

Crosshill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119858
Local Authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	313432
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Caroline Broomhead HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roger Harling
Headteacher	Mr Mike Hatch
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Shadsworth Road Blackburn Lancashire BB1 2HR
Telephone number	01254 667713
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Crosshill Special School has 120 places for students aged 11 to 16 who experience moderate learning difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational need. Many students have additional educational, behavioural or health needs. Of the 75 on roll, two thirds are boys, three quarters are White British and the remainder are of Asian heritage. A small number of students are in the care of the local authority. Half of students are entitled to free school meals. The school has had specialist technology school status since 1999. Following the outcome of recent reorganisation proposals in the local authority, the school's future is now more secure.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Crosshill is a good school with many strengths. It enjoys a good reputation locally and nationally as an open and welcoming school which very successfully promotes inclusive practice for students who experience difficulties with learning and behaviour. The headteacher's vision for the role of Crosshill and other special schools has been at the heart of this success.

As a specialist technology college, the school has established excellent provision for information, communication and technology (ICT). The e-learning centre is used regularly by the local community for training and conferences. Strong partnerships have been forged with local schools which encourage the sharing of expertise and facilities. A particular strength of the school is its commitment to the professional development of its staff. All this has had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievements across the school.

As a result of the outstanding teaching and care, guidance and support, the students make good progress in their learning and personal development. Their behaviour in and around the school is good and most students enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. The curriculum is outstanding. At Key Stage 4, it has been extended to provide an excellent range of courses which the students can choose from. Many of the Year 11 students who left in the summer achieved extremely good results on their GCSE and Entry Level courses given their starting points on entry to the school.

The school is well led and managed. Careful attention is paid to safeguarding students' welfare. Senior managers and teachers know the students well and ensure that individual education programmes are carefully tailored to match their needs and interests. Arrangements for assessing students' work and tracking their progress have improved and are now good, particularly in Key Stage 4. However, information about students' performance and attendance is not used as well as it could be to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness. The school has a fragmented approach to school improvement which is reflected in the different, and in some aspects unrelated, action plans which exist. This, combined with recent staffing changes and staff absences, slowed the school's pace of improvement. However, these changes have been well managed and the school has good expertise and capacity for improving further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of students' performance and attendance data to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work.
- Develop a coherent approach to whole school improvement which identifies key priorities and makes clear how these are to be achieved in the short, medium and long term.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All the students experience difficulties with learning and their standards of attainment on entry to the school are well below the national average. The school very effectively identifies their educational needs and puts in place individual learning programmes which include suitably challenging targets. Most students settle quickly into school and go on to make at least good progress in their learning. As a result of significant developments in the curriculum at Key Stage 4, the students who left in the summer of 2007 achieved very well in a wide range of nationally recognised qualifications aligned to their ability and aptitude. This group of 22 students between

them achieved 33 GCSE passes ranging from grade D to G, a significant increase on previous years. In addition, students successfully achieved passes in BTEC and Entry Level certificates. Achievement in ICT is outstanding across the school. Other achievements include awards for ASDAN Life Skills and Transition Challenge and Duke of Edinburgh bronze awards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They move around the school sensibly, treating each other, staff and visitors with courtesy and respect. They know who to go to if they need help and are confident that staff listen to and act upon their concerns. Behaviour in lessons is usually good, though some students with more complex needs find it difficult to remain attentive and to complete tasks. These students are helped skilfully to manage their emotions and, as a result, they persevere. Students have a clear understanding of right and wrong. Most students enjoy school, but attendance is affected by holidays taken during term time and a small number of students who are regularly absent. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Tolerance and empathy are consistent features in relationships across the school. For example, students showed exemplary patience towards each other during a film-making session of a mock television chat show, enabling all students to take part in this enjoyable activity. Learning in the community is a regular feature in their school week and, as a result, students are exceedingly well prepared for adult life. They learn to look after themselves, to cook, to clean, to shop and use money. Self-confidence is developed through use of local leisure facilities for physical education and an extensive range of residential trips. As a result of the school's focus on healthy living, students are beginning to make healthy choices at lunchtimes. Parents say their children are happy at school and are appreciative of the quality of care and opportunities provided.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching at Crosshill is outstanding. Excellent relationships and high levels of expertise are central to this. Teachers and teaching assistants work side by side in teams and their energy and enthusiasm for their work is infectious. Their talent and creativity is evident in the way that lessons are planned to capture students' interest, stimulate their imagination, and motivate them to want to learn more. The students are challenged to think for themselves, to work in pairs or groups, and to be independent. Tasks are broken down in to small steps and matched to students' abilities. Teachers are sensitive to when the students are struggling to understand and need further explanations. ICT is used very effectively to support teachers and students in lessons. Some teachers carefully ensure that students are supported in developing their writing, without this becoming a barrier to their understanding of subject knowledge. The development of students' reading has been a focus across the school over the past year. Discrete reading sessions have been introduced at the start of each day and these are proving to be successful in improving students' reading ages.

Assessment has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The school tracks small steps of progress in English, mathematics, science and ICT in Key Stage 3. Assessment in the other foundation subjects in Key Stage 3 is now being refined to be more rigorous, more

informative about students' progress over time and to include target setting for individual students. Assessment at Key Stage 4 is very good and is linked to the externally moderated courses.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides a rich and exciting curriculum which captures students' interest, is relevant to their everyday lives and motivates them to learn. Strong partnerships with local secondary schools enhance the curriculum and offer opportunities for the students to benefit from specialist expertise and facilities, for example, in design technology in Years 7 and 8 and in engineering in Key Stage 4. ICT has continued to be a strength of the curriculum and is used extensively to enhance teaching and learning. A virtual learning environment has been established so that students can use ICT to support their learning both in school and at home.

Throughout the school there is a strong emphasis on learning through practical activity and where possible in realistic settings. For example, students studying on the hospitality course are involved in serving food in the school dining room and in the on-site e-learning centre café which is used by the general public. The personal and social development of students is integral to all aspects of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support the school provides for its students is outstanding. From the moment students enter the building, the high level of care shown by all staff is exemplary. All staff provide a consistently good role model for the students. They know individual students exceedingly well and this enables very good support to be allocated to all students. Good communication between staff and external agencies ensures that students receive the best support possible. Robust procedures for child protection, safe recruitment and site safety and security are all in place. Excellent guidance supports all aspects of students' development. All staff check carefully how well students understand their work, ensuring students are given just the right level of challenge. As a consequence, students know exactly what they have to do to improve. Very effective visits, work placements, and a wide range of vocational courses are arranged so that students and their parents can fully prepare for post-16 options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has successfully established a culture of learning for students and staff in which each individual is encouraged to develop further. Team teaching is encouraged and this approach has been particularly effective in enabling the school to maintain high standards of teaching and learning during the recent period of instability. The headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school. Teaching is monitored and constructive advice is given on strengths and areas for development. Teachers' performance targets are based soundly on the progress students are expected to meet. This ensures challenge for both teachers and students.

Since 2005 the school has recruited four new subject leaders covering mathematics, science, ICT, and design and technology. They have made significant improvements to the curriculum

and are introducing more rigour and consistency in assessment. Their role in formally monitoring and evaluating the provision is at an early stage. They have developed separate action plans but these do not yet make clear the expected improvements to students' learning and achievements, although results in 2007 showed the substantial gains made by students as a result of changes to the curriculum, in particular the introduction of GCSE courses to challenge the more able students.

Senior managers know where the school's main strengths and weaknesses lie, but plans to systematically bring about improvement lack coherence. For example, the plan for specialist technology status covers the period 2003–2006 and has not been updated. It is separate from the school's one year action plan which focuses on specific activities to be completed in that year. There is no overarching school improvement plan which identifies all the school's priorities and specifies how and when these are to be addressed within a reasonable timescale. Whilst there are a few examples of good practice in the analysis of students' data to review the school's effectiveness, for example, in improving reading, this approach is not used systematically enough to establish a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation.

The governing body effectively supports the school. Governors have been visiting the school talking with teachers and sitting in on lessons to see the school at work first hand. They recognise that their role in school improvement planning could be developed further. The school numbers have fallen in recent years to 75, but the local authority has continued to fund it for 120 places. All resources have been used wisely to bring about improvements to the school buildings and facilities, staffing and, not least, to ensure students make good progress in their learning and personal development and well-being. The school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

2 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Crosshill School, Blackburn with Darwen, BB1 2HR

Thank you for welcoming us into your school this week and for giving your time to tell us about your school. These are the main findings from the inspection.

- You are rightly proud of the good progress you are making at school and told us that you value the excellent teaching and support you receive. The Year 11 group which left in summer achieved extremely good results.
- The school offers an excellent range of courses in Key Stage 4. You are able to choose options which interest you and are matched to your ability level.
- The school has very strong links with local secondary schools. For example, all students in Years 7 and 8 have their design technology lesson at St Wilfrid's and this is working very well. Also, some students from these local schools study courses such as media studies at Crosshill.
- We were very impressed with the 'service with a smile' shown by the Key Stage 4 students who are studying BTEC hospitality, travel and tourism when they were serving lunch in the dining room and in the e-learning centre café.
- The ICT provision across the school is excellent. You have access to extremely good staff expertise, equipment, and technical support. ICT is used very well in lessons and your skills and confidence develop quickly as you go through school.
- Your behaviour in and around school is generally good. Most of you enjoy coming to school, attend regularly and want to do well. You tell us that you feel safe around school and we saw for ourselves how well the staff supervise and care for you.
- The school is well led and managed. You have seen the improvements that have been made to the building, the facilities, and the curriculum.
- A particular strength of the school is the way the managers encourage and support all staff to undertake further training. This has added to the school's expertise and is at the heart of why the teaching is so good.
- The staff led a campaign so that the school could remain open and your parents, school governors and the community gave their full backing. The headteacher has exciting ideas for how the school can develop over the next few years.
- The governors provide good support for the school. They come in to talk with teachers and you may have seen them in lessons. They want the best for you and enjoy presenting the achievement awards in assemblies.

These are the main points which the school should improve.

- The school keeps records of your attendance and performance at school but managers and teachers could analyse this information better to check how well the school is doing and see what needs to be improved.
- The school needs to develop a detailed plan showing how it intends to develop and improve not just in 2008 but over the next few years as well.

Once again, thank you for your welcome and support on this inspection. Gill and I would like to congratulate you on your achievements so far and wish you and the staff every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Broomhead

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B