

Croft Community School

Address: Greencroft Road End, Annfield Plain, Stanley, DH9 8PR

Unique reference number (URN): 114340

Inspection report: 13 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	● ● ●
Needs attention	● ● ●
Urgent improvement	

✔ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders understand the barriers that some pupils face in attending school regularly. Some pupils have had negative experiences of education prior to joining Croft Community School. Leaders are creative in their approach to supporting pupils who are persistently absent from school. They work closely with multi-agency partners in removing barriers to pupils' attendance. Pupils, and their families, value the support that they receive.

Pupils are eager to impress and conduct themselves very well in school. Leaders have created a culture where staff know, support and care for pupils. Relationships are well established and built on mutual respect. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Staff uphold these expectations consistently. Leaders have established a safe, calm and respectful environment. Bullying is rare at Croft Community School and is managed effectively. Derogatory language is not tolerated, and pupils are taught how to be kind and respectful of their peers and staff. Suspensions are used rarely and appropriately.

Pupils learn to use a variety of strategies to manage their own emotions, including use of the trampettes, chew toys and balls. Staff are knowledgeable and have an in-depth understanding of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils have access to additional support through 'The Hub', where staff are well trained to provide therapeutic interventions.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders know their pupils well. They accurately assess the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that they quickly receive the support that they need. Pupils known to social care, including those in care, are supported well. Leaders work closely with multi-agency partners to ensure that pupils' needs are met.

Staff strive to meet the needs of each pupil. This includes the use of high-quality pastoral care and support. Suitable adaptations to reduce barriers to wellbeing are made for pupils. This helps to ensure that pupils are fully integrated into the school community. They enjoy social time activities to support physical development. Supported by knowledgeable staff, they enjoy activities such as bouncing on trampettes and sensory circuits.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the barriers pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, face in their learning. They use additional funding to invest in successful interventions, such as a targeted and appropriate reading programme. Typically, these interventions are effective in supporting pupils to make progress from their starting points. However, leaders do not ensure that strategies to reduce barriers to learning for pupils are used consistently effectively.

Leaders have suitable oversight of alternative provision. They use it in the best interests of pupils, with the purpose of supporting them to re-engage with education.

Pupils benefit from a well-thought-through and ordered personal development programme that builds on their knowledge over time. However, in some lessons, the tasks set lack ambition, which limits opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge.

Pupils develop an understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including online. They learn about healthy relationships at an age-appropriate level. Pupils benefit from highly effective pastoral support. They know where to go to access support. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, highly value opportunities to engage in meaningful enrichment linked to their interests, such as hair and beauty and gardening.

Pupils are supported to access structured activities during lunchtimes. Pupils socialise with their peers and actively engage with the school community. Pupils have valuable opportunities to learn about respect and tolerance. The 'Younique' group deliver effective drop down days to celebrate diversity. Examples of recent celebrations include the international day of peaceful coexistence. Pupils enjoy expressing these values through art and music.

The careers programme is well established and 'careers trees' carefully link careers to subject areas. Leaders have developed effective links with local providers and colleges. Many pupils benefit from thoughtful work experience placements. Older pupils have mock interviews and receive appropriate careers advice, meaning they are well prepared for their next steps. Pupils move on to suitable destinations to continue with their education and training or enter employment. They are well prepared for adulthood and independent living.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils do not consistently develop the depth of knowledge and skills that they need across subjects. In some lessons, learning activities provided do not fully match the ambition of the curriculum. This means that pupils do not get enough chances to practise new learning, which limits what they achieve. Gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills are not always identified or addressed. This slows their progress in some subjects.

In lessons where teaching is more effective, pupils develop their most important, key knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Some pupils also receive extra support. This helps them to catch up with their peers. However, because teaching is not consistent across the school, pupils do not develop these important skills quickly enough.

Leaders think carefully about pupils' next steps when planning the key stage 4 curriculum. Their decisions support pupils to move confidently into further education or training. Leaders are ambitious for pupils. They ensure that pupils leave school with recognised qualifications.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

There are inconsistencies in the teaching of curriculums across the school. Assessment is not used consistently well to identify what pupils already know. In some lessons, tasks are not well matched to what pupils know and can do. For example, although pupils are taught ambitious and rich vocabulary, teachers do not always check whether pupils understand the meaning of new words.

Leaders have identified appropriate adaptations for supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. At times, some pupils are not supported well enough to work towards their education, health and care plan outcomes in lessons. This limits the progress those pupils make from their starting points.

Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are taught well through the letters and sounds that phonics represent. Pupils develop a love of reading. Many pupils choose to read for pleasure. The pre-formal curriculum is carefully designed to meet the individual needs of pupils. In this area, assessment is carefully used to monitor progress. As a result, pupils successfully develop their foundations in communication and language. The formal curriculum is well ordered so that pupils can learn more over time. It is intended to give pupils the knowledge that they need to achieve well.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

The school has recently experienced changes to the roles and responsibilities of leaders and to governance arrangements following its move from a federation. The governing body has recently been elected and is in its infancy. These factors have limited the effectiveness and impact of leaders' school improvement work. Leaders' actions to bring about improvements to the curriculum and to teaching are largely focused on the right areas but have not led to improvement quickly enough. As a result, pupils do not make the progress that they should make in lessons and over time. Learning from the professional development programme that staff receive has not been embedded. This has limited its impact on improving the quality of provision for pupils.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the context of their school. Despite the additional challenge of pupil numbers increasing, they act thoughtfully and creatively to break down barriers that their pupils face. Leaders make decisions in the best interests of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Governors are passionate about the school. They too understand its context and barriers. Governors understand the ethos and direction of the school and ensure that statutory duties are met. They have clear plans to hold leaders to account. However, these plans are in their infancy. Governors are in the process of receiving training in their relevant areas of responsibility to increase their strategic oversight.

Staff are proud to work at Croft Community School. They speak highly of the support that they receive from leaders. Leaders carefully consider staff wellbeing and workload in their decision-making. Leaders engage well with parents and carers. Parents are highly complimentary of the school and the positive impact that staff's care and support has on pupils.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are safe and happy at Croft Community School. Pupils enjoy learning and are motivated to do well. However, the quality of teaching that pupils experience is variable. In some lessons, learning is not well matched or adapted to meet pupils' needs. Misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning are not identified or addressed quickly enough. This limits the progress that pupils make and prevents them from achieving all that they could.

Pupils are part of a kind and caring school community. They benefit from highly effective pastoral care and support from staff. Staff know pupils well, and relationships are secure and established. The school environment is calm and orderly, and pupils are kind to each other. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to take part in enrichment activities. They are encouraged to explore their hobbies and interests. For example, many pupils choose to attend extra-curricular clubs, such as dungeons and dragons and horse riding. Older pupils benefit from meaningful opportunities to explore the world of work.

Pupils conduct themselves very well. They are taught how to manage their own emotions and use these skills effectively. Staff model positive behaviour, and pupils respond with respect. Bullying is rare and dealt with appropriately. Pupils typically attend well. Leaders are successful in supporting pupils who are, or have been, persistently absent from school.

Diversity is celebrated at Croft Community School. Pupils learn how to respect differences. Pupils plan key events linked to anti-racism and pride. They learn core life skills linked to independent living, such as how to use a knife and fork correctly and how to prepare healthy meals. Pupils are well prepared for adulthood when they leave school.

Next steps

- Leaders should further improve their knowledge and skills to inform their strategic oversight of the school's work so that they are better placed to bring about swift, effective improvement, particularly with regards to pupils' experiences in learning and their achievement.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff deliver curriculums in line with leaders' expectations, in particular in their use of assessment to inform their design of lessons, including in subjects relating to personal development. This is to ensure that pupils are more consistently supported to develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and achieve all that they can.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff consider the range of individual needs, including those outlined in pupils' education, health and care plans, when making reasonable adjustments and adaptations to the curriculum so that learning is well matched to pupils' next steps.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Andrea Elizabeth English.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, a range of school leaders, members of teaching and non-teaching staff and several groups of pupils during the inspection. The lead inspector met with governors, including the chair of governors, and spoke with the school's improvement partner.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with an education, health and care plan for specific learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, autism spectrum disorder, moderate learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties.

The school makes use of 4 alternative provisions that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection, as it has left a federation of schools. The school has recently elected a new governing body.

Headteacher: Lee Davis

Lead inspector:

Nikki Heron, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Catherine Beard, Ofsted Inspector

Hannah Millett, His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Julie Millard, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.



This data is from 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

287

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

316

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

62.02%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

100.00%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty, SLD - Severe Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	93%	91%	Not available
2022 leavers (revised)	75%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	75%	94%	Not available

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	13.0%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	14.5%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	12.6%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	33.4%	21.9%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	37.0%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	33.0%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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