

Critchill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123946
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314764
Inspection date	7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Judith Goodchild

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Hulland
Headteacher	Mark Armstrong
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2003
School address	Nunney Road Frome BA11 4LB
Telephone number	01373 464148
Fax number	01373 453481

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Critchill School provides for pupils with a very varied range of learning difficulties and/or disability. All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils have moderate or severe learning difficulties but, over the last two years, there has been an increase in the number of pupils with complex difficulties. A few pupils have a dual placement with local mainstream schools. There are more boys than girls on roll. Pupils are mainly from White British families. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed to the school in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Critchill is a satisfactory school, with strengths in its pastoral care and support. Although standards are well below average, because of the nature and extent of learning difficulties, pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy their lessons a good deal and respond by trying their best.

Pastoral care is good and creates a strong sense of well-being amongst pupils, who feel safe and secure. Parents express considerable appreciation for the support their children receive. Staff have strong and productive partnerships with parents, carers and a wide range of agencies and other professionals, so that pupils receive the particular help that they need. Recent improvements to the ways in which the pupils' behaviour is managed have had a significant impact and, consequently, there has been a considerable reduction in the number of exclusions. Behaviour in lessons is good, so that learning is not disturbed. Pupils express their views well through the school council, although other opportunities to develop responsibility are more limited. Pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and many take part enthusiastically in the school's good range of physical activities.

While teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, they are often good in individual lessons when teachers use their knowledge of pupils to plan work based on their assessment of pupils' individual needs. Staff have started to track pupils' progress over time, but these systems are still underdeveloped. This restricts teachers' ability to set challenging targets and promote pupils' achievement in the longer term. The curriculum is satisfactory. There are strengths in the activities that introduce pupils to adult employment and links with further education and mainstream schools. As a result, many pupils in Years 10 and 11 are able to gain accredited qualifications and a few attain passes at GCSE. Nevertheless, curriculum planning does not ensure that the needs of all pupils, particularly those with complex learning needs, are met and this prevents pupils from making better progress.

Senior leaders have set a vision for the future direction of the school following a recent review of the school's effectiveness. As a result of changes to the school's management structure, more staff are now involved in school self-evaluation. However, not all have developed their skills in checking on aspects of provision such as teaching and learning. Consequently, self-review procedures are not yet consistently effective. Governors are supportive and take adequate steps to check the school's performance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress over time and to set challenging targets in order to ensure pupils make the progress they should over time.
- Improve the quality of the school's self-evaluation procedures by improving the monitoring skills of managers at all levels.
- Improve curriculum planning so that all pupils receive a suitable range of learning activities, particularly those with complex learning needs, and make the progress they are capable of.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspection evidence shows that even though pupils of all ages frequently learn well in lessons, their progress over time is no better than satisfactory. This is due in part to a curriculum that is not yet planned well enough to meet the needs of all learners as they move through the school. As a result, pupils do not always receive a range of learning activities that meets their individual needs. In addition, shortcomings in assessment procedures mean that their achievements are not assessed routinely. Consequently, the school does not have the information necessary to set challenging targets and track pupils' progress over time in order to ensure that pupils fulfil their potential. Therefore, even though pupils are successful in a good range of externally accredited courses at the end of Year 11, the school is not able to show that the grades represent the pupils' true capabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy coming into school and their attendance is good. As behaviour has improved, pupils have felt increasingly safe and secure. They report that there is always an adult who they can talk with if they have a problem. Relationships with staff are good. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They know about a healthy diet and the dangers of smoking and drugs, and are keen participants in physical activities. Pupils who are members of the school council voice their opinions well, but there are too few additional opportunities to contribute to the school community. The preparation of pupils for their future economic well-being is satisfactory. Good partnerships with schools and colleges provide pupils with individually tailored placements and courses that encourage their workplace skills, but they do not always acquire basic skills such as literacy and numeracy as quickly as they are capable of doing. Pupils are clear about the differences between right and wrong and they develop growing social awareness, such as recognising the needs of others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although lessons have many positive features, pupils' learning is satisfactory overall because the pupils do not have targets and their learning is not assessed routinely. Consequently, lesson planning lacks clarity and teachers do not always identify what they expect individual pupils, or small groups, will learn or the precise activities that will promote these small gains in learning. Learning is supported by good teamwork between teachers and their skilled teaching assistants. Good staffing levels and the constructive management of behaviour, combined with good relationships, ensure that pupils are engaged and motivated in lessons. The pupils follow well-established routines, such as moving quickly from whole-class activities to group work, and so time is used efficiently. Staff use Somerset Total Communication signs and symbols, to encourage the involvement of everyone. Resources are also used imaginatively to engage pupils, such as providing those pupils with more profound and complex needs with a wide variety of sensory materials.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of activities that promote pupils' learning and personal development. While the curriculum meets all statutory requirements, with a strong personal, social and health education element, it is not planned in a way that ensures that the learning needs of all pupils are met. This is particularly evident in the planning for pupils with the most complex difficulties because there is not sufficient attention paid to their individual and precise needs. There is, though, good provision for the most capable pupils, such as those who have dual placements. Such links with mainstream schools provide pupils with opportunities to extend their learning opportunities, as well as encouraging their personal development.

The provision for work-related learning is a strong feature of the curriculum. Partnerships with local schools and colleges, work experience and careers education make an important contribution to preparing pupils for leaving school. Many pupils move into continuing education or training when they leave Critchill. The school provides a good range of activities that support pupils' learning. For instance, a recent visit to the American Museum, links with the National Youth Orchestra and joint ventures with local schools enrich the quality of learning opportunities. Transport arrangements make it difficult to arrange activities after school, but a number of clubs are provided at lunchtime to enable pupils to follow their interests and to develop new ones. The school has run an after school club each week for the last 5 years. This is also open to local children and is well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is a strong aspect of the school's work. Carefully managed induction arrangements enable new pupils to settle quickly. The pupils are prepared equally well for leaving school, with highly supportive transition procedures that give pupils good advice about courses and other options available to them. The in-depth knowledge that staff have about pupils' personal and medical needs helps to form the basis of the good standard of care and pastoral support and guidance that pupils receive. There are good working relationships with other agencies and professionals who provide additional support to pupils. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with the care their children receive. Through annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs and other meetings, they feel they are encouraged to become a partner in their children's learning.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are secure and widely understood by all staff. Recently introduced behaviour programmes, based on praise, encouragement and rewards, are understood and valued by pupils; they look forward to the weekly celebration assembly. The procedures for supporting and guiding pupils' academic progress are much less effective. The absence of a consistent assessment system restricts staff's ability to set challenging academic targets for all pupils to help them improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The newly established leadership team is successfully encouraging and supporting staff to embrace the culture of change that it has identified. Leaders have established the direction in

which they want the school to develop and some priorities have been dealt with well, such as improving the management of behaviour. Nevertheless, some important areas, such as assessment and planning, have still to be fully resolved so that the rate of pupils' progress can be accelerated further. There is satisfactory capacity for the school to meet these challenges. School managers now have a more extensive involvement in monitoring what goes on in school, but their skills are in need of further development. Governors are aware that they have to become increasingly involved in finding out at first hand how well the school is doing.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

8 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Critchill School, Nunney Road, Frome, Somerset BA11 4LB

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed the time that we spent with you. Critchill is a satisfactory school. You obviously enjoy school and go as often as you can. While you are there you behave well and learn how important it is to work with your classmates and to listen to what they have to say. You know a lot about staying healthy and feel safe in school. All the adults in the school take good care of you. Some of you have a say in how the school is run, such as in the school council, but it would help if more of you could take on responsibilities as you get older. The school prepares you satisfactorily for when it is time to leave.

Teaching is satisfactory and teachers give lots of opportunities to speak and to listen to others. You have a reasonable variety of things to do in lessons and you make satisfactory progress in your work. Those in charge of the school are doing a satisfactory job in the way that they run the school and they want to make things better. We have asked the school to do three things :

- to make certain that they know exactly how well the school is doing
- to make sure that all of you have targets and to check that all of you are doing as well as you can
- to plan work that is just right for each one of you so that you can learn as much as possible in every lesson.

You can help too by continuing to behave so very well and by carrying on attending school as often as you can.

Thank you once again and we wish all of you lots of luck in the future.

Judith Goodchild Lead Inspector

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Lead Inspector