

Hillcrest New Barn

The Long Barn, The Row, Welford Estate West and East, Welford, Berkshire RG20 8HZ

Inspection dates

5–7 December 2017

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| 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 | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and staff have created a welcoming and successful school in a very short time. The headteacher's determined leadership and staff members' strong teamwork ensure that pupils are nurtured and educated well.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Through careful planning and precise attention to pupils' needs, staff ensure that pupils learn and achieve success.
- Pupils make good progress in their academic studies and, equally importantly, their self-esteem and behaviour improve.
- A varied and exciting programme of curriculum subjects, events and off-site activities help pupils to thrive and enjoy learning.
- Pupils form secure and warm attachments to the adults who work with them. Pupils get along well together and form firm friendships, taking care of each other.
- Pupils attend well, with many achieving 100% attendance for the very first time in their school careers.
- School leaders ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Senior leaders are relatively new to their roles and their work is yet to show full impact on outcomes for pupils.
- Staff and leaders have a wealth of information about pupils' current and past progress and experience. However, some of the systems used to record, store and share this information are not as efficient as they could be.
- While pupils' early reading skills are developing rapidly, reading is not promoted widely enough among older pupils. Some are reluctant to read for pleasure and widen their horizons through enjoying a range of books.
- Many pupils have difficulties with writing. Leaders and staff have gone some way to building up pupils' confidence as writers, but writing remains weak, particularly among the older pupils.

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?

- Fully establish senior leaders in their roles, in order to increase pupils' progress.
- Ensure that information about pupils' safety, behaviour and progress is systematically tracked and used to set targets, learn lessons for the future and improve the performance of the school.
- Improve pupils' reading comprehension and promote their reading for enjoyment more widely.
- Improve pupils' willingness and ability to write confidently and independently.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is experienced, thoughtful and capable. In a very short time, she has established a welcoming and successful school, in which every pupil and member of staff is valued and cherished.
- Senior leaders have benefited hugely from the dynamic and determined approach of the headteacher and in turn have created a professional and ambitious ethos in the school.
- All staff endorse the school's compelling values, which include building attachments, respecting each other and taking responsibility. Staff are energetic and willing to learn, and deeply appreciate the role they play in the lives of the pupils in the school.
- Staff and leaders are determined to achieve outstanding outcomes quickly. They are creative, introducing innovative and successful ways to bring out the best in their pupils.
- Staff work as a team and make the most of giving and receiving support. They fully uphold the school's motto of 'working as one, learning together'. Leaders ensure that all staff have regular supervision to guide them in their work. They also ensure that there is good-quality training for all staff to progress and improve. Staff who are new to the school or profession are very well supported and are successful in their roles.
- The school's curriculum, in both the primary and secondary phases, is motivating and challenging, and teaches pupils about the world outside their own experiences. Rightly, teachers focus on improving pupils' English and mathematics, through intelligently designed programmes and sequences of lessons. Pupils also enjoy history, geography, science, art, food technology and music. Together with an energetic focus on physical education and outdoor pursuits, pupils gain a rounded experience that prepares them well for the next stage in their education and for life outside the school.
- The timetabled curriculum is further enhanced by extensive opportunities to join in with the cycle of events during the year. Many pupils in the school may not have had the chance to mark key moments in their lives, enjoy happy memories and look forward to celebrations. The school makes sure they have such experiences through different religious festivals, sports events, charitable work and performances.
- The school's core values tie in closely with British values and are threaded through everyday school life. Pupils are given responsibilities and, increasingly, are able to contribute to and participate in the development of the school. In addition, pupils have the opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions and broaden their understanding of the wider world. Pupils also have the opportunity to learn about different cultures through arts subjects, including the regular and very popular 'Bollywood' dancing sessions.
- The school has formed close working relationships with parents and with the local authorities who place pupils at the school. The school's good reputation has quickly become established with other agencies working to protect children. Parents are delighted with the frequent communication from the school and its welcoming and supportive atmosphere. Parents told the inspector that they 'could not fault' the school.

- The school and its staff are well supported by the proprietor and the new board of governors. Leaders have also made sure that there is some independent and objective scrutiny of the school by appointing a school improvement partner. The school also benefits from links with other schools in the company.
- The headteacher and her team, supported by the company, make sure that all regulatory requirements and the independent school standards are met. The school will be likely to meet the independent school standards if the school roll increases to 25.
- It is early days for the senior leadership team in this school and the experienced headteacher provides a strong guiding hand. However, leaders rightly acknowledge that their work on assessing pupils' achievement is not yet fully established. Some initiatives and systems are yet to demonstrate direct impact on pupils' progress.

Governance

- The school benefits from the experience and support from Hillcrest Children's Services, which is the parent company for the school. The regional manager is chair of the governing body and holds school leaders to account. He, in turn, reports to the executive board of the company.
- The governing body is made up of experienced educationalists, leaders from the company and the school has been fortunate enough to secure parent governors. The governing body is therefore well placed to plan strategically for the future, challenge leaders and check arrangements to assure pupils' safety and their good education.
- A specialist governor, with experience of managing a children's home, is responsible for overseeing the school's safeguarding arrangements. She has a thorough knowledge of current requirements, and a depth of knowledge of pupils' needs. She also has a keen eye for detail and had already identified that the school's safeguarding records need to be more efficient.
- New governors are enthusiastic and keen to have their voices heard and challenge school leaders. However, they have not been thoroughly trained yet in the protocols and boundaries for their role. This particularly applies to parent governors who are not yet clear about how to separate their role as a governor from their interest as a parent. It is reassuring that training is scheduled to take place soon.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding and child protection policy is up to date, meets statutory guidance and is published on the school's website. The policy is helpful to parents and staff, providing clear guidance about what to do if a concern is raised about a pupil's safety.
- Leaders and staff have a strong understanding that pupils in the school are vulnerable and that their complex needs could increase the risk of harm. Staff have been well trained to be vigilant and alert to any concerns. They know exactly what to do if they are worried about a pupil or if they are concerned about the conduct of a member of staff.
- Communication with other agencies who work to protect children is excellent and provides a network of support around pupils to protect them. Particular care is taken with

the most vulnerable pupils whose behaviour and communication are difficult to understand and manage.

- Staff have benefited from up-to-date training in identifying all signs of abuse and other risks that pupils may be vulnerable to, such as child sexual exploitation or extreme views.
- Staff are equally well trained in the use of safe de-escalation techniques and restrictive physical intervention, so that any risk of harm is minimised for both pupils and staff. Leaders insist upon a clear code of conduct and behaviour for staff, who are expected to manage pupils' behaviour calmly, cheerfully and with dignity.
- During the inspection, the inspector identified that some aspects of the school's records of safeguarding incidents and related information were not stored and recorded efficiently enough to provide a helpful overview. While this shortfall did not place any pupils at risk of harm, as soon as this was identified, leaders set about making immediate improvements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching staff are tenacious. They will do everything they can to interest the pupils and ensure that they have the opportunity to learn and succeed. For example, teachers have bravely arranged their own classrooms in an imaginative way to welcome pupils and focus them on what they need to learn.
- Planning for pupils' learning is effective. Teachers know exactly what pupils need to learn to make progress and gain knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Teachers are receptive to how pupils are responding and adapt their approach to maximise learning. They do not give in or give up, but keep trying new strategies to encourage pupils to get back on track. Teachers also assess pupils' work carefully during lessons to note and record the small steps of progress they make and whether they are hitting their targets. This approach is very affirming for pupils and leads to greater success, without placing an unnecessary burden of paperwork on teachers.
- Teachers know their subjects well in most cases, and also have acquired a good understanding of the different range of needs in their classes. It is also routine for teachers and support staff to share their approaches and talk over what is working well and what is not. Teachers' teamwork is clearly working, because pupils told Her Majesty's Inspector that 'teachers try to give us as much support as possible'.
- Pupils form strong relationships with their teachers and, over time, contribute well and try hard. They want to achieve and know that school is for learning. Pupils' rapid progress and their work in books and folders clearly show that pupils are getting accustomed to the routines and expectations of school. During the inspection, pupils wanted to present themselves well and be seen to be concentrating and working diligently. This shows a commendable pride in themselves and their work.
- Pupils are interested and stimulated by the topics chosen by teachers. These are not only based on what pupils will like, but also what will challenge them and provide a new experience. Teachers create attractive and well-designed resources and materials that interest pupils and make them feel special.

- Teachers ensure that pupils gain a broad experience of different topics and tasks. In mathematics, pupils cover problem solving, mathematics in the real world and number practice. Some pupils particularly enjoy algebra and find the repeated practice and re-learning builds their confidence.
- Thoughtful teaching in science enables pupils to learn key concepts and apply them. In art and music, pupils not only pursue their personal interests, but also are encouraged to practise and repeat skills. Many pupils enjoy the structure of sequenced instructions, such as in following a recipe in food technology, which has the added incentive of an edible end product!
- The school sensibly makes good use of the lovely rural surroundings to give pupils opportunities to explore outdoors, learn about wildlife and develop teamwork. Some pupils benefit from working on a farm and caring for and riding horses. During the inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector observed younger pupils enjoying 'camping' outside in the rain, cooking for themselves under supervision and exploring the natural world safely. Pupils played, had fun, and were also able to report on what they had been learning.
- Pupils also benefit from the school's emphasis on physical education. Many teachers specialise in this curriculum area. Their energy and skill help pupils to be physically healthy, to reduce their stress levels and to work as a team, as well as setting up a leisure interest for life.
- Homework is not fully established for all pupils although the school sets regular reading and other tasks for pupils to complete at home. Many pupils are encouraged by their parents or carers to complete tasks in their own time and their response to this is closely monitored by school leaders.
- Teaching in English is not enabling pupils to make as much progress as they are in other areas of the curriculum. Leaders have rightly identified that while younger pupils are progressing fast in phonics, they are not developing their comprehension skills as quickly. Although some pupils are reading and taking home books for the very first time, for older pupils, reading is not promoted widely enough.
- The school has inherited a legacy of reluctant writers. On the positive side, teachers provide pupils with challenging texts to write about. Staff highlight key language features and also remind pupils of more sophisticated vocabulary. However, pupils repeat and go over features that they already know without their work leading to a piece of writing. This approach reinforces pupils' habitual reluctance to write for themselves and is proving to be a barrier to their further achievement.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are lively and happy in this busy and purposeful school. They enjoy close relationships with adults and bond with each other. It is clear that some pupils are developing confidence and greater self-esteem. For many pupils, this is the first time they have enjoyed coming to school.

- Pupils like contributing to school life and leaders are rightly working on developing pupils' role in the growing school in order to give them a tangible stake in its development.
- Pupils take a pride in the appearance of their work. It is heartening for them to see their assignments and work accumulating over time as a record of their commitment and staying power. They are beginning to recognise that they are learning in the same way as their peers in mainstream schools.
- Pupils understand that bullying is wrong and are conscious of the need to be kind and considerate to each other, including adults. Casual derogatory language and swearing are rare. Pupils seldom forget themselves unless experiencing extreme anxiety, distress or anger. It is pleasing to see pupils increasingly taking responsibility for their words and actions, with many trying to consider other people's feelings and make amends.
- Pupils learn about online safety in their personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) lessons and through assemblies and talks from outside speakers. Pupils are protected from inappropriate use of social media and the internet during the school day. However, staff and leaders are understandably concerned that the pupils are very vulnerable when online at home.
- Adults in the school conscientiously act to protect pupils from risk of harm. However, pupils themselves have not acquired a strong sense of how they can manage risk themselves and learn about how to keep safe.
- Some pupils have had such difficulties in their lives that they find it hard to trust adults. These pupils are not confident when speaking to visitors or when faced with change and challenges. While the school is establishing itself, there is more work to do to build up pupils' confidence and self-assurance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are admitted to the school with a range of social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which often manifest themselves in challenging behaviour. An increasing number of pupils join the school with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. These pupils sometimes find that they cannot communicate their emotions or anxieties very easily.
- Staff and leaders have worked on a successful approach to managing challenging behaviour. Pupils' behaviour is regarded as communication and staff try hard to understand it. Staff do not take a punitive approach, but will work on strategies to defuse and de-escalate behaviour when emotions are running high. Leaders take a firm line with dangerous behaviour that puts pupils and staff at risk. As a result, the school is a calm and secure place.
- Staff are specially trained in safe restrictive physical intervention, which is only used as a last resort. There is careful follow-up if any intervention has taken place, which is shared with parents and reflected upon with lessons learned.
- Pupils respond very well to the rewards system for behaviour and attitudes to learning, together with rewards for regulating emotions and being kind to each other. Pupils value the reward points and enjoy earning appropriate treats, activities and extra responsibilities and independence.

- Pupils with particularly challenging behavioural difficulties settle down into school life and serious incidents become less frequent. Staff are alert to the change in dynamic that is inevitable when new pupils join the school or when there are changes to routine. Teaching staff are guided to prepare pupils carefully for change, in order to minimise stress, but maximise opportunities for pupils to cope with the ups and downs of life.
- Pupils' attendance improves dramatically while they are at the school. Overall attendance is broadly in line with that found in mainstream schools for all pupils. A large number of pupils have 100% attendance. This is a great improvement for many pupils who previously had very low attendance or were not attending school at all.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because some of the older pupils do not have such positive attitudes to learning. Some are taking longer to get used to the school's raised expectations of what they can achieve, because they have spent too long not believing in themselves.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make rapid progress from the moment they are admitted to the school, both academically and personally.
- With the combination of carefully planned and stimulating teaching and tailored intervention, pupils start to make gains in reading and mathematics. Leaders rightly track the progress of pupils at an individual level because they all have particular needs. There is no particular group, therefore, at risk of falling behind, because they are all treated individually.
- School leaders can point to several pupils whose reading age has increased significantly since joining the school.
- Pupils make strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. Many are achieving well in food technology, art, physical education, science, music and humanities subjects.
- Another key outcome for pupils is the improvement in their attitudes to learning and to school in general. Pupils are already in a more secure position to achieve their future hopes and dreams.
- As a result of their growing successes, older pupils are looking forward to a future with qualifications. Leaders are rightly planning to offer accredited courses to the older pupils as they grow up through the school. Because some of these pupils have already caught up quickly, it is clear that, with support for their anxieties, they will be ready to achieve well in their GCSEs when the time comes.
- Teachers are assiduous about recording pupils' progress as it happens. They are also careful to repeat key work to make sure that pupils retain their learning. In this way, pupils are becoming more confident that their knowledge and understanding are increasing and moving towards what would be expected of their age group.
- The school's system for tracking regular assessments is not yet well established enough to make comparisons or draw any conclusions about progress trends.

- Pupils do not achieve as well in writing as they do in mathematics. Some pupils' reading comprehension is also under-developed and school leaders are rightly tackling this through some personalised extra help for individual pupils.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 144033 |
| DfE registration number | 869/6019 |
| Inspection number | 10043102 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other Independent Special School |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 6 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 22 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Hillcrest Children's Services Ltd |
| Chair | Mark Birkbeck |
| Headteacher | Alice Anstee |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £51,621 |
| Telephone number | 01488 505145 |
| Website | NewBarn@hillcrestcs.co.uk |
| Email address | alice.anstee@hillcrestcs.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Hillcrest New Barn school was registered by the Department for Education in January 2017 to admit up to 20 pupils aged 6 to 16.
- The school caters for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Most pupils on the school roll have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some pupils have experienced trauma and neglect in their early lives. A number of pupils are looked after by their local authorities.
- At the time of the inspection, the Department for Education had given permission for the school roll to increase to 22 pupils.

- Many pupils have been out of education for periods of time before joining the school. Some have been excluded from mainstream maintained schools.
- The school is situated in a rural, wooded setting.

Information about this inspection

- This was the school's first standard inspection. It was carried out with one day's notice.
- Her Majesty's Inspector toured the school, observed tutor time, visited an outdoor learning session and observed pupils learning in 11 different lessons, accompanied by senior leaders.
- The inspector evaluated work in pupils' books and folders, together with information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. She also checked relevant documentation and policies related to the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and governors. The inspector attended the daily staff debriefing session and also met with all the teaching and support staff. Three pupils met formally with the inspector to discuss their views about the school.
- Telephone conversations were held with officers from two different local authorities and the school improvement partner. The inspector also spoke to parents on the telephone and took into account the views of the small number of parents who contributed to Parent View. The views of 23 staff who completed the staff questionnaire were also considered alongside other evidence.
- As part of this inspection, the Department for Education commissioned Her Majesty's Inspector to consider a material change to increase the number on roll to 25.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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