

Crowdys Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126549
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	315580
Inspection date	2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Lake
Headteacher	Peter Crockett
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2004
School address	Jefferies Avenue Swindon SN2 7HJ
Telephone number	01793 332400
Fax number	01793 511894

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Crowdys Hill School educates pupils with a range of special educational needs, including complex needs and autistic spectrum disorder. This represents a change since the previous inspection when the school predominantly educated pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Around a third of children are entitled to free school meals. A very small number of pupils are identified as being from an ethnic minority group, and most of this group speak English as an additional language. A small minority of pupils are in the care of the local authority. The school has a flat in which pupils can develop independence skills, and has its own farm.

When the inspection took place, pupils formerly in Year 11 had already left school and pupils in Year 10 were on a residential trip. Judgements relating to the progress of these pupils were made based on samples of their work, progress data, teaching records and other evidence.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In this good school, pupils make good progress and achieve very well. Parents greatly appreciate all that is provided. A typical view is reflected in the comment, 'My child is extremely happy at school and eager to go in the mornings', and parents say of the staff, 'Nothing is too much for them'. Crowdys Hill works in close and successful partnership with other agencies, including staff from the health service and Connexions services to ensure pupils get the best provision for their needs.

Pupils arrive at the school with skill levels significantly below those typically expected of children of the same age, because of their special educational needs. However, they make good progress throughout their time at school, leaving with a good range of qualifications and going on to college or employment. This is because of good teaching typified by strong relationships, effective management of pupils' behaviour and well-structured, interesting activities. However, occasionally lessons do not always offer every pupil enough challenge, or sufficiently encourage pupils to be more independent and take control of their own learning. The suitable and well-balanced curriculum meets the needs of pupils very well, providing a good structure on which to develop basic skills and other knowledge. Information and communication technology is used well across all subjects. The curriculum is enriched by the school farm where pupils learn to care for animals, and a flat where they prepare food they have bought at local shops. Residential trips and school clubs enrich the curriculum well. This underpins the good progress pupils make throughout the school.

Pupils' good personal development reflects the school's strong support and care. They are polite and courteous and behave very well because expectations of behaviour are high. Pupils feel safe because the school places great emphasis on care and on health and safety issues. Systems of child protection are clear and known by staff. Because the school promotes health very well, pupils enjoy physical activities and participate in them eagerly. They are aware of healthy eating, although not all act accordingly. Pupils are well prepared for work and develop strong economic skills because the school promotes basic skills very well, and enjoys very productive links with the Connexions service. The local community and the school both benefit from the contribution of pupils through music and drama performances, and through the school's use of the community as a place to learn.

Strong and committed leadership and management have helped steer the school well through recent changes. Clear systems, including staff performance management and well-focused training, are used effectively to set targets for staff and support them in reaching these targets. The school has systematically and successfully tackled issues it has identified in recent years and has a good long-term vision. A full complement of committed governors supports the school very well. In assessing the progress pupils make, the school has some information that shows very small steps of progress. However, its use is not fully embedded in school practice. Also, assessment information is not used well enough in order to help the school identify exactly where it needs to intervene to push standards higher. The school has progressed well since its previous inspection, adapting to new pupils with different types of special educational needs in the process. It has a good capacity to improve further and is eager to do so.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupil assessments showing small steps of progress are used throughout the school, and make better use of assessment information to drive up standards.

- Improve teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the level of challenge for pupils, and pupils' development of greater independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The pupils' good progress and achievement is indicated in their work, school assessments and examination results, inspectors' observations, and the school's own lesson observations. Pupils reach challenging targets and they know their personal targets. They achieve particularly well in art and design and in music. Both younger pupils and older pupils make good progress, and they leave school with a good range of qualifications, including GCSEs, Entry Level and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). They successfully go on to further education at the local college or to employment. Different groups progress equally well, including boys and girls, pupils with different types of disability and disorder, and those in the care of the local authority.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils greatly enjoy school as is reflected in their good attendance and punctuality to lessons. They feel very safe because the school takes great care with safety, and where bullying sometimes takes place, it is dealt with effectively. Good reward systems encourage and sustain pupils' good behaviour. Pupils find learning enjoyable and therefore concentrate well and try hard in lessons. They are proud of their achievements because the school celebrates what they do, working hard to raise self-esteem. Pupils care for each other, reflecting the school's emphasis on kindness and consideration. They also benefit from learning to care for the animals on the school farm. They are direct and honest because they know their views are valued, not only through the school council but elsewhere. Contributing well to the local community, they take part in many activities in the neighbourhood. Their economic understanding is well developed through good work experience arrangements and the good progress they make in achieving basic skills. Pupils' cultural understanding is very well encouraged by a range of activities, including those in art and music, celebrating different cultures. However, the independence of some pupils is occasionally underdeveloped, because staff are sometimes over-keen to help them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching throughout the school supports the good progress pupils make. Teaching observed during the inspection ranged from good to satisfactory but it was good overall. For example, in an effective English lesson on 'Macbeth', pupils made strong progress and behaved well because they were engaged very well with the interesting activities, which included writing a doctor's report on Lady Macbeth. Among the common strengths of lessons are the caring, trusting relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils; the good management of behaviour; pupils' efforts to do better; and the way lessons are structured so that activities do not go on for too long, yet without the lesson becoming fragmented. Nevertheless, work is not always pitched to sufficiently stretch all pupils, and teachers do not always encourage pupils' independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The well-balanced curriculum underpins the enjoyment of pupils in school activities. As well as a strong structure for basic skills and a balanced range of subjects, the curriculum offers a rich variety of trips, activities in the community, and residential experiences. The farm provides many opportunities for caring for and learning about animals, including studying courses leading to examinations. It makes an important contribution to pupils' personal development, including encouraging empathy and care. Art and design and music are areas of particular success. A good variety of lunchtime clubs are enjoyed and appreciated by pupils, and the school also offers an after-school club. Work experience and related arrangements are very well established and valued, helping the transition of pupils in Year 11 to employment or further study. The school flat is well used to develop pupils' skills in shopping and preparing food. Although the curriculum meets the needs of pupils well, the school recognises that it should be further refined to respond to pupils with increasingly complex needs. The school has already taken some appropriate steps in the flexible organisation of some groups.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff care a great deal about the care of pupils and their families, and pupils and parents appreciate this. Consequently, relationships are trusting and very positive, and pupils make real efforts in their learning, contributing to the good progress they make. The effective participation of partners from other agencies considerably enhances the effectiveness of the good support offered. Safety is a paramount consideration for staff and risk assessments are carried out as appropriate, contributing to the sense of safety and security reported by pupils. Pastoral care is particularly strong, and staff are very sensitive to the challenges the pupils face in this calm and orderly community. Staff know pupils very well and respond to them as individuals with their own needs and preferences. Most pupils know their learning targets, and older pupils in particular evaluate their own work. However, opportunities are missed to further develop pupils' independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management have created a clear sense of direction in a time when the learning needs of the school's newer pupils are changing. It has brought much needed stability after a period involving several changes in leadership. Great care has gone into developing the very strong partnership links, such as those with the Connexions service, which strengthen provision. School development planning is well considered and supports the school's sense of purpose. Through well-established systems, including informed and accurate lesson observations, related performance management, and supportive training, the school sets and reaches suitable targets to raise standards. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses in different areas of school life. All of the school's evaluations of itself closely matched the views of the inspectors, and the school responds well to the views of pupils and parents. Equal opportunities are well nurtured, as is reflected in the comparable progress made by different groups of pupils. The governing body balance support and challenge very well and are greatly committed to the school. The school has a wide range of assessment information. Some of this is detailed enough

to show small steps of progress, but the use of this information is not sufficiently rooted in whole-school practice. In addition, the school does not use its analysis of data as fully as possible in order to show where very precise interventions are needed to drive standards higher.

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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?	2
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	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	2
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

3 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Crowdys Hill School, Swindon SN2 7HJ

It was good to meet you when my colleague and I inspected your school recently. Thank you for your help and politeness to us.

We found many things to praise. You like the school a great deal and told us how much you enjoyed all the activities. You develop well and progress well in your work because the school teaches and supports you very well. The school is well led and managed and knows its future direction. You feel happy and safe, because the school puts a lot of work into this area.

There are a couple of things the school can do even better. I have asked staff to:

- make sure the assessments of your progress are detailed enough, and that they are used fully to show where you may need more help;
- give you more opportunities to do things without too much help and assess how well you are doing, and make sure everyone is really challenged by the work.

I am sure you will want to help staff in this by looking at ways you can improve your own work.

Thank you again.

I wish you every success for the future,

Michael Farrell Lead Inspector