

Cramlington Hillcrest School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122383
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327713
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Mel Blackband

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 (total)	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Joynson
Headteacher	Mr Colin Gibson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	East View Avenue East Farm Cramlington Northumberland NE23 1DY
Telephone number	01670 713632
Fax number	01670 713920

Age group	11–16
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Inspection number	327713

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and increasingly for pupils with needs that are more complex or who display challenging behaviours. Almost half of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are four times as many boys as girls. All the pupils are White British in origin. A small number of pupils are repeating Year 11.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, which has shown substantial improvement since the previous inspection when its overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Pupils achieve well and a few make outstanding progress. The quality of teaching continues to improve and is now good throughout the school. Lessons are interesting and well paced. Literacy and numeracy are well taught because of the good use of national strategies which adds rigour to lessons. The pupils enjoy the challenging activities and respond by trying their best. Those pupils with complex needs, who are taught in separate accommodation, have also made good progress and there is no evidence of any underachievement in the school. Teachers know the pupils well, but there are some inconsistencies in the way that the small steps in pupils' progress are recorded. As a result, targets are not always focused clearly enough on each individual pupil's learning needs. All the pupils make good gains in their personal development because the school provides them with good support and many opportunities to improve their personal skills. These underpin the pupils' academic achievements.

Pupils thrive within the caring ethos of the school and they make good gains in all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They feel safe and well supported and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff. The staff manage the pupils' behaviour very well. The pupils learn how to be healthy, to keep safe and gradually to take responsibility for their own conduct. The attendance of most pupils is good, although, despite the school's best efforts, a very small proportion of pupils have high rates of absence. Pupils, in the main, love coming to school and parents are, almost without exception, very pleased for their children to attend, knowing they are happy and are making good progress. One parent's comment was typical, 'It's a fantastic school and my kids love it!'

The good curriculum provision is enriched by the varied opportunities to interact with the community and by the effective programmes in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Older pupils benefit from good programmes to teach them about the world of work and to prepare them for leaving school. The small number of pupils who are repeating Year 11 are making good progress through the effective mix of programmes in basic skills, vocational awareness and links with the local college. This has a positive impact on their confidence and motivation to learn.

School leaders have substantially improved several important aspects of provision since the previous inspection. For example, teachers monitor the pupils' progress more effectively than at the time of the previous report and this has led them to have higher expectations of their pupils' achievements. The curriculum has also been significantly improved for the oldest pupils and the management of pupils' behaviour has become a strength of the school. The governing body is supportive to the school and provides a good and improving standard of strategic leadership. The school's leaders, ably supported by governors, evaluate the school's work effectively. This indicates that, together with the drive and enthusiasm of the senior team, the school has a good capacity to build on the progress made since the previous inspection. As a result of the improvements made and the capacity to improve further, the school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there is consistency in the way the small steps in pupils' learning are recorded.

- Raise achievement further by working closely with pupils to set suitably challenging learning targets which give clear guidance about how they can improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know pupils very well and this enables them to plan interesting, well paced lessons. Teaching standards have improved since the previous inspection as a result of regular and consistent monitoring by the headteacher. Pupils gain confidence to learn new things because they receive a high level of individual tuition from well trained teaching assistants. The pupils' behaviour is very well managed and this has a significant impact on raising their achievement. The tracking of the pupils' progress in basic skills has been made more effective. The small steps in progress which the pupils make are not always recorded consistently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has good provision for teaching the basic skills. Good programmes which ensure that pupils understand the value of living healthily and about how to keep themselves and others safe, underpin the school's curriculum. There are many and varied trips and visits so that pupils learn new things in different situations. There are well constructed programmes to teach the oldest students about the world of work and which encourage them to gain a range of vocationally based experience and qualifications. For instance, all the pupils in Year 11, including those who are repeating their year, spend one day each week at the local college where they learn a variety of practical skills. A minority of pupils in Years 10 and 11, who have experienced significant difficulty in adjusting to school life, follow individual alternative timetables with a higher concentration of practical work experience. The activities successfully motivate almost all the students to continue their education in college or on training places.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a high standard of care for all of its pupils. Safeguarding requirements are fully met. Pupils are well supported and there are good links with parents. For example, teachers visited the parents of almost every pupil during the past year. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in their children's education. Pupils receive good advice and support as they are about to leave school. The school makes determined and effective steps to improve the pupils' attendance. Due to excellent procedures for managing the pupils' behaviour, exclusions have been reduced by half over the previous year and bullying has become a rarity. However, pupils' learning targets are not always precise enough to enable them to understand how to improve their academic work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, supported by an effective leadership team, has driven through substantial improvements since the previous inspection. Valuable evidence, which comes from the rigorous monitoring of teaching and the curriculum, enables the school's leaders to evaluate accurately the school's improvements in provision. The excellent communication and a strong team spirit within the school enable staff to feel fully consulted, involved and valued. The school makes a good contribution towards community cohesion through the quality of the links with the local village. The quality of professional training is good and clearly linked to the high quality of monitoring and performance management of teachers and all other staff. There are challenging targets for all staff members. This has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and pupils' good achievement. The governing body provides effective challenge to the school's leaders through effective committees which monitor every aspect of the school's provision.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cramlington Hillcrest School, Northumberland, NE23 1DY

Not long ago I came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and in the dining room.

I was only with you for one day. That was, however, long enough for me to realise that you go to a good school. I could see that you all enjoy school and that you behave well. These are the main strengths of the school.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work, your behaviour and your personal development.
- You have a good range of activities, including well planned programmes to prepare you for when you go on to further education or training after you leave school.
- All the adults at the school have a real interest in your welfare and look after you well. They are very good at helping you to behave better.
- Lessons are interesting. This means you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Your school is well run.

I think the school could improve further in two ways.

- All the small improvements you make in your work should be written down more clearly.
- This information should be used more effectively to give you a better idea of what you need to do to improve your work.

You can help yourselves too, by making sure your behaviour is always good and continuing to try as hard as you are doing in lessons. Please thank your parents for the comments they made on the questionnaires, which showed how much they like the school and the way it helps you all to learn and behave well.

Yours sincerely

Mel Blackband

Lead inspector