

Hillcrest Park School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	9316115
Unique Reference Number	123326
Inspection number	320358
Inspection dates	17-18 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Hillcrest Park is a small Independent School that is part of the Hillcrest Group. The school admits pupils aged 7 to 16 years. Most pupils have a statement of special educational need relating to their severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Almost all are looked after by their local authorities and have been excluded from their mainstream schools. The school aims to raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence, develop their learning skills and their academic knowledge, and enable them to become successful citizens. The school has links with two Hillcrest homes and several schools and colleges.

Pupils all reside at children's homes owned by the Hillcrest Group. One of these is for children up to the age of 13, and is on the same site as the school. The other is about 10 miles away and children over the age of 11 live there. Not all the children in these homes are pupils of Hillcrest Park School.

Evaluation of the school

This is a good school that meets its aims well. Pupils make outstandingly good progress in their behaviour, their attitude to learning, and their social skills. The curriculum is broad, imaginative and practical. It is very well supported by evening activities carried out in the two residential homes where pupils live. Teaching is good overall, and is at times inspirational and highly motivating for pupils. The proprietors have increasingly high expectations of staff and pupils, and are committed to continued improvement. All but two of the regulations are fully met.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The good curriculum includes a wide range of subjects that are academic, creative and practical. Good planning ensures that they are relevant and well matched to pupils' interests, as well as being well based on assessments of pupils' previous and recent progress and standards. Good links between subjects help to reinforce and extend pupils' learning. Some pupils have lessons for one or more days each week at mainstream schools or colleges to enhance their learning. The Hillcrest homes also provide very valuable activities and guidance for pupils. Both homes were inspected by Ofsted in 2007, and were considered to be outstanding, or good with outstanding features, respectively. There are close links between the two homes and the school. These are extremely valuable

in giving pupils a secure and homely environment. Pupils do their homework, develop their social and independence skills, have visits to many places of interest, and pursue their developing interests, especially in sporting and musical activities.

The curriculum for personal development, citizenship and careers is central to meeting the school's aims, with extremely good topics and strategies that help pupils to develop their confidence and a sense of their own worth. Many pupils study appropriate courses that are nationally accredited, including Entry Level Certificates, GCSE and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses. However, these courses are not enough to stretch all pupils, although the school is considering extending the range and challenge of external qualifications.

Pupils' statements of special educational need are not all up to date. Some are several years old, without any record of an annual review. Whatever the cause, the school does not hold records of annual reviews of some pupils. It is therefore not possible for the school to plan provision to comply with the statement. Furthermore, some statements fail to name Hillcrest Park School as the appropriate placement for pupils. However, the school has made its own individual plans for supporting and guiding pupils' behavioural and academic development which are clear and practical.

Good teaching is based securely on an accurate assessment of pupils' progress. Lessons are well planned and are mostly well matched to pupils of different abilities. Teachers are mainly enthusiastic, and have good knowledge of their subjects. They expect pupils to behave well and work at a good pace. Sometimes, the work set is too easy to stretch pupils fully, which means they lose some interest in learning, cause minor distractions and this is not managed effectively. Mostly, however, teachers are enthusiastic and firm in lessons, and are often inspiring in subjects such as drama, art and music. Relationships between pupils and classroom staff are almost invariably positive, calm and frequently laced with good-natured humour. Both homes do their best to ensure that homework is completed.

Pupils make good progress in their work, through effective problem-solving and investigations, in particular. They achieve well in sports, in their social development, as well as in academic work in general. Teacher assessments and national testing show good achievements by most pupils, although pupils attain lower standards than their mainstream peers. Pupils gain Entry Level Certificates in subjects such as science, English and mathematics, as well as nationally recognised certificates in information and communication technology (ICT) and adult literacy and numeracy. Progress by a minority of pupils who are not fully stretched in some lessons is satisfactory. A significant area of progress is in pupils' personal development. They build up a much more positive attitude to themselves and to learning. They begin to see a worthwhile possible future for themselves, and learn how to cooperate with each other and with adults. They also learn the value of personal hygiene, punctuality, and dressing correctly for school and work.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good, and pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils' confidence is built up well through activities such as drama, art, music and sports, and by the way they are valued in school and in the homes. Many trips and visits enhance the cultural understanding that pupils build up in lessons. Pupils act responsibly and are trusted with a variety of tasks. They understand rights and wrongs in different situations in school and in the wider world. Their behaviour is 'impeccable usually', but they can, as one member of staff said, 'blow up sometimes, of course'. Pupils agreed that they generally get on very well together, but can occasionally be very provoked by certain incidents. Although some pupils deny that they enjoy their lessons, they have only to be seen in music, science or English, for instance, to see that they derive great enjoyment and satisfaction from their learning. Many support each other by helping with using the internet, and contribute more widely, such as by raising funds for Red Nose Day.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Pupils are well cared for and are supervised effectively. Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that they could talk with staff if they had difficulties. Staff are mostly consistent in applying policies, especially with regard to behaviour. There is a strong commitment to maintaining clear and practical procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety in school, in the homes, and on visits out of school. Staff from each home are on hand throughout each day in case of problems. The handover between the homes and school at the start and end of each school day is valuable in giving consistency to how pupils are managed throughout the entire day. Through regular lessons, food preparation, and healthy eating days, pupils learn much about the value of correct eating and drinking. In personal, social and health education they learn the dangers of drugs and in physical education learn and experience the benefits of exercise. Many pupils take very good advantage of the opportunities on offer for adventurous and sporting activities, especially in their childrens homes. The school has very good regard for people with disabilities. The three-year accessibility plan includes re-testing the school's fire precautions and exits, as emergency evacuation is limited to a single doorway.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school places a strong emphasis on safeguarding its pupils through rigorous checks on all staff, including undertaking enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. Full information is kept securely in the form of a single central record.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is on a single site in new purpose-built premises. It is adjacent to one of the homes where most pupils live. The grounds are three acres of grassland, with farm animals that some pupils help to look after and hard surfaced games areas. All of the buildings are in good condition. Rooms are spacious and fit for purpose, including specialist facilities for some subjects such as art and music. Good use is made of all the on-site facilities, and of many local amenities such as football and rugby clubs, horse-riding, swimming and other schools and colleges. Both homes are in very good condition, and provide extremely good facilities in which pupils can relax, socialise or develop their leisure skills, as they see fit.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Good information is provided for parents and others. The prospectus is clearly written, easy to understand and practical. The only failing is the lack of information about how discipline is managed and sanctions applied. However, the information states clearly the school has a policy never to exclude pupils. This information is contained in the behaviour policy, but this does not generally go out to parents, and is not mentioned as being available in the information to parents.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written complaints policy that covers all of the regulations well. There have been no complaints to date.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a regular annual review system for all pupils with statements of special educational need so that it can demonstrate that it is fulfilling the current requirements of those statements (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- include particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline (paragraph 6(2)(e)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Test the fire evacuation procedures in terms of the suitability of alternative exits, other than the front door.
- Expand the range of nationally accredited qualifications open to pupils in order to provide the possibility of greater challenges.

School details

Name of school	Hillcrest Park School		
DCSF number	9316115		
Unique reference number	123326		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1995		
Age range of pupils	7-15		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 7	Girls: 0	Total: 7
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 95,000		
Address of school	Hillcrest Park Southcombe Chipping Norton Oxfordshire OX7 5QH		
Telephone number	01608 644621		
Fax number	01608 644295		
Email address	parkschool@hillcrestcare.co.uk; kingsbromley@hillcrestcare.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Mark Hollinshead		
Proprietor	Hillcrest Care		
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts AI		
Dates of inspection	17-18 January 2008		