

# Hillcrest Slinfold

Independent special school progress report

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Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell
Social care inspector	N/A

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

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## Purpose and scope of the visit

This inspection visit was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002<sup>1</sup>, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, and under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools or residential special schools.

The visit was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

## Information about the school

Hillcrest Slinfold is situated in a village five miles west of Horsham. It is a school with residential accommodation 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 acting headteacher was absent at the time of the inspection and the acting head of care had been in post for three weeks. A substantive Principal has been in post since February 2010.

## Context of the visit

The last education and welfare inspection was carried out in November 2009. The school was judged to be providing a satisfactory quality of education but the quality of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was inadequate as was their behaviour. Assessment systems were not fully adequate. The provision for welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding and boarding was also inadequate. Records of checks made on staff were inadequate. There was one issue relating to the premises and a few relating to the provision of information. A number of the regulations were not met. The school's subsequent action plan to address the unmet

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

regulations was accepted in March 2010 and this is the first follow-up visit to monitor its implementation.

## Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

At the time of the last inspection, weaknesses in assessment, particularly at Key Stage 3, were identified. Since that time, the school has invested in a computer-assisted assessment and tracking system. The Principal and acting headteacher have relevant experience using this system in other schools. However, a lack of training for teaching staff has delayed its introduction and thus presently it does not benefit teaching or learning and a regulation relating to assessment remains unmet.

Significantly more attention has been given to improving the students' behaviour by focusing on the school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school council has been reinstated with a clear purpose to increase the students' involvement and confidence that they can contribute to decision making. Regular meetings are also held with the newly-appointed leadership team comprising of the Principal, acting headteacher and acting head of care. Issues recently discussed have been highly relevant to their behaviour, their understanding of right and wrong and respect for their own and other cultures. Within a project on crime and justice, the students have responded well to visitors who have relevant experience of the impact of crime and violence. For example, parents of a murdered schoolboy, who was an innocent victim of street crime, related their experience of trauma and of the efforts to prevent similar events. Another valuable input was made by a musician who had turned away from anti-social behaviour. Improvements have also been made in the creation of individual behaviour plans and a reward system that emphasises rewards for positive behaviour rather than sanctions for unacceptable behaviour. During the inspection, the students' behaviour was satisfactory in lessons and during breaks. Staff managed a minority of students' inappropriate behaviour effectively. The school now meets all the regulations relating to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

At the last inspection, there were several regulations unmet in relation to the students' welfare, health and safety which also adversely affected students' behaviour. Shortcomings in the policies on the prevention of bullying and promotion good behaviour have been rectified and revised in light of recent guidance. Existing systems have been strengthened including more effective liaison between education and care staff, the monitoring of incidents and use of restraint. The school now maintains a 'consequences' record that records incidents and sanctions imposed for serious disciplinary offences. The impact of the improved policy implementation, staff training and more effective staff deployment, including corridor supervision, is evident in the marked decrease in serious incidents, including the use of restraint. The introduction of a new 'talent system' that seeks to increase the levels to which students monitor their own behaviour is at an earlier stage of implementation. At

the time of the last inspection, the attention given to fire safety was a weakness. The school now ensures that all practices related to fire safety, including fire drills, are properly undertaken and recorded by suitably trained staff.

The school has also made satisfactory progress in complying with safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education. Policies have been revised and sent to relevant parties including parents and carers. Staff have completed relevant training at appropriate levels to act as designated persons and additional training is planned for other staff. Newly inducted staff are fully aware of who to contact in any given circumstances. The school now meets all the regulations relating to the students' welfare, health and safety.

The school's arrangements for ensuring the suitability of all staff are now robust and meet all the required regulations. The school no longer uses external agency staff, although it has a number of experienced fully-vetted staff who are known to the school and may be called upon when required. All relevant files are held on site. Staff records, including all recruitment checks, are kept systematically and all the required information is held on its single central register of staff.

In relation to the premises, the outdoor area includes a pond that was a potential risk to the students' safety. In response, the school has made limited progress in seeking a solution. The school's management have improved the perimeter fencing surrounding the pond. A permanent solution which may see the pond relocated or filled in has been discussed by the school council. However, the school has sought and accepted expert advice that the pond contains an endangered species of newt that should not be disturbed at this time of year, which leaves this regulation unmet.

The school has improved the information it provides to parents, carers and other relevant parties so that the relevant regulations are now met. Its prospectus now contains appropriate information related to staff qualifications. Parents and carers have been provided with the safeguarding policy, and appropriate information about income and expenditure is sent to the relevant local authorities who place students at the school.

The school has made satisfactory progress in implementing its agreed action plan.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection visit, the school must take action to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003<sup>3</sup> as amended ('the Regulations'), as follows:

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

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<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)

## School details

Name of school	Hillcrest Slinfold
DCSF number	938/6255
Unique reference number (URN)	131139
Type of school	Residential special school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1996
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11
Number of boarders	Boys: 11
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 10
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 11
Annual fees (boarders)	£179,504
Telephone number	01403 790939
Fax number	01403 790954
Email address	Slinfold@hillcrestcare.co.uk
Principal	Mr Mark Birckbeck
Headteacher - acting	Mr C Jackson
Proprietor	Mr R Greenwell
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell
Dates of inspection	27 April 2010