

Hill House School

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

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| DCSF Registration Number | 850/6031 |
| Unique Reference Number | 116565 |
| Social Care URN | SC066897 |
| Inspection number | 330438 |
| Inspection dates | 24–25 March 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Thomas Smith |
| Social care inspector | Brian M ^c Quoid |

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). The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

An inspection of the boarding provision was also carried out. The full report on this provision is not published but may be obtained from Ofsted by telephoning 08456 404040.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding students and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Hill House School, near Lymington, is an approved, independent, 52-week residential special school for students aged 11-19 who have an autistic spectrum disorder and associated learning difficulties. It opened in 1992 and is owned and managed by Cambian Education Services. All students exhibit severely challenging behaviour and each is supported, individually, by at least one staff member, throughout the day. There are 22 students on roll, 15 boys and seven girls, each of whom has a statement of special educational need. Students are placed at the school by 15 local authorities throughout the south of England and the Channel Islands. Based on a philosophy of respect and empathy for its students, the school aims to help them learn to manage their behaviour, improve their communication and maximise their academic potential. The school was last inspected in February 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Hill House School provides outstanding education and care for its students. It fully meets its aims and, in so doing, enables them to make outstanding progress in their personal and academic development. The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is also outstanding. The school gives students a fully integrated and high quality service, encompassing residential, therapeutic and educational experiences. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and her senior management colleagues ensures that students receive the best possible care and support from the experienced and expert staff. The quality of teaching is outstanding resulting in all students making progress which, on their admission, may have appeared unlikely. Parents and referring local authorities are justifiably unanimous in their appreciation of what the school does for the children. The school has maintained the high standards seen at the last inspection and meets all the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education and the curriculum upon which it is based is outstanding. The inspection judgement agrees with that of the school. Local authorities, which refer students to the school, are glowing in their praise of the provision.

The curriculum is outstanding because it is planned in meticulous detail to meet the needs of individual students. The impact of this is that students become more able, according to their capability, to make better adjustments to their surroundings (what the school refers to as 'transition'). There is an appropriate emphasis on developing each student's ability to communicate. Throughout the school this is supported by signing, as well as systems, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System. Staff use a combination of these systems consistently and this develops the confidence of students to make choices appropriate to their circumstances. The impact of this is that students in the older years become more able to influence events which affect them, as well as make choices.

The curriculum broadly follows the requirements of the National Curriculum with detail adjusted to suit the individual needs of students. Throughout the school there is an emphasis on communication as well as literacy and numeracy. Planning of the curriculum is done jointly between key stages but each maintains an age appropriate emphasis. The social aspects of the curriculum and the manner in which these are planned and implemented enable students to successfully accept changes within their lives and routines. For the majority of students this is a considerable achievement. The programme for the personal, social and health education of students is exemplary and fully supports the schools' aims.

Older students follow a life skills curriculum with an emphasis on developing those skills that will be useful in later life. Part of this curriculum is structured and accredited according to the requirements of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). The impact of the work undertaken by these students is that they become more confident to make independent choices and develop simple skills, such as light domestic tasks. They become able to work as part of a group; many become much more tolerant of others and are accepting of social conventions. They are introduced to the world of work through a very effective programme of work-related learning. Realistic jobs are undertaken, such as litter picking in the local area; this also brings positive reactions from the local community.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. All staff, no matter what their role, bring high quality expertise to the ways in which they carry out their support for students. This is supported by the excellent training and support that the school offers to all staff. Teachers orchestrate lessons in ways that ensure the learning achieved by students is maximised. This is done by detailed planning, which takes account of each student's attainment as well as their personal and behavioural needs. Signs, symbols and interactive, visual timetables are used most effectively to enable students to locate where they are in their daily programme. Constant reference to these enables students to monitor their own progress.

Lesson plans are closely referenced to individual education plans (IEP); these are compiled using additional advice from therapists and the in-house educational psychologists. The high quality of advice provided by these professionals supports the rate of progress achieved by individual students. An outstanding feature of all lessons is the familiarity that all staff have with the contents of each IEP and the manner in which outcomes are recorded. The latter enables teachers and senior managers to add to the considerable data base of information, which confirms that most students make outstanding progress.

Teachers use a wide variety of methods within their lessons and these enable students to remain focused on what they need to learn. Students work hard and concentrate on their tasks. Short therapy sessions, some of which are tailor-made for individuals by the occupational therapist, enable students to relax and prepare them well for their next activity. As a result they become more receptive and learn more effectively. These sessions are blended seamlessly into lessons and impact positively on learning. Occasionally, opportunities to improve communication are lost. This is particularly so when individual students fail to give some recognition that they have taken part in the communication process. For example, staff show objects or symbols to a student and then remove these, without first checking that the student has acknowledged them.

The teaching accommodation remains an area of weakness. Even though it is maintained well and provides bright and airy spaces there is evidence to indicate that the demand for space is acute and some activities are inhibited by this. This is especially so for the youngest students. The age and construction of these buildings also means that vibration from quite normal activities can be felt throughout. The company recognises this weakness.

Assessment practice is outstanding. The comprehensive range of information gathered by staff is used effectively to compile detailed reports about each student to illustrate their progress. Attainment is judged through P scales.¹ The assessment data indicates that all students make, at least, good progress and some make outstanding progress. In the last year the school reported that more than 90% of IEP targets were achieved by students. Accreditation opportunities, especially for older students, are available through the ASDAN curriculum.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The inspection endorses the view of the school that it provides outstanding opportunities for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Provision for this is skilfully integrated with that in the residential settings. From very low starting points, students make outstanding progress in being able to make choices that affect their lives and be able to more readily accept and

¹ P scales are standardised measures of attainment for those students working below National Curriculum measures.

adapt to change. Consequently their behaviour is outstanding. Older students, because of the effective ways in which their routines are structured, are able to develop their personal confidence and self-esteem.

The ethos throughout the school is one of unconditional and patient support which results in positive and supportive relationships between staff and students. The approach is one of caring for students and challenging them to do their best.

Students' awareness of themselves is promoted well through a high quality programme for personal, social and health education. The school has imaginatively adapted the requirements of the Every Child Matters initiative and has incorporated these into every aspect of its work. The planning for this blends outstandingly well with the residential provision. As a consequence, and by the time they are ready to leave the school, students have matured in ways that may not, initially, have been thought possible. The views of parents, as well as students' siblings, confirm this.

The provision to raise students' cultural and multi-cultural awareness permeates all aspects of the school's work, from the residences to the school. Visits to the local community and further afield are regular features. These greatly assist the social development of students as they learn from such diverse experiences as playing golf, visiting supermarkets to do their shopping or enjoying games of ten-pin bowling.

Since the last inspection the school has maintained the high quality provision and further extended the range and quality of the opportunities available to students.

Safeguarding students' welfare, health and safety

The inspection confirms the school's view that it makes outstanding provision for safeguarding students' welfare health and safety. The provision is consistent in both residential and school settings. Throughout all its work the care of and concern for students, is to the fore. All staff are vigilant about their responsibilities. Levels of staffing, of at least one to one, ensure that students are safe throughout the day.

Effective procedures are in place to ensure students' wider safety. These include detailed risk assessments and fire safety measures. The policies, which articulate these, are robustly implemented. Arrangements to safeguard students are rigorous and all staff are trained to the appropriate level to help them carry out their duties. A culture of openness, combined with outstanding monitoring systems in the school and residences, guarantees the safety of students. The arrangements for the appointment of staff are thorough and the school maintains the details of these on its central register. The school has in place a 3-Year response which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

The school has gained a nationally recognised award as a 'Healthy School'. It encourages students to take regular and vigorous exercise and provides nutritious meals. Students are helped to make choices about food by doing some of their own shopping as well as preparing simple meals. The school has also made good use of

its grounds to encourage students to exercise even more, but despite this there is limited indoor provision for students to exercise in any inclement weather.

A most notable feature is the patience and concern which staff, throughout the school, show for the students. There is genuine warmth from staff even though, at times, the responses of students are extremely challenging. This warmth is underpinned by a professional determination to consistently encourage students to do their best and improve their lives. Throughout the school, including the residences, there is excellent understanding of how individual students communicate; because of this the school regularly seeks their views.

The residential provision was judged to be outstanding and National Minimum Standards were met. A full report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

The school meets the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and associated regulations

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:

- Ensure in all exchanges with students, when signs, symbols or objects are used, that the intended communication occurs and the process is completed.
- Implement plans to replace and redevelop the school buildings.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

The quality of education

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Overall quality of education | ✓ | | | |
| How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students | ✓ | | | |
| How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs | ✓ | | | |
| How well students make progress in their learning | ✓ | | | |

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | ✓ | | | |
| The behaviour of students | ✓ | | | |

Welfare, health and safety of students

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of students | ✓ | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|

The quality of boarding provision

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| Evaluation of boarding provision (Staying safe) | ✓ | | | |
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School details

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| Name of school | Hill House School | | |
| DCSF number | 850/6031 | | |
| Unique reference number | 116565 | | |
| Type of school | Special school for students with an autistic spectrum disorder and associated learning difficulties | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | 1992 | | |
| Age range of students | 11–19 | | |
| Gender of students | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time students) | Boys: 15 | Girls: 7 | Total: 22 |
| Number of boarders | Boys: 15 | Girls: 7 | Total: 22 |
| Number of students with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 15 | Girls: 7 | Total: 22 |
| Number of students who are looked after | Boys: 15 | Girls: 7 | Total: 22 |
| Annual fees (boarders) | £259,619.90 | | |
| Address of school | Rope Hill Boldre Lymington Hampshire SO41 8NE | | |
| Telephone number | 01590 672147 | | |
| Fax number | 01590 670535 | | |
| Email address | jenny.wright@cambianguroup.com | | |
| Headteacher | Ms Jenny Wright | | |
| Proprietor | Cambian Education Services | | |
| Reporting inspector | Thomas Smith | | |
| Dates of inspection | 24–25 March 2009 | | |