

Hillingdon Manor School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	312/6083
Unique Reference Number	131940
Inspection number	322729
Inspection dates	1 - 2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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

Hillingdon Manor is an independent, approved day special school for up to 90 pupils who have autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Pupils have a very wide range of ability and many have additional needs. These relate to their behaviour, learning, physiological and psychological well-being. All pupils have statements of special education needs and, at present, 16 local authorities fund their placements. The school is located to the south of Hillingdon, London. It was opened by the four current directors, two of whom have pupils at the school. The school has grown considerably since that time and there are now 86 boys and girls on its roll, located on two separate sites. The 'Manor', for pupils aged from 3 -14, is based in a former local authority special school building. The second site, the 'Courtyard', for students from 14 to 19 years, is a converted stable block about two miles from the main site.

The school was last inspected in 2005 when it was judged to be good. Since then there have been two changes of principal and many new staff appointments. The current principal has been in place since September 2007.

The school's mission is to '*address the triad of impairment to reduce the effect that autism has on learning.*'

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is satisfactory as are the curriculum, teaching, assessment and pupils' progress. However, pupils make good progress in their communication and personal development and learn to effectively manage their particular anxieties and difficulties in coping with the world around them. They behave outstandingly well and develop effective ways in which to express themselves. The school has come through some very difficult times but is rapidly improving as a result of the excellent impact of the new principal's work. Staff commitment and motivation are now high and their roles and responsibilities are now better suited to their particular skills. The pupils are supported well and the provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. All but one of the independent schools regulations are met. Although most improvements have taken place over the last year, the school has addressed reasonably the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and all regulations are met. Throughout all subjects and activities there is a good emphasis on how the plans can be adapted for the pupils' needs and how their communication skills, whether using signs, symbols or spoken language, can be promoted. Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall but good for their development of communication skills. The school's new approach to supporting reading for pupils who find it particularly difficult, is beginning to accelerate their skills and rapidly improve their attitudes to reading. The speech and language therapists put much effort into supporting groups and lessons and their push on using information and communication technology (ICT) is paying dividends for some of the pupils with the greatest difficulties. However, this is not widespread across classes. In addition, its use to support learning generally is also underdeveloped.

The principal has focused heavily on improving the curriculum this year, especially in ensuring that plans build on each other to assist pupils to make progress throughout each year group. There is now much more emphasis on learning across a wider range of areas, especially for those pupils who need the most support with their communication. There is now a better balance between the emphasis on therapy and the need to provide a broad curriculum.

Throughout the school the planning in most subjects is thorough. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, which is a requirement of most pupils' statements of special educational need. Schemes of work are in place for all subjects. The introduction of French, last September, in Key Stage 3 has been well received by pupils. The planning for science and design and technology is not as thorough nor does it cover as wide a range of topics as in other subjects, especially in how pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding build on previous learning.

The school's consultant and interim head of Key Stage 4 and post 16 has done some very effective work in revamping the Key Stage 4 and post 16 programmes, so that they better meet the greatly varying needs of students. Although there is still a little way to go to ensure that there is a totally accurate balance of vocational and academic programmes, the picture for lower attaining students is greatly improved. Higher attaining students who left the school in 2007 have progressed to college courses and obtained a small number of GCSEs, commensurate to their ability. The school supports students with the move to the next phase of their lives and the support of the Connexions service is excellent. Older students enjoy a range of trips and activities, including camping; these enable them to develop their social and coping skills.

The curriculum is enhanced by additional therapies that impact well on pupils' emotional and social development. In addition, the work done on the social and emotional aspects of literacy and the use of social stories in the curriculum help

pupils cope with their everyday anxieties, enabling them to make all the use they have of the time available for learning.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Teachers usually provide interesting activities which motivate and engage the pupils well and promote their enjoyment of learning. Teaching assistants provide excellent support for pupils' behaviour and have a good knowledge of their social and emotional needs. They also manage and support pupils' communication skills well. Occasionally, however, teachers do not always give them a clear role in introductions and sometimes they have little to do when pupils are asked to undertake activities one by one, while the rest of the class wait. This is an approach which also slows the pace of lessons and causes some pupils to lose interest. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and the productive working atmosphere in most lessons is built on a firm foundation of trust and enjoyment of learning.

The principal, utilising staff with particular expertise, has analysed the strengths and weaknesses of teaching exceptionally well and has focused on improving the quality of teaching. However, although this has considerably improved, it is still not consistently good across all classes. For instance, the understanding of how lessons can be adapted to meet individual needs varies between staff and they often miss the opportunity to assess pupils' learning in plenary sessions at the end of lessons. They do focus on how hard the pupils have found the lesson and, in this, are getting pupils to self-assess the level of challenge. Assessment is now more accurate and the small steps of progress are measured using National Curriculum and other performance criteria. Assessment data is now better evaluated using a computerised system. However, there are still some inaccuracies in the levels that are assigned to pupils' work. In the Courtyard pupils' targets are specific and clear and pupils review their learning against these. At the Manor they are not as well developed and targets are infrequently referred to in lessons. Improvement here is targeted from September 2008.

Parents are positive about the improvements the new principal is making and about what the school offers for their children. However, a few feel that their children have not made the progress they expected because of the past weaknesses in the curriculum and assessment outlined above.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is firmly founded on supporting the whole child and especially their personal development. As a result, pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. Programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh Award, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the good programme of outdoor activities have a positive impact on pupils' personal development. The school creates a 'can do' culture and fosters pupils' independence well. Through the reward systems and the praise they receive in lessons, pupils quickly gain confidence and improve their

self-esteem and their ability to relate to one another. They are helped to understand the world around them, learn about public institutions and prepare for the future ahead. As one of the older, more able, students put it last year, 'you opened up paths to my soul'.

Behaviour is outstanding, considering each individual's complex needs and pupils are taught to take responsibility for their behaviour and learn right from wrong. Older students are prepared for their future lives by work experience and college placements.

The school council plays an active part in contributing to ideas for the school and pupils take their roles and responsibilities seriously. They have raised money for charities, such as The Samaritans and have contacts with local schools on 'sharing' days. Pupils study a range of cultures both in the curriculum and collective assemblies and are prepared well to live in a multicultural society.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Overall, the school has high regard for pupils' welfare, health and safety and provision is good. Very good attention is given to the implications of pupils' autism such as their self-management and safety. All safeguarding procedures are in place. Behaviour management plans provide very strong guidance for staff and reward systems are well constructed, as a result pupils develop a good awareness of the consequences of their actions. Risk assessments are thorough, both for activities in and out of school. The school's improved and graduated approach to managing behaviour is having a positive effect on the learning of pupils and those who cannot cope at times find the 'Place 2 Be' a safe haven where they can calm down but also carry on with their learning. However, there is not always the same attention to pupils' posture when they use computers and some seating positions are too low.

Good attention is also given to pupils' diet and the management of their anxieties over food. Health is also promoted through the good range of physical activity and sport. The monitoring of health and safety is satisfactory and fire procedures have recently improved. Pupils get plenty of exercise both in school and off-site. Fire safety procedures meet requirements. The school meets all requirements including those relating to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Most of the necessary checks regarding the staff's suitability to work with children are in place, including those made by the Criminal Records Bureau. The school's single central register of staff checks complies with requirements. However, the school engages most of its staff, initially, through employment agencies and all the required information is supplied by these agencies. If the school deems these staff to be able to successfully work with the pupils, they are then employed by the

directors. However, for the large majority of staff no application form is completed and no complete record of employment history is obtained.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is satisfactory and meets all regulations. It is well maintained. At the Manor, the space is used well to provide a wide range of facilities, including classrooms, therapy rooms, a sensory area and garden, library and a few different areas to help pupils calm and manage their behaviour. Most classrooms are small but adequate for the number of pupils; although the science room can only just accommodate the largest groups. There is a reasonably sized hall at the Manor but at the Courtyard the area for physical education is small as is the outside recreation area. However, use is made of external facilities to compensate for this. Space is adequate at the courtyard, although there are no specialist facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There is a good range of information provided to parents and carers, both formally and informally. Daily communication books keep parents informed and there are regular updates about what is being taught. Reports to parents are very thorough and detailed and a well organised system for the annual review of each pupil's statement is in place.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school fully complies with all regulations and no formal complaints have been made in the last school year.

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 the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), ensure appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm their previous employment history, and that such information is taken into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

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:

- ensure that work is closely matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils in each class and ensure that all lessons move at a swift pace so that all pupils are motivated and learn effectively
- provide opportunities for assessment and review of pupils' learning during plenary sessions and ensure that the accuracy of assessments is made consistent throughout the school
- make better use of ICT for learning and communication.

School details

Name of school	Hillingdon Manor School		
DCSF number	312/6083		
Unique reference number	131940		
Type of school	Day special school for pupils with autism		
Status	Approved Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	3-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 71	Girls: 15	Total: 86
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 71	Girls: 15	Total: 86
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£34,635 to 35,844		
Address of school	Moorcroft Complex Harlington Road Hillingdon Uxbridge Middlesex UB8 3HD		
Telephone number	01895 813679		
Fax number	01895 813679		
Email address	enquiries@hillingdonmanorschool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Gail Pilling		
Proprietor	Moorcroft Manor Ltd		
Reporting inspector	George Derby		
Dates of inspection	1 - 2 July 2008		