

Cressex Community School

Holmers Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP12 4QA

Inspection dates

2–3 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Progress made by students is improving; however, progress has not been rapid enough to close the gap between the school and national averages in most subjects. This is evident mainly in Key Stage 4, particularly in English, and in science at both key stages.
- The quality of teaching is improving but it is not consistently good or better.
- When planning lessons teachers do not always focus on how students will learn, adopt practical and active approaches to learning or make the best use of time.
- There are inconsistencies in the quality of feedback to students and in the way teachers follow up on the advice they have given.
- Although students' literacy skills have improved, teachers have yet to ensure they are consistently pro-active in promoting students' skills in reading, writing and communication across the curriculum. This is required to ensure that learning is fully supported in all subjects so that progress for all students, including those learning to speak English, is accelerated.

The school has the following strengths

- Attainment has risen since the last inspection and is now close to the national average; consequently, achievement in mathematics has remained outstanding.
- Students from a wide range of backgrounds get on well together and have positive attitudes to learning within an inclusive and caring school community.
- The behaviour and safety of students are good. Behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved significantly. Students feel safe and show good respect for each other, school staff and their excellent school accommodation and facilities.
- Attendance has improved significantly and is currently above the national average.
- Leaders and managers at all levels closely monitor teaching and each student's progress towards their targets. Nevertheless, they do not always systematically assess the impact of planned actions. The quality of teaching and progress being made by students, particularly at Key Stage 3, has improved.
- The sixth form is good. The very few students on roll make good progress and almost all continue with their education because the programme of study which they all follow has been tailored well to meet their needs.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons taught by 27 teachers, of which 4 were joint observations with members of the school’s senior leadership team. In addition, the inspection team made some short visits to lessons and tutorial time as part of four learning walks with senior staff, listened to a small group of students reading, and spoke to students around school throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, school staff, including senior and middle leaders, and the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor. A telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority also took place.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and scrutinised a range of documents, including the school’s monitoring and planning documentation, internal student progress information and records relating to behaviour and attendance, together with documents relating to safeguarding.
- No responses were recorded on the on-line Parent View survey but inspectors considered the school’s own parent survey data. They also analysed questionnaires completed by 12 staff.

Inspection team

Angela Corbett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Robert Faulkner

Additional Inspector

Richard Sutton

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much smaller than average secondary school that gained business and enterprise status in 2009. A much higher proportion of students than seen nationally joins or leaves the school at times other than the start of Year 7. The school is housed in new accommodation that opened in 2010, shortly after the last inspection.
- The majority of students come from Pakistani and White British backgrounds: around 70% and 16% respectively. Almost all other minority ethnic groups are represented in very small numbers. Around three quarters of students speak English as an additional language, with a small proportion who are in the early stages of learning English.
- Around a quarter of students are supported by the pupil premium; this is significantly higher than average. Similarly, the proportion of students identified as disabled or with special educational needs is above average. While a higher proportion than found nationally is supported by school action plus; the percentage who has a statement of special educational needs is just below the national average.
- The exceptionally small sixth form is part of the Wycombe Consortium of local school sixth forms and Amersham and Wycombe College. Currently no students in Years 12 and 13 are undertaking courses off site.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 follow part-time courses off site at Wycombe Wanderers Football Club and a small number access provision arranged through Wycombe Grange, the local pupil referral unit.
- Since the last inspection the school has achieved trust status and formed the Cressex Cooperative Learning Partnership, which consists of the following partners: Dr Challoner's Grammar School; Wycombe Abbey School; The Cooperative College; Buckinghamshire County Council; and Buckinghamshire New University.
- The school currently meets the government's floor standard.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good, with a higher proportion that is outstanding, and so raise the achievement of students, particularly in English and science, by:
 - ensuring teachers focus more on how students will learn in their lesson planning
 - making best use of teaching time, particularly by ensuring prompt starts to lessons
 - accelerating the development of students' reading, writing and communication skills by teaching these more explicitly in all lessons across the curriculum
 - making the most of students' positive attitudes by providing more opportunities for practical and active learning to promote independence in learners and accelerate their progress
 - improving the consistency and quality of assessment and feedback to students and more systematically reviewing the extent to which students have responded to guidance to improve.
- Build on the strong practices of monitoring and reviewing all aspects of the school's work, particularly in relation to students' achievement and the quality of teaching by:
 - assessing in a more systematic way the impact of planned actions for improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' attainment on entry, including their literacy and numeracy skills, is significantly below average. The proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or better, including English and mathematics, shows some improvement but indicates that attainment is still significantly below national expectations by the end of Year 11. The proportion achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or better over the last three years has risen and, while low, has risen at a faster rate, in part due to improvements in the curriculum and well-targeted interventions.
- Current information suggests that progress across the school, and by students of all backgrounds, is improving and, although some variation remains, attainment is rising. However, it has not improved fast enough to make up for low starting points, and the legacy of underachievement for those in Key Stage 4, to close the gap between the school and that seen nationally. This is particularly the case in English and science; the notable exception is mathematics where progress is outstanding and attainment is close to the national average.
- When strong teaching fully engages students, expectations are set high, such as in mathematics lessons; as a result, they develop confidence in what they can achieve and make rapid progress. Nonetheless, achievement requires improvement, in particular in English at Key Stage 4 and in science across the school.
- Achievement for the very few students in the sixth form is good, with almost all successfully completing their courses.
- Pupil premium funding is used to provide additional learning and pastoral support. Whilst it is not always specifically targeted at this group of students, they and others are benefiting with the gap between their and others' attainment narrowing.
- Some good progress is evident in improved progress in English, particularly at Key Stage 3 where the literacy intervention programmes have been focused. However, the progress of some of the weakest readers is hampered because they lack skills in blending letter sounds to read unknown words. There has been some variability in the progress made by students with special educational needs, although the focus on developing literacy with better targeted support is securing better progress.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The proportion of good or better lessons is steadily increasing; however, there is still some variation in the quality of teaching, with inspection evidence indicating that it requires improvement.
- Where the quality of teaching requires improvement:
 - teachers usually apply their good subject knowledge to provide lessons that are well structured, although they do not focus sufficiently when planning their teaching on how students are going to learn to enable them to make good progress
 - time is not always well used, particularly when learning does not get off to a prompt start
 - expectations of what students can achieve are not set high enough
 - there are insufficient opportunities for students to work independently and learn to think for themselves.
- Where teaching has the greatest impact on students' learning, as seen commonly in mathematics, physical education and some humanities lessons:
 - work is both challenging and well matched to the abilities and needs of students
 - teachers make the most of students' positive attitudes to learning and provide them with opportunities for practical and active learning experiences that accelerate their progress and promote independence
 - explanations, activities and tasks proceed at a brisk pace

– students' progress is regularly checked, helpful feedback given and teaching reshaped. For example, in a geography lesson, the teacher's highly active and creative approach to learning about migration fully engaged all students and developed their thinking and independent learning skills through making decisions about places to live. Consequently, they made outstanding progress, regardless of ability or educational needs.

- Teaching in the sixth form effectively supports students' good progress.
- Other adults are trained and deployed well to provide effective support in lessons or through small group teaching for lower attaining students, those with special educational needs and those learning to speak English as an additional language.
- Teachers routinely mark students work. However, the quality of the assessment and clarity of feedback about what students need to do to improve is too variable. Not all teachers are systematically reviewing students' response to their advice to ensure it has been acted on and progress secured. Examples of good practice were seen in mathematics and some English books.
- All teachers include the development of students' literacy skills when they plan lessons. However, too often opportunities are missed to accelerate progress, particularly in communication and writing. Intervention programmes to improve reading are having good impact and there are effective systems in place to develop the language and literacy skills of students who are learning to speak English, including those in the early stages.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The high-quality accommodation, improved systems for managing behaviour, highly effective individual support for students and better partnerships with parents and carers have led to a dramatic fall in exclusions and serious incidents, so that a calm and harmonious atmosphere pervades the school.
- Courtesy and mutual respect for each other and staff, regardless of cultural background, are apparent and contribute to the positive ethos. Both staff and students recognise the improvements in behaviour, consequently low-level disruption in lessons is uncommon and students say it is well managed by teachers so that learning is not disrupted. However, in some lessons students rely too much on their teachers and do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning.
- Students, including the few in the sixth form, said they feel safe in school, are confident that any concerns, including incidents of bullying, will be promptly and effectively dealt with by staff. Senior students are also appointed and trained to provide mentoring support to younger ones.
- Students told inspectors that they are taught well about how to stay safe, covering topics such as road and rail safety as well as how to be safe when using the internet. For example, they are clear about the dangers of using social networking sites. They are also taught about different types of bullying and how to avoid using language that may offend others. As one student said, 'We know we should treat each other fairly.'
- Students are well cared for, including those who join the school who are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Students who are vulnerable receive comprehensive guidance and support from school staff and through strong partnerships with outside agencies and links to organisations, such as 'R U Safe' which provides support for vulnerable young women.
- Attendance, including when students are educated off site, is carefully monitored. It is now above average due to the school's active and supportive approach, although absence rates are higher for a small number of students who are supported by school action plus.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior and middle leaders, is dedicated to improving the achievement and life chances of all students which they consistently communicate to staff and students. The good capacity for improvement identified at the last inspection has been built on,

as evidenced by the sustained outstanding achievement in mathematics and significant improvement in students' behaviour and attendance.

- Student progress is tracked rigorously, helping to ensure equality of opportunity of different groups including those from Pakistani and White British backgrounds.
- Self-evaluation is based on strong reflective practice at all levels and insightful analysis of data. Consequently, the school has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for improvement so that development planning is well founded. However, the actions are not always systematically assessed.
- Senior and middle leaders focus well on the impact of teaching on students' learning, accurately judge quality and provide constructive feedback. The proportion of good or better teaching is increasing through professional development of established performance management systems that robustly address weaker practice. Nonetheless, some actions have yet to fully impact on students' achievement, such as those in science.
- New policies focus effectively on improving students' literacy; however, progress has not been accelerated sufficiently to compensate for low starting points, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum is increasingly meeting students' needs. The wider range of vocational-based courses, while keeping an appropriate balance of academic qualifications, is contributing positively to students' engagement with education and achievement. Visits, assemblies and activities in school contribute to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, although some opportunities are missed for students to be inspired or raise aspirations. Some good links with local business and enterprise activities appropriately reflect the school's specialism.
- Sixth form provision is well managed. Almost all students are carefully guided into employment, other sixth forms or local colleges at the end of Year 11. The curriculum is suitably adapted to meet the needs of students who continue their studies at Cressex.
- All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
- The local authority has provided a range of support that has had a positive impact on the improvement of the school. This has reduced considerably in the last year, however the school benefits from working with trust partners.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - governors have a broad range of expertise, are highly committed, engage with the local community, including parents, and actively campaign to promote the school and seek additional funding
 - presentations, reports and their link work with subject leaders and aspects such as literacy or safeguarding, provide them with a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development
 - the governors provide support and challenge for the headteacher, including addressing weaker practice to improve the quality of teaching
 - they routinely monitor the progress of students and the use of funds, including the pupil premium; however, they do not always make the best use of data in holding the school to account for students' achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110500
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	401129

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	580
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katy Simmons
Headteacher	David Hood
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 March 2010
Telephone number	01494 437729
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