. In some lessons, teachers do use materials and activities which engage pupils' interest but do not have a clear understanding of the teaching of phonics and its assessment.
- Teachers provide written feedback in pupils' workbooks. Teachers provide verbal feedback and praise in lessons, celebrating pupils' success. In lessons where pupils make good progress, work is closely matched to pupils' starting points and teachers use questions effectively to check and develop pupils' understanding.
- Leaders are clear about the actions that they need to take to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, leaders' actions have been frustrated as a result of a period of high staff turnover, a significant number of teachers and teaching assistants on temporary contracts, and two new leadership posts not being filled at the time of the inspection.
- Pupils, staff and parents welcome the recent introduction of 'ready to learn' lessons. The contribution of the school's occupational therapist is important in ensuring that these preparatory activities closely match pupils' needs. Staff report that this change has had a positive impact upon the attitude and behaviour of pupils. Leaders are working with staff and pupils to evaluate the impact of this change to the curriculum.
- The relationship between staff and pupils is strong and respectful. Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons. On the few occasions when pupils are distracted from learning, they are supported by staff who effectively redirect pupils to the lesson so that they return to learning quickly.
- Staff use picture symbols and 'now and next' prompts effectively and consistently across the school. Picture symbols are used to help pupils understand the timetable, teachers' writing and lesson objectives. This helps pupils with emerging reading skills to understand the work in lessons. Staff use 'now and next' prompts to help pupils who

have an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis to understand the structure of the day. As a result, staff make learning accessible to all pupils.

- An increasing number of pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis attend school. Leaders have organised class groups in both the primary and secondary departments specifically for these pupils. Staff organise teaching and learning effectively to meet the needs of the pupils. For example, pupils use individual work stations to help them concentrate and staff use symbols to help pupils understand the structure of lessons and the school day.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school works effectively to promote pupils' personal development and welfare.
- Staff have reviewed the arrangements for pupils arriving at school. Staff meet and greet pupils, are aware of the pupils that need additional support for the transition into school, and record pupils that are absent. As a result, pupils start the school day safely and in an orderly manner.
- Staff know pupils well and provide sensitive care and support. The school works closely with other agencies to improve the outcomes for children and their families.
- Pupils are confident that staff keep them safe. The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, consider that their child is happy, safe and well looked after at the school.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop responsibility. Each class has a representative on the school council which, in partnership with the school's leadership team, has made changes to the curriculum. The school's head boy and girl show visitors around the school.
- Leaders have recently established the Bridge provision in school. Pupils attend the Bridge for intervention support in literacy and numeracy, for counselling support and to discuss welfare concerns. Pupils are able to request that they attend the Bridge for support.
- The recently introduced 'ready to learn' sessions include work on emotions and anger management. An inspector observed an effective session with three key stage 4 pupils who were discussing how they would react to different situations.
- Pupils are taught to how to stay safe when using the internet. This is reinforced in lessons and school assemblies.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour in class is good. Staff know the pupils very well and support them skilfully. Occasionally, in lessons, pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning falters; staff use well thought out and consistent strategies to manage pupils' behaviour and to ensure that pupils return to learning quickly.
- Staff are aware that when some pupils arrive at school they may need additional

support. Staff are sensitive to the needs of these pupils and provide this support effectively, enabling pupils to join lessons quickly and successfully.

- Behaviour incidents are recorded in detail on a new behaviour recording programme. Where there are concerns, the behaviour of a small number of pupils is managed effectively through an individual behaviour management plan. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils that have fixed-term exclusions. No pupils are permanently excluded. Staff challenge poor behaviour and pupils respond effectively to this support and guidance.
- Pupils say that they enjoy school, they speak positively about their lessons and work, visits and trips. Pupils attend school regularly.
- Pupils say that they enjoy the new 'ready to learn' lessons. Pupils' behaviour around school, in the corridors and at lunchtime is good. Pupils sit together at lunchtime and talk to their friends and staff. The 'ready to learn' lessons help some pupils to manage their behaviour. The work of the occupational therapist has been important in designing these activities. Staff have not yet evaluated the impact of this change to the curriculum.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Progress across the school varies across subjects and key stages. Progress in key stage 3 is not as strong as in other areas of school.
- Outcomes in English are not as consistently strong as they are in mathematics. This is a result of the good leadership in mathematics. Teachers' subject knowledge in English is not as good.
- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is tracked and progress information collected each term. This information indicates that all groups of pupils, including boys and girls, those who are disadvantaged and those who speak English as an additional language, make similar progress from their starting points. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils.
- Scrutiny of the work in pupils' books includes assessment grids and learning objectives for each piece of work. The use of photographs, with staff comments, to record pupils' achievements is effective for those pupils who are unable to record their work in books.
- A review of the key stage 4 curriculum has resulted in the introduction of a broader range of courses and examinations. Pupils study courses in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, art, science, food technology, PE and life skills. Some of these courses are offered at GCSE and others at entry level. As a result, every pupil achieves an award for their learning.
- All Year 11 pupils move on successfully to post-16 education and training. The school supports pupils to prepare for leaving school with specialist careers advice and taster days at the local further education college.

Early years provision

Good

- The progress of the small number of children in the school's early years provision is good. The leadership of a senior member of staff has resulted in a well-structured learning environment, with clear routines and high expectations. The classroom and outside play area provide a wide range of stimulating learning activities that successfully promote children's academic, social and physical development. Staff use a range of communication strategies, including the use of symbols, to support children with a diverse range of needs. Detailed portfolios record children's progress sometimes using photographic evidence. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

School details

Unique reference number	114340
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10036566

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

Type of school	Special school
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katrina Culyer
Headteacher	Simon Adams
Telephone number	01207 234547
Website	www.croftcommunityschool.co.uk
Email address	croftcommunity@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	20 October 2015

Information about this school

- Croft Community School is a maintained special school for pupils who have cognition and learning difficulties (moderate learning difficulties) and pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties, including pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis. A small proportion of pupils have social and emotional or mental health needs. A small number of pupils have severe learning difficulties.
- The headteacher took up his post in September 2015, at the same time that the school moved into its current premises.
- The work of the governing body was reviewed following the last inspection. All members of the governing body have been appointed in the last 12 months.
- There is an increasing number of pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis. As a result, leaders are developing the provision for these pupils.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan.

- The proportion of pupils that are disadvantaged, and known to be entitled to pupil premium funding, is well above the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those that speak English as an additional language are well below the national average.
- There are significantly more boys than girls. There are many more pupils in the secondary department than in the primary department. A very small number of pupils attend the school's early years provision.
- The school uses alternative provision for two key stage 4 pupils.
- At the time of its last inspection in October 2015, the school was judged to require improvement.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 10 lessons. Lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and members of the school's senior leadership team.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, at lunchtime and breaktime and observed pupils arriving and leaving school on both days. Inspectors spoke formally to a group of pupils on day one.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher; senior and middle leaders; a range of staff, including support staff; governors and a representative of the local authority's school improvement service.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents including the school's assessment and tracking records, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, records relating to the quality of teaching and learning, teachers' performance management records and the evaluation of the use of additional funding. Inspectors also reviewed the school's records relating to safeguarding, pupil attendance and behaviour and checked the risk assessments for educational visits and pupils with medical needs.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and looked at work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the beginning and end of the school day and to four parents by telephone. Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. Inspectors took account of the views of pupils and staff.

Inspection team

George Gilmore, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tudor Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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