

# Hillcrest Shifnal School

Hillcrest Shifnal School, Lamledge Lane, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8SD

**Inspection dates**

12 September 2017

**Overall outcome**

**The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

*Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(g), 2(2)(h), 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(g) and 3(h).*

- Clear aims and objectives underpin the school's curriculum policies. However, staff do not implement these policies consistently. This results in poor outcomes for pupils, particularly those in the secondary phase.
- Curriculum planning in the secondary phase is much weaker than in the primary phase. It is notable that very few schemes of work for secondary pupils were available during the inspection. In contrast, planning for the primary phase was readily available. The primary phase scheme of work is detailed, organised and thorough. This supports the teaching team to plan lessons effectively. The primary phase manager has a good grasp of what is being taught and the progress that each pupil is making.
- In the secondary phase, outcomes are exceptionally weak. Examination results are poor. This is because teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers do not make learning interesting or challenging. They do not take account of the individual needs of pupils, their interests or their prior attainment. For example, the work in Year 10 pupils' mathematics book shows that they are asked to work out simple sums, or copy times tables from one to 11. All were completed accurately. The extension task was to do the same for the 12-times table. This activity undermined the pupils' motivation and self-esteem and inhibited their progress. This is in stark contrast to primary pupils' learning over time. For example, their learning includes topics such as area, handling money and problem-solving.
- Outcomes in the primary phase are improving. Last year, almost every pupil made good progress from their starting points. Over half made similar progress to pupils in other schools nationally. This is because teachers use assessment to plan varied, interesting and challenging work that is suited to individual pupils' needs.
- Staff in the secondary phase do not apply the school's marking policy consistently. This means that teachers are not tracking and monitoring pupils' progress over time. As a result, teachers are ill informed about what pupils can do and what they need to learn next.

- Primary-phase teachers give pupils supportive feedback. This helps pupils to improve the quality of their work. It also helps to increase pupils' motivation and resilience. This helps them to concentrate for longer periods of time.
- Teaching over time in the primary phase helps pupils to learn to behave appropriately. This was exemplified in the lessons that the inspector observed. Pupils were sensible, well-mannered and polite. This is not replicated in the secondary phase. Secondary pupils' behaviour is unacceptable and inhibits their learning.
- Some weaknesses in the primary phase exist. In particular, the teaching of physical education (PE) is ineffective. Lessons do not always encourage pupils to be sufficiently active. The inspector observed a PE lesson in which pupils were not wearing suitable clothing. Teachers lack the subject knowledge required to teach correct techniques. Consequently, pupils do not improve their skills or fitness levels well enough. The school has the resources to address this issue because it employs a sports specialist in the secondary phase.
- The weaknesses in the curriculum and quality of teaching, particularly in the secondary phase, mean that the school does not meet these standards.

*Paragraph 3(f).*

- Historically, lack of investment has resulted in poor resources to support quality teaching. Similarly, lack of suitable display equipment means that the environment is rather sombre and uninviting. The interim headteacher is attempting to address these issues by purchasing interactive screens and a set of display boards. Nevertheless, too few computers are available for the number of interactive screens. Consequently, this expensive resource is not being used effectively.
- Some aspects of the school's environment are better resourced. For example, the well-equipped workshop provides pupils with the chance to learn useful workplace skills, such as mechanical engineering, painting and decorating, in a realistic environment. Pupils value the workshop and look after it well. Similarly, pupils enjoy learning outdoors in the Forest School. This facility helps pupils learn about, and develop respect for, the environment.
- The overall lack of suitable resources means that the school does not meet the requirements for this standard.

*Paragraphs 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(i), 3(i) and 3(j).*

- The curriculum covers all the required areas of learning and provides full-time education. It enables pupils to acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- The programme for personal, social, health and economic education supports the school in achieving its aims for the pupils and helps them develop respect for and acceptance of other people.
- The school provides careers guidance which helps pupils make informed choices about their future career options.
- The school meets the requirements for these standards.

## Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

### *Paragraphs 9, 9(a) and 9(c).*

- The behaviour policy aims to promote a range of worthwhile values, including respect, self-awareness, resilience and equal opportunities. It also refers to the rights of the child and the sanctions for pupils' misbehaviour. In this respect, it is suitable and meets requirements.
- The school records the sanctions imposed on pupils as a result of their misbehaviour.
- The school has ensured that these standards are met.

### *Paragraphs 9, 9(b).*

- However, the behaviour policy is not working for secondary-age pupils. As a result, inappropriate behaviour is seriously limiting their learning. Therefore, the policy is not implemented effectively and the requirement to do so is not met.
- The behaviour policy describes the provision of a 'peaceful place of de-escalation'. In the primary phase, this is indeed a place for quiet time. The space is furnished comfortably with therapeutic features, such as secluded areas and low lighting. It is used well by staff and pupils as it enables pupils to return to lessons in a calmer state after a period of agitation.
- The secondary equivalent of this provision is an unpleasant place to be. Pupils treat it with utter contempt. It is akin to an unfurnished prison cell. Teachers send pupils to this room too readily. Once in the room, pupils are not allowed to leave until staff make it possible. This practice is unlawful as it restricts pupils' liberty.
- A physical intervention policy is in place. It is very explicit in terms of who should do what. Recent training, organised by the interim headteacher, has begun to focus staff more on using de-escalation strategies, rather than on restraining pupils too readily, in order to manage behaviour in a more dignified and less stressful way for pupils.
- The proprietor has not ensured that these standards are met.

### *Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 16(a), 16(b) and 32(1)(c).*

- The safeguarding policy is fit for purpose as it takes account of national and local guidance. It is published on the school's website. A designated safeguarding lead is identified in the policy. Cover arrangements are in place in the event of this person's absence. In this way, the school makes sure that there is always someone available to deal with safeguarding matters. The policy sets out a comprehensive framework of principles and procedures for staff to follow to keep pupils safe. A helpful flow chart, showing how the processes should be followed, is included.
- Staff are visibly present around the school. This helps keep pupils safe and reduces the disruption caused when secondary pupils leave their lessons. Classroom doors are locked to prevent pupils who have left their lesson entering without authorisation. Doors can, however, be easily opened from inside if needed.
- The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that identifies the different types of bullying and the signs for staff to look out for. There are clear procedures for dealing with issues, including teaching pupils how to look after themselves in such circumstances. Incidents are recorded and dealt with effectively.

- The school's health and safety policy is generic to the organisation rather than specific to this particular school. Nevertheless, it sets out a strong commitment to ensure a safe working environment. Separate bespoke policies are in place to cover fire safety, first aid and risk assessment.
- All staff who regularly work or visit the school site are included in the single central register. Safer recruitment procedures are followed and all the required checks are made before appointments are taken up.
- Pupils' low attendance has been a cause for concern in the past. Attendance registers are kept in line with requirements. This inspection was carried out very close to the beginning of the new school year. For the first two days of school, pupils' attendance overall was 98.7%.
- The school meets the requirements for these standards.

#### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

*Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(2) and 25.*

- The school provides separate toilet facilities for pupils and staff, and boys and girls. They are clean, although the porcelain is stained in most toilets, creating a dirty appearance.
- All toilet facilities are provided with a suitable supply of hot and cold water, but there are no bins for pupils to put used paper towels in. This means that pupils either take the used towels with them until they find a bin, or leave with wet hands, or do not wash at all.
- Toilets are kept locked to minimise abuse. Pupils have to ask to go to the toilet and then ask a duty member of staff to open them. This can be undignified.
- A dedicated medical room is provided which meets requirements.
- The required standards for these paragraphs are met.

#### Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c).*

- Leaders have developed a strong framework of policies. However, they have not ensured that staff implement all the policies effectively. This is because internal monitoring has been weak. Consequently, standards have fallen. In particular, the quality of teaching and learning and the management of behaviour have declined.
- The interim headteacher had been in post for less than two weeks at the time of the inspection. He carried out a self-evaluation exercise with all staff prior to the start of term during an intensive five-day training programme. This helped staff to recognise the weaknesses in the school's work. Staff welcome the opportunity to improve.
- The interim headteacher has updated the staff handbook and he has set very clear expectations for the behaviour and professionalism of staff. He provides strong and purposeful leadership that has already improved morale. He also clearly understands the processes of change management and is dealing with emerging issues in a firm, but sensitive, way.
- Middle leaders have not had opportunities to develop effective leadership skills. The

newly appointed leaders and existing primary-phase leaders are enthusiastic and aware of the demands of the role.

- Leaders at all levels have weak knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards. This is a barrier to improvement.
- The interim headteacher has developed a new curriculum model which will offer a broader and more relevant range of learning opportunities, especially for secondary-age pupils. He intends to consult with staff and proprietors about implementing this.
- The school does not meet the requirements of this part. Leaders, including the proprietors, have not demonstrated good skills and knowledge or fulfilled their responsibilities effectively to ensure that all the independent school standards are met consistently. The proprietors have not actively promoted pupils' welfare because they have permitted the unlawful restriction of pupils' liberty.

#### Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school has produced a three-year accessibility plan but it does not include any development points. Its focus is too narrow as it concentrates on physical issues and ignores social and cognitive disabilities.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

### **The school does not meet the following independent school standards**

- Part 1 paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2), 2(2)(g), 2(2)(h), 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h).
- Part 3 paragraph 9, 9(b).
- Part 8 paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c).

## School details

Unique reference number	133478
DfE registration number	893/6025
Inspection number	10039929

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	Independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Graham Baker
Chair	Graham Baker
Headteacher	Vacant (new appointment to start January 2018)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£87,000
Telephone number	01952 468220
Website	<a href="http://www.hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk/school_home/hillcrest-shifnal-school">www.hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk/school_home/hillcrest-shifnal-school</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@hillcrest-cs.co.uk">admin@hillcrest-cs.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	6 September 2016

## Information about this school

- Hillcrest Shifnal School is an independent day school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and other learning needs. It is located in Shropshire close to the Shropshire/Staffordshire border and enjoys close proximity to the countryside.
- Hillcrest Shifnal School is part of a much larger organisation called Hillcrest Children's

Services, who provide therapeutic schools and services across the country. The parent company also operates a clinical psychology service from the same site (but not the same premises) and this is accessible to the school as and when required.

- The last full inspection of the school was in July 2015 when it was judged to be good. This inspection is the third additional inspection since the full report
- The school is organised into a primary section and a secondary section. The majority of pupils have complex and severe social, emotional and mental health needs, often involving challenging behaviour.
- The former headteacher left her post at the end of the academic year. A new appointment has been secured for January 2018. An education consultant was commissioned to work with the school. He is now retained as the interim headteacher.
- The school has 10.4 full-time equivalent qualified teaching staff, three unqualified teachers, three temporary supply teachers (primary, mathematics and science), 26 instructors and one teaching assistant.
- The site has ample teaching spaces for the number of pupils on roll and the proposed curriculum.
- The school does not have a religious ethos.

## Information about this inspection

- This emergency inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) following a complaint about the quality of education provided, the welfare, health and safety of pupils, the state of the premises and accommodation and the quality of leadership and management.
- The school was given no notice of this one-day emergency inspection.
- The inspector met with the education consultant/interim headteacher; members of the staff team; and pupils. Policies and other related documents were scrutinised against the independent school standards specified by the DfE for this emergency inspection.
- Pupils and staff were observed working in lessons and around the school. Samples of pupils' work from both primary and secondary phases were scrutinised too.
- The inspector, accompanied by the interim headteacher, toured the school to inspect the premises and accommodation.
- There were no responses to Parent View either for last year or the year before.

## Inspection team

Elizabeth Ellis-Martin, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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