



# North Hill House School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

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**Better  
education  
and care**

DfES Registration Number      933/6200  
Unique Reference Number      131975  
Inspection number              296852  
Inspection dates                13-14 February 2007  
Reporting inspector              Mr Andrew Redpath HMI

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

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Age group 8-16	Published 9 March 2007	Reference no. 296852
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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

North Hill House School is a residential special school which provides education for boys with Asperger's syndrome and associated learning difficulties. It occupies two sites about one mile apart near the centre of Frome, in Somerset. The main site provides education and accommodation for pupils aged between 10 and 16 years. Students aged over 16 years reside at a second site and receive their education at a local school or college. The school is registered with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to admit 56 boys; currently 51 are on roll. All boys have a statement of special educational need and approximately a third attend as day pupils. Pupils attend from the south of England and all have their places funded by their local authorities. The school is in the ownership of The Priory Group, which owns several other establishments providing education for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school was last inspected in 2001, when it had been open for only 18 months.

The school seeks to improve pupils' social and communication skills whilst ensuring that they achieve fully their academic potential. Its mission statement is *'The fostering of a responsible, positive outlook on life and achievement through the provision of an appropriate and stimulating educational environment.'*

## Evaluation of the school

North Hill House School provides a good quality of education. High expectations, together with the good, extensive curriculum and good standard of care, ensure that pupils make good progress overall. Teaching is satisfactory with some good features, but is not always sufficiently closely matched to individual pupils' needs. The school has expanded and built on the excellent start described in the previous report. It meets almost all the regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school provides a broad range of experiences which includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum. There is an appropriate balance between subjects which includes additional support for those who experience difficulty with reading and writing. The timetable is

arranged carefully to ensure that pupils who arrive late on Monday morning after weekend visits home receive the appropriate amount of teaching time. Detailed planning is in place for all subjects. The personal, social, health and citizenship curriculum covers relevant topics and includes sex and relationship education. The school makes good use of a local sports hall to provide the physical education curriculum. An impressive number of GCSE and Entry Level courses is offered. This has recently been supplemented by the introduction of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network course which focuses on the needs of lower attaining pupils and gives accreditation for the development of their independence skills. Careers education and guidance and work experience placements help prepare pupils for their next stage. This work is supported effectively by the independence programmes and community visits provided by care staff. The transfer of students at the end of Year 11 from the main site to two small residential houses provides a good bridge towards future independent living. Programmes followed at a local school or college are very appropriate for post-16 students and include A level, vocational and independence courses. A wide range of therapies is provided on the main site which is carefully matched to each boy's needs. However, this therapy is not extended for students attending the post-16 houses, and consequently the requirements of their statements of special educational need are not met fully.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features. Staff have good subject knowledge and use this to set high expectations. These, together with the extensive curriculum and high standard of care, ensure that pupils make good progress overall. Pupils work hard and achieve high results in tests and examinations. They gain GCSE and Entry level passes each year and the school consistently ensures that many are successful in achieving several higher grade GCSE passes. Lessons are often split into different activities, which helps pupils to maintain concentration. Staff typically set a calm and supportive atmosphere in lessons, offering regular praise and encouragement. As a result, pupils generally behave well. However, strategies to manage the behaviour of a small number of pupils with more complex needs are less secure, and are not always checked closely to measure their effect on improving pupils' behaviour. Occasionally, lessons are not matched closely to pupils' level of ability and work is too difficult for lower attaining pupils. This limits their understanding and progress and contributes to their anxiety.

There is a good range of resources to support teaching and learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in lessons to engage pupils' interest. Learning support assistants are deployed well to work on individual programmes with pupils, for example to improve their literacy or behaviour. In some lessons their skills are not used fully and they do too much for pupils, which limits the development of pupils' independence skills. The school has thorough assessment arrangements in place which measure pupils' progress in each subject of the National Curriculum.

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## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. Daily assemblies provide valuable opportunities for pupils to consider the deeper meaning of life. Pupils develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through experiencing both personal and academic success. Their behaviour is generally good. They have a keen sense of right and wrong and they respond well to high expectations of appropriate behaviour. Some pupils exhibit challenging behaviour on entry to the school, but over time this improves substantially.

The structured routines provide the safe and predictable security the boys need, and help them to develop positive attitudes to one another. The residential provision gives good opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills in a wide range of activities. Parents commented on the improvements observed in their children in becoming more independent, more confident and more adept at interacting with other people. Pupils' independence is promoted very effectively through carefully planned programmes so that they are taught how to use local transport, shops and local amenities successfully. However, in some lessons, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their independence skills.

Pupils attend well and enjoy their lessons; most have positive attitudes to work and are keen and confident to answer questions. They gain a sense of achievement and success through a wide range of certificates and rewards. Pupils are well prepared for their future through a good programme of work experience placements, such as bank, building society and retail placements. The good achievement of pupils in academic subjects and their ability to manage their anxieties and difficulties associated with Asperger's syndrome is important in promoting their personal development successfully.

Pupils make a positive contribution to their school and wider community. The school council meets termly and representatives have discussed and improved the food, suggested activities such as paintballing and agreed community rules. Through the citizenship programme pupils develop a good understanding of public services, such as the police and other institutions. They have been active in supporting charity events and organising fair trade enterprise projects. They make good use of local facilities such as youth clubs, scouts and sporting activities such as karate and twai kondo. Systematic planning for cultural development across the curriculum is in its early stages.

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## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The residential provision makes an effective contribution to the high quality of care of pupils, a view supported by the recent Commission for Social Care Inspection report. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and that if there is any bullying, they can confide in staff knowing that swift action will be taken to tackle the problem. Pupils also have access to an independent listener and a counsellor, where they can share their concerns. The majority of pupils hold positive views about the school; one older pupil commented 'I'm enjoying my time at the school and will be sad to leave.' A few expressed concerns over issues such as, losing their clothes in the laundry or feeling their views could be considered more fully. There is a clear policy setting out how positive behaviour is promoted and what sanctions are to be imposed when pupils misbehave. The school is beginning to admit more pupils who have a greater level of challenging behaviour. For some of these pupils, arrangements for more detailed recording, monitoring and management of incidents are still being developed.

Arrangements for ensuring that pupils are well protected are robust. There are good procedures to assess key risks and appropriate levels of staffing to ensure that pupils are safe. There are generally rigorous health and safety policies and procedures, although some features of safety in the design and technology (DT) room do not comply fully with regulations. Pupils have comprehensive individual care and health plans. They are encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles through being more adventurous in tasting nutritious food. Pupils participate in a good range of physical activities within school and in after-school clubs such as judo and karate. The school has a plan to improve access for disabled users and meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school's arrangements for the recruitment and appointment of staff are thorough. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. References are sought for all new appointments and there are checks to ensure an applicant's proof of identity, the validity of their qualifications and their medical fitness.

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## School's premises and accommodation

The standard of the premises and accommodation is good. The buildings have recently been refurbished and they are maintained to a high standard. The pleasant environment is enhanced by interesting displays of pupils' work. Notices and instructions are clearly displayed which helps pupils' understanding of daily routines and expectations. Residential accommodation is set out to encourage independence and choice, with small kitchens for making snacks and recreational areas where pupils can either work at tables or relax in comfortable chairs. The main site comprises general classrooms, a dining room, an assembly hall, withdrawal rooms for individual study, and designated classrooms for science, ICT, DT, art, and photography. Some of these rooms are small but of adequate size for the number of pupils using them. There are suitable arrangements for outside play. These comprise an all weather surface for ball games and an adjoining area with climbing apparatus and bench

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers receive a good range of information. They are provided with an information pack which includes a '*Statement of Purpose*' containing details of the school's educational aims and policies. Pupils who join receive the '*New Kid's Handbook*' which contains practical information regarding food, pocket money, travel, and what to do if there are any worries or concerns. The school provides regular information to parents on their children's progress through weekly written reports, sixth-monthly academic open days and detailed annual reports.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy which has recently been updated to meet all the regulations. Procedures are particularly supportive of any pupil who may wish to make a complaint.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

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

- ensure that where pupils have a statement of special educational need, the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

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

- have regard to the DfES guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers*, (paragraph 3(4)).

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- monitor the impact of strategies to improve the behaviour of pupils with the most complex needs
- provide increased opportunities for pupils to develop their independence skills in lessons.

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## School details

Name of school	North Hill House
DfES number	933/6200
Unique reference number	131975
Type of school	Residential special school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1999
Age range of pupils	10-18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	51
Number of boarders	32
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	51
Number of pupils who are looked after	2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£61,178-£115,263
Annual fees (boarders)	£82,749-£136,835
Address of school	Fromfield Frome Somerset BA11 3AD
Telephone number	01373 466222
Fax number	01373 475175
Email address	andyc@nhh4as.co.uk; sharone@nhh4as.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Andy Cobley
Proprietor	The Priory Group
Reporting inspector	Mr Andrew Redpath HMI
Dates of inspection	13-14 February 2007