

Hillcrest Slinfold School

Stane Street, Slinfold, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0QX

Inspection dates

17–19 January 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, the regional manager and staff share a deep care for pupils and a commitment to preparing them as well as possible for their future lives. As a result, the school is improving and all of the independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher has prioritised the development of good teaching and learning. Staff challenge and support each other to improve so that pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Pupils make significant improvements to their behaviour and attitudes. Staff understand this aspect of pupils' special educational needs very well, set high expectations and provide highly appropriate and consistent support that enables them to succeed.
- Pupils leave the school ready for the next stage in their education. Year 11 pupils attain a range of qualifications including GCSEs and BTEC national diplomas.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and staff prioritise all aspects of pupils' welfare and safety so that they feel safe at school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and British values are well promoted. The curriculum provides a range of experiences that ensure pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- A new careers education programme and participation in a range of clubs and activities help to further pupils' personal development effectively.
- Leaders have identified some valuable further improvements to the school. However, leaders and the new governing body do not place a strong enough emphasis on checking the impact of their work on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders recognise that the support that a few pupils receive to address their specific difficulties in English and mathematics is not precise enough. They have started to increase their expertise in supporting pupils' special educational needs.
- Assessments of pupils' abilities in English and mathematics do not identify pupils' learning needs accurately. Teachers do not currently provide enough activities to help a few pupils to overcome difficulties in these subjects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders and governors measure and demonstrate the impact of their work on pupils' achievement
 - leaders continue to develop their knowledge and improve the support that they provide for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Further increase pupils' achievement by:
 - implementing effective assessment systems to identify and track pupils' learning in English and mathematics more closely
 - ensuring that teachers provide activities that support pupils' learning needs better, particularly in mathematics and English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is ambitious for the pupils in the school. At the heart of her work is deep care for the pupils and a commitment to doing the right things to make the best impact on their future lives. She has formed effective relationships with everyone at the school and ensured that staff share her aims, aspire to excellence and enable pupils to flourish.
- The headteacher and the regional manager have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Together, leaders have devised improvement plans that have identified correctly some important changes to the school. The developments so far have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. Nevertheless, leaders do not demonstrate sharply enough the intended impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- Securing high-quality teaching and learning has rightly been a priority for the headteacher. For example, she has ensured that teachers have a good understanding of the subjects that they teach. As a result, pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Staff work collaboratively to strengthen teaching and learning. Teachers support and challenge each other, by providing helpful feedback when they visit each other's lessons and check pupils' work. Consequently, the quality of teaching is good.
- Leadership is increasingly shared among staff. This approach has enabled further improvements to learning. For example, one member of staff is completing training so that she can become the special educational needs leader and has already used her new knowledge to make some important changes such as introducing some phonics activities to improve some pupils' reading skills.
- Pupils' behaviour improves substantially during their time at the school. Leaders have ensured that this aspect of pupils' special educational needs is assessed carefully, as soon as they start. Staff use this detailed information to provide highly effective support for pupils' challenging behaviours.
- Leaders have recognised correctly that assessments of some pupils' understanding in English and mathematics are not fully effective. They have started to develop their own knowledge of a range of learning needs and consider how to ensure that teachers have accurate information and can support pupils so that they catch up. However, this work is not complete and a few pupils do not currently receive support that matches their needs closely.
- The curriculum provides pupils with experience across a broad range of subjects. Extra-curricular activities enable pupils to explore their own interests and develop their skills further. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide them with a range of pathways to prepare them for further education, training or employment.
- Pupils work towards a range of qualifications in English, mathematics and science that lead up to GCSEs. Pupils are highly motivated by lessons in construction, food technology and motor vehicle maintenance and also achieve BTEC national diplomas in these subjects. As a result, pupils leave the school with qualifications and skills that enable them to continue their education at college.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of British

values are promoted well. Special events such as 'black history month', a strong citizenship curriculum and wider experiences, such as constructing a playhouse for a local primary school, underpin this learning.

- Pupils learn about mutual tolerance and respect through monthly cultural studies of events such as 'Chinese new year', and experience democracy as active members of the student council. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governance

- The governing body is new. The regional manager and school improvement adviser have identified features of effective governance and used these to establish the aims and direct the work of the governing body. Governors have asked the headteacher to report on safeguarding, finance and the progress of the school development plan. However, governors have not yet asked for information about pupils' progress.
- The regional manager provides the headteacher with appropriate support and challenge. For example, he has checked with the headteacher that all of the independent school standards are met. Through the network of schools in the group, the headteacher has received helpful advice that has increased the impact of staff appraisal.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders prioritise pupils' welfare. There is a culture of vigilance because leaders ensure that care for pupils takes a high priority. Staff receive regular training and updates that are tailored to the school, such as how to prevent boys from experiencing child sexual exploitation. The safeguarding policy meets current requirements and is published on the school's website. This sets out clear guidance for staff. Consequently, staff know what to do if they are worried about a pupil.
- The school works closely with a range of other professionals to help keep pupils safe. The 'open door' approach allows pupils to talk to any adult about their concerns. Staff keep a close eye on pupils and take action to address any unsafe behaviours or situations. As a result, pupils say that the school helps them to feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Across the school, staff build warm, trusting and caring relationships with pupils that enable them to participate in lessons successfully. Staff have a secure understanding of each pupil's social, emotional and behavioural needs. They use this very well to provide just the right amount of encouragement and address any challenging behaviours quickly so that pupils can apply themselves to their work and make good progress.
- Teachers plan lessons that capture pupils' interests. This enables pupils to complete work well. For example, in a key stage 4 English lesson, pupils were learning about persuasive writing. The teacher motivated pupils with travel brochures for safari holidays in Africa. They read the brochures eagerly to identify words in the text that would persuade a reader.
- Teachers use time effectively. They make important links across subjects that further

pupils' learning. For example, in a motor vehicle maintenance lesson for key stage 3 pupils, the teacher asked pupils to use their scientific knowledge to explain how the brakes on a car work. Pupils spoke about forces in detail and described how the design of a car was 'aerodynamic'.

- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and set challenging work. This is particularly the case in science lessons. Teachers ensure that pupils acquire knowledge and use precise vocabulary such as 'menstruation' to describe processes. The most able pupils receive work that helps them to deepen their understanding. As a result, pupils make the best rates of progress in science.
- Staff check pupils' understanding during lessons and adjust tasks to help pupils achieve well. For example, in a key stage 3 physical education lesson, the teacher noted that pupils were not adopting the correct posture when lunging. He then showed pupils, step by step, how to position their bodies. This enabled them to perform the action safely and accurately.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Consequently, pupils make good progress across the curriculum. For example, in a key stage 4 construction lesson, the teacher showed pupils how to position the trowel at different stages when plastering to achieve a smooth finish. He told pupils how experienced plasterers seek a 'pre-worn' trowel to achieve the best finish as these trowels are not perfectly flat and make the task easier.
- Pupils' books show that teachers provide pupils with sufficient challenge. In some subjects, the most able pupils are reaching the standards expected for their age. Consequently, the most able pupils achieve very well. Nevertheless, teachers do not have precise information about some pupils' learning needs in English and mathematics.
- Plans to support pupils show that teachers do not always identify the most effective activities to help pupils with specific difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics. This means that a few pupils do not always make as much progress as they could.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Bullying is rare. Pupils learn about the different types of bullying and know what to do if they have a problem. They are confident that staff help to keep them safe.
- Pupils participate in a range of clubs and activities that develop their social skills and increase their confidence. These include, 'train club', boxing, football and martial arts. Pupils value these activities because they match their interests very closely.
- Staff teach pupils how to keep safe. Pupils have lessons about healthy relationships and lifestyles. In construction, food technology and motor vehicle lessons, teachers make important links to safety when using equipment such as compressors, gas hobs and drills.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new and appropriate careers education programme. Pupils have started to learn about the skills and attributes that they have and how these will help them in a future career. Pupils talk with confidence about their aspirations to be

a mechanic, soldier or estate agent. However, it is not yet possible to see the full impact of this work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- All pupils at the school have challenging behaviours. Staff set very high expectations and know how to support pupils so that they make significant improvements to their behaviour. One pupil said, 'There is no flexibility here, they expect us all to behave very well'.
- Around the school, staff manage pupils' challenging behaviour consistently. Pupils and staff adhere to the school's reward system, 'the bank of Slinfold', very closely. This helps pupils to learn to recognise and demonstrate the attitudes that they need to succeed in lessons and earn rewards. Pupils also value 'the hub', which provides them with a safe place to complete their work if they find it hard to cope in lessons. As a result, there are very few disruptions to learning.
- Pupils rarely use derogatory or offensive language. This is because staff challenge pupils' inappropriate language. Pupils know that this language is not acceptable in school.
- Last year, pupils' attendance was above the national average for special schools. As they settle in, pupils develop trusting relationships with staff and enjoy lessons. This ensures that they come to school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school at different times with a range of experience of education. Many pupils start with very negative experiences of school and do not want to attend. However, over time, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning improve significantly. This is because staff understand pupils' behavioural needs very well and provide highly effective support that increases their participation in learning.
- Those leaving the school, at the end of key stage 4, are well prepared for the next stage in their education or training. Last year, the large majority of pupils achieved GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. All pupils attained qualifications including BTEC national diplomas in construction and motor vehicle maintenance. Over the past three years, all pupils who have left have continued their education at college.
- From their very different starting points, most pupils currently at the school are making good progress across the curriculum. The most able pupils and those who have been at the school longest achieve very well. This is because teachers have secure subject knowledge and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Pupils make particularly strong progress in art and science. In these subjects, teachers set pupils challenging tasks that accelerate their learning.
- A few pupils who find reading, writing or mathematics difficult do not make as much progress as other pupils, particularly in these subjects. Staff are not yet able to identify and address their needs accurately enough so that they catch up quickly.

School details

Unique reference number	131139
DfE registration number	938/6255
Inspection number	10006053

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Outcomes First Group
Chair	Mark Birkbeck
Headteacher	Alison Dobbie
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,128 – £47,840
Telephone number	01403 790 939
Website	www.hillcrestchildrensservices.co.uk
Email address	alison.dobbie@hillcrestcs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 November 2012

Information about this school

- Hillcrest Slinfold School opened in 1996. The school has places for up to 17 boys between the ages of 11 and 16 years who have severe emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties. The school is located in Slinfold, a village to the west of Horsham.
- The previous inspection of the school took place in November 2012. At this time, the school was judged to be good.
- Most pupils have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. All pupils have challenging behaviours and require a high level of support. Some have had gaps in their education or have been excluded from other schools. Some pupils

have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorders and autistic spectrum conditions.

- Pupils join the school at different times and with very different abilities. Some pupils leave the school before they reach age 16. At the time of the inspection, just over a quarter of the pupils had arrived in the last month.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The aim of the school is to 'encourage all children to be as independent as possible both in their learning and in their social and personal development'.
- The school is part of the Outcomes First Group, which owns several schools across the country.
- There is a small governing body, comprised of the regional manager, the headteacher, a teacher and the headteacher of another school in the group. The governing body has only recently been introduced.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector visited lessons in all classes and spoke informally to pupils. Two observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher. Pupils' work was also scrutinised.
- The inspector met with senior leaders, two staff members and some pupils. A meeting was held with the chair of governors. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with social workers from several local authorities.
- There were no responses, and no written comments, to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- The inspector examined a wide range of documents. This included the school's improvement plans, information about the curriculum, safeguarding documents, records of behaviour incidents, individual education plans and pupils' achievement information.

Inspection team

Caroline Dulon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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