



Cressex Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110500
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288693
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Holmer's Lane
School category	Community		High Wycombe
Age range of pupils	11–18		HP12 4QA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01494 437729
Number on roll (school)	663	Fax number	01494 461502
Number on roll (6th form)	74		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr K Simmons
		Headteacher	Mr P Walker (Acting Head)
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	10–11 January 2007	288693

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cressex Community School is a smaller than average school with a small sixth form. It serves a mixed socio-economic area in a county where there is a selective authority. The school is a culturally diverse community, with 70% of pupils coming from a Pakistani background and about 18% from a White British background. About two thirds use English as an additional language. The local area is one of significant social and economic deprivation. Eligibility for free school meals is well above the national average. Attainment of the pupils when they join the school is well below the national average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Since the previous inspection in October 2001 the school has made satisfactory progress. During the past two years the school has had two substantive head teachers and two acting head teachers. Despite the fluctuations in staffing at various management levels, staff exhibit a sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the school under the present leadership. This has been bolstered by the announcement of funding for a rebuild in 2009.

Behaviour of pupils in lessons is satisfactory and good around the school. They feel safe and show respect to adults and each other. The small amount of poor behaviour is dealt with quickly and the rate of exclusions is now low. Although attendance is increasing, it is still too low and the school is working systematically for further improvement.

Teaching is satisfactory with some examples of good practice. The school is developing effective procedures to raise the quality of teaching and learning but this is being hindered by the amount of supply teaching that is required. Although standards are low, they are rising due to the support strategies enabled by excellent data analysis, and pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils in the main school have access to a satisfactory range of subjects although there is no opportunity for work-related learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school's self evaluation recognises the issues that need addressing. The subsequent action plan is rigorous and robust although implementation is slow and policies are not applied consistently. Links with parents are not strong but parents and carers are becoming increasingly more involved and one parent commented, 'There has been a marked improvement in the management, ethos and expectations within the school.' Productive links with the community are increasing and pupils now have confidence that they can do well at Cressex. The reputation of the school deservedly is improving.

Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in respect of the management and curriculum of the sixth form is inadequate. Before its next inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying this weakness.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The school judges the sixth form to be inadequate. On the basis of scrutiny of data, lesson observations and discussions with staff and students, the inspectors agree with this judgement. Teaching is satisfactory with some examples of good practice. However, the standards achieved in lessons are often too low. The curriculum lacks breadth and so too few pupils are attracted to, or retained in the sixth form. Although there are some community based activities, there are few opportunities for sixth form students to take part in additional activities such as competitive sports, trips and visits. However,

students are loyal to the school and speak positively about their teachers. There is no head of the sixth form and the head of Year 12 is also covering the long term absence of the head of Year 13. Consequently, issues on management and curriculum identified in the local authority report in February 2006 have not been addressed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all levels of management are effective and apply school policies and procedures consistently.
- Raise attainment at all levels of national testing.
- Reduce the dependency on supply teachers to raise the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory but standards are low. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are much lower than in most schools. By the end of Year 11, they make satisfactory progress. In 2005, Year 9 pupils made outstanding progress due mainly to the support strategies the school adopted for that key stage. However, school data for 2006 show that progress at Key Stage 3 slowed and is now satisfactory. Attainment in Year 9 remains significantly below the national average.

Pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 was significantly lower than average in 2005, although satisfactory for mathematics and English. In 2006 the number of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C increased to 41%, the highest proportion the school has ever obtained although still significantly below the national average. This was due to the good practice from Key Stage 3 being adopted for Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five passes at grades A* to G is significantly above average and all pupils achieved at least one entry level qualification.

In 2005 boys with low attainment on entry made significantly good progress. However, pupils from Pakistani backgrounds made significantly less progress than expected in Years 10 to 11, although school data for 2006 show that progress for this group is now satisfactory. Due to the low standards with which the pupils enter the sixth form, the attainment of most students is below the national average, although the achievements of most pupils are satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Pupils speak politely and enthusiastically to visitors and the school has a relaxed and convivial atmosphere.

Behaviour around the school is good and pupils from different races and nationalities mix easily and effortlessly. Attendance is below the national average but improving.

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Inconsistencies in the implementation of school policies mean that pupils are not always clear what is expected of them. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme has had insufficient impact in developing pupils' social skills. Pupils enjoy coming to school and report that they have good relationships with their teachers. The majority enjoy their lessons, although this varies between subjects. Opportunities are provided for pupils to make a positive contribution to the community, for example in assisting at sports competitions for local primary schools. However, these opportunities are not yet available for all pupils. Sixth form students are involved in enrichment activities within the school and in the local community, such as organising Eid celebrations, but there is little opportunity for trips and visits, and competitive sporting activities.

Pupils increasingly adopt healthy lifestyles. Food in the canteen has been improved and pupils are aware of the importance of taking regular exercise, although take up of the broad range of sports offered in the school is low. Few opportunities exist for pupils to acquire workplace skills and the school has rightly prioritised this as an area for development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, lessons observed ranged from good to inadequate. The recording and analysis of pupils' progress provide teachers with a very good range of information. This is used with increasing effectiveness to raise teachers' expectations about what pupils can achieve. In some departments the data has been used exceptionally well to make appropriate additional provision for higher achieving pupils. While the school endeavours to arrange suitable cover when teaching staff are not in school, it is not always successful and this disrupts the pupils' learning and the progress that they make. There was little evidence of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support teaching although an example of good practice was seen in a mathematics lesson.

In some lessons, teachers had good subject knowledge and high expectations of behaviour and what pupils could achieve. Lessons were planned well and used a range of challenging activities that allowed pupils to practise new skills. Helpful oral and written feedback enabled pupils to improve the quality of their work. This was not consistent practice in all lessons. At times, inappropriate behaviour was tolerated, lessons plans were too vague and too little was expected of pupils, resulting in work of a very low standard being accepted. In a few lessons boys were seen to dominate the teachers' time and girls were often passive.

Some parents commented, with good reason, on the lack of consistency in applying the school's policies and procedures, for example with regard to setting homework and marking work. These inconsistencies confuse pupils and make it more difficult for newer members of staff to establish good working practices.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school but inadequate in the sixth form. Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum across Years 7-9 and all statutory requirements are met. The school has introduced drama as a new subject and this is proving popular with pupils. The school has identified opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills as a priority across subjects but as yet there is too little impact on pupils' achievement. A revised PSHE programme has recently been introduced, alongside dedicated citizenship lessons. As yet, it is too early to judge the impact of these new initiatives.

In Years 10 and; 11, all pupils follow a core curriculum and there is an effective options system that allows pupils to choose up to four subjects. Vocational subjects including health and social care and business studies have been introduced successfully. There is currently no provision for work-related learning which adversely limits some pupils' achievements.

The 6th form curriculum lacks appropriate breadth, restricting pupils' choice and opportunity. Poor initial advice and guidance lead to too many students failing to complete their courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory in the main school but inadequate in the sixth form. Staff care about the welfare of their pupils and suitable procedures are in place to promote health and safety. Improvements in the quality of guidance have enabled more pupils to achieve challenging goals this year but in lessons there is too much variation in the amount of feedback that pupils receive. The guidance of pupils onto relevant GCSE courses is good. However the guidance pupils receive regarding entry to the sixth form and future careers is ineffective.

Pupils feel safe and reasonably well cared for in school. They report that the school takes bullying seriously and are confident that adults and prefects would provide appropriate and immediate support if they needed help with such matters.

The newly appointed Head of Learning Support has made an excellent start in improving provision and ensuring that policies are applied consistently across the school. Pupils benefit from the additional support provided by a range of external agencies. For example, the local police constable and the representatives of the Wycombe Race

Equality Council, who visit the school regularly, provide specific advice and guidance to pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory but are inadequate in the sixth form. The Local Authority (LA) has supported the school well through a turbulent period and the school has made good progress in raising standards and improving behaviour over the last two years.

Senior leaders are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the school's self evaluation is thorough and accurate. A detailed action plan has been produced but to date its implementation has been too slow. Governors have identified and agreed key areas for improvement. The acting headteacher is demonstrating high quality leadership and this is recognised by staff, governors and the LA. However, there is some uncertainty about individual roles and responsibilities. Some staff have taken part in management training in order to develop their roles.

Senior leaders and governors have not yet developed a sustainable strategy to recruit and retain staff. High staff turnover has led to the inconsistent application of the school's policies and procedures and has caused disruption to pupils' learning. Strategies have been introduced to improve the quality of provision and there is evidence that these are beginning to have a positive impact. As a consequence, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

The governing body meets the school's statutory responsibilities. The deployment of resources is satisfactory and the school provides satisfactory value for money. Although the accommodation is unsatisfactory and not conducive to learning, the staff and governors work hard to make the school a safe environment.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	4

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff and visiting lessons. Many of you told us how the good relationships between you and the staff meant that you enjoyed school and felt safe there.

We judged your school to be providing you with a satisfactory education. In conversations with us, you described how the school was changing for the better.

We were impressed by:

- how much progress you make
- your attitude to learning and the way you treat each other with respect
- the way the school is led by the senior staff
- how the school tracks your progress in school and works hard to ensure you receive appropriate support to achieve.

To make your school even better we think it needs to:

- continue to improve results in national assessments and exams
- apply school policies and procedures, such as the setting and marking of homework, consistently
- increase the amount of good or better teaching
- develop broader and well managed sixth form provision.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have got plans to do it. We believe that if you attend well and help the school put in place these plans, and our recommendations for improvement, then standards will rise. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Nigel Fletcher
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools