

Hill Farm

C/O Castlecare, The Manor House, Squires Hill, Kettering, Northamptonshire NN14 6BQ

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Adequate	3
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- Students make expected progress from their individual starting points.
- Following a period of instability, teaching and students' learning are improving.
- Students become anxious and frustrated when staff give mixed messages about what is expected for learning and behaviour in class.
- The most important things that students need to work on to improve their academic achievement and behaviour are not always clear in teachers' plans and students' targets.
- Progress for some students is hampered by the lack of a well-structured programme to teach reading and spelling.
- Not all of the accommodation is used to best effect for a good learning environment.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff are highly committed to work together to improve students' achievements and personal development.
- Students' attendance in school improves significantly when compared with their previous experiences of education.
- The operational manager for education has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and took decisive action to reverse a decline in the provision.

Information about this inspection

- The headteacher was notified of this inspection on the day before the inspection started.
- The inspector observed teaching by two teachers in three lessons, looked at students' previous work and assessments of their progress, and briefly observed other sessions where learning took place.
- Meetings were held with the school's operational manager for education and other members of staff, and the proprietor's regional operations manager. Policies were scrutinised for welfare, health and safety, the curriculum, and teaching and assessment.
- Responses to questionnaires from students and staff were considered.

Inspection team

Heather Yaxley, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a small special school that is registered to admit up to 12 boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 16 years, who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The number of students on roll fluctuates throughout each year. Some will stay for a short period and others for much longer. Most students have a statement of special educational needs and all students are in the care of their local authority. The school caters for residential students. It is common for students to have been out of school for long periods prior to attending Hill Farm.
- The operations manager for education leads the school, in addition to three other schools within the company.
- The school opened in 2008. It was previously inspected in February 2010, when the quality of education and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were judged as inadequate. A monitoring inspection took place in October 2010 and found that good progress had been made in addressing the weaknesses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that students make good academic progress in lessons by:
 - implementing a well-planned, systematic programme to teach reading and spelling
 - making sure that targets for lessons are specific about what each student will learn.
- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning in class by:
 - making sure that support staff facilitate independence, reflection and resilience
 - making sure that teachers and support staff have a clear, shared understanding of how behaviour is managed and how the lessons are organised, and then to stick to it.
- Improve assessment by making sure that all staff and all plans focus on the same set of individual targets for each student, and that there are not too many targets.
- Improve the learning environment by making good use of all accommodation available.
- **The school must meet the following independent school standards:**
 - ensure appropriate arrangements for the short-term care of sick and injured students (23B(1)(b)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' achievement is adequate across a range of skills, including literacy and numeracy. For the past two years, students left school with a range of Entry Level qualifications and vocational certificates that helped them to go on to further education. The amount of progress that students make from their individual starting points is directly affected by their attendance, attitudes to work and the quality of teaching. At times over the past 12 months, some students underachieved because expectations for learning and behaviour were not consistently high enough. This decline has been reversed. Work folders show that, since the beginning of the year, their achievements are adequate. Work is complete, generally well-presented and involves written responses that are sufficient in detail and quality to be an accurate record of students' application of their knowledge and understanding. Students' achievement in reading is not accelerating fast enough to make up for gaps in knowledge and skills because reading and spelling are not planned or taught specifically enough.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development are adequate. Staff manage students' complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties appropriately when incidents occur. However, they do not always help enough to reduce students' frustration and anxiety because of misunderstandings between staff about what has been agreed. This means that learning in lessons is sometimes interrupted unnecessarily and students get mixed messages about how well they are doing.

Students' development as independent learners is sometimes stifled by too much adult support in lessons, albeit well-intended, leaving little room for reflection or extending work on their own. Nevertheless, supportive and determined work from staff to improve attendance is generally very effective in re-engaging students in education and taking examinations. Students want to come to school. There are examples of students settling very quickly to learning, even when they have been out of school for over a year, and they have then gone on to attend local schools or spend some of their week at college or off-site for vocational studies.

The curriculum and supportive relationships with staff help to develop students' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, cultures and beliefs that are different to their own. This is true also for developing students' awareness of what is right and wrong, and the choices that they can make as citizens within a democratic society and according to British law. Opportunities for the curriculum and teaching to support students' individual targets for behaviour are sometimes limited by a lack of clarity about the most important things that each student needs to work on.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate and is improving. It is not yet good enough to promote students' good achievement because planning and support limit students' opportunities to do better. Each lesson is planned carefully but plans sometimes refer to what will be done, rather than what will be achieved. Lessons start promptly and purposefully, but there are sometimes too many adults in lessons to allow students good opportunities to show what they know and can do. At times, this also leads to mixed messages between staff about what is expected of learning and behaviour, and allows students to manipulate situations for their own benefit, rather than to focus on what the teachers want them to achieve.

Students' academic achievements are assessed across a range of subjects and provide an accurate picture of what students can do. Students' personal development, focusing on their emotional, social and behavioural needs, is reviewed frequently. Targets for what they need to work on next

are set out in students' individual plans and these are reviewed formally on a regular basis. But these reviews and targets often serve different purposes for different professionals, including the monitoring done by the proprietor. This means that there are lots of targets which do not easily fit together. This does not help teachers to plan good opportunities in lessons to specifically support students' personal development alongside the acquisition of academic skills.

There are good quality resources to support teaching and learning, including computers, interactive boards and text books. These things, together with staff's relevant subject knowledge, provide students with what they need to gain knowledge and skills across the curriculum. Arrangements to teach students to read and spell are adequate but not planned carefully enough to make sure that they have the best opportunities to succeed.

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The curriculum is adequate. It ensures a suitable range of subjects with accreditation and examinations for students with different abilities and interests. English and mathematics have sufficient priority within weekly timetables. Schemes of work help teachers to plan lessons that ensure students' entitlement to the National Curriculum, as well as having the flexibility to keep students engaged in learning new skills when a less formal structure is needed. Particular favourites with students are cooking and sport, where they often show greater levels of cooperation than in other subjects. Some policies overlap unnecessarily, such as those that promote students' personal development. Policies tend to be generic rather than detailed guidance to help teachers focus specifically on what it is that students need to learn most in relation to their complex emotional, social and behavioural needs. Nevertheless, the curriculum covers a range of general issues that supports students' personal development such as bullying, discrimination and sexual health. Personal development is also promoted in lessons that cover living independently and how public services operate, and by opportunities to visit museums and local amenities.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Adequate

Students' welfare, health and safety are adequate, and include robust arrangements for recruiting staff and thorough procedures for addressing bullying. All regulatory requirements are met. Staff know the students' needs and circumstances very well. The residential and teaching staff are united as a team to help students participate in education successfully, and go the extra mile to make sure that this happens. For example, deterioration in students' behaviour in school during the autumn term was effectively addressed by a coordinated and concerted approach. Students' behaviour improved, attendance in school continued and the focus on learning maintained. However, there are now too many adults involved and there is some blurring of the boundaries between residential and education staff. This inhibits students' opportunities to be more responsible for their behaviour and learning.

Students' understanding of healthy lifestyles is not well promoted at lunchtimes. Staff do not make sure that students make healthy choices or that they develop their social skills by being active participants.

Leadership and management

Adequate

Leadership and management of the school are adequate. The operations manager for education took swift action when there was deterioration in the quality of teaching and students' behaviour earlier this year. An accurate assessment that the staff had lost focus on the prime purpose of education being on learning led to successful action. Teaching methods and the curriculum were not adapted well enough when students' needs became more complex and more challenging. Expectations were not high enough. Experienced staff were brought in from other schools within the company and staff were challenged about their performance. This led to some short-term

instability while standards of behaviour and teaching were re-established. Now, things are back on track. There is still some inconsistency in how staff apply policies for managing students' behaviour, and staff and students say that this is frustrating. The proprietor monitors the school's work regularly. Some of the information that the proprietor requires creates an additional layer that is unhelpful to school staff when evaluating their success and setting targets for improvement.

All but one of the regulations for independent schools are met. There is a medical room on the first floor but it has nowhere for students to lie down and the toilet facilities for students are on the ground floor. The premises and accommodation are adequate in other respects. Classrooms in the main building are suitable for small group work but in general the area is cramped. The proximity of classrooms to administrative and other facilities is not helpful in promoting a good educational environment. In contrast, the adjacent building is spacious, well-maintained and equipped, with the potential to give a strong learning ethos; but this building is under used.

The school prospectus provides parents, carers and local authorities with a suitable range of useful information. The policy and the procedures for handling complaints are effectively implemented and set out clear guidelines for when concerns are raised. There is a helpful, separate policy to help students raise issues formally and informally, and students are given a written response to any issues that they raise.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135626
Inspection number	420226
DfE registration number	891/6033

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Independent
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	3
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Castlecare Group Limited
Headteacher	Mary Mackinnon (operations manager for education)
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2010

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