

Inspection of a good school: Cramlington Hillcrest School

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

Inspection dates: 30 November and 1 December 2022

Outcome

Cramlington Hillcrest School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils develop their emotional regulation and communication skills well through the school's curriculum. Staff work closely with parents and carers. They are ambitious for pupils to 'aim high' and to 'dream, believe and achieve'. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils. Staff care for pupils and treat them with respect. Relationships are positive.

Staff make sure that pupils can access the curriculum. Classes are small. Staff know pupils well. There is a holistic approach. Teachers plan learning to meet pupils' individual education, health and care plan (EHC plan) requirements. Staff work closely with parents and external agencies to support pupils.

Pupils feel safe in the school. Established routines help them to feel safe. Pupils know adults they can trust and go to when worried. Staff make sure that pupils can use suitable communication tools independently. Pupils can explain their needs to adults and use worry boxes or talk to 'worry monsters' when needed.

Pupils' behaviour is generally good. Skilled staff know what to do to meet pupils' complex needs. Leaders make sure that therapeutic support is available to pupils to help them to manage and understand their behaviour. Most pupils think that staff sort out incidents of bullying or poor behaviour appropriately.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have improved the curriculum since the last inspection. Curriculum content is clearly ordered. Pupils develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Teachers make sure that learning is interesting. Lessons are precise and focused. Extra adult support and resources help pupils to engage in learning. For example, in mathematics, practical resources support pupils' mathematical understanding well. Teachers plan lessons to build pupils' learning in logical steps. Pupils can revisit their learning. Teachers encourage them to recall their learning to solve problems.

Teachers prioritise the development of pupils' speech, language and communication skills. In English, staff use a variety of communication tools. These include signing and the use of symbols to help pupils to communicate and engage in lessons. Lessons align well with the targets identified in pupils' individual EHC plans.

Most pupils have complex social and emotional needs. Leaders ensure that external expert advice and support are available to staff and pupils. Speech and language therapists and occupational therapists work with pupils. They help them to develop their communication skills. They support their mental health and welfare. They provide teachers with advice to identify any potential triggers for pupils' behaviour.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils access a diverse range of texts. Teachers encourage pupils to read for different purposes, including for pleasure. Yet, leaders have recognised that the teaching of phonics could be more effective in meeting pupils' specific needs. There are some inconsistencies in the way different staff teach phonics. A new approach is being implemented. Training for all staff is to take place in the coming weeks.

Teachers check frequently what pupils know and can remember in different subjects. However, the steps of knowledge that pupils learn are not always clearly identified in assessments. Assessments focus on skills rather than the knowledge gained. This makes it difficult for leaders to have an accurate overview of the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority. Pupils debate relevant issues. For example, recent work on human rights led them to reflect on issues related to protected characteristics, including those related to race and sexual orientation. The police crime reduction team work with pupils on safeguarding projects. They encourage pupils to reflect on the consequences of actions that may put people at risk. Pupils are proud to represent different opinions as part of the school council. There is a range of extra-curricular activities for pupils to enjoy at lunchtimes. These are well attended. Pupils can take part in a variety of experiences which develop their cultural capital and enhance their learning. They learn about their options for further education. They receive independent advice and guidance about potential career prospects.

Students in the sixth form take part in work experience opportunities. They develop an appropriate set of skills that they can apply in other areas of life. For example, students are currently setting up their own café in school. They use the knowledge and skills they get from their work experience in a local food bank to support the development of this project.

Most staff enjoy working at the school. They appreciate that leaders are considerate of their welfare and workload. Many appreciate the training and coaching provided by leaders to support them to meet pupils' needs.

Many parents are supportive of the school. A typical comment was that the school is 'rare in this day and age. It is a school which nurtures its pupils who, through no fault of their own, find themselves with challenges'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders train staff to ensure that they are aware of the signs that could point to a child being at risk. The curriculum helps pupils to learn and understand the ways that they can keep themselves safe. They know how to report their concerns to a trusted adult and are confident to do so. Leaders act quickly to respond to concerns raised by pupils or staff. They work in partnership with external agencies to get families the support they need. Leaders know pupils and parents well. They make frequent checks on the welfare of vulnerable pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff have not been trained to use a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Leaders recognise that as a result, not all staff have the knowledge they need to provide effective support to pupils who are at the early stages of learning how to read. Leaders should ensure that all staff across all key stages are trained to teach phonics to a high standard.
- The key knowledge that pupils need to know and remember is outlined in curriculum planning. However, this knowledge is not always clearly represented in whole-school assessments. Subject leaders do not have an accurate picture of the precise knowledge that pupils acquire in their curriculum subject area. Senior leaders should ensure that assessments clearly identify the knowledge that pupils learn so that subject leaders have a good understanding of the progress pupils are making and teachers can use assessment data to plan pupils' next steps more effectively.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to

find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	122383
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10211332
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Joyce Reid
Headteacher	Andrea Mead
Website	www.hillcrest.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 January and 1 February 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Most staff working in the school have been appointed since the last inspection.
- The school currently uses two alternative providers. Both providers are operating as unregistered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, school business manager and lead practitioner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and personal, social and

health education. Inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some teachers, met with some pupils to consider their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and a school improvement partner commissioner by the local authority to support the school.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the school's policies and procedures, met with the designated safeguarding leads and spoke with pupils and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. The responses to Ofsted's questionnaires were taken into account.

Inspection team

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Mills

His Majesty's Inspector

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