

# Hillside School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113648
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	289683
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 July 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sarah Mascal

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	90
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Thomas
<b>Headteacher</b>	Clifford Keith Edwards
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 May 2005
<b>School address</b>	Bodmin Road Whitleigh Plymouth PL5 4DZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 773875
<b>Fax number</b>	01752 775761

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<b>Age group</b>	11-16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Hillside was previously a school for students with moderate learning difficulties but is in the process of being re-designated as a school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, as well as moderate learning difficulties. The majority of students come from Plymouth, many from areas of social-economic deprivation, and most are White British. A high proportion (nearly 50%) are eligible for free school meals.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Hillside School offers a satisfactory education to its students. The senior management team have been successful in maintaining a well ordered school where students gradually develop skills to manage their behaviour and improve their social skills. As a result students make satisfactory progress in their personal development. They are friendly and polite to visitors and keen to show off their work.

As a result of students' special educational needs, the standards they reach in their work are well below those expected nationally. However, students make satisfactory progress and teaching is satisfactory overall. The positive relationships with students and good humoured approach of staff ensure that students behave appropriately in lessons. Not all teachers, though, plan work that is sufficiently well matched to students' ability to ensure that they make the best possible progress. Much has been done to improve the curriculum and it is satisfactory. A strength lies in the good opportunities for work experience and the range of activities that support students' learning. Students appreciate this and it is one of the reasons they say they like school. The support for students' academic and personal progress is satisfactory. There are good targets to help students improve their behaviour and social development but those for literacy and numeracy are less effective and students do not know if they have academic targets.

Parents' views of the school are very varied. A number expressed their support but several raised concerns about aspects of their children's education. Many were worried about behaviour. This is partly because the systems in place to support behaviour beyond lessons are not always used effectively. As a result the school is often too quick to exclude students for short periods of time rather than to look at the cause of the issues and try to prevent exclusion. An inclusion centre, designed to support those students with significant behavioural difficulties, is a positive and effective initiative which students and parents value. The school does provide some information about students' targets, but this is not always easily accessible to parents. Several commented that they do not feel they are as well informed as they should be about what their children are doing in school and how well they are doing.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. They have correctly identified some of the schools strengths and areas for development and have introduced a number of positive initiatives such as improving the quality of education for students in Years 7 and 8. However, their systems for checking what goes on in school and using this information to evaluate how good it is are inadequate. This has resulted in the school having an unrealistic view of its effectiveness. Staffing issues, including high absenteeism, have hampered the school's quest to offer a higher quality of education. However, the appointment of some committed new staff over the last three years, the recognition by governors of the need to take a more challenging role, and the school's overall track record of improvement show that it has the capacity to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve systems for monitoring the work of the school in order to develop a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Make better use of the behaviour systems in order to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions.
- Make better use of the information gathered on students' achievements so that targets for learning are more effective in enabling teachers to ensure work matches students' needs.

- Improve information to parents so that they are more aware of the progress their children are making and what they are doing during the day.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' standards, in comparison with those nationally, because of the nature of their special needs, are well below average but their achievement is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11 many have achieved passes in entry level examinations and a few pass GCSEs. It is difficult for the school to judge whether this reflects good progress because it is still in the process of analysing the information it has gathered about students' achievements over time. Evidence from students' work and the school's information indicate that students generally make satisfactory progress. In some areas such as mathematics progress is variable, being better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7, 8 and 9. A strong lead is being taken to improve students' literacy skills, and progress overall in English is satisfactory. Recent developments in science are ensuring that students are making at least satisfactory progress. Students' progress in ICT has been unsatisfactory but action has been taken to address this.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students appreciate the rewards system and are responding to the school's procedures for encouraging good behaviour. Behaviour in lessons is often good but this is not always the case out of the classroom and there are incidents of aggression. Students feel that the use of the inclusion centre has had a positive impact on improving their behaviour. Several parents expressed concern about bullying but this was not reflected in students' comments. Students said they feel safe in school and that they know who to go to if they have problems. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their attendance, which although satisfactory overall does, for some, represent good improvement since arriving from their previous schools.

Students show an understanding of staying healthy and many participate in the good range of sporting activities. They celebrate each other's successes and are proud of the fact that they are doing so well in a number of competitions. These activities ensure students have some involvement in the local community and several students work with others in a nearby special school. The school recognises that this aspect and the way students are prepared for life in a multicultural society, whilst satisfactory, are relative weaknesses. A better focus on vocational courses and satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy are enabling students to be suitably prepared to meet the challenges they will encounter as they grow older.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers have received support from local subject specialists to improve their teaching, and this is beginning to have an impact. For example, students now have a better understanding

of what they are expected to learn in lessons. A strength of teaching lies in the good subject expertise of staff. This is used well, particularly in subjects such as science, to enable students to experience a range of activities that promote their learning well. Teachers' planning, however, is not always effective in ensuring that the different abilities of students in each class are met and it is evident from students' work that many do the same task regardless of ability. The use of support assistants varies but where they are used well they support students both academically and in moderating their behaviour. The quality of marking is inconsistent and whilst most work is marked up to date not all teachers ensure that students know what they have done well and which areas they could improve upon.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

Much work has been done to extend and improve the curriculum. It has a number of good features. These include the wide range of experiences students have to help them understand the world of work. This, together with opportunities to attend college one day a week, prepares students appropriately for the next stage of their education. The use of the community to enrich the curriculum is good and provides students with opportunities for bringing learning to life such as through visits to historical buildings. Accreditation has already been extended and the school is looking to extend its range of vocational courses further. Effective action has been taken to enable students in Years 7 and 8 to settle more quickly by adapting the curriculum for them so that it more closely reflects a primary model.

Personal, social and health education is well planned and supports students' personal development appropriately. Senior staff have worked hard to ensure that there is continuity in students' learning but there is an awareness that in several subjects planning for what students will learn over time has not been reviewed. This is particularly the case in subjects other than English, mathematics and science, and it is partly because of staff absence. As a result students' skills are not always built upon in a systematic way.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The care, guidance and support of students are satisfactory. There are strengths in the care and welfare provided to students to enable them to make progress in their personal development. Staff know students well as individuals and do much to help them improve their behaviour and attitudes to school. This is recognised and appreciated by students. Risk assessments and procedures for the vetting of staff are secure and arrangements for child protection are good. Communication between professionals involved with students in school is effective and good use has been made of external agencies to provide further support to students. Effective action has been taken in encouraging parents into school and providing them with the support they need to help their children.

The systems for supporting students' behaviour are satisfactory. However the school recognises that they are not specific enough about the areas within behaviour, such as swearing or disruptive behaviour in class, for it to analyse what causes students to react and take more preventative action. At times the school's systems are not used effectively to enable students to develop better awareness of controlling their behaviour and the use of temporary exclusions and part-time timetables has not been effective. Effective targets to support students in their social development are in place and beginning to have an impact. Regular reviews of these ensure that students know how well they are doing. Few students, though, have literacy and

numeracy targets that will enable them to measure how well they are doing in their work. Equally, whilst teachers are beginning to use different ways of helping students to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do next, there is no consistent approach across the school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Despite the difficulties it has faced, the school has continued to ensure that students make progress and that teaching is satisfactory. The senior management team have worked hard to bring in new initiatives and extend the range of expertise of staff. The appointment of new staff has had a positive impact because they are keen to take on their responsibilities and develop the school further. However, this is not the case for all staff and the school reports that there has been some resistance to change from a small number of them. This, together with high staff absence, has had the effect of slowing the rate of improvement.

Although there has been some monitoring of the school's work, information has not always been collated and analysed well enough to enable the senior management team to have a clear understanding of what it is good at and what needs improving. A few subject managers, such as in English, are beginning to use data to understand the strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects, but this is not yet consistent with all staff. The school has not had the benefit of external monitoring of its work for some time and this has also made it difficult for it to be objective in its assessments. As a result its evaluation of its effectiveness is too positive. Planning for improvements is very detailed, but is not always well focused on key outcomes such as achievement. Where the school has taken action, such as in improving provision for ICT and adapting the curriculum for Years 7 and 8, this is beginning to have a positive impact. The governing body is very supportive of the school and has a good understanding of some of the issues facing the school. The governors have not always been sufficiently challenging to ensure that they have a clear overview of the progress students are making, but they are now taking action to remedy this weakness.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Hillside School, Plymouth PL5 4DZ

Thank you for making Mr Arnold and me welcome and being so polite and friendly when we visited you. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you and looking at all the work you have done. We feel that you are getting a satisfactory education at Hillside and these are some of the things that we particularly liked:

- The teachers use their subject knowledge well to help you learn, and many of you succeed in gaining passes in your examinations.
- Many of you enjoy going to school and some of you improve your attendance from when you were at your previous school.
- A good range of work placements prepares you well for life in the world of work.
- The inclusion centre is used well to help you improve your behaviour.
- The school's senior staff make sure you are well looked after and kept safe.

These are the things we have asked the school to do to make sure you all do as well as you can:

- Improve the systems for checking on its work so that everyone has a better understanding of what it is good at and what it can do better.
- Review the systems for helping you to improve your behaviour so that the number of fixed-terms exclusions is reduced.
- Make better use of the information it has gathered on your achievements so that your targets for learning are better and enable your teachers to ensure work always matches your needs.
- Make sure that your parents or carers know more about how well you are doing and what you are doing in school.

You can help by trying to improve your behaviour out of class.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall Lead inspector