

Hillcrest Oaklands College

Inspection dates

26–28 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Require improvement |
| Sixth form provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Satisfactory |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. There is no formal governance to hold the school to account. Improvement planning does not focus on improving teaching and learning with enough rigour.
- Leaders do not use information about pupils' and learners' performance well enough to pinpoint areas of strengths and weaknesses in subjects.
- British values are not taught through a coordinated approach so that pupils have a deep enough understanding of all aspects.
- The school does not meet all of the independent school standards.
- The outcomes of pupils require improvement. The most-able pupils do not achieve high enough examination grades. Pupils say that some work given to them does not challenge them enough.
- Teaching and learning require improvement. Inconsistent feedback does not inform pupils of their next steps in learning and this slows progress. Some work set, particularly for the most-able pupils, is too easy. Some teaching does not capture pupils' interests and leads to some pupils losing focus in lessons.
- There are too few regular reading opportunities to foster a love of reading.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' and learners' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. During their time at the school, they make rapid improvements in their behaviour and engage in learning more readily.
- Staff are skilled in the management of pupils' behaviour.
- Senior leaders have started to improve outcomes, and raise the expectations and aspirations for pupils.
- The attainment of most pupils is improving, as they are beginning to achieve better in a greater range of suitable academic and vocational qualifications.
- The sixth form is good. Vocational studies and work-related learning prepare learners effectively for when they leave Oaklands.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the leadership and management of the school through:
 - establishing more effective governance arrangements to challenge and support the school
 - ensuring the school's self-evaluation captures a more accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and informs school improvement planning
 - further promotion of fundamental British values through a more coordinated approach across subjects and through school information
 - analysing and using information about the progress and attainment of pupils to inform teaching and learning
 - ensuring teachers implement the school's marking policy consistently so that pupils know how to improve their work.

- Improve teaching and learning so pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers provide pupils with more academically demanding and interesting work
 - providing regular opportunities for pupils to develop reading for interest.

The school must meet the following independent school standards:

- The proprietor must ensure that an admission register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.¹ (paragraph 15).
- The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently and their responsibilities are fulfilled effectively (paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)).

¹ S.I. 2006/1751, to which there are amendments not relevant to these Regulations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- The leadership and management of the school have not ensured that all the independent school standards are fully met. However, the unmet standards do not have a direct impact on pupils and learners' safety, well-being or outcomes. Vulnerable pupils are secure and protected.
- The learning climate promotes pupils' academic and vocational achievement. However, monitoring of the school's marking policy is weak and information about the progress and attainment of pupils is not used well enough to inform improvements needed in the teaching and learning of subjects. These relative weaknesses contribute to slowing the rate of some of the most-able pupils' progress.
- The school's self-evaluation does not accurately reflect the current state of the development of the school. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans are not linked well enough. For example, improvement planning does not address how British values and governance arrangements are to be developed. Improvements in teaching and learning are not prioritised sufficiently.
- British values are not articulated well enough for pupils to show an in-depth understanding of them. Discussions with pupils and staff revealed that they lacked clarity on these values. School information does not make clear how the promotion and understanding of these values are planned and taught. However, despite this weakness, pupils are suitably prepared for life in modern Britain, as they demonstrate tolerance and respect for different cultures, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. These values are fostered through visits, such as to the local Buddhist temple, and a range of visitors to the school. They learn the importance of acceptance and equality, which are reinforced by good staff role models.
- Pupils are taught the full range of subjects that they should receive. A significant strength is the emphasis on vocational studies, which does much to engage pupils' interests. Equine and land-based studies are popular courses and some pupils use this interest to go on to study at agricultural college. The school has increased the range of nationally recognised qualifications pupils can take and this is beginning to improve their achievement and self-esteem.
- Leaders' capacity to improve is shown through the substantial improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and in the improving outcomes of pupils and learners. This capacity is further strengthened by more consistent staffing.
- The school receives a small amount of additional funding for vulnerable pupils. This money has been spent appropriately and evaluated by leaders so that it has helped these pupils to make up lost ground in their education.
- The performance management of staff and decisions about salary progression are carried out within the financial constraints of the school. Regular teaching observations by senior leaders are beginning to improve teaching and learning. These procedures have not yet secured good teaching.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Pupils are treated with respect and a strong emphasis is placed on avoiding stereotyping, so that the girls are encouraged to achieve their potential. The school works proactively with members of the local police, who teach sessions on positive relationships and aspects of diversity. Discrimination of any type is rare.
- Many pupils have a history of difficult relationships and risky behaviours. Staff work hard to create a positive and supportive culture in school, where pupils feel secure. The school works well with other stakeholders to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe.
- The procedure for handling complaints meets regulations.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Currently there are no governance arrangements for the school to provide challenge and support to senior leaders. However, the proprietors check that the school meets the needs of pupils appropriately and that they are safe and protected. The proprietors are aware of the need to look at developing this aspect.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Safeguarding information and training reflects the latest guidance and staff are alert to signs of extremism, exploitation and pupils who may go missing from education. Recruitment procedures are robust. Pupils feel safe and confident because their well-being is nurtured effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- A number of pupils said that work given to them was not always demanding enough. Some complained that work they were given they had covered in primary school. Inspection evidence supports this view. In some lessons, tasks are not challenging enough, with too much emphasis on the completion of worksheets that are too easy. This can result in some pupils losing interest in their learning.
- The school's marking policy is not applied consistently. Some teachers do not make clear to pupils in their written or verbal feedback how pupils can improve their work and what they need to focus on next. Where this is the case, pupils' progress is slower.
- Teachers do not share with pupils what they are expected to learn in lessons precisely enough. Some teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are too low.
- Many pupils are able and confident readers, but there are not enough planned reading opportunities for them to develop a habit of reading for pleasure.
- Staff create an informal learning atmosphere and this encourages pupils to respond well to their teachers. Relationships are trusting and supportive and this puts pupils at their ease so that they are more receptive to learning.
- Teachers encourage pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils overall engage well in lessons. For example, pupils contributed well to a discussion on relationships, listening to each other's views and modifying their own thinking. Management of pupils' behaviour is skilful and this enables pupils to settle down quickly and get on with their work.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strongest in mathematics, where the expectations of pupils' academic achievement are rising and there is a strong emphasis on examination preparation to gain better pass rates, which in turn boost pupils' confidence in their learning.
- Pupils enjoy lessons when there are opportunities for practical activities, such as art or food technology.
- Pupils enjoy carrying out research on topics using information technology and devices such as tablets and this helps them to write extended pieces of work of good quality.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say incidents of bullying are not common, but if they do occur, they are responded to quickly by staff and dealt with effectively.
- Pupils develop their self-esteem and self-confidence well, because they are safe. Pupils are encouraged to develop mature attitudes. They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour and understand how they can make positive contributions to other people through charitable activities.
- The school council is an effective body and has made good suggestions for improvements, such as additional activities and resources.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and develop their personal responsibility through the good curriculum. They learn how to be safe online and understand the risks of substance misuse and alcohol.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is promoted effectively. Pupils visit places of interest such as the Blue John mines and outdoor education centres to learn an appreciation of nature and team-building skills. They enjoy learning how to care for animals on the school site, such as alpaca, sheep and horses.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Attendance is well above average, with pupils rarely missing a day's education. Time lost in lessons due to unacceptable behaviour is kept to a minimum.
- Pupils have largely positive attitudes to learning. They respect the school premises and take pride in displays of their work and their uniform, which they designed.
- Pupils' behaviour when attending off-site activities is equally good, as it is a prerequisite for them to access such provision.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around school is mostly good and they make rapid improvements in their conduct and attitudes over time.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Most pupils have a chequered history of schooling and many have gaps in their knowledge and understanding due to a disrupted education. Consequently, most have below average levels of attainment on entry. In addition, pupils stay for varying amounts of time at the school and some pupils are placed on a temporary or emergency basis.
- Pupils' outcomes require improvement, as some do not make good progress from their starting points. Although pupils gain a range of nationally recognised qualifications, not enough pupils achieve grade C or above in GCSE in English and mathematics, when they have the potential to do so. On occasions, pupils' progress is hampered by work which is not demanding enough, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- Pupils' achievements are starting to rise, through the increased range of qualifications, which are beginning to be more demanding for pupils. Senior leaders acknowledge that some of the most-able pupils could still achieve more if they were challenged more rigorously.
- Pupils also gain awards in vocational qualifications, such as hairdressing and land-based studies. When pupils experience success in these, they gain an appetite for achieving more qualifications and their aspirations are raised.
- Pupils who are in receipt of the pupil premium funding achieve at broadly the same level as other pupils in the school. Additional resources, such as revision guides, have been used appropriately to enable them to prepare for examinations and to address specific gaps in their learning.

Sixth form provision

is good

- The number of learners in the sixth form is small. Vocational courses and work-related learning prepare them effectively for their next stage of life.
- Sixth form learners follow courses that build on their prior knowledge and experiences. This often includes continuing with existing GCSE coursework and students often resit an examination to gain a higher grade. Some learners also work toward AS-level courses.
- Where appropriate, learners have the option of attending a local college and have a personalised timetable built around their needs. Suitable safeguarding checks and risk assessments are carried out to ensure the safety and well-being of learners. Progress is monitored to check the suitability of the courses being followed, through liaison with the college.
- Learners receive impartial careers education advice to help them in decisions about their future. Work-related placements are provided for learners in retail, or health and beauty salons.
- Learners are prepared effectively for their next stage of life when they leave Oaklands. Most return to their home areas and attend college courses such as equine studies, music, art and textiles.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 131004 |
| Inspection number | 10008887 |
| DfE registration number | 860/6029 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School status | Independent residential special school |
| Age range of pupils | 12–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Girls |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Girls |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 18 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 5 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Hillcrest Care Ltd |
| Headteacher | Steven Williams |
| Annual fees (education) | £36,800 |
| Telephone number | 01543 473772 |
| Website | N/A |
| Email address | oaklandshead@hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk |
| Date of previous school inspection | 12–13 December 2012 |

Information about this school

- Hillcrest Oaklands College is a dually registered independent residential special school and children's home for vulnerable girls aged 12 to 19 years.
- The college was last inspected in December 2012. The current headteacher took up his post in April 2013.
- All students are taught on-site, although where appropriate sixth form students may attend a local college for part of the week.
- Students attend from 15 different local authorities. All are residential on the college site.
- The residential provision was not inspected at the time of the education inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 12 parts of lessons, eight of which were joint lesson observations with senior leaders.
- Students' work, surveys, annual reports and other records were scrutinised.
- The school's documentation was examined, including planning for subjects, records of students' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of students. The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The views of pupils were sought through discussions.
- There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire Parent View to elicit an analysis.

Inspection team

Frank Price, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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