

Hillcrest Slinfold

Independent school inspection report

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Inspection dates	25-26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI
Social care inspector	David Coulter

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 11-16

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

Hillcrest Slinfold is situated in a village five miles west of Horsham. It is a school and children's home offering 52 week care and education placements for up to 17 boys from 11 to 16 years of age who have severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Almost all have a statement of special educational needs and the large majority have a history of previously interrupted schooling. A small number are involved with the youth justice system. The boys come mainly from the south east although some are from further afield, and all have been placed by their respective local authority. At the time of the inspection there were 11 students on roll, aged between 12 and 16, all of whom had English as their principal language.

The school is part of the Hillcrest group and offers 'a holistic model of care and education that is designed to help boys to take control of their lives'. It aims to teach them how to achieve their potential and prepare to manage their future. The school has applied for approval to extend the age range to 19 from September 2010. The school was last inspected in January 2007 and the last inspection of the children's home was in March 2009.

The acting headteacher was absent at the time of the inspection and the acting head of care had been in post for three weeks. The principal of another school in the Hillcrest group has been providing support and a substantive principal is due to take up post in February 2010.

Evaluation of the school

Hillcrest Slinfold provides students with a satisfactory education. Boarding provision is inadequate. Curricular provision has been extended since the last inspection and is

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory but not always well informed by assessment which, although adequate overall, is less secure in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. By the end of Key Stage 4 the students make satisfactory progress overall. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, even taking into account their significant behavioural and social needs, is inadequate. Arrangements for welfare, health and safety overall, including safeguarding, are inadequate. The aims of the school are not consistently met.

Although the school had taken action to address the unmet regulations from the last inspection, some improvements that had been made have since been adversely affected by the instability of staffing in key management positions. The school fails to meet a number of the regulatory requirements relating to independent schools.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The school has taken appropriate steps which have largely addressed the issues raised by the last inspection and has extended the curriculum to create more opportunities for work-related learning. The Key Stage 3 curriculum covers all the required areas of experience and cross-curricular links have also been developed. For example, students reading '*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*' in English created a Second World War landscape in art which was also linked to their topic in history. The school has strengthened links with colleges and maintains good contact with social workers from students' placing authorities. This enabled a number of last year's school leavers to make positive transfers to college or work placements. Good opportunities to develop appropriate skills are provided and accredited through the Entry Level certificate, BTEC national diplomas, adult literacy and numeracy (ALAN), and Edexcel Level 1 in information and communication technology (ICT). The school is also introducing appropriate courses accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

The school provides some very good extra-curricular opportunities in the form of skiing (where students can gain a certificate) and adventure trips where students learn to test their own resilience and work together outside school. Closer to home, outings to the cinema and theatre are closely linked to the behaviour and reward system. This is a new approach and creates an overlap between school and care which is not accepted by all the students so has yet to have a demonstrable impact.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. Some good teaching is evident. Teachers use their knowledge of accredited courses well to plan and prepare their lessons which are often delivered on a one-to-one basis. However, in larger groups, written planning for individuals is not consistent. As a result, what students are going to do, rather than learn, becomes the focus and opportunities for independent learning are missed. Assessment systems are in place and appropriate use is generally made of individual education plans to set long-term targets. However, shorter-term target setting and assessment, particularly at Key Stage 3, is not sufficiently used to inform teaching and hence ensure that all students learn well and

make as much progress as they can. Some lessons are too reliant upon worksheets and students themselves say that resources are limited for practical science. Inspectors agree. However, good use is made of ICT to enhance learning and, when motivated, students work well to research areas of interest through the internet. The last inspection identified homework as an area that could more effectively support learning but this has yet to be implemented effectively.

Given their often very low starting points, the academic progress of those students who are able to remain at the school to complete their courses is satisfactory. As a result, students leave school having gained Entry Level Certificate or BTEC vocational accreditation in at least one subject as well as Level 1 or 2 in ALAN and in ICT. Some students make good or very good progress but inappropriate behaviour and poor attitudes to learning inhibit progress for others. The school has appropriate plans to introduce a more robust system for tracking and monitoring progress. At present it relies too strongly on individual teachers to set targets so that lack of aspiration is not necessarily challenged. However, the increased emphasis on a range of accreditation suits the interests of the students well and staff work hard to build success where possible.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. Despite some respite in lessons, one-to-one time with staff, or in particular activities, too much of students' experience of life at the school and home is affected either by their own negative behaviour or that of others. They are given insufficient opportunity to develop self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. There is little sense of community and in general students demonstrate scant regard or respect for other people's beliefs and values. They do not learn to distinguish effectively between right and wrong. A few students have poor attendance; despite concerted effort, and often due to circumstances beyond its control, the school's attempts to re-engage these students are not consistently effective.

Satisfactory, and sometimes good, development of key skills such as numeracy, literacy and ICT, as well as teaching of cookery and other life skills, supports students' preparation for adult life. Opportunities to grow produce and make things for their houses encourage pupils' contributions to their community and the school has good plans to extend opportunities for enterprise. However, such opportunities are currently relatively limited. The school council, which was disbanded last year, has not been replaced with any other opportunity for students to regularly express their views in school. Opportunities to experience other cultures, such as learning about Black History Month or participating in the 'cultural breakfasts' are too limited as they lack the momentum which incorporation within a whole-school project would provide. Students enjoy opportunities to develop their creative interests through music and art. However, while these subjects go some way towards providing a spiritual element to students' experiences, not enough attention is paid to this area.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The overall quality of the provision for welfare, health and safety of the students is inadequate. Systems and procedures are not rigorous enough to ensure that all students are safe. Some procedures are due for review, policies are not always implemented correctly and full records are not consistently kept. For example, although the school is confident that regular fire escape practices have been carried out, records do not support this.

Key policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and child protection are inadequately implemented, most particularly with regard to promoting good behaviour and preventing bullying. Although there is generally a high staff presence, this has proved to be inadequate in preventing serious incidents of aggressive behaviour or bullying. As a result, the number of such incidents is too high and students' behaviour is inadequate overall. Systems and practice with regard to safeguarding, including recruitment of staff, are in need of review to ensure that they fully comply with requirements. In the absence of the substantive head of care, the acting head of care has become the child protection officer and is awaiting suitable training. She does, however, have strong experience in this area.

Some arrangements, such as those to promote students' health, are positive. There is a good choice of food at mealtimes and students demonstrate a good approach to healthy eating. The provision of a small gym offers improved provision for students to improve their fitness during the school day. The recent designation of the whole site as a non-smoking area has helped some students to reduce their reliance on smoking and some good teaching in personal, social and health education provides clear guidance about sexual health.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Arrangements for ensuring the suitability of staff working in or for the school are not robust. There is too great a reliance upon the organisation's head office so that the school itself does not keep the required information adequately. Records, including the single central register of staff, are not kept systematically. The required checks for staff and regular visitors not directly employed by the school are not carried out consistently and written evidence of checks made is not routinely kept.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises generally provide an appropriate environment for learning and living. Classrooms are of a reasonable size and specialist teaching areas for vocational subjects are used well. Lack of specialist provision for science limits practical scientific activity. The garden serves its purpose well as an area in which students can study horticulture. However, it includes a pond which is surrounded by a broken fence and contains unattractive and potentially dangerous debris.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Hillcrest provides some information on its website and there is an informative prospectus, although this does not contain all the required elements. The school's safeguarding policy is not routinely made available to parents or carers. The school also fails to provide particulars of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications. The reporting system, which includes the annual review process, helps parents, carers and placing authorities to be informed about students' progress. However, although placing authorities are provided with an account of income received and expenditure incurred on request, this is not provided routinely.

Procedures for handling complaints

Procedures for dealing with complaints are available and are broadly compliant with the relevant regulations. However, the distinction between processes for students and others wishing to make a complaint is not entirely clear.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision was judged to be inadequate, and national minimum standards were not fully met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

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

- put in place a fully comprehensive framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly so that information from assessment is utilised to plan teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3 (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve provision for students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence (paragraph 2(a))
- improve provision for students to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the law (paragraph 2(b))

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- improve provision for students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- effectively implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance 'Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools' (DCSF-00656-2007)⁴ (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- ensure that the school is fully compliant with DCSF guidance 'Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education' (DCSF-04217-2006)⁵ (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- effectively implement a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst students which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of students misbehaving (paragraph 3(2)(d))
- ensure that provision for fire safety complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005⁶ (paragraph 3(5))
- ensure that staff are deployed in such a way as to ensure the proper supervision of students (paragraph 3(7))
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon students for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8)).

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

- ensure that no person supplied by an employment business (including an agency) to the school begins work at the school unless the proprietor has received written confirmation from the employment business:
 - that an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check has been made or an enhanced CRB certificate obtained in response to a check by that or another employment business. The CRB check must have been obtained no more than three months before the date on which the person is due to begin work at the school; or the person has already had an enhanced CRB check from working in a school or further education institution not more than three months previously (paragraph 4A(3-5))
 - that if an enhanced CRB certificate was obtained before the person was due to begin work and if it contained a disclosure, the school obtained a copy of the certificate from the employment business (paragraph 4A(3-5))

⁴ www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/11908/SAFE_LEARN.pdf

⁵ http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Final6836-SafeGuard.Chd_bkmk.pdf

⁶ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm

- that the proprietor has checked the identity of any staff not directly employed by the school before they begin work at the school, irrespective of any check made by the employment business (4A(6))
- include in any contractual arrangements with an employment business, the requirements set out in paragraph 4A(3), including a requirement to supply a copy of a CRB certificate that contains any information (paragraph 4A(7))
- ensure that for each member of staff in post on or after 1 September 2003, the single central register shows that the following checks were made:
 - of his/her identity (and the date on which this check was made)
 - the date on which the check was completed or certificate obtained (paragraphs 4C(2) and (3))
- in relation to staff not directly employed by the school, ensure that the register shows whether written notification has been received from the employment business that it has carried out the checks referred to in 4C(2): identity, List 99, qualifications where appropriate and appropriate checks if the person lived outside the United Kingdom (UK) and right to work in the UK (paragraph 4C(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate arrangements for students to play safely in the outdoor space currently occupied by a pond (paragraph 5(t)).

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

- provide particulars of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(3)(g))
- publish on its website or send to parents or carers of students (and of prospective parents on request) a copy of their safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4))
- ensure that an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of any student funded by the local authority is submitted to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 6(8)).

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs			✓	
How well students make progress in their learning			✓	

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development				✓
The behaviour of students				✓

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students				✓
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The quality of boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				✓
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School details

Name of school	Hillcrest Slinfold
DCSF number	938/6255
Unique reference number	131139
Type of school	Residential special school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1996
Age range of students	11-16 years
Gender of students	Boys
Number on roll (full-time students)	11
Number of boarders	11
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	10
Number of students who are looked after	11
Annual fees (boarders)	£179,504
Telephone number	01403 790939
Fax number	01403 790954
Email address	Slinfold@hillcrestcare.co.uk
Headteacher (acting)	Mr C Jackson
Proprietor	Mr R Greenwell
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI
Dates of inspection	25-26 November 2009