

North Hill House School

Independent special school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Frank Price
Social care inspector Michael Williams

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000³ having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

Information about the school

North Hill House School in Frome, in Somerset, is a purpose-built residential and day school for boys between the ages of seven and 18 years who have Asperger's syndrome and associated learning difficulties. It occupies four sites across Frome. At the time of the inspection the school had 27 day pupils and 32 boarders. Pupils are placed by local authorities and all but one have a statement of special educational needs. Post-16 pupils are educated at local further education colleges. The school is part of the Priory Group, which operates a number of schools nationally for pupils with learning difficulties. The school first opened in 1999 and the last education inspection was in February 2007, when it met most of the regulations for registration. Boarding provision was last inspected in July 2008. The school describes its mission as, *'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, which promotes pupils' good progress, academic achievement, and personal and social development. It is successful in meeting its aims and provides a positive and supportive ethos, which pupils respond to very well. The school has built securely on the findings of the last inspection, with particular improvements to teaching and the range and quality of therapy available to pupils. The quality of the residential provision is outstanding and makes an important contribution to promoting pupils' maturity and independence. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and effective. The school meets nearly all of the regulations.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and is continuing to develop and improve. The National Curriculum is provided, but with appropriate additional emphasis on promoting the social use of language and communication and motor skills. In Key Stage 4, pupils follow appropriate GCSE and Entry Level courses. The school has recognised the need to extend the range of courses to meet the needs of less able pupils that it is beginning to admit. Some new courses have been introduced and more vocational courses and awards are being developed, for example National Vocational Qualifications. Medium-term planning for subjects is secure, although mathematics has been highlighted as an area for improvement to make the subject more interesting to pupils.

The personal, social, health and citizenship programme is well constructed to meet the needs of pupils at different key stages. It addresses important risks such as the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse, the importance of healthy eating, emotional health and well-being. It helps pupils to manage aspects of their Asperger's syndrome, for example by promoting greater self-awareness and understanding the feelings of others. The strong links between the care and educational settings help to provide a consistent approach to managing behaviour. Opportunities throughout the day and evenings are used to encourage and promote pupils' personal development as part of the 24-hour curriculum. There are good arrangements for older pupils to study independently and to complete homework in the residential settings. Clear outcomes are set for pupils to achieve in areas such as completing daily routines to promote their independence and maturity in the residential provision.

A strength of the curriculum is the flexibility to meet individual needs. For example, pupils benefit from a good range of school based therapeutic inputs, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and access to a counsellor. The post-16 provision supports pupils' access to academic and vocational courses within local community colleges, with support from North Hill House. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, such as computer and chess clubs, and opportunities for pupils to participate in community based leisure activities, for example cadets and visits to places of interest.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. A lot of effort goes into ensuring that pupils are receptive to learning. Barriers that many pupils have, such as anxiety and anger, are dealt with effectively and pupils are able to access learning and make good progress. Good relationships between teachers and pupils are important ingredients in lessons. Predictable routines supported by visual prompts are valuable tools to help pupils cope with school life. Lessons follow a three-part structure and learning objectives are made clear to pupils at the start of lessons. Good use is made of information technology to support pupils' learning. The management of pupils' behaviour is carried out sensitively and staff afford respect and dignity to pupils. A number of pupils are taught to self regulate their behaviour so that they can recognise the signs that they are finding situations difficult to cope with. The use of

questioning to test pupils' understanding and to draw out verbal contributions is a strength of teaching and in lessons some pupils make perceptive contributions. There are some examples of best practice in lesson planning, although teachers' planning is not always consistently good, and there are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs or small groups in some lessons. Occasionally teaching in mathematics lacks pace and focuses too much on mundane worksheet tasks. However, the good teaching overall enables pupils to make good progress and achieve creditable GCSE results in a range of subjects, and a few pupils pursue A-level courses at post-16. Pupils do particularly well in the subjects of English, science, art and information and communication technology (ICT).

A traffic-light system to show whether pupils are on track to achieve their target has been introduced in the last 18 months and this has been effective in improving pupils' progress and highlighting where action is needed to improve their learning. The school has started to quantify the percentage of pupils who meet their targets, so that progress can be demonstrated more clearly. Comprehensive annual and termly reports are made available to parents, which give a rounded picture of pupils' progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils develop their self-esteem and confidence, often having had negative experiences of education elsewhere. As a result, they have largely positive attitudes towards school and their behaviour and attendance are good. The opportunity to achieve in examinations does much for their sense of self-worth. Pupils take time through daily tutorials and through regular assemblies to reflect on wider issues such as the earthquake in Haiti and human rights. The vast majority of pupils enjoy school and recognise the improvements in their academic work, behaviour and social development. Some pupils are keen to show visitors around the school and take pride in doing so. Pupils develop a keen sense of moral behaviour and they understand, although may not always agree with, the school rules. They make a good contribution to the school community through their active involvement in the school council and a residential council has also been recently established. Pupils participate in a range of community based leisure and sporting activities. Pupils are provided with a general knowledge of public institutions. For example, some pupils are involved in a national children and youth board and two pupils visited Downing Street to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Pupils are prepared effectively for the future through participation in work experience placements such as local shops. The personal, social and health education curriculum includes aspects of financial independence and planning, to help pupils to be financially literate. Their independence is promoted well through developing confidence to use public transport, to meet and greet people and to purchase shopping. Pupils are taught to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own

and other cultures through aspects of the curriculum such as art, food technology, geography and themed days.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good and has many outstanding features. There are close links between care and education which benefit pupils enormously. Handover meetings ensure that staff are briefed on current issues affecting pupils' emotional well-being, so that they can be managed with care and sensitivity. Links with parents are also good and parents are pleased with the care and education their sons receive.

Pupils develop an excellent understanding of healthier lifestyles. Most residential pupils undertake physical activities in the mornings and pupils enjoy the all-weather activity area. Pupils can choose healthy foods at meal times, although some pupils have restricted diets. There is a wide range of physical activities that occur both at lunchtimes and into the evening, such as football, swimming and badminton. Aspects of the curriculum develop pupils' understanding of healthier lifestyles such as the importance of diet, exercise and emotional health and well-being.

Pupils are closely supervised through high levels of staffing. Most pupils stated that they felt safe. There are instances of bullying but the school is diligent in tackling these issues quickly and effectively. There are high-profile posters around the school to promote anti-bullying and pupils are confident to confide in staff or independent listeners. The behaviour policy has clear expectations to promote positive behaviour and to manage poor behaviour effectively, and these are implemented consistently. The school has devised and implemented a range of well-thought-out policies, which are reviewed regularly. These include good policies on health and safety, behaviour, anti-bullying and safeguarding. The members of staff responsible for safeguarding and child protection have attended the required training and all staff have regular awareness training. However, the admission register and attendance registers are not completed in accordance with the regulations. The school is vigilant about fire safety and has very robust procedures in place.

The school has drawn up a three-year plan to show how it will fulfill its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school checks carefully and systematically the suitability of all staff, including the proprietor, to work with children and holds the required information on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The purpose-built accommodation provides an attractive, safe and effective learning environment for pupils, which is enhanced by displays of pupils' work. The main site

provides both residential and educational facilities. There are specialist rooms for food and design and technology, art, science and ICT, and a small library. However, there is no dedicated room that can be used when a pupil is ill. The school makes alternative arrangements, such as using a spare bedroom, but often these rooms are in regular alternative use. The residential accommodation on site provides communal relaxation areas and individual bedrooms which are personalised. The small kitchen facilities enable pupils to prepare snacks and encourage their independence skills. The off-site residential facilities afford pupils a greater degree of independence and maturity. There is limited outside space, but there are safe areas for games and skateboarding. The school makes effective use of other local facilities to provide opportunities for swimming, leisure and physical activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school keeps parents, carers and others well informed through the prospectus, website and newsletters. Parents receive regular comprehensive reports on their child's progress. For new pupils when starting the school, there is a pupil-friendly handbook, which contains essential information to help them settle in quickly. The parents and local authority representatives who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school, with one parent commenting, 'This school is the best thing that has happened to our son. He is now happy and has friends.'

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a policy and procedures which fully meet the regulations. There has been one formal complaint during the last 12 months.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The residential provision is outstanding and the school exceeds the intended outcome of all the key national minimum standards for residential special schools. Boarders who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the residential provision, with one boarder commenting, 'Staff are very caring and thoughtful and make school exciting, fun, enjoyable. A great place to be.'

The weaknesses identified in the last boarding inspection have been remedied. The school's list of homely medications has been ratified by the local medical practice, and the bullying policy has been expanded and refers to cyber bullying. Ofsted's contact details are now in the complaints section of the New Kids Handbook. The single central register contains all of the required information and written confirmation is received from employment agencies regarding the checks carried out on agency staff. The formal complaints procedure is now given to all parents and carers. As a result, there are no outstanding recommendations or actions to fulfil.

Boarders' good health is promoted by the outstanding health care and catering provision they receive. The school's deputy head of care is a registered nurse and has strategic oversight of medication and first aid. Each boarder has an individualised health and placement plan, and care support workers appropriately implement these plans. Boarders are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs. The school has a five-star rating from the local environmental health inspection and one boarder acts as the food representative on the school council.

The arrangements for boarders to stay safe are outstanding. The school has clear procedures which are implemented very effectively. Boarders know how to use the complaints process if they are unhappy with any aspect of living in the school. Any complaint is addressed seriously and quickly. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. The school's principal is the lead safeguarding officer and is appropriately trained for this role. There are routine links with other agencies concerned with safeguarding, including the local safeguarding children board, which has ratified the school's child protection procedures. Boarders are protected from bullying by the school's effective anti-bullying policy and the school is diligent in tackling any such issues. Boarders are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the school's encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive responses to inappropriate behaviour. However, the school record their use of physical intervention and sanctions with pupils in the same bound and numbered book when such information should be recorded in separate books. The needs of individual pupils are carefully considered. For example, one pupil had 'non-violence' as a key priority and staffing was arranged accordingly to meet this need. The school provides a safe environment as a result of the positive steps that are taken to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. Given the particular risks arising from the boarders' special educational needs, the school follows rigorous risk assessment procedures.

The school's residential provision actively supports boarders' educational progress at the school. For example, each boarder has a pastoral tutor in the residential area and an academic tutor in school who regularly liaise with each other. Boarders receive exceptional individualised support to meet their needs which includes therapists, an educational psychologist and an independent listener. The school has carried out a criminal records bureau check on the independent listener, who is included in their single central register. However, written references and the outcome of an interview were not formally recorded.

Boarders are supported to make their opinions known, so that they may influence the way the school is run. A school council meets regularly and the staff and boarders in each residential area meet weekly. The school manages admissions of pupils effectively to help them settle in quickly. Transitions are well managed from initial assessment through to leaving or transfer to the post-16 provision. Boarders' needs are comprehensively assessed and outlined in an individualised health and placement plan that is implemented by staff. During their four nights a week at the school, boarders are encouraged to maintain telephone contact with their family.

Boarders live in pleasant premises providing sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs.

The organisation of the boarding provision is outstanding. The school has a clear statement of its purpose that it achieves very effectively. Boarders are looked after by staff who are more than adequate in number and who promote boarders' welfare effectively. They are suitably qualified, experienced and trained. Boarders enjoy the stability of an efficiently run school and benefit from the school's principal also being the head of care. Internal and external monitoring of key areas, to identify any action required, is regularly reported on by the school's principal and Priory Group representatives. However, a Priory Group monitoring visit had not taken place the half-term before this inspection. The school's promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is most evident in the work the school does to counteract discrimination and exclusion.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.⁴

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

- maintain the admission register and attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

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 regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the teaching of mathematics, so that lessons are less reliant on worksheets and textbooks
- ensure greater consistency in lesson planning and provide more planned opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs or small groups

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- keep the recommended records of staff's use of physical intervention and sanctions with a child in separate bound and numbered books (national minimum standard 10.9 and 10.14)
- carry out and record the full range of staff vetting checks for the independent listener appointed by the school but not directly employed by them (national minimum standard 22.8)
- carry out half-termly monitoring visits on behalf of the proprietor (national minimum standard 33.1).

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?				
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?				

How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?				
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?				

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision	✓			
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School details

Name of school	North Hill House School		
DCSF number	933/6200		
Unique reference number	131975		
URN Social Care	SC033014		
Type of school	Residential special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	7–18		
Gender of pupils	Boys		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 59	Girls: 0	Total: 59
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total:
Number of boarders	Boys: 32	Girls: 0	Total: 32
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 58	Girls: 0	Total: 58
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£70,821–£133,432		
Annual fees (boarders)	£95,793–£158,403		
Address of school	Fromefield Frome Somerset BA11 3AD		
Telephone number	01373 466222		
Fax number	01373 475175		
Email address	sharone@nhh4as.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Sharon Edney		
Proprietor	Ms Julia Bond		
Reporting inspector	Frank Price		
Dates of inspection	19–20 January 2010		