

North Hill House

Fromefield, Frome, BA11 2HB

Inspection dates 26–28 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers know their pupils very well and this exceptional understanding of how best to support their learning and development ensures that pupils make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points.
- The curriculum is extremely well planned to ensure that the specific needs of the pupils are met exceptionally well.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding.
- Leaders have ensured that the pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are outstanding. The Principal and leadership team are constantly seeking ways of improving the pupils' achievement even more.
- Attendance at school is very good and the pupils confirm that they enjoy school and feel safe.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school does not meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was undertaken with one day's notice. The inspector observed 12 lessons, taught by 12 different teachers, most of which were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with leaders, teaching staff and pupils.
- A number of responses to the Parent View online questionnaire were received. Questionnaires from 29 staff were considered.
- Written evidence, including work in pupils' books, schemes of work, individual behaviour plans and data on pupils' progress was examined.
- This was an integrated inspection as the provision and outcomes in the residential setting were evaluated by the social care inspector.

Inspection team

Jill Bainton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sharron Escott

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- North Hill House School in Frome, Somerset, is a purpose-built, co-educational residential and day school for pupils between the ages of seven and 19 years who are on the autistic spectrum. It occupies three sites across Frome.
- At the time of the inspection there were 24 day pupils and 24 boarders on the school roll. Most pupils are placed by local authorities and all but one have a statement of special educational needs. Six pupils are looked after by their local authority.
- The school makes use of additional off-site locations for physical education, together with placements at colleges and settings where work experience is provided. Post-16 pupils are educated at local further education colleges.
- The school is part of the Priory Group, which operates a large number of schools nationally for pupils with special educational needs. The school opened in 1999 and the last education inspection was in January 2010, when it met most of the regulations for registration. Residential provision was last inspected in June 2012.
- A progress monitoring visit was made in April 2010 to evaluate the progress the school had made in implementing its action plan and all the regulations were then met.
- The school describes its mission as, 'Caring and preparing for an independent, successful future through individual pathways of education and learning, promoting self-worth and well-being in a safe, positive environment.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the vocational studies available to the pupils.
- Ensure alternative communication aids are available to enable continued learning outside of the school day, and enhance communication opportunities between parents, carers and friends by having wireless access (WiFi) to the internet.
- Ensure boarding accommodation is well maintained, for example, by redecorating areas that are damaged and replacing tired and worn furniture.
- Ensure all outdoor play areas are appropriately lit to enable safe play.

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

- A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any physical intervention. Records may include the information in Appendix 2 (Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards) – 'use of physical restraint'. The record is made within 24 hours of the sanction being applied and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of physical intervention restraint and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. (NMS 12.6)
- Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include: checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of physical intervention, risk assessments, and, where they exist, individual care plans for children; assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet a visitor (in private if they wish). (NMS 20.2)

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Pupils' achievement is outstanding, especially in English and mathematics. This is as a result of excellent teaching and a very well-devised curriculum, which is exceptionally well suited to the pupils' needs. Teachers devise ways of making the learning both meaningful and memorable for the pupils so that they make extremely good progress from their starting points. All pupils have had significant difficulties before joining the school with high levels of non-attendance due to their previous difficulties with learning and behaviour. The high achievement of the pupils reflects their new-found confidence in learning which helps them to make sustained progress.

Pupils' attainment is carefully assessed on entry to the school using nationally recognised systems for measuring attainment. This information is then used very well by staff to meet the specific needs of the pupils as identified in their statements of special educational needs. Pupils join with attainments that are low in comparison to national averages, but they soon realise how much they are valued as individuals and quickly learn to trust staff. This helps to accelerate learning and they are pleased when they succeed, for example, in solving a problem in mathematics or making the 'perfect' white sauce in food technology. Pupils who arrive with limited aspirations and low self-esteem and self-belief in their own abilities go on to achieve notable success in national examinations. All pupils leave with a wide range of accreditation including GCSE, A levels, Cambridge Nationals, Entry Level and vocational awards.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Relationships are very positive and supportive and pupils confirm that they can always talk to staff, with one commenting, 'Staff give me a lot of help and make me believe in myself.' The pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. Staff manage behaviour in a very positive manner, encouraging the pupils to manage their own behaviour whenever possible. The school successfully integrates education, care and therapy to meet the individual needs of the pupils and the therapists are instrumental in helping the pupils to manage their own behaviour. The food served at lunch is healthy and wholesome and a very sociable occasion with staff eating and talking to the pupils in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The student council meets regularly and pupils definitely feel that they 'have a voice' and their concerns are listened to. They confirm that there is no bullying and they are always well supervised. Older pupils are given responsible tasks to perform and excellent opportunities are provided to help all pupils develop their self-confidence. Pupils' individual contributions to the life of the school are celebrated and many participate in charity fund-raising activities, which are made enjoyable.

There is an exceptional holistic approach between the highly experienced care, education and therapy teams, which is seamless. Pupils develop very good social skills, grow in self-confidence, learn to interact with others and their health improves. The effective working relationship the school has established with the local police has significantly benefited pupils' safety and well-being, which in turn has reduced any possible intervention. As a result, the pupils have established a trustful and respectful relationship with the local police community officer who frequently visits the school. Pupils have a range of communication systems to enable them to make choices and communicate their needs, views and wants. However, they do not currently have good wireless access to the internet (WiFi) to promote continued learning opportunities outside of the school day and enable them to contact parents, carers and friends online. The pupils' induction process is very well planned and individualised. The excellent working partnership between the school, therapy team, education, families, and placing authorities has ensured pupils have well-considered and realistic care plans, effective strategies for managing their behaviour, and realistic and achievable targets resulting in their outstanding personal growth and development.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively. They are encouraged to consider and respond to other people's views and feelings. A weekly assembly celebrates pupils' achievement and helps them to focus on specific themes, with anti-bullying week being the most recent. Pupils mix well together in sporting activities, for example, different age groups participate enthusiastically in games of badminton. They are aware of the simple school rules and respect staff who provide excellent role models. The curriculum provides them with an increasing knowledge of other cultures and beliefs. Pupils learn about English services and institutions through frequent outside visits, visitors to the school and regular planned theme events, many based on food; these are very popular with the pupils. Racial harmony is effectively promoted. The school does not promote any partisan political views and ensures that any controversial issues are addressed in a balanced way.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

Teaching is outstanding and is instrumental in re-engaging pupils in learning and helping them to make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development. The very well-qualified teachers have high expectations to which the pupils respond by behaving very well; they are respectful towards staff and understand that they are in lessons to learn. The lessons are extremely well planned and effectively meet the varied and specific learning needs of the pupils. An integral part of the planning is the detailed 'Pupil Learning Profile' and 'My Progress Sheet', alongside a range of academic attainment data. This ensures that staff know the pupils' capabilities very well, their learning styles, behaviour expectations and the level of support they will need to achieve their tasks. The lessons are composed of short, focused learning tasks, which are well supported and delivered by both the teacher and teaching support assistants. These are carefully planned to enable each pupil to achieve and maximise their progress. Most of these tasks are designed for the pupils to do unaided or with minimum support to encourage independent learning.

More-able pupils are given appropriate tasks to keep them engaged and those who need additional support are given work that matches their learning needs. As a result, the pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem, engage the staff in discussion and increasingly become independent learners. Pupils' work is very well marked. The lessons mostly move at a brisk pace with staff reminding the pupils to stay on task; they respond by listening and engaging in learning. There is a major focus on the improvement of basic skills in literacy and numeracy and some pupils are confident in demonstrating their increased fluency in reading. The school's focus on the positive management of behaviour has had a direct impact on pupils' learning. Their behaviour in lessons is outstanding and they are aware of the need to conform to simple classroom rules and can manage their own behaviour with support if needed. They are empowered to make positive choices with some taking very short breaks out of lessons when they need to.

There are excellent arrangements in place, implemented very well by teachers, for the continuous assessment of pupils' attainment. The assessment systems in use are thorough and use national guidance, and give the staff a very clear picture of what the pupils need to do next to improve. The process of collating and interpreting the data on pupils' attainment is very thorough. This information is all part of a pupil's annual review for placing authorities, and is used very effectively.

Quality of curriculum

Outstanding

The curriculum is outstanding. The very detailed and well-documented programme provides an extremely varied range of learning opportunities for the pupils which has been carefully adapted to meet their specific needs and relates very well to their statements of special educational needs. This enables the pupils to make exceptional progress in their personal development and academic learning. The curriculum covers all the areas of learning required by the independent school regulations. It is based on academic, vocational and therapeutic strands. The school focuses on the development of the 'whole child' and devises highly individualised timetables to meet the needs of

those pupils who find it a challenge to work alongside others. Personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHCE) education is firmly embedded into the curriculum and is central in promoting pupils' personal development in the life of the school. This helps prepare the students very well for life after school. The pupils are successfully entered for GCSE, A-level, Entry Level Certificates, National Open College Network Awards (NOCN) and Access, Progress and Transform Awards (APT). Some more-able pupils are able to take examinations, GCSE and A level, at an early stage. Other pupils are more suited to vocational courses in practical subjects and the school has identified the need to extend the range of courses available.

Pupils are able to access some outside agencies, for example for construction training and animal care. Post-16 pupils are mainly educated in local further education colleges with individual support in school where needed. Pupils have very good access to careers guidance, with specialist careers support and opportunities for work experience. The wide range of extra-curricular experiences contributes significantly to the pupils' personal development, which helps to promote the 24-hour curriculum. There are many sessions after school including life skills, swimming and skateboarding. Lunchtime clubs include those for football, information and communication technology (ICT), a games club and for history. A wide range of curricular-related visits to museums, local attractions, theatres and outdoor centres further enhances the curriculum.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good and all regulations are met. Pupils' safety is given very high priority and the school has some outstanding safeguarding systems and procedures in place. A judgement of good is given due to some very minor administrative deficiencies identified in the records maintained by the school, which do not reflect the very good practice delivered and managed both within the school and residential provision. These minor deficiencies identified during the inspection were immediately rectified. Within the residential provision the senior leadership team is aware of the minor weaknesses identified in the central records of major sanctions and restraints and is keen to rectify them. The team plans to take immediate action to review the school's independent monitoring to ensure all reports are informative and accurate.

Senior staff have undertaken the required training for child protection and all other staff have been trained at the required level. The school works very effectively with other agencies that have roles in relation to child protection. All policies relating to the pupils' welfare are clear and up to date and include child protection, anti-bullying, behaviour and health and safety. All the required checks are made on staff to ensure their suitability to work with children and the information is recorded on the required single central register of staff appointments. There is very good provision for first aid with trained staff on duty and accidents and incidents carefully recorded as required. The school and residential provision provide a safe and secure environment. There is very good management of risk and for addressing all aspects of safety, including fire safety, associated with the premises and activities undertaken by the pupils. Pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle and they have very frequent opportunities for planned physical activities and enjoy a well-balanced diet.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Leadership and management are outstanding and enable the pupils to learn and achieve extremely well. The senior leaders are highly ambitious for the pupils and communicate their passion very effectively to the staff. The very experienced Principal leads her team enthusiastically with a very clear focus on improvement. All staff who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about working at the school and confirm that they have a 'great team of colleagues who give 100% every day to their work'. The senior management team has devised a focused and targeted development plan, which identifies how it intends to move the school forward. Its members relentlessly focus on improving teaching and have a detailed staff training programme

which is supported by close supervision and the management of staff performance throughout the year. The school's accurate self-evaluation identifies where they needed to improve following the last inspection; they took expert professional advice and acted on the recommendations. They have recently implemented a proactive behaviour policy whereby the pupils are encouraged to actively manage and reflect on their own behaviour, which is proving successful. The whole staff, including teaching, care and therapists work together seamlessly to ensure that each pupil is given the best possible support relevant to their specific needs.

The proprietors support the school's development by employing an external educational consultant to evaluate its performance and challenge the senior leaders. They ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met. The premises provide safe and effective teaching and residential accommodation. There are some areas of the residential accommodation which the leadership has identified as in need of redecoration and refurbishment and the outside play area does not currently have sufficient lighting. Parents, carers and placing authorities receive the full range of required information and feel well informed of pupils' progress. A local authority educational representative commented very positively on provision at the school. Parents and carers are highly satisfied with the provision and those who responded to the online questionnaire would all recommend the school to other parents and carers. Some parents and carers who were unable to complete the online questionnaire contacted the lead inspector to confirm how pleased they were with the school, with one commenting, 'The highly professional staff, expertly led, demonstrate a willingness to work with us and keep us very well informed about our son's academic and social progress.' The complaints procedure fully meets requirements.

Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	Good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good

What inspection judgements mean

School and residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education and care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education and care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education and care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	131975
Social care unique reference number	SC033014
Inspection number	422737
DfE registration number	933/6200

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential special school
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	24
Proprietor	Priory Education Services
Chair	Helen Sharpe
Principal	Sharon Edney
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 January 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,000
Annual fees (boarders)	£98,000
Telephone number	01373 466222
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