

# Hillside Specialist School for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Communication and Interaction

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131479
<b>Local Authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	341145
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 April 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Terry McKenzie

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>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	63
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Philip Hargreaves
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Alison Foster
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 April 2007
<b>School address</b>	Ribchester Road Longridge Preston PR3 3XB
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited all class groups, 13 lessons and two classroom gatherings. They observed 10 teachers and teaching assistants delivering lessons, and discussions were held with a member of the governing body, senior staff and teachers. Inspectors looked at the school's work and scrutinised policies, improvement plans and 34 parents' and carers' questionnaires.

- how assessments are used to help students make progress
- the impact of the curriculum on promoting basic skills and preparing students for the next stages of their lives
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers in improving the school
- the specific arrangements needed for the care, guidance and support of students within the autistic spectrum.

## Information about the school

Hillside educates students with autistic spectrum conditions and is a specialist school for autism communication and interaction. Many students also experience other learning difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs. Students enter the school at any time in their school career and most continue until aged 16. At the time of the inspection no children were enrolled in the Nursery provision. Following the last inspection Hillside was without a headteacher for almost 12 months. The new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed within the last two years. Hillside has the regionally representative cohort of students from minority ethnic groups of around 17%. Two are looked after and around 10% are eligible for free school meals. The school was recently highly commended by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), and has gained a learning excellence award and the Financial Management Standard. The school has Investors in People status and holds national and local Healthy Schools awards.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

### Main findings

Hillside makes good academic provision for students and cares for them very well. It is valued by parents and carers and held in high esteem by the local authority. A typical comment received was, 'The change in our child has been beyond what we hoped for.' As far as they can, students attend willingly, enjoy lessons and contribute very well. Behaviour is exemplary. Students feel very safe and gain plenty of exercise, eat well and greatly enjoy working outdoors. Interesting opportunities are provided for learning off-site and participating in holidays and visits. Thus, students gain valuable experience in socialising with others and begin to learn about communities. Students are taught about right and wrong and Hillside has recently implemented new strategies that successfully help students to manage their own behaviour. Hillside works well with others to ensure that care, guidance and support for students are outstanding.

Students arrive with attainment levels very much below national averages but all groups make good progress compared with others in similar schools. Consequently, they develop skills that prepare them well for the future and for moving on to their next stages. Older students gain qualifications and some learn to cope in the workplace. Teaching is good and improving rapidly under very effective leadership. Teachers use assessment information to understand students' attainments but the use of clear and focused targets in lessons and through support plans is not yet uniform throughout the school. Consequently, it is not always possible to measure accurately the progress made. The recently improved curriculum is good and ensures that all students are included, develop basic skills and have access to a range of opportunities. Managers and governors are extremely rigorous in ensuring that statutory obligations are met. For example, the school's data are expertly interrogated to ensure that no students are disadvantaged in school or discriminated against. Arrangements for safeguarding are exemplary. Hillside is highly cohesive, it interacts very positively with many other communities. Under the new leaders great improvements are apparent in the use and allocation of resources. However, the outside area for the Early Years and Foundation Stage children is too small and does not provide enough space for extensive play. The overall quality of education at Hillside is good and the many changes implemented by the headteacher have greatly improved the school. Improvement planning undertaken as a result of very effective self-evaluation builds on these successful changes and provides evidence that the outstanding capacity to improve is sustained and can be maintained.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- By 2011, improve students' learning by ensuring that better use is made of clear and focused targets.
- As soon as possible, improve outside space for play in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enable more extensive play and allow for a wider range of activities.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

In lessons all students take part in activities planned for them, indicating that they are keen to learn. For example, in classroom lessons they settle quickly and engage well; and outside, when gardening, they willingly complete tasks. They begin to share experiences as far as they can tolerate and behave very well. Most make good gains in communication skills. All Year 11 students are successful in the accreditation for life and living courses, some to the higher stages. Because of their learning difficulties, students' attainments remain below the national average for all schools but all groups make good progress and all are included in learning.

That students feel very safe in school is indicated through the responses provided by parents and carers. This is confirmed by the careful work undertaken recently to try to establish how students with severe communication difficulties feel about school. Using communication aids and the skills of staff students reported that they feel more confident about moving around the school and less troubled by the exhibited behaviours of others. This is a good example of how Hillside implements the expertise of its specialist status. Regular exercise is undertaken as part of the curriculum and utilised creatively. For example, through taking part in the innovative on-site 'forest school' students learn about using tools and being more self-reliant. They also work in the garden to gain access to the fresh air. Additional physical activities include swimming and visits to the gymnasium. The outside activities and exercise help to reduce stress and thus help students engage more effectively with school. They are encouraged to eat the healthy school lunches. Hillside has recently instigated a 'healthy lunchbox initiative' that is appropriately designed to encourage reluctant eaters tolerate a wider variety of healthy options and students are beginning to respond well to this.

Students contribute very well within their limitations to the life of the school. The school council represents their views and has been instrumental in bringing about changes, such as to play equipment. Fundraising occurs at the suggestion of students and many have begun to accept responsibilities in classrooms and around school as a result of better strategies to manage behaviour. Regular trips out of school support the curriculum and students take part in residential visits that support learning and interaction with other communities. All older students take part in supported work experiences both on and off the school site and this contributes to their outstanding social and moral education. Visits to cultural centres and places of worship familiarise them with people from different cultures and religions. Students welcome people from different backgrounds into school for events such as African drumming.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good overall. Teachers know students well and largely plan tasks to match their abilities. However, not all teachers challenge students with well-matched targets, and the success criteria of lessons are often not individualised. In these circumstances students make less progress than they should. The best lessons make use of clear and sharply focused targets carefully planned for each student and assessed during the lesson. Classroom assistants generally guide students well and help them to engage in activities with controlled respite from work. Students form close relationships with the adults who care for them and thus benefit in their learning from effective support.

All students follow courses linked to the National Curriculum. Exciting new developments are underway to improve the school's programmes of study further. The school's leaders are ensuring that the current holistic integrated thematic curriculum takes even more account of students' communication needs. The development of basic skills is a high priority. All students engage in nurturing activities throughout the day to revisit and reinforce aspects of personal, social and health education. Thus, they develop skills for living that help them to move on to the next stages of their lives. In Key Stage 4 all gain qualifications and last year every leaver moved on to education or training placements, a remarkable achievement for a school of this nature. Students gain confidence from work-related learning opportunities, supported work experiences and outdoor activities

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

in the forest school. Religious and cultural celebrations are maintained and students are regularly introduced to music and drama from other countries. Their learning about others is enhanced through aspects of the curriculum and by trips and residential visits. The care, guidance and support of students at Hillside is highly effective. Staff work closely with other each other and with other professionals to ensure that students spend as much time as possible in school and in lessons. They provide outstanding care and support across all areas of the school, for example in ensuring that students are ready to start the day, and in helping them to be ready to tolerate the arrangements for transport home. Thus, staff are successful in helping students to feel positive about their school when that has not been the case when they have attended other education provision. Students and their families receive valuable advice about transitional arrangements for moving on to the next stages of their lives.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher and leadership team have greatly improved learning by raising the status of assessments and encouraging teachers to use them more effectively. They have instigated new curriculum pathways that take account of the needs of students with autism. Consequently, all have opportunities to learn and succeed. Managers appraise the work of the school with skill to ensure that all students have opportunities to progress and that none are discriminated against. However, a few students do not always receive their full therapeutic entitlements because of difficulties in maintaining some partnerships that are beyond the control of the managers. The governing body is enthusiastic and supportive. Recent changes in membership have produced a good mix of talents and a wide range of backgrounds and the governors are becoming much more effective. For example, governors now observe the work of the school closely through having members who visit the school regularly as partners and parents. Safeguarding practices are outstanding because policies and procedures are exemplary. Designated safeguarding staff and governors have completed training beyond the statutory requirements and all aspects of safeguarding are undertaken with great skill and awareness.

Hillside places great importance on its contribution to the community. It undertakes research and considers and reviews this work regularly. Consequently, students begin to understand as well as they are able about maintaining good relations with others,

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

including people from different backgrounds and religions. Contacts are maintained with other organisations, such as the police, to help students know more about public services. Parents and carers engage well with the school and are kept very well informed about the education and care undertaken with their children. Despite the shortcomings of the outside play area of the Early Years and Foundation Stage, teachers generally make good use of resources, including new technologies and communication aids, to help children to learn. Hillside therefore provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children clearly feel safe in this well-structured environment and they are supported well. Children arrive with little or no nursery experience but quickly settle to routines and become ready to learn. They develop early communication and social skills that are fundamental to their progress and future well-being. Good planning and attention to detail ensures good coverage of the Early Years and Foundation Stage curriculum. All children are at different stages of development but the range of assessment tools used by the teacher helps to ensure that staff understand what children can do and what their capabilities are. Consequently, they make good progress. The outside learning and play area of the facility is far too small to meet the full range of learning needs for Early Years Foundation Stage and must be improved. The coordinator for this area of the school has only been in post for six months but leadership and management of the facility is good and improving.



*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## **Views of parents and carers**

Questionnaires were returned by 34 parents and carers and inspectors also spoke with one parent at length. The great majority of parents and carers were very positive about the school. For example, one written comment went as far as to say: 'My child is having a wonderful year. The teacher is wonderful and I can't praise her enough.'

A few parents and carers expressed discontent about certain aspects of the school. These included concerns about the amount of progress that their children make and inspectors agree that although progress is good, there is room for improvement. Other concerns about preparing students for moving on and how well the school is led and managed were not supported by the findings of the inspection. Overwhelmingly, parents and carers believe that their children enjoy school and that Hillside meets their needs. The inspectors support this conclusion.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hillside Specialist School for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Communication and Interaction to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 63 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	74	9	26	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	79	7	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	74	9	26	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	59	10	29	3	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	71	9	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	59	13	38	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	59	13	38	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	47	15	44	2	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	74	8	24	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	62	10	29	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	62	11	32	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	21	62	10	29	0	0	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	74	6	18	2	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



Dear Students

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you on the playground, at lunch and in classes.

Hillside is a good school and the adults look after you very well indeed. We believe that you feel that the school has become a much safer place recently. Your contributions to the school are outstanding through behaving very well and trying hard to adopt healthy lifestyles. Your attendance is good and many of you try very hard to share your learning with other students.

Your teachers produce good lessons with many interesting things to do. The headteacher, other senior leaders and governors are working hard to make sure that you gain an even better education. You have many exciting opportunities outside of school and Hillside communicates well with most of your parents and carers.

The inspectors feel that the school could be even better, for example by all teachers planning challenging lesson targets for you so that you can make even better progress. Also, we believe that the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage should have much better facilities for outside play.

We wish you all the best for the future and once again thank you for your help and interest in the inspection.

Yours sincerely

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