

Cressex Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110500
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	337517
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	502
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Katy Simmons
Headteacher	David Hood
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 20 lessons, observed 19 teachers, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at school planning documents, assessment information, governors' planning and students' work. Forty-two parental questionnaires were analysed. One hundred and four students also completed questionnaires about the school's work.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the use of assessment to measure students' achievements
- how far the quality of teaching and learning had improved since the last inspection
- the extent to which the overall effectiveness of the sixth form had improved
- the school's planning to sustain improvement.

Information about the school

Cressex Community School is smaller than the average school with a small sixth form. After a period of falling rolls, numbers entering the school are now rising quickly. It serves a mixed socio-economic area in High Wycombe in a local authority which retains selection. The school is culturally diverse with over 70% of students coming from a Pakistani background and about 18% from a White British background. About three quarters of students use English as an additional language. Eligibility for free school meals is well above the national average. The school attained Business and Enterprise status in January 2009. Governors are consulting on a move to National Challenge Cooperative Trust status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Over the past two years, because of strong and determined leadership at all levels, the school has overcome an earlier period of instability and is now making good progress in addressing low attainment and securing better progress for students. The overall effectiveness remains satisfactory because some of the changes have not had time to raise current low attainment across all subjects and, although the proportion of good teaching is increasing, a number of lessons do not challenge all groups of students effectively. The school is a caring community which values each individual and encourages students to engage positively in the many activities it provides. Students are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and they have ample opportunity to undertake leadership roles within the school. Older students enthusiastically mentor younger ones to help them enjoy school and make progress.

Following a thorough review of provision, rigorous systems have been established to monitor the work of the school and the progress being made by all groups of students. There is solid evidence from reliable tracking information and early GCSE module results that attainment is rising in core subjects. Students enter the school with attainment levels that are well below average. Overall, progress for all groups of students is satisfactory, although students make significantly good progress in English and outstanding progress in mathematics. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory, which represents good progress since the last inspection.

The impact of these rigorous systems is also evident in the accurate self-assessment, improved behaviour and attendance of students, and good safeguarding procedures. The stronger monitoring procedures and the record of significant improvement in some outcomes for students show the school has a good capacity to improve further. Leadership of the small sixth form is improving. Its current capacity to embed and drive planned changes is satisfactory.

Teaching is improving. The school relies much less on supply teachers than at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers are beginning to use the detailed assessment information to help them identify how well students are making progress, but there remains too much inconsistency in the way this information is used to provide work which has sufficient challenge for all levels of ability. In less strong lessons, teachers fail to adjust their teaching to ensure all students make good progress. Teaching is variable in the sixth form, but there is some good practice.

The curriculum meets students' needs well. Through a good range of partnerships, the school is able to offer a broader range of options than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Extra-curricular activities have a good take-up. There are many

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opportunities for students to enhance their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and outcomes in these areas are good. The development of students' literacy skills across the curriculum is being strengthened but initiatives have not yet led to improved outcomes.

The school cares for students well and they feel safe. There are good relationships with parents and carers and outside agencies to ensure individual needs are met.

Arrangements to support the move from primary school are well-managed and enable students to settle in quickly. Support is also good for those students whose first language is not English. Students are guided well on how to improve their work.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve learning and progress by:
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information carefully to plan lessons that meet the needs of all groups of students
 - strengthening cross-curricular provision for improving students' literacy
 - improving the capacity of leadership and management of the sixth form to drive and embed planned improvements.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The percentage of students who gained five or more GCSE passes including English and mathematics at grade C or above in 2009 were lower than in the previous year.

However, taken over the last three years, attainment remains low in comparison to that found nationally. All groups of students, including those for whom English is not their first language, made satisfactory progress in 2009. Some students, particularly in English and mathematics, made excellent progress. The collection of detailed data on the progress of all groups has enabled the school to target support effectively at students who are identified as falling behind. In lessons, progress is usually at least satisfactory.

Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. The business and enterprise specialist subject is beginning to contribute well to this outcome. Students contribute to developing the school. Student mentors have a positive impact in the school and the community, and all students work hard for a number of charities.

Students are developing some good skills for their future working lives but their basic literacy skills are still low. The curriculum is enhanced to support their understanding of the world of work and their enterprise skills. Students demonstrate their ability to empathise with others in discussions in lessons. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, students made mature and insightful contributions in a discussion about characters in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Social and moral development is good. Clubs and sporting events as well as events for gifted and talented students are well attended. Students' spiritual and cultural development is supported well through the specialist enterprise subjects.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is improving but remains satisfactory overall because the use of assessment is inconsistently applied across subjects. The level of challenge in good lessons enables students to learn well and make good progress but in less effective lessons, the level of challenge is not high enough. Lesson objectives clearly identify a range of outcomes to suit different levels of ability, but the activities teachers devise do not always allow the more able students to demonstrate and develop the skills needed to reach those levels. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it to enthuse the students. They plan a range of activities and the pace of the lessons is generally brisk. As a result, most students are engaged and enjoy their learning. The good curriculum allows students to follow a range of courses that meet their individual requirements well. Those for whom a vocational course is more appropriate have a choice of courses available to them in which they are beginning to achieve well. Well-prepared enterprise days for each year group are improving students' workplace skills and beginning to prepare them well for the future. Opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum are limited.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall with a number of excellent aspects which both parents and students were very positive about. The support provided for vulnerable students is a particular strength. The arrangements to guide students as they enter and progress through the school are effective. Sometimes, the support provided in class does not match that provided in withdrawal groups, but students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The excellent leadership of the headteacher, effectively supported by senior leaders, has ensured that key improvements have been made which are beginning to raise attainment and improve achievement. Governors and other leaders and managers provide good support to help the school maintain a tight focus on raising achievement, improving teaching and learning, and broadening curriculum provision. Middle leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in ensuring that students' progress is closely monitored and swift action taken to support those at risk of underachieving. Over the last two years, the senior team has implemented well-considered improvement strategies which are now beginning to have a positive impact in many areas of school life. Improvements in behaviour have led to significant reductions in fixed-term exclusions and students told inspectors how much behaviour had improved around the school over the past two years.

Self-evaluation is effective in identifying areas for further improvement and senior leaders and governors agree challenging targets to secure these improvements. Governors have played a key role in securing the improvements already achieved and are well-informed about all aspects of school performance, providing good levels of support and challenge. They have been instrumental in developing the vision for the development of the National Challenge Cooperative Trust and have successfully garnered a wide range of parental and community support for the future development of the school.

The school has established a wide range of partnership working to support its improvement. Close working with external agencies provides good additional support for many students. Examples include working with the education welfare officer to improve attendance, use of the Connexions service to support students' transition to Key Stage 4 and post-16 education or training, and good support from youth workers and community

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police officers.

Promotion of equality and diversity is central to the school's drive to raise attainment and students say they get on well together and learn respect for others from different social, cultural or faith backgrounds. Arrangements to ensure the safety of students are good. Excellent safer recruitment procedures are in place, and the designated officer and staff have received appropriate levels of training. The school works well with families and external agencies to promote awareness of child protection issues and follows up referrals assiduously.

The school promotes community cohesion well. The school is a hub for the local community and frequently used by local residents for sports and other social events. School staff are actively engaged with local community groups, promoting positive relationships between different groups, which benefits school students and local residents alike. The school develops students' understanding of important national and global issues, for example through presentations and discussions with external partners and use of assemblies.

The school has successfully managed the development of the new school building, and financial management and planning are good. In the context of satisfactory outcomes for students, value for money is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Overall, effectiveness is now satisfactory. Until recently, outcomes were inadequate with very poor results, largely due to an inappropriate curriculum and loose application of

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entry criteria to A-level courses. Current students are making satisfactory progress and the majority are on track to achieve their expected grades this year. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students learn well when tasks are closely tailored to their individual needs and interests, but in some lessons, students remain too passive. Senior leaders have made well-considered revisions to the curriculum. The sixth form provision now consists of BTEC first diploma courses, combined with literacy and numeracy development which matches students' needs more closely and supports their progression to higher level courses, training or employment. Students value the support they receive from teachers and form tutors, and say they receive regular feedback on their progress. Frequent changes in sixth form leadership have impeded progress in securing improvements, but the deputy headteacher has ensured that day-to-day management runs smoothly. She has a good understanding of the local post-16 context and a clear strategic vision for the role of the school's sixth form in the local area.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Although a small number of parents and carers replied to the questionnaire, their responses were positive and supportive of the school. Most feel their children are making enough progress and several spoke well of the support they receive if there are problems. A few were concerned about the variability of teaching. Several would like their children to have more challenge in lessons. Inspectors agree with parents and carers about the good support that students receive at the school and also about the need for some teachers to provide more challenging work in lessons. Inspectors received 104 responses from students. Some students indicated that behaviour was not as good as it could be. Inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory and that the school now has good procedures in place to manage behaviour better.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cressex Community School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 42 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 502 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	24	28	67	3	7	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	15	36	25	60	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	40	18	43	4	10	2	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	29	22	52	7	17	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	8	19	25	57	4	10	4	10
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	31	21	50	4	10	3	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	31	23	55	2	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	12	29	17	40	4	10	4	10
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	24	20	48	3	7	5	12
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	29	19	45	4	10	5	12
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	21	21	50	3	7	4	10
The school is led and managed effectively	3	21	21	50	2	5	4	10
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	43	14	33	3	7	5	12

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Cressex Community School, High Wycombe, HP12 4QA

On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I should like to thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently.

We judge your school to be satisfactory but improving. We congratulate you on the increasingly higher standards you are reaching. We are pleased that the variation in the progress some of you made in recent years has been reduced. We want the school to make sure that you are all given work that has the right level of challenge to ensure you make good or better progress in all lessons.

You told us that you appreciate the hard work your teachers put in on your behalf to make lessons interesting. You make a good contribution to the learning that takes place by your positive attitudes and behaviour. Well done! It is good to see you all working together and enjoying your free time happy in each other's company. The assembly we observed was moving and demonstrated how deeply you think about important issues about life and death. The range of subjects you can study is good and we know the school looks after you with the utmost care. You told us you feel safe and we understand why.

Leaders in the school keep careful records of how well you are progressing and share the information with you well. You know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve. Leaders in the school use this information well to improve their work and we think they have good capacity to improve further. To that end, we have asked them to:

- make sure you have work that challenges you whatever your level of ability
- see to it that your literacy skills are developed in more areas of the curriculum
- make sure planned improvements for the sixth form are managed effectively.

I wish you all the very best for your future and hope many of you will read my full report which contains greater detail of our findings.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector

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