

Cramlington Hillcrest School

East View Avenue, East Farm, Cramlington, Northumberland NE23 1DY

Inspection dates

31 January – 1 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Governors and senior leaders communicate well their strong vision for high-quality provision at the school. This motivates teaching staff and pupils alike and promotes pupils' well-being and achievement effectively. The school is improving as a consequence.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' learning and progress. They use this information to develop teaching skills and provide additional support for pupils when they need it. This helps pupils make good progress.
- Senior leaders have structured the curriculum to best meet the needs of all learners by carefully balancing pupils' personal development and academic learning needs.
- Middle leaders develop teaching skills and check on pupils' learning. This helps pupils make good progress
- Teachers use their subject knowledge and good knowledge of pupils' needs to plan engaging, interesting lessons. They check carefully that pupils understand their learning tasks.
- Teaching staff occasionally miss opportunities to challenge pupils more to accelerate their learning, especially the most able in their classes.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are considerate of others. They are proud to be members of the school, and feel safe and cared for well. A small number of pupils do not attend school as well as they should.
- Pupils make rapid progress in English and mathematics, including disadvantaged pupils. Progress across a range of other subjects is good, but not as rapid, for example in science. Pupils enjoy reading.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy a broad range of learning experiences and accredited courses that meet their needs and prepare them well for the next steps in education and training. Sixth-form leaders ensure that students know how to keep themselves safe and keep a sharp eye on their progress and personal development.
- Governors are active in ensuring that they know the school well. They ensure that they have the right staff in place to support pupils' personal development and achievement. They monitor the school's performance regularly and challenge leaders with increasing rigour.
- Governors do not link their monitoring activities closely enough to the school's priorities for development and improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - further sharpening questioning skills to challenge pupils, especially the most able, to move them on more quickly and deepen their thinking and understanding
 - increasing the precision of planning for learning in science, so that it matches the sharply focused work in English and mathematics and leads to equally rapid pupil progress.
 - further refining the checks on pupils' progress to ensure that pupils make equally good progress in each area of the curriculum
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening further the focus on improving the attendance of a small number of pupils
 - aligning governors' checks on the school's performance and development more closely to the priorities in the school improvement plan.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and senior leaders have a well-considered vision for the school that focuses on providing high-quality care and teaching that promote all pupils' well-being and achievement. They communicate their vision effectively to pupils, parents and staff. As a result, staff are very well motivated. Pupils flourish in their care, develop good personal skills and achieve well.
- Governors make sure that they appoint staff who are able to bring to life their vision for pupils' personal and academic development.
- Leaders take effective steps to improve pupils' personal development and learning skills. They focus on the most important things first, ensuring that high-quality support and interventions are in place to meet pupils' emotional and learning needs. As a result, pupils develop effective strategies to manage themselves. This has led to improvement in pupils' progress. Pupils enjoy their learning and are proud of their school. As a result, pupils' overall attendance has improved steadily since the previous inspection.
- Following their evaluation of its effectiveness, leaders have redesigned the curriculum into coherent broad areas of learning. They have aligned this to a teaching system based on class teaching. This has brought coherence to pupils' experience in school by better meeting their learning needs.
- Central to curriculum planning is the place of the personal, health and social education programme (PHSE). The well-planned programme ensures that pupils develop a broad understanding of the world around them, and develop an appreciation of the diversity of the society in which they live. This aspect of the curriculum plays a key role in promoting equality and diversity.
- Sharply focused assessment procedures, especially in English and mathematics, bring rigour that makes sure that pupils make good progress. Leaders recognise that similar sharper review of progress in other areas of the curriculum is needed so that pupils make even better progress in these areas. The full range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities gives breadth to learning and enhances pupils' experiences, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders ensure that baseline assessments of needs focus on pupils' literacy, communication and numeracy skills as well as their behavioural, emotional and medical needs. They ensure that sharply focused interventions in speech and communication, alongside therapeutic interventions, match pupils' specific needs. As a consequence, additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is well directed towards their particular requirements. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make at least as much progress as others in the school.
- Leaders use Year 7 catch-up funding and the additional funding for special educational needs to good effect. Funding is directed to address individual needs through personalised support. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerated.
- Leaders carefully monitor the quality of teaching. They use their findings to challenge and support teaching staff to improve their practice through a range of professional

development opportunities. Teaching staff value their training and use it with increasing impact in their work with pupils.

Governance of the school

- Governors provide effective support and challenge to school leaders.
- They ensure that arrangements to safeguard pupils and keep them safe are robust. They make sure that they and staff in school are well trained to recognise risks to pupils and that systems are effective in providing help to pupils in difficulties.
- They make sure that staff performance management, including of the headteacher, is rigorous, and that it is used to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Governors scrutinise and challenge the school on its performance, using a range of information, including information on current pupils' progress alongside performance in externally accredited courses. This has led to strong improvement in pupils' achievement, especially in English and mathematics.
- Governors set about finding out for themselves how well pupils learn and develop personal skills in school. They record their findings carefully. However, governors' challenge is not consistent, because the links between their own monitoring and the priorities in the school development plan are not fully developed.
- Governors successfully communicate their vision for the school and work with the local authority to develop the school to meet their aims. Since the previous inspection, governors have used support from the local authority to restructure and strengthen leadership at all levels. This contributes to the sustained improvements seen in the school's performance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Daily focus group activities provide pupils with a settled start to the day. Teaching staff use this opportunity to check that pupils are not facing risks to their welfare and well-being.
- This strong culture of safeguarding is underpinned by the schools' child protection policy, the high levels of staff training and the consistent day-to-day vigilance of staff. Leaders show determination in their resolve to involve appropriate external teams and agencies to help pupils in need of support.
- Checks that staff are appropriate adults to work with children are carried out and recorded carefully in a single central register as part of the school's appointment processes.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching staff make their expectations of pupils clear. Well-established routines and skilled responses to pupils' needs provide for a positive learning climate. As a result, pupils flourish and make good progress. They participate well, enjoy their learning and apply themselves to the tasks that teaching staff set.
- Teaching staff plan lessons carefully. They make effective use of their knowledge of pupils' learning difficulties and current levels of learning to plan engaging activities that

move pupils forward in small steps.

- Teaching staff take care to plan different tasks at different levels for individual pupils. As a result, they can quickly identify if pupils are beginning to fall behind and take steps to move them on again. Teaching staff make good use of their training to ensure that they communicate instructions and ask questions effectively to check pupils' understanding.
- Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to extend learning and deepen thinking further for some pupils, especially the most able in their classes. For example, teachers do not consistently use a wide range of questioning, that challenges pupils' thinking and deepens their understanding. When this happens, the pace of learning and progress slows.
- Teaching staff are adept at providing feedback on learning, in a range of ways that help pupils know what to do to improve their work. This contributes to the progress that pupils make and increases their self-awareness as learners. Some pupils are able to articulate very well how feedback helps them focus on completing and improving their work.
- Teachers value their professional development and apply their learning in their work with pupils. Recent development work on the use of language has improved the way that teaching staff communicate with pupils. This is improving pupils' learning further.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Pupils make use of the techniques they use in phonics lessons to help them read accurately. As a result, pupils' reading is increasingly fluent and this helps them access other parts of the curriculum.
- The well-balanced mix of nurturing techniques and academic learning is the cornerstone of teachers' work. It exemplifies teachers' high expectations and the encouragement that they give to pupils. As a result, teaching in English and mathematics is particularly effective.
- The precision of teachers' planning seen in English and mathematics is not fully matched in other parts of the curriculum. As a result, progress is good across a wide range of subject areas, but is not consistent in all subjects, for example in science.
- Teachers model respect for others, and ensure that pupils put their learning about prejudice, stereotyping and bullying into practice. Teachers challenge even the mildest examples of inappropriate language. However, occasionally, teachers are not quick enough to tackle low levels of disruption. Whenever teachers do so, pupils respond positively.
- Teachers ensure that parents are well informed about pupils' personal development and how well they are learning. Annual reports are detailed and full of helpful, well-expressed information. These complement the regular parents evenings, held three times a year, and the annual formal review with parents and pupils of their education, health and care (EHC) plans. Parents say communication between the school and home is excellent. This builds and sustains the positive partnership between the school and parents.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils show that they apply themselves well and are proud of their learning. Most pupils demonstrate that they develop confidence as learners, and are ready to have a go. Their confidence grows as they develop their learning skills and techniques to manage themselves.
- Pupils respond to the tasks that teachers set and to teachers' advice on improving their work. This contributes to the good progress they make. However, pupils tend to rely on their teachers and classroom staff to direct their learning. This limits the range of ways in which pupils can reapply their learning.
- Pupils enjoy their PHSE and citizenship lessons. They learn through a range of topics about key issues such as equality, democracy, religious beliefs and racism. Pupils respond maturely and show good understanding of key issues in society such as these. As a result, pupils develop knowledge of the wider world around them and the diversity of their society.
- Through their enrichment activities, such as a residential experience on the Northumbrian coast, leaders provide valued opportunities for pupils to develop an appreciation of their environment and society. Pupils show a deep appreciation of key values such as showing respect for others. This prepares them well for life beyond school, as they move on to the next steps in their education and training.
- Pupils access a broad range of learning met in daily focus (tutor group) lessons on weekly topics. This, together with personalised interventions for pupils, means that all pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of how to lead healthy lives, eat well and keep well physically and emotionally. They learn to recognise and manage risks with increasing skill and maturity.
- Pupils understand the hurt that bullying of any kind can cause. Through their learning, they know about different sorts of bullying and what they should do if it happens. Pupils report that bullying is extremely rare and is dealt with immediately. Pupils are adamant that they are well cared for. Some say that they feel happier here than in some other schools they attended previously.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils accept and fully understand how they should behave. Almost always, pupils respond positively to instructions from teaching staff and show that they have learned to use a range of techniques to manage their own behaviours. As a consequence, the school day unfolds in a calm and orderly manner. Any unexpected incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively by skilled staff who know their pupils very well.
- Positive, well-managed relationships with staff and other pupils have led to a rapid reduction in the number of exclusions since the last inspection. Now, exclusions are rare. In the last school year, no pupil was excluded permanently.

- During lessons and around school pupils show respect for each other and for the adults who work with them. They listen to and respect others' points of view, for example when discussing their responses to learning about racism and how it relates to current affairs and their own lives.
- Pupils move around school with care, respect their surroundings and enjoy social time together in a variety of ways. A group of pupils were completing their presentation display work on gender and sexual orientation during a breaktime club. They were proud of their project, in which they had involved the whole school.
- Leaders and staff have worked with pupils and parents to improve attendance, with some notable successes. As a result, there has been rapid improvement in pupils' attendance, including some of those who previously had high rates of absence. However, attendance remains well below the national average overall. In part, this is due to a small number of pupils who cannot attend school for known medical conditions. Nevertheless, some other pupils attend poorly. Leaders are pursuing their actions with pupils, and their parents, to help them attend regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- From a range of starting points, all well below age-related expectations, pupils make good progress across a wide range of subjects. Careful baseline assessments, that take into account each pupil's EHC plan, form the starting point by which the school assesses progress.
- The progress made by pupils individually and in broad ability groups is very strong in mathematics and English. The school's work to promote accelerated progress, especially in English and mathematics for disadvantaged pupils, is also very successful. In key stages 3 and 4, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils matches that of others in the school or exceeds it.
- No pupils enter the school with higher levels of prior attainment. Nevertheless, leaders and teaching staff strive to ensure that the most able pupils in their classes are challenged to achieve as well as they can. Such pupils usually make at least good and better progress from their starting points in English and mathematics, as do those most-able pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, progress slows when teaching staff do not move them on quickly enough when they are ready, to deepen their thinking.
- A number of pupils are looked after by their local authority and their progress matches that of other pupils in the school.
- Progress in other subjects is good for all groups of pupils from their starting points. However, the proportion of pupils making rapid progress, including the most-able pupils, in science for example, is not as strong as in English and mathematics.
- There is no discrepancy in pupils' progress by gender or background. There are no significant gaps in the attainment or progress in learning between disadvantaged pupils and others.
- Attainment is very low but is commensurate with good and better progress from the starting points of pupils in the school. Many pupils do not complete accredited courses

until they reach an appropriate stage of learning in the sixth form.

- Supported well through bespoke advice and guidance, pupils' progress in learning prepares them very effectively for the next stage of their education. Pupils, from an early stage, look forward to further study in the sixth form, or reintegration into a mainstream school, local college or training provider.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders in the sixth form have considered the needs of students carefully and, as a result, have established a broad and balanced curriculum that meets students' needs. Leaders are ambitious for their students and strive to ensure that good progress in learning is matched by equally sound personal growth and development.
- Leaders ensure that the courses students follow meet their individual needs and are linked to a wide range of relevant qualifications at appropriate levels. As a result, students are able to pursue their studies successfully, building on their achievements at key stage 4.
- Leaders make sure that they have detailed knowledge of students' wider interests and learning needs. As a consequence, they provide a carefully personalised curriculum that contributes well to students' overall preparation for their next steps in education, training or employment. All students continue their study on appropriate courses until the end of Year 13.
- When they leave the school, all students have a suitable place for further education and training. Students report that the quality of external, independent careers advice and guidance, as well as that provided by the school, is very high. Students enter courses in a range of local colleges and settings. They almost always follow vocational courses. Some current Year 13 students have already secured a place on vocational courses, such as cookery, for the next academic year.
- Students work collaboratively to run an on-site café. They develop a range of skills, from simple book-keeping to learning to lead and taking responsibility for different aspects of the project. Students secure supplies, cook and maintain hygiene standards. Students thoroughly enjoy this work-related learning experience. It supports the development of their independent living skills and their abilities to work with others for a common purpose.
- The school ensures that all students continue to study to develop their English and mathematical skills and, while GCSE is offered, pupils are normally guided to follow functional language and numeracy courses to secure progression in their learning and support their wider preparation for independent living as a young adult.
- Students make very good progress in English and mathematics. There is no discernible difference in the progress made by students who were previously supported through the pupil premium and others.
- Students also make good progress in a range of other subjects and courses. They develop their personal skills very well and achieve accreditation through schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the award of personal effectiveness (AOPE).

- Students apply themselves to their learning with enjoyment and energy, because good teaching and good relationships motivate and help them move forward quickly from their individual starting points. Teachers make sure that students know how to improve their work and develop their learning skills. Students respond positively, and this contributes to their good progress.
- The PHSE programme for sixth-form students and the daily interactions with each other and their teachers ensure that students develop a strong awareness of risks and how they can deal with them. They are well informed and respond maturely to such risks. They are confident that they will receive additional support and help when needed.
- Students show good knowledge and understanding of the diverse society in which they live. They understand stereotyping well. They know that by showing tolerance of others who are different by reason of sexual orientation, religious belief, race, gender or heritage, they contribute to a more harmonious society. They contribute, too, to the school's determination to promote diversity and equality. Students are proud of their learning and proud to be part of the school.

School details

Unique reference number	122383
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10023819

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joyce Reid
Headteacher	Andrea Mead
Telephone number	01670 713632
Website	www.hillcrest.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@hillcrest.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Hillcrest is a community secondary special school for students aged 11 to 19 with a range of complex needs. Most students have needs relating to speech, language and communication, autistic spectrum condition, cognition and interaction, and social emotional and mental health. All students are supported by an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. A much higher than average proportion of pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The school serves a wide catchment area, with most pupils coming from the Cramlington and Blyth areas. The school has recently opened new, purpose-built sixth-form accommodation.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in the staff at the school. A number of senior and middle leader posts have been established. A new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have taken up their responsibilities.
- The school is an active partner of The Dales Teaching Alliance and has links with the Percy Hedley Foundation, Sunderland University for Initial Teacher Training and Northumbria University for Occupational Therapy and Social Work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other senior and middle leaders in the school.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons, including in the sixth form, across a range of different subjects. Inspectors examined the quality of work that pupils produce and considered the progress that they make over time.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's self-evaluation and planning documents and the records that the school holds on pupils' progress, their attendance and punctuality.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body and the local authority.
- Inspectors talked with pupils in meetings and informally during social time. Inspectors also took into account the views of parents collected from Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, through informal discussion and the findings of the school's recent parent survey. Inspectors took into account the views of staff.

Inspection team

Chris Campbell, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Westley	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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