

Hillside Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124903
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328238
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	68
Sixth form	4
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pauline Lucas
Headteacher	Mrs Suzanne Upson
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hitchcock Place Sudbury Suffolk CO10 1NN
Telephone number	01787 372808
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Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hillside is a community special school for pupils who have severe learning difficulties (SLD). This means that because of their learning needs pupils enter the school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are exceptionally lower than those expected for their age. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. Many of the pupils have learning, sensory and medical needs in addition to their SLD. Over half have autistic spectrum disorders and approximately a fifth have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Eight pupils are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), some of whom attend part-time. The EYFS provision includes an assessment Nursery and many of these children are supported into full-time or dual placements in local mainstream schools. Most pupils leave the school at 16 to attend local colleges. The very new post-16 department caters for students who have PMLD. At the time of the inspection a major building project was underway, revamping some classrooms and administrative rooms and providing a new hydrotherapy pool. The school has a number of Awards including the Sportsmark and Activemark. It is also part of a Suffolk western Area Special Schools Group, which delivers outreach support to mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parents believe their children are 'lucky to attend this school' because of the 'caring and dedicated staff team' who are determined to help their children achieve 'whatever they are capable of'. Inspectors agree that this is an outstanding school, which is constantly challenging itself to help its pupils achieve even more. The school has improved provision well from the last inspection and almost every element of its work is now outstanding. The standard of care is exceptional. The school is meticulous in its efforts to keep pupils safe and to find ways of 'hearing the voice' of even those with the most complex needs about what they want and the help they need. There are very strong partnerships with families and all the other agencies that surround the child and family, and a determination to use their advice and support to best effect. Where there have been difficulties, such as in the limited therapy support available, the school has trained its own staff to follow through advice given.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding from their starting points. Children in the EYFS make great strides from their admission, settling quickly and learning to trust and have a go at new experiences. This means a significant number are able to also attend local early years provision and transfer at age five to mainstream schools. Those pupils who remain in Hillside and those who transfer from other provisions make excellent progress overall, particularly in key areas such as their personal development and independence, and their communication, literacy and number skills. Because of this, all pupils, whatever their needs are set up extremely well for the next stage of their education and life. Improvements in the ways pupils' progress is monitored ensures work in classrooms is effectively linked to what each pupil needs to do. The information gained is also analysed very carefully to make sure each different group of learners is progressing appropriately in the different subjects and areas of learning.

Achievement is excellent because of the way in which teachers and managers think about individual needs, but also because of the excellent teaching and curriculum. The activities they plan and teach are relevant, capturing and holding the pupils' attention. Staff are constantly encouraging pupils to 'have a go' at new experiences, something which many find challenging because of their learning needs. Even those with the most complex needs 'glow' in response to the praise and encouragement they receive and this motivates them to try again. However, the school recognises that some of the older pupils and post-16 students' achievements could be celebrated even further if a wider range of awards was available. In addition, because the post-16 department is new and building work has not been completed. Some aspects of its provision are not fully in place and therefore the curriculum is good rather than outstanding as in the rest of the school.

The outstanding provision is in place because of the excellent quality of leadership and management in the school: from the governing body, the headteacher and senior leadership team, to the middle managers whose roles have all been strengthened through training and support. Everyone within the school has a quiet passion for it. They work unstintingly to get the best out of the pupils, to put the best resources in front of pupils and to enable their inclusion in family and community life. This they do exceptionally well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The new post-16 department in the school has hit the ground running because of excellent leadership and management. It is an extremely well-organised and focused provision which, despite some work still to be done, is outstanding overall. This is because teaching is excellent and all students receive a very high standard of personal care and attention to help them benefit greatly in their personal, communication and key skills. Classroom staff make every possible effort to interest students and to build on and develop their skills in ways that will support their transition into the next stage of their provision. Despite highly complex needs, students are helped to feel dignified and are included in all aspects of lessons and school life and in the broader community.

Careful application of individual target setting for students helps them to make extremely good progress. For example, their work for the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) 'Towards Independence' award is closely linked to the school's own personal social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) scheme and this helps maximise students' achievement and independence. This programme includes very carefully thought-out careers and work experience opportunities. The school is continuing to extend the good range of off-site and school-based learning opportunities for students. It is rightly planning to develop a wider range of curricular opportunities and awards to enable students to develop even better skills and support their life after school even more effectively.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school makes outstanding provision for its youngest children because of the excellent leadership and management of this phase and the skills and expertise of all EYFS staff. Adults have a very clear focus on helping each child to demonstrate their capabilities and encouraging everyone to understand and provide well for them. This is reflected in the excellent relationships they develop with families and other settings that the children attend. It is also shown in the outstanding progress children make from very limited communication and concentration skills and challenging behaviour on entry. Some also have very little responsiveness to others when they first start. Children grow as individuals and their welfare and development are nurtured effectively through staff's deep understanding of their needs and personalities and their ambitions for them. Learning opportunities are carefully planned to enable each to be involved and challenged at their own level, but also to ensure that children have plenty of meaningful experiences. Children are comfortable; their personal needs are very well met and their safeguarding and well-being are always paramount. Achievement in all areas of learning is outstanding, and a particular strength is in the support for personal development, including pupils' behaviour and communication. The quality of teaching and of individual support, the stimulating activities and the use of technology and sensory approaches enable all children to become increasingly aware, cooperative and involved. Children's smallest communication and demonstration of interest is seized upon and valued. This means that when the children transfer to their school-aged provision they are much more responsive and demonstrate hugely improved willingness and ability to take part in lessons.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the 14 to 19 curriculum and in particular post-16 provision, accommodation and links, to strengthen this provision further as more students attend.
- Increase the range of ways in which pupils' achievements are celebrated through external awards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve extremely well in every department of this school, whatever their background or level of need. This is because of the consistently high quality of teaching and learning experiences, the high level of personal care and the ways in which the curriculum progressively builds on their previous learning. They do so in all subjects and in relation to the challenging targets that are set through annual reviews of their statements of special educational needs and their individual education plans. A particular strength is the progress they make in communication and early literacy and number and in their independent living skills. Groups with less complex needs are able to read and write simple sentences by themselves or through using symbols and technology by the time they leave the school. They apply their planning and number skills in shopping and cooking activities that have real transference to everyday life, and are proud to do so. Art, the pupils' progressively developing skills in food technology and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are also particular strengths. Pupils with the most complex needs have a good range of symbols and technology that they are systematically supported to use. This enables them to communicate their needs, likes, dislikes and to make choices. As a result, they are empowered as far as they can be and make small but highly significant strides in their understanding of the world and their inclusion in lessons. Students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 complete 'Towards Independence' and 'Transition Challenge' and achieve particularly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' enjoyment of school is exceptional, given their needs, and they feel very valued. They come to school expecting to work and join in with lessons and other activities. The overwhelmingly supportive reports from parents via the questionnaires and very positive comments from the pupils themselves clearly demonstrate this. Pupils feel safe in the school and have great trust and faith in the adults who care for them. Attendance is excellent, especially given the poor medical health of a large number of pupils. Relationships between staff and students are exceptional and, within the context of their own challenging needs, behavior too is outstanding, both in lessons and around the school. All this is brought about through the strong emphasis on PSHCE and respect for the individual in all of the school's work and daily life. This enables pupils to understand right from wrong and develop their awareness of themselves and others extremely well. Pupils begin to explore the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through their work, their strong physical education programme and by eating well-planned meals at lunchtime. An after-school club provides additional opportunities for more varied sporting activities. Links with local and wider communities are very strong, including those with other schools internationally. This all helps pupils to enjoy a wide range of off-site activities, to become more flexible and to learn about, and to recognise and understand, different communities outside of their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Pupils are excited by their learning. This is because teachers make learning so relevant and interesting for them. The use of symbols, signs and other objects to support communication and learning is very strong and enables pupils at all levels to be involved in learning and to communicate their choices and views. Further strengths of the excellent teaching and learning lie in the good pace of lessons, the opportunity to try out new skills in meaningful ways, the excellent relationships staff have with pupils and the ways in which pupils receive ongoing praise and feedback on their efforts. Occasionally, lessons do not always have a clear review or plenary at the end and pupils are not reminded of what they are meant to be thinking about. Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress is excellent. Staff observe, note and reflect carefully on pupils' learning in lessons. They adapt their plans well and effectively use the considerable data gathered to identify pupils' 'next steps' targets.

The teaching, learning and inclusion of pupils with PMLD is outstanding because the school has worked hard since the last inspection to explore how best to monitor and assess their achievements. These new ways of assessing and monitoring progress are paying off and have enabled staff in all parts of the school, including EYFS and post-16, to plan in more detail what these pupils will achieve in lessons, and how they will be included. This means programmes are extremely well targeted on pupils' specific needs. Highly skilled teaching assistants make a huge contribution to learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding for all subjects, including core subjects such as literacy, numeracy, science and ICT. This is because of the high quality of what the school provides itself and the ways in which it draws on the resources of others, such as local secondary schools for science and sports. This means pupils have good opportunities to use enhanced resources but also to be very visible in the community where they have to practice their developing skills. The learning opportunities provided are particularly motivating and include theme-based approaches and a sensory curriculum which are highly relevant and inclusive. Excellent progress had been made in the development of individual subjects. Subject leaders and staff have developed programmes of study and resources that make clear how learners with different needs can be successfully included in activities and make progress towards the learning objectives. There are very good resources to support this. Good arrangements exist for careers, work experience and work-related learning, and pupils benefit from having good opportunities to contribute to community projects such as coppicing and path-laying. A huge range of enrichment activities allow pupils to develop their own interests further. Careful planning enables pupils with particular difficulties to access the curriculum, for example, through the provision of communication aids and mobility devices. The school is determined to do even more as is evidenced by their involvement in a national 14 to 19 curriculum initiative and their plans for post-16.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Everything the school does is effectively designed to nurture and safeguard the individual pupil's achievements and well-being. Despite the challenging nature of pupils' needs and high dependence on adult support, pupils are afforded dignity and choice and know their views and feelings are valued and respected. Safeguarding procedures, recruitment, risk assessments, and health and safety issues are all dealt with appropriately and all requirements in these respects are met with meticulous care. Parents report that they feel informed and included in their children's programmes and that this helps them carry over similar approaches into the home. The school works extremely well with the range of other practitioners involved with pupils, thereby ensuring there is a real 'team around the child' to optimise inclusion and achievement. It has excellent transition arrangements for supporting children and students into their next placements and for those pupils who have inclusion opportunities through dual placements. It makes very good use of the Connexions service through transition reviews. It supports pupils and their parents extremely well through annual reviews to plan for, and understand, the next steps and priorities. Best use is made of the limited therapy time available from physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapy, by using them to train the school's own staff as well as work with pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leaders and managers at every level have a very clear view of where this school is going and what needs to be done. They are determined that there is always something that they can improve. The school now has considerable evidence to back up its judgements about how well it is doing. It analyses this in detail and puts things into place such as new approaches to reading and spelling where it feels it could do better. Governance is excellent. Governors say they have a 'passion' for the school and this is evident in the detailed attention that they pay to its work and achievements, and the ways in which they work with the staff to find the money for what needs to be done. Parents and friends of Hillside, together with the local community, have raised the bulk of the money for the new building work, which has already enhanced provision. This all confirms the leadership and management of this school to be outstanding in all aspects of its work. Their capacity to improve it even further is excellent. The school reaches out to the community very effectively through its extensive links and welcomes it in. This enriches the school's provision for its students and their achievements but also enables others to understand and be more at ease with those with disabilities. Its partnership and outreach work with other schools is of a high quality, is highly valued and ensures other pupils with learning needs benefit.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

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/or disabilities make progress	1	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	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	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1	1
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

30 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hillside Special School, Sudbury, CO10 1NN

We enjoyed visiting your school and thank you so much for welcoming us into your lessons.

When we came, your parents and the school council told us how much you enjoy going to Hillside and how much progress you were making. We agree with them. We think that you should be proud to be in such an excellent school where everyone works so hard to make lessons fun. We know that you are making excellent progress in your lessons, in learning to do things for yourself, in your talking, signing and in your number work. We are pleased with the ways in which the building has been improved and the ways in which staff do everything they can to help those of you who have lots of needs so that you are made comfortable and helped to be involved in lessons. We think you really try to behave well and to help each other and your teachers. Well done!

The governors, your teachers and Mrs Upson have lots of plans for your school which will make it even better. We have asked them to do the following:

- carry on developing the different things that students can do when they are in the post-16 department so that they are as independent as possible when they leave
- find out about more awards that you might gain for your work by the time you leave the school and post-16.

Once again, it was a delight to meet you all.

Best wishes

Sue Lewis

Lead inspector