

Hillcrest Shifnal School

Lamlodge Lane, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8SD

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new headteacher, with effective support from the proprietors, has brought about rapid and substantial school improvement. As a result, the school now meets all the independent school standards, the quality of teaching has recovered from its recent decline and standards are improving quickly.
- Leaders have improved the quality of the school's curriculum. It now provides a wider range of opportunities for pupils to study interesting subjects and to attain worthwhile qualifications.
- Improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' behaviour are having a noticeable impact on the progress that pupils are making. Pupils recognise and welcome these positive changes.
- Examination results for pupils at the end of key stage 4 were low last year. This reflected the weak teaching they had received. However, teaching at key stage 3 and 4 is now as effective as it is in the primary phase. Consequently, outcomes are improving quickly.
- Pupils behave well most of the time. Most enjoy lessons and show pride in belonging to the school's community. This is impressive, given their history of disengagement from school. Nevertheless, a few still struggle to cope when things go wrong. Too often, this leads to temporary exclusion for these pupils.
- Post-16 provision has improved and is now effective. Appropriate courses and pastoral care help to prepare students well for life after school.
- Senior leaders use assessment information to check whether individual pupils are on track to meet their examination targets. However, leaders do not use this information as well as they might to assure themselves that all groups of pupils achieve equally well.
- The proprietors have agreed upon a new governance structure. The proprietors are determined to ensure that the new structure will provide more challenge and support.

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 all groups of pupils, such as boys or girls, the most able pupils, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities or those who are in the care of the local authority, attain the standards of which they are capable and achieve suitably high qualifications by:
 - sustaining the current strong progress
 - challenging them to have high aspirations for what they can achieve
 - using assessment information effectively to identify and address any underperformance of groups and individuals.
- Manage the behaviour of a small number of pupils more effectively, so that the number of temporary exclusions is reduced substantially.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following the additional inspection in September 2017, the proprietors swiftly and successfully addressed the reasons for regulatory failings. Staffing is now fit for purpose and leadership is strong. The recently appointed headteacher has brought about many positive changes to the school's work. As a result, all the independent school standards are met and the quality of education has improved from its recent decline.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have improved the culture of the school. They have injected a sense of optimism among staff and the belief that the school is moving in the right direction. This has translated into raised expectations of pupils, both academically and socially.
- The proprietors have supported the headteacher in establishing greater accountability for pupils' outcomes effectively. The appointment of faculty leaders has led to a sharper focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, leaders are fully informed of where the strengths in teaching lie and what more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils make consistently strong progress.
- Senior leaders check whether pupils are on track to reach their predicted grades in each subject. Therefore, leaders know if a pupil is falling behind these expectations. However, leaders do not make as much use of this information as they might. For example, they do not have a picture of how well different groups of pupils achieve. As a result, they do not know if the most able pupils are being challenged well enough, or whether additional support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is effective. Similarly, leaders are unable to demonstrate whether girls and boys perform equally well, or whether the pupil premium funding is making a positive difference to the progress of disadvantaged pupils or children who are looked after.
- The curriculum is much improved. Pupils now have more opportunities to study for accredited qualifications in practical subjects in addition to their academic studies. For example, pupils can now learn about small-animal care and land-based construction. Success in these hands-on subjects boosts pupils' self-esteem and provides them with useful qualifications for the world of work.
- Classroom-based lessons are well supplemented by additional activities. Leaders believe strongly in the benefits of outdoor education. As a result, pupils spend valuable time visiting places of social, historical and geographical interest. For example, some participated in a skiing trip to Scotland. This provided them with new experiences and promoted their social and cultural development.
- The small number of post-16 students now follow suitable courses. For some, this means they study vocational subjects, such as catering. Others study for A-level examinations.

Governance

- The proprietors rightly recognise the need to widen the governance of the school. A governing body has been established to take effect from September 2018. This will be made up of relevant stakeholders to provide increased levels of challenge and support. Senior leaders will be required to report to this body against key performance indicators. In this way, proprietors believe that the school's effectiveness will be checked more easily.

- Governance of the school is currently provided by the regional manager of the parent company. She supports the headteacher in strategic decision-making and provides challenge. Therefore, she understands the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders give high priority to the protection and welfare of pupils. They ensure that staff are well trained to spot changes in pupils' behaviour and act appropriately when they have a concern.
- The school works closely with parents, carers and outside agencies to ensure that pupils who need help get the support they need.
- Teaching places a strong emphasis on keeping pupils safe, particularly with regard to the dangers of online activity.
- The school's safeguarding policy reflects current government guidance and is available on the school's website.

The school's progress towards meeting standards that were not met at the previous inspection

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)

- At the time of the emergency inspection in September 2017, several independent school standards in relation to the planning of the curriculum, teaching and outcomes, particularly for secondary-aged pupils, were unmet. The school now has appropriate plans for all subjects. These are implemented effectively.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 4 was low in 2017. However, inspection findings show that pupils' progress has improved, particularly in the secondary department. As a result, most pupils are on track to achieve their targets in GCSE examinations. This shows that they are making good progress from their relevant starting points. This view is supported by the high quality of work in pupils' books.
- The post-16 provision has improved. Sixth-form students now follow a range of appropriate courses suited to their aptitudes and needs.
- The previous inspection found teaching in the secondary department to be mundane and expectations too low. Teaching and learning has improved. Teachers now provide clear guidance to pupils about how to improve their work, in line with the school's marking policy.
- The school now meets all these standards

Paragraph 3(f)

- Resources were found to be inadequate at the previous inspection. They have been improved. There is a library for the primary department. There is no dedicated library area for secondary-aged pupils, but there are sufficient books to support the curriculum.
- The school now meets this standard.

Paragraphs 9, 9(b)

- The previous inspection found that the behaviour policy for secondary-aged pupils was not implemented effectively. Pupils' behaviour limited their learning. The 'quiet room' in the secondary department was not fit for purpose as its use restricted pupils' liberty. This room is no longer used. Pupils' behaviour is more effectively and sensitively managed. For example, if pupils cannot cope in the class, they are given space and time to calm down to reflect on their actions. Poor behaviour now rarely interrupts pupils' learning.
- There has been a sharp reduction in the use of physical intervention. Leaders aim for the number to be zero. Pupils attest to the improved behaviour of others in and around school. They say that the school is a much calmer place than it used to be.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are met.

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

- The emergency inspection in September 2017 found that staff were not implementing the school's policies effectively. Weak monitoring had led to a decline in the quality of teaching and in the management of pupils' behaviour. Middle leaders lacked the opportunity to develop effective leadership skills. Leaders, including the proprietors, had not ensured that all the independent school standards were met consistently, and pupils' welfare was not promoted strongly enough.
- Policies are now implemented effectively. This, together with the better quality of teaching, has resulted in substantial improvements to pupils' behaviour and their progress. Pupils' welfare is promoted more strongly. Good levels of respect and trust exist between staff and pupils. Middle leadership is developing. Faculty heads have been appointed who are making staff more accountable. Monitoring is much more rigorous and senior leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for improvement.
- The school now meets these standards.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The previous inspection visit found that the three-year accessibility plan did not include any development points and was too narrow as it concentrated on physical issues and ignored social and cognitive disabilities.
- The accessibility plan has been rewritten. It now focuses on providing access to the curriculum and after-school clubs, along with the importance of matching tasks to different abilities in lessons. Consultation with parents and pupils has taken place to ensure that pupils with specific needs can access learning successfully. For example, signs are used to support those with communication difficulties.
- The accessibility plan now meets requirements.

The school now meets the following requirements.

- *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).*

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- All subjects are now taught by suitably qualified staff. Suitably qualified and experienced teaching assistants support teachers. As a result, there has been rapid improvement in the quality of teaching. This is particularly so in the secondary department. Teachers now plan much more interesting activities. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and now work harder.
- Staff now expect more from pupils and are getting better at ensuring that pupils rise to the challenge. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well. They know how to motivate them to try hard and sustain their concentration. This is why pupils are more confident to have a go and persevere for longer when the work is tricky.
- Teaching, on the whole, enables pupils to build knowledge and understanding gradually from their different starting points. This is because staff know what pupils can and cannot do. In addition, teachers usually provide tasks that require pupils to think carefully and extend their knowledge and understanding. Occasionally, teaching does not challenge pupils to achieve as highly as they could. This is so for pupils of different abilities and with different needs, such as the most able and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Teachers often use interesting subject matter to gain pupils' interest. For example, in an English lesson, pupils were encouraged to write comparative and descriptive pieces of work by using various biscuits as a starting point. Pupils wrote enthusiastically and responded well to the challenge to produce a more extended piece of work.
- In mathematics, teachers help pupils deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts. For example, pupils were observed learning how to use a formula to work out the circumference of a circle successfully. Teachers have identified that many pupils join the school with weak multiplication skills. They have provided more opportunities for pupils to practise these skills. As a result, pupils' skills and mathematical fluency are improving.
- Pupils particularly enjoy learning in vocational studies. For example, some were seen enthusiastically learning about the anatomy of the human nail and how to apply and design nail patterns in a hair and beauty lesson. This is because the teacher captured their interest and made the learning meaningful.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school provides a stable environment in which pupils can learn, often after they have experienced multiple placements elsewhere.
- The school provides many experiences which help pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning and promote good social development. The daily breakfast club, games such as chess, and team-building activities, for example rock climbing, build pupils' self-confidence and ability to work as a team.
- Pupils feel well supported in school. They say that they trust staff to care for them and can confide in them if they have any concerns.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They learn about how to keep safe online and follow health and safety rules in food technology.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted and pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. The school actively promotes fundamental British values through the curriculum and through rich and varied experiences, such as out-of-school trips.
- Pupils learn about tolerance, acceptance and respect for people of different backgrounds, lifestyles and faiths. Although girls are in a minority at the school, staff vigilantly ensure that all pupils have equality of opportunity. The girls said that they are treated equally and with respect.
- School council members have made suggestions for improvement such as the breakfast club and more outdoor equipment, which have been implemented
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare in alternative provision develop well. Staff closely supervised these placements to ensure that they are safe and provide meaningful courses. As such, they complement the school's provision well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The behaviour of pupils, particularly of secondary-aged pupils, has improved strongly since the previous inspection. Staff are skilled and sensitive in the management of pupils' behaviour. They expect pupils to behave well. Most pupils live up to this expectation. When a pupil struggles to do so, staff respond calmly and appropriately. As a result, disruption to lessons is rare. Similarly, teachers set high expectations for the presentation of pupils' work. Work in pupils' books is neat and tidy as a result.
- School records show a marked reduction in incidents of bullying, physical restraint and aggressive outbursts. This is due to better and more consistent behaviour management. However, there are still too many occasions when leaders temporarily exclude pupils for poor behaviour. The number of pupils affected is small. Nevertheless, leaders are seeking alternative approaches to manage the particularly challenging behaviour of this group as they know that the number of exclusions is too high.
- Pupils' attendance is improving well and most pupils make great strides in securing better attendance. Pupils who have poor attendance have individual action plans to help them improve their attendance. Most do so.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils enter the school having missed a substantial amount of their education. Consequently, their attainment is often below average for their age. Once they have settled in, most pupils begin to close the gaps in their learning and make progress towards the standards expected for their age.
- Primary pupils make strong and sustained progress in a range of subjects. Some make very impressive progress and make up lost ground very rapidly. Pupils achieve particularly well in mathematics and science. They develop confidence in reading through well-planned opportunities to read often and widely. They learn to write more accurately.

- Outcomes for secondary-aged pupils at the time of the last additional visit were weak. Current pupils are making good progress towards qualifications in English, mathematics, science, art and vocational awards. An increasing number of pupils are experiencing success in GCSE courses. Pupils' current attainment information and the work in their books indicate that examination results are likely to rise in the next few years.
- Nevertheless, some pupils could achieve more. Some pupils are capable of passing higher-level examinations than the ones they are entered for. The most able pupils could produce work of a higher standard than they do at present. This is largely because the pupils do not believe that they can be successful. This lack of confidence is holding some pupils back.
- Pupils' improving outcomes and attitudes to learning are preparing them increasingly well for moving on to the next stage. Many go on to further education or employment and training.
- Outcomes for the small number of post-16 students are improving. GCSE retakes show improvements from their previous examination results. The most able students gain good GCSE passes in English, mathematics and art and go on to pursue A-level courses. They have regular work experience opportunities in local businesses and participate in enterprise projects.

School details

Unique reference number	133478
DfE registration number	893/6025
Inspection number	10047131

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 category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Graham Baker
Chair	Graham Baker
Headteacher	David Coles
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000 to £87,000 dependent on need
Telephone number	01952 468 220
Website	www.hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk
Email address	school@hillcrest-cs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 June – 2 July 2015

Information about this school

- Hillcrest Shifnal School is an independent day school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and additional learning needs. It is located in Shropshire close to the Shropshire/Staffordshire border.
- Hillcrest Shifnal School is part of a much larger organisation called Hillcrest Children's Services, which provides 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 majority of pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- As part of this inspection the DFE commissioned Ofsted to consider the school's progress in meeting the previously unmet independent school standards.
- The school is organised into a primary, secondary and a small sixth-form department. The majority of pupils have complex and severe social, emotional and mental health needs, often involving challenging behaviour.
- The new headteacher took up his post in January 2018.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers to deliver aspects of the curriculum. These are Nova Training, which provides functional skills courses, and Wyldwoods, which provides outdoor therapeutic activities.

Information about this inspection

- This standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The last full inspection of the school was in June 2015, when it was judged to be good. In February 2016, an additional inspection found that standards in relation to safeguarding were unmet. A follow-up visit in September 2016 found that all standards that were checked were met. In September 2017, an emergency visit identified numerous standards that were not met and the submitted action plan was rejected as being inadequate.
- The inspector observed 12 parts of lessons, all of which were observed jointly with the members of the senior leadership team.
- Pupils' work, staff surveys, annual reports and other records were scrutinised.
- The school's documentation was examined, including schemes of work and planning for subjects, records of pupils' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of pupils. The inspector checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- The views of pupils were sought through discussions.
- There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, to take these into consideration. Written comments from parents and carers from annual reviews were read and one parent made comments on the free-text facility online.
- A telephone discussion was held with one of the proprietors of the school.

Inspection team

Frank Price, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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