

Hilltop School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106972
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	287668
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	99
6th form	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Scholey
Headteacher	Mr P Leach
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002
School address	Larch Road Maltby Rotherham South Yorkshire S66 8AZ
Telephone number	01709 813386
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average special school. It caters for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. All of the pupils have statements of special educational needs. The proportion with complex needs has increased since the previous inspection. Currently, 39% of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties and 25% have autistic spectrum disorders. A very small proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Pupils find it hard to explain how much they enjoy being here, but their enthusiasm for learning and excellent relationships with each other and staff speak louder than words. Many parents express delight that their children are so happy at Hilltop, one remarking, 'My child can't wait to get to school'. Pupils' personal development is extremely good. 'This is a healthy school', one commented accurately. Pupils develop a clear awareness of how they can try to be healthy and they frequently put their knowledge into practice. For example, throughout the school, pupils take part in regular and very varied exercise during lessons, free time and after-school clubs. Physical education is amongst the many highlights of what is an exceptional curriculum. Another is the focus on work-related learning and enterprise education. Both elements contribute significantly to the school's notable success in preparing pupils for their lives beyond school. Pupils readily seize opportunities to help each other and staff. For example, they carry out jobs in the classrooms, run the healthy caf, or tuck shop, and choose to spend time with more vulnerable pupils. The school council is in its infancy and does not yet make a strong enough contribution to pupils' personal development. Behaviour is often exemplary, during lessons and when pupils are round and about. As a result, all pupils are able to learn and have fun, with little interruption. Staff expertly manage those pupils who have most difficulty coping with stressful situations. This ability is one of the key components of the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support the school provides. Pupils say, 'Everyone is kind'. Owing to pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards are much lower than those of mainstream schools. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement is outstanding, in line with the quality of teaching and learning. Parents use words such as 'unbelievable' and 'amazing' to describe the exceptional progress children make from their first days in the Foundation Stage. This rate is maintained as pupils move up through the school and in the sixth form. Teaching, the curriculum, and the care, guidance and support provided combine to give each pupil equal opportunities to reach their potential. Teachers adapt lessons and topics with considerable skill in order to meet individual needs and pupils are made as safe and comfortable as possible. Interactive plasma screens have been fitted in some classrooms, with more planned. Maximum use is not yet made of these and other information and communication technology (ICT) resources in order to help pupils learn. The school's enormous success is the product of first-rate leadership and management. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work closely together to ensure that all staff are focused on continuously improving what the school provides and the outcomes for pupils. Expectations are extremely high, as reflected in the current bid for Sports College status and in the targets set for each pupil to achieve. The school has developed substantially since the previous inspection based upon a very clear understanding of what is working well and what else needs to be done. The school is in an exceptionally strong position to continue to improve. One parent, understandably, summed up Hilltop as 'an inspiring school'.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is led and managed extremely well. The secondary department leader has very successfully spearheaded developments in the curriculum. This provides excellent opportunities for all students to develop and apply key skills within real or simulated workplace environments. These contribute to students' outstanding personal development and achievement. In order to give students experience of further education, the school takes full advantage of any suitable college courses, but these are limited. The quality of teaching and care matches that in the

main school. Students are expected to be increasingly independent and responsible and they rise to these challenges. Depending on their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they each gain a variety of external accreditation. This includes Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Towards Independence awards and Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA) Units.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make consistently effective use of ICT resources in order to promote learning in all subjects.
- Increase the impact of the school council on pupils' personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Children in the Foundation Stage and pupils throughout the school make outstanding progress and achieve exceptionally well in literacy, numeracy, and personal, social and health education. In Key Stages 1 to 4, progress in science is exceptionally rapid, because pupils respond particularly well to the practical nature of the subject. Their achievements in physical education have been recognised by the Activemark Gold and Sportsmark national awards, as well as a host of individual certificates for activities such as swimming or gymnastics. Targets set at annual reviews and in individual education plans are very challenging and are frequently met or exceeded. The school's data show that boys and girls achieve equally well, regardless of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ethnic background or personal circumstances. Year 11 pupils gain accreditation through AQA Units and the ASDAN Transition Challenge award.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

From their first days in the Nursery, pupils grow in confidence and become increasingly independent. For instance, those with profound and multiple learning difficulties make huge efforts to communicate or cooperate with the staff who work with them. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders become less anxious and more ready to make choices, work alongside others, and cope with new experiences. Older, higher attaining pupils take on significant responsibilities, such as planning, preparing and serving healthy food for younger pupils' Christmas parties. They learn to be more accountable for their own safety. For example, Key Stage 3 pupils carry out their own risk assessments: 'Breadmaker gets hot. Be careful!' Attendance is above average and pupils are seldom absent unless ill. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils become extremely aware of the needs of others, both in school and in the wider community. The school council is currently considering how the school can recycle more of its resources, but in general, its impact is not as strong as it might be.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is very effective. All staff understand their roles in helping pupils to learn. They share very high expectations for each one's behaviour and learning, which are rooted in very thorough and accurate assessments of their particular stages of development. Varied methods, such as choosing symbols or using electronic equipment, are used very successfully to enable pupils to communicate. Tasks and resources are chosen very carefully to be meaningful, so they motivate pupils to tackle challenging work. For example, higher attaining sixth form students appreciated why they needed to write to younger pupils and encourage them to produce letters for a Post Office enterprise. Compared with the outstanding provision for literacy and numeracy, opportunities for pupils to use ICT across the curriculum are rather less well developed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is imaginative and exciting, so pupils enjoy learning. Additional programmes are provided to cater for precise learning difficulties, sessions of music therapy, rebound therapy, or aromatherapy, for example. The school has won a national award for the excellence of its enterprise education. This work is being extended into the Foundation Stage and primary years so that these pupils also develop skills such as the ability to work as part of a team, which are needed now and in their future lives. Very strong links with a number of mainstream and special schools provide valuable opportunities for pupils to work and communicate with people they know less well. Enrichment opportunities are exceptional and include frequent performances by musicians and theatre groups. Visits, including residentials, extend pupils' experiences and provide chances to practise social skills. After-school clubs are very varied and change each half term, so pupils of all ages and learning difficulties and/or disabilities are catered for equally well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know that they should approach a member of staff if they have any worries. Parents praise the 'understanding, dedicated and considerate' staff. These excellent qualities are backed up by comprehensive procedures to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. Staff training, for example, in moving non-ambulant pupils safely, is given very high priority. A special eye is kept on particularly vulnerable pupils, to ensure they have opportunities equal to those of others. Extremely effective partnerships with an extensive range of agencies enhance the support the school provides. Support plans are in place for pupils whose behaviour is challenging, ensuring they are provided for consistently and to help to keep everyone safe. Pupils' personal care needs are met efficiently and discreetly. Assessment procedures are very thorough. Each child's achievements are tracked rigorously, with extra

support provided at the first sign that progress may be faltering. Parents are kept very well informed about how their children are progressing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher's exceptional leadership is supported by a very strong deputy headteacher and senior team. These staff members fulfil their responsibilities very effectively and share the headteacher's determination to keep the school moving forward. The wide-ranging arrangements for monitoring the school's performance include regularly seeking parents' views. The outcomes of these stringent systems feed into action plans and the extensive programme of staff development. The school has a complete and accurate view of its strengths and knows where further improvement is needed. However, it is too cautious in its view of its effectiveness in comparison with other schools. It judged itself good but is outstanding. Governors are very supportive and their own monitoring activities are developing well. Careful management of the budget has supported school improvement and ensured that value for money is outstanding.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school. I really enjoyed meeting you. I know that you find reading difficult and so your teachers will tell you about this letter. I found out many excellent things about your school. I was very impressed with your splendid behaviour and how you help each other and your teachers. You learn how to stay safe and be healthy. The enterprise work you do is very exciting and helps you to get ready for leaving school. I was interested to meet the school council. The councillors want to help everyone and they have good ideas. I think they could play a bigger part in the school and I hope you will all listen to what they say and also tell them about your own ideas. You learn a great deal, because you have outstanding teachers. They take care that you all have equal chances to learn and have fun. I want them to make sure that you all make better use of the new plasma screens and other ICT resources to help you learn. You told me you feel safe in school. This is because you are cared for very well indeed. The staff arrange lots of brilliant things for you to do in lessons and in clubs. Your parents and carers are very pleased with Hilltop School. I'm not surprised, because it is outstanding and your headteacher keeps finding ways to make it even better.

My best wishes to you all.