

Hillcrest Park School

Southcombe, Chipping Norton, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX7 5QH

Inspection dates

20–22 February 2018

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	Insufficient evidence
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- School leaders and those in positions of governance have ensured that the school has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- The headteacher and his deputy lead by example. Their understated determination has built a positive culture where the welfare, health and safety of pupils always come first.
- Classrooms are generally calm places where pupils enjoy learning and make outstanding progress because of strong teaching over time.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils extremely well. As a consequence, they show good attitudes to school and appreciate the opportunities to learn that staff plan for them.
- Staff have very high expectations of behaviour. They offer pupils consistent and timely advice. As a consequence, most pupils behave in an exemplary manner and thrive at school.
- The great majority of pupils make rapid progress with their academic, social and emotional development after joining this school.
- Senior leaders and those responsible for governance have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils' rates of attendance are excellent. Very few pupils are absent from school. Persistent absence is extremely low.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel safe in school and appreciate the care and attention given to them by staff.
- Staff track pupils' progress meticulously. This means that they plan learning for individual pupils very effectively.
- Leaders recognise that their tracking of pupils' long-term academic progress needs to be acknowledged and celebrated more widely.
- Leaders know the school well. However, their improvement planning should be sharpened by better acknowledging what is already working really well, so as to focus on the few less effective aspects.
- Very low student numbers make reporting on the quality of the sixth-form provision unsound.

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?

- Ensure that leaders' and governors' self-evaluation more accurately acknowledges the strengths of the school so as to focus even more closely on areas that need to be developed.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher leads the school with total resolve. His unwavering patience and complete dedication are admirable. His strong partnership with the deputy headteacher and other leaders has ensured that the school has improved rapidly since the last inspection to become outstanding.
- Leaders at all levels play a full role in ensuring that the quality of provision is excellent. Owing to the size of the school, most staff have some kind of leadership responsibility. Phase and subject leaders are talented and knowledgeable. Their impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning is clear to see.
- School leaders and those responsible for governance are effective in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Staff know pupils well. Leaders ensure that communication between staff is strong. Dialogue is open and honest. This includes sharing information with care staff and other professionals. As a consequence, issues that might hinder pupils' access to learning are anticipated, understood and addressed before they become a problem.
- Leaders track the short-term progress of each pupil well. This means that leaders have good insight into the academic as well as the social and emotional development of all pupils.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils particularly well. One pupil compared his curriculum at Hillcrest favourably with that at his previous school. His clear and unsolicited explanation supported leaders' assertions that the school provides a very effective curriculum that is tailored to individual pupils' needs.
- Pupils can study a wide range of subjects and courses at Hillcrest. The wider curriculum also helps prepare pupils for the next stage of their education, as well as helping prepare them for life in modern Britain. Leaders have ensured that the school is well resourced, so that a wide range of BTEC National Diploma courses can be accessed, as well as GCSE courses.
- Developing pupils' functional and social skills is given a high priority. Trips into the local community help with this, as do themed assemblies and taking part in local arts festivals with other schools. Examples of activities such as mapping a route to get to the local town bring learning to life and give pupils a wider insight into their local environment.
- Pupils learn about democracy and the rule of law through specific lessons that focus on their personal and social education. Crucially, leaders and staff ensure that the daily life of the school reflects the values associated with living in modern Britain. Teamwork is encouraged. Tolerance and respect for others are expected.
- Leaders are not always good enough at recognising the highly successful aspects of the school's work so that resources can be focused on the few less effective aspects.

Governance

- Governance is a strength. Those in positions of governance maintain an effective and highly strategic overview of the school. Some governors have a unique insight into the quality of provision because of their professional links with the school. This means that they are well placed to hold leaders to account for the quality of education that pupils receive, as well as providing the support required to move the school forward.
- The governing board carries out its statutory duties well. There are clear lines of accountability between the proprietor, the governing board and school leaders. An external improvement adviser provides those in positions of governance with accurate information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and how this affects outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture to ensure that pupils are protected is strong. Staff training is wide ranging and addresses key aspects of keeping vulnerable young people safe. Because of this, pupils benefit from staff who are nurturing and caring, but who are well aware of the potential dangers pupils are subject to in daily life outside the school.
- The school site is well maintained. Daily routines are sound. Because communication is so strong, staff are well informed about pupils' emotional well-being. Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe. One suggested he had, 'no reason at all to feel unsafe in school'. All staff who replied to the staff survey expressed the opinion that they feel pupils are safe at the school. This was also the case with all other professionals who talked to the inspector.
- The school complies with all elements of the independent school standards regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils. This includes publishing a suitable safeguarding policy on its website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching and support staff know pupils exceptionally well. Teachers attach great importance to understanding pupils' backgrounds and attainment. Effective assessment of previous learning and identification of gaps in knowledge and understanding when pupils join the school ensure that their learning builds on what pupils already know.
- Relationships in classrooms between pupils and staff are highly developed. Expectations of behaviour and of pupils' engagement in learning are high. This is true across all phases of the school.
- Leaders understand the importance of continuity in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Because of this, they ensure that teachers plan learning that is pitched at the right level for the individual pupil. As a result, most pupils make rapid progress across a range of subjects. This is especially the case with pupils who have been at the school for longer periods of time.
- Teachers are tenacious when they need to be. Because of their complex needs, pupils are sometimes reluctant to engage in learning, often through their fear of failure. Staff have

developed excellent strategies to counter this and are not afraid to persevere when required. As a result, pupils become increasingly confident, because of the small steps of success they experience on a daily basis.

- Staff understand that building pupils' self-esteem is important, and that pupils' social and emotional development are as vital as their academic progress. This has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes because staff attach great importance to ensuring that pupils are ready to learn before they get into the classroom.
- Teaching staff have excellent subject knowledge, which they put to good use across the school. As a result, classrooms are productive places where pupils make accelerated gains in their learning because the quality of teaching is consistently strong over time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils respond quickly to the positive ethos of the school, which is designed to build their self-esteem through providing successful learning experiences. As a result, their sense of self-worth and confidence grows rapidly during their time at the school.
- The school's positive and caring culture has a direct impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Consequently, classrooms are positive places where progress is rapid and most pupils engage increasingly well with learning.
- A great strength of the school is founded on the quality of the curriculum and the way it supports pupils to understand the potential dangers in the world around them. This includes learning about using the internet safely and the hazards of social media.
- Pupils are positive about the help and support they get from staff. They told the inspector that they know whom to talk to if they have problems of any kind. Bullying is not a problem at Hillcrest. When asked, pupils struggled to identify things that they would improve.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is not to say that pupils' behaviour is perfect all of the time. However, because of the caring culture of the school, pupils work hard to control their emotions and understand the impact of their actions on others when things go wrong.
- Staff deal with pupils' emotional outbursts well. There is a sense that rather than having to de-escalate situations, staff do not let things escalate in the first place. Strong communication and appropriate staff training help with this. High expectations and a consistent approach are also key in providing an environment where most pupils thrive because their behaviour does not get in the way of learning.
- Rates of attendance are very high and much better than for most other schools nationally because staff ensure that pupils understand the importance of coming to school. Older pupils in particular recognise that missing time at school affects their outcomes negatively. Younger pupils told the inspector that they come to school because they enjoy learning. One pupil said that she enjoyed coming to school because she could 'get her

head down' and 'focus', which was not the case in her previous school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress at Hillcrest. Outcomes of pupils who stay at the school over longer periods of time are especially impressive.
- Leaders measure progress in a number of ways. Staff maintain a sensible balance between supporting academic achievement and ensuring that pupils possess the confidence and emotional intelligence to be successful when they leave the school.
- All pupils undergo a series of academic assessments when they join the school. These depend very much on the age and unique circumstances of each pupil. Other information is also used, including information from previous schools and reports from professionals. As a result, staff quickly build a coherent picture of pupils' strengths, as well as their areas of need or vulnerability.
- Teachers use a wide range of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning for pupils. Small class sizes help staff to provide appropriate levels of challenge for individual pupils. Support is always readily available when required, although staff recognise the importance of building resilience and developing pupils' independent learning skills.
- Outcomes at the end of Year 11 in 2017 were the best ever for the school, although very small numbers in cohorts mean that year-on-year comparisons are meaningless. However, pupils achieved a wide range of GCSE qualifications, including in English, mathematics, art, design technology, humanities and science. Outcomes of BTEC National Diploma courses were equally important and impressive. All pupils leaving Year 11 last year went on to further education.
- Although staff track the progress of pupils extremely well, monitoring tends to focus on next steps in learning, and does not look at the bigger picture. This is a pity. Many pupils make exceptional progress from their low starting points at this school, due to the excellent quality of provision available to them. Recognising this and 'celebrating the same' will reward staff, but more importantly, stimulate pupils to believe in themselves and aspire to do even better than they are at present.

School details

Unique reference number	123326
DfE registration number	931/6115
Inspection number	10039157

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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Outcomes First Group
Chair	Cliff James
Headteacher	David Davidson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£51,480
Telephone number	01608 644621
Website	www.hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk
Email address	jackie.watkins@hillcrestcs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–23 October 2014

Information about this school

- Hillcrest Park School is an independent special day school. It is registered for up to 40 pupils aged from seven to 18 years who have social, emotional and other needs. Currently there are 26 pupils on roll.
- All pupils attending the school are looked after and placed by local authorities. Many have spent considerable periods of time outside formal education before they joined the school.
- The school currently uses Banbury College and Oxford City College as alternative providers.
- Ofsted inspected the school in 2014, when it was judged to be good overall and met all of

the independent school standards.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a number of classroom visits during the inspection, all accompanied by the headteacher. During classroom visits, the inspector assessed pupils' learning, looked at their work, and talked to them about the progress they were making.
- A wide range of meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, and other staff with leadership responsibilities. The inspector also met with the chair of the governing board, who acted as a representative of the proprietor. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of Oxfordshire local authority's virtual school service. The inspector also met with two home managers, as well as a group of pupils.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and as they moved around the school.
- The inspector took into account the 17 responses to the staff survey.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, records and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards. Minutes of meetings of the board of governors, a note of visit by the proprietor's improvement adviser, the school's own self-evaluation, improvement planning and information about pupils' outcomes were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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