

Inspection of Croft Community School

Greencroft Road End, Annfield Plain, Stanley DH9 8PR

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at the school because staff know their individual needs well. They enjoy the subjects they study and are proud of what they know and can do. Younger pupils are given plenty of additional help to communicate. Older pupils gain the skills needed to transition into adulthood. Parents praise the way that the school supports pupils. One commented, 'The school has a can-do approach with a lovely ethos.' On occasion, pupils do not have the knowledge they need to complete the tasks teachers set.

There is both an upbeat and orderly atmosphere in school. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They report that bullying is extremely rare. The school provides opportunities for pupils to take on a variety of leadership roles, such as 'head people' and sports leaders.

Pupils have exceptionally positive relationships with staff. They show respect for others through their words, attitudes, and actions. They behave extremely well, showing dedication to their studies. Pupils' confidence and communication skills mean they can share any concerns. Pupils use the approaches that they have been taught to manage their emotions.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous full inspection, executive leaders, school leaders and governors have made changes that have strengthened many aspects of the school. For example, leaders have improved pupils' behaviour successfully. Improvements mean that pupils' diverse needs are now well met. However, COVID-19 has slowed leaders' work in some aspects of curriculum development. Senior leaders have robust and detailed improvement plans in place to strengthen these aspects.

The curriculum caters well for the variety of additional needs that pupils have. Pupils study a broad range of subjects. For example, in Years 10 and 11, pupils can choose from a variety of academic, practical, and vocational subjects. Qualifications are offered at different levels. The curriculum also provides pupils effectively with the personal skills needed for transition into adulthood.

Over the past year, subject and phase leaders have improved the curriculum so that it better enables pupils to gain subject-specific knowledge. Improvements are more established in English and mathematics than in some other subjects. For example, in English GCSE classes, pupils can link their knowledge of Victorian religious beliefs to the themes in the 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'. However, in some subjects, the curriculum does not prioritise essential subject-specific knowledge well enough. For example, the science curriculum does not place enough focus on scientific vocabulary. This means that pupils sometimes do not have the essential prior knowledge they need to complete the tasks that teachers set. There are well-developed plans in place to improve this aspect of the curriculum.

Teaching staff adjust their teaching methods so that pupils who struggle to absorb information can do so. Leaders and teachers have also developed some aspects of assessment. For instance, the assessments that pupils undertake at the start of the autumn term, enable teachers to gain a detailed overview of pupils' starting points. Senior leaders are currently working with subject leaders to develop ongoing assessments of pupils' knowledge and skills. This work is in its early stages.

Leaders have rightly emphasised the importance of all pupils learning to read. They see this as the gateway to learning in other subjects. Approaches for teaching reading are successful. Leaders have ensured that staff have been well trained in phonics. Pupils practise sounding out letters and combining them to make words, using suitable methods. Leaders have adjusted the school's phonics programme so that it suits secondary pupils who have gaps in their knowledge.

There is a well-established programme for developing pupils' social, moral, spiritual, and cultural (SMSC) understanding. There is a strong focus on respecting the rights of others. Pupils also benefit from an effective programme of lunchtime sporting activities. This programme enables pupils to develop their ability to work in teams and enhances their fitness. Pupils receive independent careers guidance which meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. Leaders are currently developing the school's careers curriculum so that it enables pupils to know and understand more about the world of work. Leaders have not prioritised improving the careers curriculum enough.

Leaders' determined approach to improving behaviour has paid off. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally strong. Not only do pupils respond very well to staff, but they also respond positively to each other. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour was exemplary. In class, pupils demonstrate impressive commitment to their studies. Leaders explore pupils' behaviour from all angles, and approaches join up well. For example, the SMSC work on human rights helps pupils to consider the impact of their behaviour on others.

Governors are extremely committed to the school's vision and values. They have high expectations for the pupils. Some have extensive expertise in education which helps the governing board to oversee the developments in the school's curriculum effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders are keenly aware of risks that pupils with additional needs may face. The curriculum provides them and their parents and/or carers with information about the risks pupils may encounter, including online risks. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy designated leaders ensure that any concerns they have about pupils are recorded in detail. They follow up on all concerns diligently. When external agencies are

involved, the DSL monitors their work with pupils closely. Where necessary, the DSL suggests additional follow-up actions to better protect pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in some subjects, other than English and mathematics, is not yet sufficiently well planned and sequenced. However, leaders have already taken action to plan improvements in the curriculum and to train staff in how to deliver them. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied.
- Assessment methods do not consistently enable teachers to identify ongoing gaps in pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills. Senior leaders should ensure that subject leaders have the expertise they need to develop assessment in the subjects they manage. Subject leaders should make sure that teachers' checks on pupils' knowledge and understanding provide deeper insight into any small gaps that pupils may have in subject-related knowledge and skills.
- Leaders have identified that the school's careers programme needs further development. However, this area of the school's work is not improving with enough urgency. Leaders should prioritise the development of a more comprehensive careers programme, to enable pupils to be better equipped for any future education, employment, or training.

How can I feedback my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	114340
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10200650
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Clive Hubery
Executive headteacher	Andrea English
Website	www.croftcommunityschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 March 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Croft Community School is a maintained special school that caters for pupils who have cognition and learning difficulties (moderate learning difficulties) and pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties, including pupils with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis. A small proportion of pupils have social and emotional or mental health needs. A small number of pupils have severe learning difficulties.
- The school is registered for children aged four and above. At the time of the inspection, no Reception-age children were on roll.
- The school is part of The North and South West Durham Learning Federation, which was formed in September 2015. It is a hard federation between Evergreen Primary School, The Oaks Secondary School, and Croft Community School. Croft Community School joined the federation in September 2018.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative education providers. One of which is based on a farm and called Open Arms Ltd, and the other is World Alternative Provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the head of primary and secondary phases, other leaders, five governors, including the chair of the governing body, the local authority improvement partner and the leader who oversees education, health and care plans. Meetings were also held with leaders responsible for careers education, the personal development programme and pupil leadership programmes.
- Visits were made to both alternative education providers used by the school.
- Inspectors met with a group of boys and a group of girls to discuss their experiences of school. They also met with the parent of a pupil in the secondary phase.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading in the primary phase, as well as English, science, and history in both the primary and secondary phases. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to the school's curriculum, along with the school's own evaluation and its development plans. Inspectors also sampled a selection of education, health and care plans, as well as internal plans detailing the individual support the pupils require.
- Inspectors considered the 27 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, including the 18 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the views of 39 members of staff and 20 pupils who responded to Ofsted's surveys.
- The school's single central record, which includes the recruitment checks made on staff, was checked. An inspector also reviewed records of safeguarding concerns and referrals. A meeting was held with the deputy headteacher, who is a designated safeguarding lead, along with the deputy designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

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