

Hillcrest Park School

Southcombe, Chipping Norton, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX7 5QH

Inspection dates 21–23 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school because

- Pupils successfully re-engage in learning, many after disrupted previous experiences, and make good progress in their lessons.
- Pupils’ attitudes are very positive and they behave well. Their attendance is very high.
- The safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and the pupils confirm they feel safe.
- All staff are very proud to work at the school and support what leaders are trying to achieve.
- Leadership and management are good. They are effective in establishing good-quality teaching and learning.
- Leaders establish a school culture of high expectations of learning for all. Leaders ensure that a good standard of education is provided for pupils with a range of learning difficulties.
- The sixth form is good. Pupils gain a range of academic and life skills which prepare them well for the next stage of their lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Records of information on pupils’ progress are not sufficiently refined to show their achievement over time as they move through each key stage.
- School assessments of pupils’ achievements have not been checked externally to ensure their accuracy.
- Pupils’ individual education plans do not include sufficiently detailed small steps which the pupils need to take to achieve even more success in their learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (‘the independent school standards’) and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was undertaken with one day’s notice.
- The inspector observed 13 lessons or parts of lessons, most of which were jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the school's leaders, teaching staff and pupils. A range of documentation was examined, including policies, assessment records, the curriculum and teachers’ plans. The inspector heard pupils read and looked at their written and other work. The inspector observed them at break times.
- The inspector collected pupils’ views of the school from the many conversations that were held with individuals and small groups throughout the two days of the inspection.
- The views expressed by 13 members of staff through survey questionnaires were considered.
- There were no responses to Ofsted’s Parent View survey. The care home managers contacted the inspector and made very positive comments about the way that the young people in their care enjoyed their school life.

Inspection team

Jill Bainton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hillcrest Park School, which opened in 1995, is an independent special day school for pupils with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is owned by Outcomes First Group and serves four of their residences. The school is located in purpose-built premises close to Chipping Norton, in Oxfordshire.
- It is registered for up to 28 boys and girls aged between seven and 18. Currently, 19 pupils aged from seven to 17 are on roll. They are placed at the school by a large number of different local authorities. Currently, 16 pupils have a statement of special educational needs and all relate to severe emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. All are looked after children. Many pupils have spent considerable periods of time outside formal education before they joined the school.
- The school uses alternative provision for sport. Pupils are given opportunities for work experience, both on and off the school site.
- The school aims to 'raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence; help them learn strategies to support their behaviour; and to develop their learning skills and academic knowledge to enable them to become independent and successful citizens'.
- The school was inspected by Ofsted in January 2011 when it met all but one of the regulations.
- This was an aligned inspection with Ofsted social care.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop assessment systems so that pupils' progress over time can be checked more easily as they move through each key stage.
- Ensure that an independent, external check takes place on the accuracy of the school's records on pupils' progress.
- Ensure that the pupils' individual education plans include more detailed small steps to enable pupils achieve even greater success in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good and enable the pupils to learn and achieve well.
- The senior management team, which is comprised of the headteacher and senior teacher, has a detailed school development plan which identifies the right areas for improvement. Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the school accurately. Leaders rightly identify that the school's systems to check on pupils' progress require refinement. They are aware that they need to have an external moderation of assessments and records of pupils' progress.
- Senior and middle leaders ensure that teaching and learning are good. As a result, pupils achieve well and their personal development is very good. The curriculum is effective as it is well planned with suitable learning activities, which the pupils can tackle successfully and, as a result, achieve well.
- The management of staff performance has a positive impact on achieving good teaching and learning. Staff questionnaire responses indicate that they are highly positive about the school and proud to be a member of the staff.
- The headteacher and staff have successfully established a school with a single, shared vision. All staff work hard to provide chances for all pupils to succeed. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they are given to make a fresh start in this school and the ways in which it tailors the learning to address their particular needs. Both pupils and staff hold the headteacher in high regard. He is successful in raising the levels of achievement in the school, ensures that the teaching is good and gives the pupils confidence in themselves.
- The accommodation and the complaints procedures meet the regulations. Parents, carers and placing authorities receive the full range of required information through the school website, brochure and reports. Numerous placing authorities confirm that their young people have settled very well at the school and are making good progress. They indicate that they are very pleased with the school's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**

The proprietors, Outcomes First Group, take an active and supportive role in the governance of the school. Ongoing conversations with the senior management ensure that school leaders are held to account for the administration of the school and for teachers' and pupils' performance. Through this close liaison, the proprietors have a clear understanding of the school, its strengths including the quality of teaching, how well students are doing and of areas in need of development.

The proprietors ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- Pupils' behaviour is good. This is evident both in lessons and around the school, and contributes positively to their learning. Pupils said during the inspection that 'life is normally like this at school', confirming that the pupils' behaviour is usually good.
- Most pupils arrive at the school having experienced difficulties in managing their behaviour in previous schools. Through very skilled staff management of their behaviour and good strategies to raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence, their behaviour improves considerably. This is clearly evident in the school's detailed pupil behaviour logs.
- Pupils who still struggle with their behaviour in lessons are initially given 'take up time' for several minutes to help them refocus so the learning of others is not disrupted. If this action is unsuccessful, they leave the class for a short period with the teaching assistant to reflect on their behaviour. As a result of this effective action, most pupils then return to their class to re-engage in learning.
- Pupils make good progress in learning to work alongside others, often after not being in school for some time. A number of pupils with previous behavioural and learning difficulties are enabled to re-enter mainstream education.
- Pupils confirm that they are happy at the school. They look smart in their uniforms and display positive attitudes during the day. They made many comments such as, 'It's cool here... I am doing well... I like the staff...even though we are in care they make it as normal as possible.' They understand and approve of the rewards system for behaviour and effort in lessons which promotes pupils' moral development well. It helps to ensure that the school is an orderly place where learning can take place. Pupils' improved attitudes to learning and very high attendance helps to increase their self-esteem and confidence.

- Pupils say that they have no concern about bullying, including cyber-bullying. This view is also confirmed by school and care staff who responded to the parental survey.
- Hillcrest Park School is a caring and welcoming community. Pupils are treated respectfully and respond well to the staff who are very good role models.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils confirm that they feel safe at school and always know who to turn to should they need help.
- All staff have been checked for their suitability to work with young people. The school has rigorous appointment procedures which are accurately recorded on the required single central register of staff appointments. There are thorough procedures to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and that all staff are trained to the appropriate levels. The safeguarding policy meets the requirements of latest guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).
- Detailed risk assessments on the premises and activities both on and off site are completed well; this includes local sport facilities and placements for work experience. The school sports staff teach the pupils a well planned range of sporting activities using local sports facilities which have been fully risk assessed. All the required welfare, health and safety policies are in place. Their content is clear and they are implemented effectively.
- Staff ensure that provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, they learn about how democracy works through the school council. Visits outside school, such as to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford to see the Egyptian exhibition, help to improve pupils' historical awareness and provides them with time for reflection.
- The curriculum provides pupils with an increasing knowledge of different beliefs and ways of life. This is achieved through the very good personal, social, health and citizenship programme, which is firmly rooted in the life and work of the school, and weekly religious education lessons. Racial harmony is effectively promoted as staff assist pupils in their growing awareness of those from backgrounds different from their own. Pupils learn about English services and institutions through outside visits and school events. For example, during the inspection, older pupils organised a charity fundraising event for a national children's charity, baked cakes and organised games for the younger pupils.
- The school does not promote any partisan political views and ensures that any controversial issues are addressed in a balanced way.
- Huge improvements in pupils' attendance and renewed positive attitudes to learning make a positive contribution to their achievement.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The learning is good throughout the school as a result of the effective teaching. This enables pupils to make good progress over time in both their academic learning and personal development. The high quality of relationships with the pupils is a key factor in their success. As a result, pupils who have been disaffected in the past are now ready to learn.
- The small size of the class groups helps pupils to learn well. For example, it encourages more pupils to take part in discussions to develop their speaking skills. Pupils' behaviour in class is good with some behaving in an outstanding way. They mostly listen carefully, join in discussions if able to do so and answer questions confidently. As a result, they make the best use of time spent in class, make good progress in their learning and confirm that they enjoy school. They show in their responses during lessons that learning can be fun, rather than something that is simply to be endured.
- The infrequent incidences of poor behaviour in class are very well managed by staff with the minimum of disruption to the learning of the other pupils.
- Staff have an accurate knowledge of each pupil's attainment and use this information well to plan interesting activities. All staff, including support staff, are well informed about the pupils' individual learning and behaviour characteristics. Learning activities, especially in English and mathematics, build very closely on pupils' previous learning. They are effectively broken down into small steps, so pupils can understand the work and achieve well. Staff make frequent checks to ensure pupils understand what they are learning.
- The curriculum is well planned, including the extra-curricular activities. Pupils especially enjoy the practical sessions, for example making chocolate cookies, constructing a wooden workbench and examining mould on bread in science. These activities help pupils to keep engaged with their work and their desire to learn.

- Pupils are assessed carefully when they enter the school to find out what they know and can do. This process helps teachers to provide work at the correct level for each pupil. Pupils' achievement is suitably documented and there are large amounts of assessment data. However, progress cannot readily be checked to confirm achievement over time as pupils move through each key stage as systems are not sufficiently refined to allow this to take place. There are no additional procedures such as an external checks on the accuracy of the school's assessments and records of pupils' progress.
- The marking of pupils' work is very regular and consistent across all subjects. Teachers give pupils very clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils confirm that this advice helps them to know what to do next.
- Care staff from the company's residences work alongside teaching staff in school each day to help support pupils. These staff, together with teaching assistants, play a vital role in guiding pupils, for example, in keeping them focused on tasks set. Staff work seamlessly as a team to promote a calm working atmosphere where the pupils can thrive and develop as confident young people.
- A wide range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), is used to provide interesting activities to develop pupils' skills.
- Good careers advice is provided through an outside agency. Pupils are given opportunities for work experience, both on- and off-site, which enables them to gain a valuable range of skills.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils achieve well from often very low starting points in terms of skills, knowledge and levels of motivation. Most arrive at the school with fragmented prior learning experiences. This good progress is shown in the quality of work in their books, observations of their learning in lessons, and through the school's own information about each pupil's progress. The school successfully re-engages pupils in education and helps them to improve and manage their own behaviour well. Once they have settled into the routines of the school, the majority make good progress from their various starting points.
- Pupils make good progress because of the good curriculum and effective teaching. Some older pupils, who have been at the school for some time, are making better than expected progress over time due to their settled learning environment.
- The school uses effective strategies to help pupils to read and to express themselves verbally. Their listening skills develop well alongside their speaking skills. As one pupil said, 'We like to talk a lot here.' These approaches assist them in developing good writing skills.
- Pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3 make good progress in reading, English and mathematics. Some pupils make more rapid progress in these core subjects as they move through the school as a result of the effective support they are given.
- Key Stage 4 pupils also make good progress in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects. These include vocational subjects, such as hair and beauty, construction, art, craft, and sport and leisure. Pupils take accredited courses in these subjects starting in Year 9. The school has not had pupils in Year 11 entered for GCSE examinations in the last two years. Most Key Stage 4 pupils achieve their predicted outcomes taking into account their previous difficulties. Placing authorities spoke highly of the school, especially of the success of pupils who had been placed in a number of previous settings.
- Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs have suitable individual education plans, but they are not all sufficiently detailed or precise in identifying the small steps which they need to take to achieve even greater success. Annual reviews are carried out and are very well documented. Pupils are aware of their targets and know what they need to do to improve.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Sixth form students achieve well. Some more-able students acquire helpful literacy and numeracy skills. Students' mathematical skills are developed well, often in more practical ways, such as in cookery and art. Sensory experiences are used effectively to help engage the students in play and exploratory activities.
- The provision for sixth form students equips them well for the next stage of their life. These students make good progress in many aspects of their personal development. They show impressive gains in confidence and self-esteem such that by the time they are preparing to leave school they are talking optimistically about their future.
- Students develop with a wide range of life skills, such as learning to cook for themselves, which will help

them to live more independently once they leave full-time education. The fully functioning hairdressing and beauty salon gives some students an excellent introduction to the world of work. The painting and decorating and construction workshop gives them an opportunity to develop other practical skills which will support them well in their adult life.

- Sixth form students make very good progress in preparing for their next steps in life. This is because of the very good promotion of their personal development and support in acquiring sufficient skills, knowledge and understanding in English, mathematics and ICT to be able to function in society.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	123326
Inspection number	446270
DfE registration number	931/6115

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted 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	Special day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part time pupils	2
Proprietor	Outcomes First Group
Chair	Roger Colvin
Headteacher	David Davidson
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 January 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,128
Telephone number	01608 644621
Email address	parkschool@hillcrestcare.co.uk

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