

Hillgate Farm

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 893/6099
Unique reference number 131171
Inspection number 342525
Inspection dates 29-30 September 2009
Reporting inspector Mark Mumby HMI

Age group: 8-17

Published: 16 November 2009

Reference no: 090070

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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

Hillgate Farm is a children's home which provides education for boys and girls aged 8 to 17 years. It caters for pupils who have complex special needs. It is owned by Da Capo Caring for Kids Ltd. The school aims to provide integrated therapeutic care and education. The school is located in a rural setting in Shropshire. The school opened in 2006 and is registered for three students. There are currently three full-time students on roll, two with a statement of special educational needs. This is the school's first published inspection report by Ofsted.

Evaluation of the school

Hillgate Farm provides a good quality of education for its pupils. The teaching team work very effectively with the care staff to ensure consistency of expectations between the school and home environment. This helps to ensure that these vulnerable young people get the most out of their education. Arrangements for safeguarding do not meet current requirements and there are shortcomings in health and safety arrangements. Consequently, the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. A small number of important regulations are not met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is based on the National Curriculum with a particular emphasis on giving pupils a good grounding in basic literacy and numeracy skills. Effective use is made of nationally produced guidance materials. For older pupils, the school is successful in its aim to provide a broad range of subjects for pupils to choose from. This is possible because of the range of expertise among the teaching staff, all of whom work part-time on a sessional basis. The programme of study for each pupil is unique and is planned around his individual learning needs. Full account

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

is taken of the objectives included in a pupil's statement of special educational needs where this is applicable. Where appropriate, pupils study subjects to entry level or GCSE. The Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) scheme contributes to pupils' good personal development and provides opportunities for them to gain awards that recognise their development of practical life skills. Pupils have good opportunities to participate in a range of physical activities including fitness training, swimming, horse riding and hill walking. A project week at the end of the summer term complements the work the pupils have done during the year by focusing on a particular topic. Activities are then planned to take place in and away from school covering several curriculum areas. Work with Connexions provides older pupils with appropriate careers guidance.

Teaching and assessment are good. Consequently, pupils make good progress. This is because teachers know each of the pupils very well. They use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons carefully to meet the individual needs of each pupil. All teaching takes place on a one to one basis and teachers take good account of the pupils' individual interests in order to plan activities which will engage them in their learning. As a result, pupils are well-motivated and have good attitudes to their work. Teachers use a good range of teaching strategies, quickly moving from one to another to ensure that pupils do not lose interest, even when they only have a short attention span. Pupils, therefore, remain focused in lessons and learning takes place at a good pace. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils.

The limited teaching space makes it difficult to provide adequate learning stimuli for pupils, such as displays or artefacts. Consequently, pupils do not benefit from a stimulating learning environment. There are few physical resources available for teaching and those which are available are not always used as effectively as they might be. For example, in a science lesson about mixing and filtering materials, the pupil had to use recycled plastic pots, a jam jar and writing paper doubling up as filter paper rather than appropriate scientific equipment.

Pupils' progress is monitored and recorded carefully. Teachers assess pupils against national benchmarks and prepare individual reports each half term. These reports are used to inform the detailed half-yearly reports for parents and review meetings.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. They clearly enjoy school, attend well and have good attitudes to their work. The school's systems for managing behaviour are effective and pupils respond particularly well to the 'respect' programme where they earn rewards to have at weekends. This is a good example of how the education and care staff work well together to get the best out of the pupils. As a result, behaviour is good. Pupils relate well to each other and to the adults that work with them. The occasional incidences of bullying are dealt with effectively through clearly established systems. Pupils have a good understanding about the difference between right and wrong. When a pupil does misbehave, consequences are negotiated with the pupil and this is an effective strategy towards preventing any repetition of unacceptable behaviour.

The curriculum provides pupils with good preparation for their future economic well-being through its focus on literacy and numeracy as well as developing life skills through the ASDAN programme. There are extensive opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge of their culturally diverse world. However, pupils' understanding of the world in which they live remains limited. There are good links with a partner school and the Youth Council provides a good opportunity for pupils from the two schools to meet each other. In this way they are able to share any concerns they may have and to influence the life of their school. The chairing of the council by one of the pupils provides appropriate experience in understanding how a committee can work effectively to achieve worthwhile outcomes.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate because procedures to safeguard pupils do not meet current requirements. Although the school has designated a member of staff to have responsibility for child protection, this person is not suitably trained. Furthermore, this member of staff is not on site at all times and a deputy has not been appointed. The school has a suitable policy in place for visits away from the school site, but this is not fully implemented. Risk assessments for these visits have not been routinely carried out with sufficient rigour. Appropriate periodical checks of fire safety equipment and practices of evacuation procedures take place. However, the school's fire risk assessment has not been reviewed sufficiently regularly and not all identified risks have been addressed. Although the school maintains an admissions register, it does not fully meet the requirements because it does not include all of the necessary details for each pupil.

Pupils have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. They eat healthily and take regular exercise as part of the school curriculum. Pupils are supervised well in lessons and around the school. First aid procedures meet requirements and accident recording is rigorous. Any trends are identified so that suitably precautionary measures can be put in place.

The school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has appropriate procedures in place relating to the checks it makes on prospective employees and volunteers regarding their identity, qualifications, and suitability to work with children. However, its record keeping procedures do not fully meet current requirements because information regarding an employee's right to work in the United Kingdom is not included in the school's central record.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is located in a former farmhouse which provides barely adequate space for teaching. Facilities are very limited and there are no suitably equipped specialist areas. Some lessons take place in the living accommodation and this restricts opportunities to establish a stimulating educational environment. The proprietors are aware of this shortcoming and plans have already been prepared to address this issue. The school is set in extensive grounds which provide well-planned spaces for environmental work such as gardening and animal husbandry as well as physical exercise. Good use is made of local facilities, including a swimming pool and sports centre, for sport and recreation.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The information provided for parents and carers is detailed and meets current requirements. All of the school's policy documents are available in printed or electronic format for any parent or carer who requests them. Parents and carers are kept fully informed about their child's attainment and progress through detailed written reports.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written and fair complaints procedure which meets the requirements.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care provision was judged to be satisfactory and national minimum standards were not 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 all of 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:

- ensure that there is an adequate quantity and range of resources to support learning and that these resources are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

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

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

- ensure there is a senior member of staff designated to be responsible for child protection on site at all times and that this person is appropriately trained in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (DCSF-04217-2006) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- ensure that risk assessments are carried out for all visits off site (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- ensure that routine fire risk assessments are carried out to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 3(5))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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

- ensure that the school's single central register of staff includes information about each employee's right to work in the United Kingdom (paragraph 4C(2) and (3)).

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home which should be read in conjunction with this report.

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 pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils				✓
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision			✓	
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School details

Name of school	Hillgate Farm		
DCSF number	893/6099		
Unique reference number	131171		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 2006		
Age range of pupils	8-17		
Gender of pupils	mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,960		
Telephone number	01743 891862		
Fax number	01743 891862		
Email address	hillgate@dacapo.uk.net		
Headteacher	John Hanley		
Proprietor	Da Capo Caring for Kids Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Mark Mumby HMI		
Dates of inspection	29 to 30 September 2009		