

Hillcrest College, Slinfold

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Hillcrest College, Slinfold is situated in a village west of Horsham. It opened in 1996 and is dually registered as a children's home. The school admits up to 17 boys from 11 to 19 years of age who have severe emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. There are seven students with a statement of special educational needs and the large majority have a history of previously interrupted schooling. The boys come mainly from the South-East, and all have been placed by their respective local authority. At the time of inspection there were 15 students on roll, aged between 11 and 17 years.

The school is part of the Hillcrest group and offers 'a holistic model of care and education that is designed to help boys to take control of their lives'. It aims to teach them how to achieve their potential and prepare to manage their future. The school was last inspected in November 2009, when it did not meet a large number of regulatory requirements. A progress monitoring visit was carried out in April 2010 to evaluate the progress the school had made in implementing its action plan. Following this visit, it met all but two of the regulations.

The last inspection of the children's home was in February 2012. This inspection was integrated with a welfare inspection of the children's home but this is reported on separately.

Evaluation of the school

Hillcrest College, Slinfold provides a good quality of education and effectively meets its aims. The good curriculum, teaching and assessment ensure that students make good progress in their learning. Their behaviour is outstanding. The provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and for welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has improved steadily under a new management team since the last inspection and now meets all the regulations for registration, including those for safeguarding.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and all of the required areas of learning are covered. There is a very good emphasis on the development of basic skills, and daily lessons in

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

mathematics and English have been instrumental in raising the students' achievement and re-engaging them in learning. The well-planned curriculum clearly shows the progression expected through each key stage, reflects the National Curriculum and meets the requirements of students' statements of special educational needs. The school has only recently admitted post-16 students and has identified that the curriculum documentation for this age group needs further development. The current post-16 students attend a local college. The school are also beginning to introduce a range of therapies which they have identified as beneficial and wish to continue and further develop. A well-planned programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is effective in supporting the students' personal development, particularly improving their behaviour, social and emotional skills.

A major strength is the thorough assessment of students' previous learning and attainment, which informs teachers' planning. Lessons are very individualised to meet the needs of each individual. Students in Key Stage 4 have the opportunity to access a wide range of external awards in a variety of subjects, including vocational awards, which are especially suited to students' specific needs. Older students are well prepared for life after school. They are given good careers guidance and the opportunity to study vocational subjects, such as vehicle maintenance and construction, in contexts which are treated as workplace environments, which helps prepare them for the world of work. A wide range of curricular-related visits enhances the curriculum and contributes considerably to students' enjoyment of learning.

As a result of good teaching and thorough assessment, the students thrive and make good progress from their starting points. Provision is not outstanding because outcomes are not yet outstanding. Lessons are well planned with interesting content and helpful visual and practical aids to learning, which engages the students' interest. Provision helps them to build well on their previous learning, learn new skills and acquire new knowledge at a good rate. This is particularly effective in English and mathematics, where some outstanding teaching was seen. For example, students were introduced to algebra through very practical and fun activities, with very good use of information and communication technology and helpful structured workbooks. English lessons demonstrated a very good balance between speaking and listening, with younger students dramatising a play and older students researching and writing biographies. Excellent relationships ensure learning is conducted in a positive climate. Students mostly try hard with their tasks and are, in many cases, proud of their achievements. All staff provide excellent assistance to the students in lessons, checking that they understand the task in hand and using effective questioning to challenge their thinking. The very good checking of students' learning during lessons and at the end of the lesson helps move learning forward. The school have identified that students do not assess their own work often enough to help them further improve. Most students enjoy their learning and try to concentrate but not all lessons reveal a good balance between practical and academic work for the younger students, to ensure that good levels of engagement are maintained. Some students' levels of literacy skills are well below expectations for their age when they join the school and they have additional one-to-one sessions

which are proving successful in raising their reading and writing capabilities. Students especially enjoy their vocational studies and respond very positively to the practical activities prepared for them.

Assessment of the students' learning is thorough. The school now makes effective use of a computer-assisted assessment and progress tracking system to record and monitor boys' progress. This gives the school a clear picture of the extent of individual students' progress over time. The information gained from assessments is used very well in lesson planning, ensuring that the students are given an appropriate level of challenge. Good use is made of National Curriculum level descriptors to continually assess students' progress in all subjects and students are aware of these levels and how they can improve. The oldest students achieve a notable range of external accreditation.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students come to the school with previously negative experiences of school and of authority. The combined teamwork of the education and welfare staff and the very positive role models that they present help students build very positive relationships both with staff and other students. Their behaviour is outstanding. The school can demonstrate exceptional progress made by all students, for example in managing their anger and anti-social actions as a result of the excellent guidance provided and the effective strategies that they have acquired while being at the school. Some older students confirmed that this school had changed their lives; they now know how to treat others with respect and were confident that they could leave school ready to face new challenges. The students are encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour and effort at the end of each lesson through the reward system, which they consider is fair. Their attendance is excellent. They arrive at lessons on time and apologise if they are a few minutes late. Through the curriculum on offer, there is the opportunity for every student to find something that he can excel at, and several older students confirmed that they had already chosen a career path based on their practical subjects and showed a commitment in their attitude to succeed. This growing self-confidence helps them to make informed decisions about their future.

The students are encouraged to appreciate the world around them through the subjects that they study and visits to museums, galleries and other places of interest. The wide range of practical opportunities that the students engage in, such as throwing clay pots, making furniture and models, repairing vehicles, learning skills such as painting, decorating and bricklaying have engaged them effectively and help to prepare them well for life outside school. Positive comments from one student, such as: 'I have been given loads of help in every way', confirmed how the school had helped this boy to prepare for life outside school, especially in acquiring a range of practical skills. This demonstrates how much the students value the help given to them. Students confirm that they feel safe in school, that there is zero tolerance of bullying and there is always a member of staff ready to listen. The school council plays an active role, with some of their recommendations put into place. The school

is a sociable community, with many opportunities taken to promote this, such as Achievers Day and the annual parents' day to which parents and others are invited. Good opportunities are provided to help students gain a knowledge of English services and institutions and these, together with the PSHCE lessons, prepare students well in considering issues of diversity in society. A variety of approaches are taken in developing students' multicultural awareness and racial harmony is effectively promoted. The students raise funds for charitable causes regularly.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. Very high levels of staff care and support, and consistent and vigilant supervision during the day, actively promote the safety and welfare of all students. The school has devised and effectively implemented an extensive range of policies which pay due regard to national guidance. These include effective policies for anti-bullying, health and safety, with risk assessments for visits outside school, behaviour and safeguarding. Thorough risk assessments are undertaken for all activities. Policies and procedures for the management of behaviour and to prevent bullying are implemented very effectively, ensuring that the school is an orderly community. The designated persons responsible for child protection are trained appropriately in both safeguarding and safer recruitment. All staff are suitably trained to ensure students are properly safeguarded. A detailed child protection policy fully meets requirements and staff ensure guidance is implemented effectively.

All staff are fully trained in first aid and accidents are carefully recorded. The students are developing a very good understanding of how to keep healthy and take part enthusiastically in cookery and sports. Precautions for fire prevention are very thorough, with a risk assessment undertaken of the premises; all fire appliances are checked annually and fire drills are undertaken very regularly and outcomes are formally recorded. The admission and attendance registers meet regulatory requirements.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out all of the required checks on all staff and others to confirm their suitability to work with children. A safe recruitment policy is in place and it is fully implemented. The single central record contains all of the necessary information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation create a pleasant environment and assist the students to learn safely and effectively. All classrooms and other teaching and learning areas are well suited to the students' learning requirements. There are good specialist teaching rooms, especially for vocational subjects and recreational activities. Additional use is made of local facilities for games.

Provision of information

The school has improved the quality of information it provides and all interested parties, including parents and carers, are provided with all the required information. This includes termly reports, an annual whole-school review and students' annual reviews.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Continue work on the planned developments in the curriculum for introducing therapies and in developing a curriculum for post-16 students.
- Develop a system which encourages students to review their own learning.
- Ensure there is a better balance of practical and academic work in lessons which better meets the needs of younger students.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Boys school for students with emotional, social and emotional difficulties.		
Date school opened	1996		
Age range of pupils	11–19 years		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 15	Girls: 0	Total: 15
Number of boarders	Boys: 13	Girls: 0	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 15	Girls: 0	Total: 15
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,846		
Annual fees (boarders)	£179,556		
Telephone number	01403 790939		
Email address	Slinfold@hillcrestcare.co.uk		
Principal	Mark Birkbeck		
Headteacher	Chris Jackson		
Proprietor	Richard Greenwell		

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.



29 November 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Hillcrest College, Horsham RH13 0RA

Thank you for the welcome to your school when I visited recently. I enjoyed my visit very much. The inspection judged that the school provides you with a good quality of education through its good curriculum and effective teaching and supports you very well with your personal development. The school meets all government requirements. I was pleased to see that:

- provision for your spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and you are extremely well cared for
- you enjoy most of your lessons, especially the practical ones, and that you like your teachers and support staff, who are very kind to you
- you are being helped to overcome your difficulties successfully and your behavior is outstanding
- you are learning to get on well with other people
- the school and care staff work very closely together for your benefit, which you appreciate.

I have asked your school to get a better balance between practical and academic work in your lessons for younger students so that you can maintain your concentration better, to encourage you to assess your own learning in lessons and for teachers to further develop their plans for lessons for the oldest students.

With my best wishes

Jill Bainton
Lead inspector