

Hill House School

Rope Hill, Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 8NE

Inspection dates

20–22 June 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Exemplary leadership of the highest calibre ensures that pupils re-engage with education, achieve very well and are supported conscientiously as they transition into adult life. Leaders go the extra mile to ensure that all pupils experience success, realising their personal best. This is a continually improving school.
- Through a wide range of activities including training, visits and work placements in the community, this school is changing attitudes towards pupils who experience significant difficulties. Equally, all who work with the school's pupils gain much in return.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and is used wisely as a vehicle for providing pupils with an experience of education that sees no upper limit. The school's mantra 'everyone has a personal best' is explored fully through all activities.
- Notwithstanding pupils' complex social and communication needs, staff ensure that all pupils' voices are heard. This is a highly cohesive school community, with pupils' needs and aspirations at the heart of its work.
- Pupils, including those in the sixth form, achieve well and make significant progress from their starting points in a range of subjects. All pupils gain external accreditations and make significant gains in their social and personal development.
- Pupils make substantial progress in their ability to self-manage their behaviour. As a result, many pupils are able to integrate with their peers successfully.
- Teachers, therapy staff and support staff all place each pupil's needs at the centre of their work. Because of an exceptional level of collaboration and high level of expertise among staff, pupils make outstanding progress.
- Pupils' ability to keep themselves safe, including beginning to manage risk for themselves, is promoted strongly. As a result, pupils make rapid gains in becoming increasingly independent young adults.
- Governors and the proprietor make a valuable contribution. However, governors' effectiveness at setting the strategic direction of the school is underdeveloped.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the role of governors so that they contribute even more to the strategic direction of the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders, the proprietor, including the chief executive officer, and staff are united in their pursuit of excellence, ensuring that each pupil has the best possible experience of schooling. The headteacher, ably supported by other senior leaders, exudes the highest level of commitment to pupils, including ensuring that they move on to appropriate, supportive placements. Leaders meticulously orchestrate close working between specialised teams from care, education and therapy, ensuring that everyone's contribution is sought and valued. With a strong moral purpose, leaders and staff ensure that each pupil's potential is revealed and success realised.
- Leaders and staff work tirelessly to ensure that pupils become accepted and welcomed within the school's local community. As a result, this is a school where everyone plays their part in changing society's attitudes for the better. Events like the school's harvest festival bring local people into the school to mix harmoniously and work together with pupils. In return, for pupils who have experienced extended periods of isolation from wider society, the community becomes accessible and inclusive.
- Leaders regularly evaluate school effectiveness. They use the information gathered to inform detailed school improvement planning. This reflective approach and commitment to continual improvement ensures that the school meets the independent school standards and provides an education of the highest quality to pupils in its care.
- The first-class curriculum and appealing extra-curricular activities, such as the art club, afford pupils positive experiences of education. As pupils join the school, because of the terrific expertise of staff, they are able to access a comprehensive menu of activities much more successfully than they have managed in the past. Pupils develop independence, honing a variety of skills and making excellent progress. All discover previously hidden aptitude for specific subjects, including art, computing, music and design and technology.
- Training staff well and facilitating the sharing of expertise is the mainstay of the school's high-quality performance-management system. The school's care, therapy and education professionals and those from alternative providers frequently share their expertise and learn from each other. As a result, there is a comprehensive understanding of each other's proficiency, with staff collectively enabling pupils to excel in all aspects of their development. Furthermore, because of leaders' focus on a cohesive multidisciplinary approach, they have secured significant improvement to the school's effectiveness since the last inspection.
- Staff, including subject and phase leaders, demonstrate the highest levels of care and commitment to pupils. They expertly manage each pupil's needs and share wholeheartedly in the headteacher's aspiration. One member of staff encapsulated the views of others, saying, 'It is a privilege to work at Hill House. Aspirations and expectations are high.'
- Leaders support staff well. Induction processes are rigorous. Staff from education, care and therapy meet with new staff, ensuring that they are fully up to speed with all aspects of the school's work. Leaders ensure that staff are well prepared for the challenges of

supporting the pupils, all of whom have highly complex needs.

- With adult support, pupils are well prepared for life in modern British society. Pupils develop social skills appropriately, learning how to show respect and tolerance towards one another and adults. Opportunities to consolidate social skills are encouraged, such as using the school's 'purple post box' to send birthday greetings. Visits, including to the Houses of Parliament, further enrich pupils' understanding of British values.

Governance

- The chief executive of The Cambian Group takes her role seriously and demonstrates a high level of commitment to the school's pupils. With her primary focus of 'serving young people' she has ensured that school leaders are empowered to make decisions, including those relating to the development of the school site and staff training.
- In recent times, a newly forged governing body has begun to contribute effectively to school improvement. Regular discussions about all aspects of the school's work are helpful in holding leaders more firmly to account. However, this work is not fully developed in setting the strategic direction for the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders prioritise the importance of keeping pupils safe. The school's designated safeguarding lead ensures that key messages are shared widely, including with parents. This enables staff to keep abreast of current requirements in a variety of ways, such as through the weekly safeguarding 'question and answer' email. Safeguarding pupils effectively is kept firmly in the spotlight, enabling staff to understand topical issues such as peer-on-peer abuse, in depth.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are thorough and published on the school's website. Leaders consider carefully the additional vulnerabilities of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff receive training and support on a regular basis that goes beyond what is required.
- Leaders have ensured that all members of the school's community are listened to. The school's 'purple post box' enables pupils to express worries and concerns that are then addressed thoroughly by staff.
- Procedures for keeping pupils safe online are exceptionally well tailored to meet pupils' needs and overcome pupils' barriers to keeping themselves safe. For example, during the school's e-safety day, pupils considered the theme, 'the power of the image'. Pupils took photographs and then, using appropriate communication strategies, decided whether to share images online. Despite complex learning needs, leaders ensure that pupils, with adult support, develop an appropriate awareness of how to use the internet safely.
- Safer recruitment procedures are comprehensive. Leaders conduct checks on adults' suitability to work with children methodically. The single central record is maintained carefully and meets requirements. Recruitment is thorough and leaders fully explore applicants' gaps in employment and their suitability to work with children. References, including those for overseas applicants, are always verified prior to appointment.

- Staff ensure that pupils are safe by undertaking detailed risk assessments, carefully considering the vulnerabilities of the pupils in their care. Before undertaking activities, staff carefully and wisely ascertain pupils' moods and frame of mind. As a result, pupils are able to participate in off-site visits safely, such as the recent whole-school visit to a local zoo.
- The school site is secure and affords pupils opportunities to make decisions and begin to manage risk for themselves. Leaders are continually assessing safety procedures, balancing decision-making alongside encouraging pupils' independence. The school is not risk-averse. As pupils have developed their self-awareness, leaders have successfully reduced the height of security fencing while not compromising pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Pupils are fully supported from the word go and their individual needs catered for precisely. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils have access to specialised furniture, equipment and learning resources that meet their needs precisely. This enables pupils to access learning and make outstanding progress in all aspects, often after extended periods of disengagement from education.
- The school's assessment systems are comprehensive and used consistently well by staff. Staff, at all levels, understand how well pupils are learning and what their next steps are. Leaders ensure that all aspects of pupils' development are considered fully and learning achievements are recognised and recorded accurately. Leaders work closely with other local schools to ensure that the information they gather is accurate.
- Staff are highly proficient at prompting and questioning pupils, granting pupils sufficient processing time to respond. This maintains pupils' engagement with the task in hand, often for sustained periods. For example, in a music lesson, when afforded time to respond, pupils were able to successfully identify the artist, Michael Jackson, when listening to disco music. Teachers' patience and expertise ensures that pupils experience success.
- Communication strategies are used and reinforced consistently by all staff. This enables pupils to feel confident and self-assured. They make rapid progress in developing their independent skills. Pupils competently make choices and express how they are feeling.
- Staff, including support staff, know pupils exceptionally well and understand how pupils with autistic spectrum conditions learn best. Individual education plans are appropriate and reflect the school's holistic approach, pinpointing pupils' social development, personal care and educational development needs. Staff share information effectively and use their precise knowledge of each pupil to provide the right blend of challenge, encouragement and support.
- Adults' use of assessment information is spot on. All are highly alert to ensuring that pupils maintain an upward trajectory. From time to time, when a pupil's progress slows, staff are quick to make adaptations, including offering individualised sessions to address gaps in learning. As a result, pupils get back on course with ease and continue to make progress.
- Teachers' planning is superb. They understand pupils' needs and exploit a variety of curriculum 'hooks' to stimulate pupils' interest and provide engaging, sensory experiences. For example, during an English lesson, pupils watched an animated version of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Pupils responded well, watching with deep concentration

and reflecting aptly on the value of kindness.

- The school's therapy programme makes an outstanding contribution to the development of pupils' social communication skills. For example, during a therapy session, pupils were highly adept at turn-taking, sharing a learning space, passing resources and responding appropriately to each other when making a spinning crane.
- The teaching of reading is promoted strongly by the school's English leader. An appropriate phonics and reading programme is in place and pupils enjoy visiting the school's library regularly. As a result of high-quality teaching, many pupils are gaining enjoyment and satisfaction from reading and sharing books.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. All staff, including leaders, go to great lengths to ensure that the unique nature of each pupil is fully understood and their voices are heard. Exceptionally strong relationships ensure that pupils have immense confidence in the adults that care for them. This enables pupils to access learning, make independent choices and enjoy education. Before joining Hill House, often they were unable to access the world of learning.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including from all forms of bullying. Pupils have many opportunities to learn how to keep safe that weave seamlessly through the school's curriculum as well as customised learning days such as the school's 'staying safe day'. The provision for keeping pupils safe online is outstanding, with every pupil having a bespoke and well-considered risk assessment plan in place.
- The school's curriculum is brimming with opportunities for pupils to develop self-awareness of how to keep safe in a range of different scenarios. For example, staff are adept at shaping the school's sex and relationships curriculum to meet each individual's requirements at a stage-appropriate level. Within this supported environment, pupils are able to make safety decisions with increasing independence, such as deciding when to drink water and move into the shade on a hot day.
- Leaders are resolute in their pursuit of the best onward journey for pupils and often continue to support individuals long after they have left the school. One parent praised leaders' commitment, noting, 'Support is not just here today and gone tomorrow.' Pupils' needs are well considered when moving on from Hill House, with many continuing on into adult-supported living with opportunities to continue education, particularly in life skills.
- Pupils communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. Adults act as pupils' advocates, skilfully eliciting pupils' views. For example, during the school's Election Day, pupils were able to vote for their favourite sandwich for the school's café. Pupils develop a strong sense of belonging, contributing their ideas to the school's future development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- All pupils join the school with a range of complex behaviour needs. Staff implement school strategies with a high degree of consistency and tremendous expertise. This gives

pupils considerable security and they quickly forge trusting relationships with adults. As a result, pupils' behaviour is supported extremely well and many quickly develop an ability to self-regulate, something they had not managed successfully in the past.

- Pupils feel safe in school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance. Staff understand pupils' needs extremely well and support their transition very effectively into school on a daily basis. As a result, the rate of attendance is high. One parent noted, 'Pupils are always treated with the utmost respect and learn to live happily with other.'
- As pupils have complex behavioural needs, there are times when pupils disengage with what is expected. Nevertheless, these occasions are managed exceptionally well. As a result, the number of incidents requiring intervention has decreased significantly over time. Disturbances to other pupils' engagement are short-lived.
- Many pupils make outstanding progress in self-managing their behaviour. Pupils are able to self-regulate their mood with increasing reliability because of excellent guidance from adults. For those who need longer to engage, adults bring tasks to the pupils to ensure that opportunities to participate are not impeded.
- Leaders track and analyse pupils' patterns of behaviour very closely. They are meticulous at unravelling the reasons behind any dip in behaviour for individuals and in making appropriate changes. For example, from time to time pupils show high levels of anxiety about particular events, such as sports day. When this is the case, staff take time to prepare pupils in advance, successfully reducing their anxiety.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Many pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, join the school disengaged from learning, usually following a period of exclusion or absence from education. Despite such exceptionally low starting points, pupils quickly gain confidence in school routines and expectations, building trust with the adults who care for them. As a result, pupils are able to access tasks across all areas of the curriculum, making progress and achieving success.
- The school's assessment information shows that the majority of pupils make strong progress and a significant proportion make accelerated rates of progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening and mathematics. Standards have risen since the previous year. Over time, pupils make sustained and rapid progress in many aspects of learning.
- Pupils also make great gains in their personal development, becoming increasingly independent and developing secure life skills. For example, pupils fully immersed themselves in applying for the job of post person, attending an 'interview', dressing smartly and practising the skills required. Now pupils deliver letters to their peers regularly, including invitations for special events.
- Pupils make substantial progress in the development of life skills. For example, at breaktimes, pupils delight in managing the school's tuckshop, 'the snack shack'. Pupils use picture exchange to choose a snack and then apply their money-handling skills to pay. Other pupils take on the responsibility of serving customers efficiently. For many, opportunities to integrate with increasing independence are a highlight of the day. Pupils are equipped well for life in the wider community.
- Many pupils, including the disadvantaged, develop aptitude and demonstrate skill in a

range of subjects such as design and technology and art. Parents recognise the contribution of staff, with one commenting, 'Our son has made great progress since joining the school. We are extremely grateful to the staff who have helped him achieve this progress.'

- Pupils benefit from the 'Hill House hub', a dedicated area for physical education activities. During the inspection, with support and effective modelling from adults, pupils were able to hold a hockey stick and dribble a ball successfully. Pupils clearly gain hugely from such activities, making excellent progress with coordination, balance and hand-eye coordination skills.
- Positive relationships between adults and pupils encourage all pupils to give of their best. Consequently, taking into account pupils' cognitive ability, pupils move forward, particularly with the development of social skills, including concentration, attentiveness and communication. The majority of pupils achieve the goals set for them.
- Those pupils who have developed verbal communication have an emerging grasp of a variety of reading strategies, including decoding and using pictorial cues. All pupils achieve well, gaining accreditations in reading and phonics. Pupils develop familiarity with favourite texts. For example, one pupil during a library session was able to communicate to adults that after reading 'The Gruffalo', Julia Donaldson had become a favourite author.
- All pupils, including those in the sixth form, undertake external accreditations in a variety of subjects, including English and mathematics. All pupils achieve success, including in careers-based modules.
- Pupils, all of whom exhibit complex and challenging behaviour, make remarkable progress in managing and self-regulating their responses. The improvement in pupils' behaviour over time is exceptional.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- The leadership of this department is highly effective as leaders, teachers and support staff all see the individual potential of each student. As in the rest of the school, the curriculum is adapted appropriately to meet the student's individual requirements. All students are enabled to gain accreditations, many achieving awards for the first time in their schooling.
- A strength of the sixth-form curriculum is the emphasis placed on careers advice, work experience and preparation for life beyond school. Leaders and staff set aspirational goals, displaying tenacity and ensuring that students are well prepared for life after Hill House. Careers weeks, 'getting ready for work' afternoons, guest speakers, visits to local colleges and other opportunities such as work placements at the local village shop contribute towards preparing students well for their next steps.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is highly effective. For example, in a design and technology lesson, students displayed prowess in using a variety of tools to make their bird box design. Students engaged well in the task, responding well to personalised learning targets and making excellent progress, particularly in developing their independence. This aspect is further strengthened by regular visits to Brockenhurst College, enabling students to transfer their skills successfully to other areas, including bricklaying and plumbing.

- Relationships between students and staff are positive and encouraging. This enables students to access a wide and varied curriculum, achieving success. For example, in a science lesson, students confidently explored magnetism, with some using non-fiction books to further extend their knowledge and understanding.
- Engaging activities develop students' life skills appropriately, affording opportunities to undertake work-based activities on site. For example, students benefit from using the school's allotment, growing and tending vegetables for use in the school's café at lunchtimes. Students are able to reflect on their skills, evaluating statements like 'I can start work on time.'

School details

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| Unique reference number | 116565 |
| DfE registration number | 850/6031 |
| Inspection number | 10008897 |

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 | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 29 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 16 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Cambian Group |
| Chair | Anne Marie Carrie |
| Headteacher | Kate Landells |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £128,000 |
| Telephone number | 01590 672147 |
| Website | www.cambiangroup.com/ourservices/service/home/tabid/106/id/14/s/14/xmps/1816/default.aspx |
| Email address | hillhouse@cambiangroup.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 4–5 July 2012 |

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. All pupils have severe learning difficulties and complex behavioural needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The vast majority of pupils have been placed by their local authority. Approximately 17 local authorities use the school to

place pupils.

- Hill House School aims to 'actively enable each and every pupil in their care to achieve their personal best, however it is defined for them'.
- Since the previous inspection, the school's registration details have changed. The school is now registered for up to 31 pupils between the ages of 11 to 19 and is operational for 52 weeks of the year. Currently, 29 pupils attend, including two day pupils. Most pupils reside in the school's boarding provision, managed by the Cambian Group, on the same site. There are 16 pupils in the sixth form.
- The school opened in 1992. It is owned and managed by Cambian Group. In 2012, the school moved to new and purpose-built accommodation. The headteacher took up post in December 2012, following the last full inspection.
- The school was last inspected in July 2012, when it met all the independent school standards. In September 2013 an emergency inspection was conducted to look at matters of health, welfare and safety. In February 2014 the school received a progress monitoring visit and was found to meet all of the independent school standards.
- The school uses a number of alternative providers, including Brockenhurst College, Pilley Community Shop, Marie Curie Cancer Care Charity Shop, the New Arts Centre at Roche Court, Sunrise Bushcraft and Autism, and Asperger's Climbing as Therapy.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector observed a range of lessons in a variety of subjects for all age groups. The deputy headteacher and assistant deputy headteacher accompanied the inspector during all observations.
- The inspector observed pupils communicating with adults and one pupil reading in a library session.
- The inspector looked at a range of pupils' work and records of achievement.
- The inspector considered three responses to the online parents' questionnaire, Parent View and two narrative comments.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who is also the school's designated safeguarding lead. Discussions also included other staff with significant responsibilities, including the assistant deputy headteacher and the head of sixth form. The inspector also met with the English and mathematics leaders and five support staff.
- A meeting was held with the proprietor, who is the chief executive of the Cambian Group.
- Thirty-six responses to the staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documents and reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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