

Inspection of Hillcrest Shifnal School

Lamledge Lane, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8SD

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 October 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Hillcrest School is a welcoming and nurturing school; everyone is valued. Many pupils begin school feeling anxious and frustrated by their previous school experiences. However, they are quick to settle and are adamant that this school is a good place to learn. Pupils feel happy and safe at the school.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Leaders and staff, alongside the therapy team, quickly identify the support that pupils need. With this support, pupils learn to face new situations, gain confidence in meeting new people and start to prepare for their future. If a pupil needs more help, leaders ensure they receive it from school staff or the therapy team.

Pupils trust staff and accept the help that they sometimes need to manage their behaviours. As a result, pupils' behaviour in school is good, and bullying rarely happens. Pupils are confident that staff will act quickly to resolve any incidents of bullying.

Pupils enjoy the many opportunities provided to visit new places and learn new skills. A pantomime visit was especially popular with pupils.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum that is appropriately sequenced. They are determined that all pupils will achieve well and build up what they know and remember over time. They have identified that many pupils start school with gaps in their English and mathematics knowledge. With this in mind, leaders have set out the key knowledge and vocabulary that pupils need to learn and when they need to learn it. Leaders intend for pupils to revisit their previous learning in English and mathematics often, for example in other subjects. Leaders check how well the intended curriculum is being implemented and act if they identify an area that needs developing. They know, for instance, that a minority of staff do not consistently provide pupils with these opportunities to revisit prior learning.

Leaders place a high priority on pupils learning to read and developing a love of reading. Primary pupils rapidly improve their reading skills. They soon start to enjoy reading longer stories. Pupils are proud of how much their reading has improved since they joined the school. They enjoy choosing texts from within the classroom and the well-stocked library. Older pupils read complex texts, which provide them with a broad knowledge of literature. These pupils can critically analyse these complex and age-appropriate texts. Teachers use a range of checks to skilfully plan sequences of lessons which help pupils to develop into confident and fluent readers.

Leaders provide a range of staff training. This ranges from training on behaviour management and for pupils' mental health. Staff have also received some training in relation to delivering the curriculum. Some staff require further curriculum training.

This would help to ensure that they have the subject knowledge to deliver the intended curriculum in some subjects.

Leaders ensure that those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the specialist support that they need. Pupils who need specific support have access to the therapy team. For example, some pupils attend targeted therapy sessions to help them learn how to play together. Pupils quickly learn there is a team in school who can help them. Older pupils develop the skills and confidence to know what support they need and ask for it.

Leaders make sure that the positive culture in school promotes and supports the development of good behaviour. Pupils quickly learn to express themselves appropriately and manage their behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive, so learning in class is rarely disrupted. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong, and staff have a 'you can do this' ethos. The school has a well-thought-out careers programme tailored to pupils' needs. Pupils find out what sort of jobs are available in their locality and beyond. Older pupils benefit from impartial careers advice and guidance. Pupils learn what skills and knowledge they need to develop to access the careers that interest them.

Leaders have systems in place to check if pupils are in school and support them to come to school regularly. However, too many pupils are persistently absent from school. As a result, they miss learning and personal development opportunities.

Leaders have created opportunities for pupils to engage in various experiences that promote pupils' personal development. They visit places of interest, both locally and nationally. These experiences help pupils to understand, accept and tolerate others. A personal, social, health and economic education and relationships and sex education curriculum prepare pupils well for the future. Pupils learn how to make friends and show empathy for each other. Outdoor education activities are popular at the school. Pupils develop new interests, learn new skills and gain accredited awards. Some pupils continue these interests when they leave school.

The proprietor body and governors provide effective leadership and support. They have robust mechanisms for monitoring the school's effectiveness. They ensure the independent school standards are consistently met. They know the school's strengths and areas for development. The school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Proprietors, leaders and staff ensure pupils' safety and well-being is at the heart of everything they do. They have designed the curriculum to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils learn how to keep safe from sexual abuse online and how to keep themselves safe with their friends. Leaders have ensured that a copy of the safeguarding policy is available on the school's website.

Leaders make appropriate checks on staff who work with pupils. Staff training happens regularly and staff value this. Training helps staff to understand pupils' increased vulnerability due to their additional needs. Staff know how to raise any concerns they may have about a pupil's safety. Risk assessments respond to the changing needs of pupils and the environment.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(information for the school and proprietor)

- A minority of staff do not consistently implement the curriculum as leaders intend. As a result, some pupils do not have the opportunities to practise and consolidate their literacy and mathematic skills. Leaders should ensure that all teachers deliver the curriculum as intended.
- Leaders have not provided curriculum training for some staff in particular subjects. This means that some staff's subject knowledge is not consistently secure across all subjects. Leaders should focus their efforts on developing teachers' understanding of how best to teach their subjects so that the curriculum is delivered effectively in all subjects.
- Although leaders are focused on improving pupils' attendance, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. This means that some pupils are not accessing the full curriculum or the personal development opportunities offered by the school. Leaders need to continue to work closely with parents, carers and pupils so that all pupils attend school regularly and persistent absence is reduced.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	133478
DfE registration number	893/6025
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10238121
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Outcomes First Group
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Martin Winward
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,020 to £84,147
Telephone number	01952 468220
Website	www.hillcrestshifnalschool.co.uk/
Email address	shifnalypadmin@hillcrest-cs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 June 2018

Information about this school

- This is an independent school for pupils aged 5 to 19. Pupils are often placed in the school following a breakdown of placement in their previous primary or secondary school.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- A significant number of pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The primary need for most pupils is for their social, emotional and mental health.
- The school does not have a religious ethos.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with the proprietor body, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils.
- The lead inspector reviewed documents on the school's website and additional documents provided by leaders during the inspection.
- The inspectors made checks of the premises and other information to evaluate compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and looked at pupils' work in history and science.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead. Pupils' case files were reviewed. The single central record of checks on staff's suitability to work with children was scrutinised.

- Inspectors met with staff to discuss their workload and the support they receive to carry out their roles.
- Inspectors examined behaviour support plans and incident records and observed pupils at other times of the day to evaluate pupils' behaviour.

Inspection team

Amanda Green, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jane Edgerton

Ofsted Inspector

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