

Inspection of Hill House School

Rope Hill, Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 8NE

Inspection dates: 7–9 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' lives are transformed by attending this school. Leaders' high ambitions drive every element of the school's work. Staff focus constantly on preparing pupils for adulthood. As a result, pupils' personal, social and communication skills develop significantly. This supports pupils to move on towards successful future lives.

Carefully planned routines settle pupils quickly into the school. This helps them to access meaningful learning. Pupils engage enthusiastically with the rich range of life experiences that leaders open up for them, both in and out of school. These enable pupils to practise vital skills, such as communication and cooperation. In the school café, pupils queue up patiently, make healthy choices for lunch and enjoy eating lunch alongside the adults who care for them. This is just one example of how pupils learn to manage their behaviours and interactions with others.

Hill House is a safe and caring place to be. Leaders and staff understand pupils' complex needs extremely well. Education, care and therapy staff work seamlessly together. Their thoughtful work keeps pupils' wishes, views and needs constantly in mind. Consequently, pupils thrive.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Over time, leaders have sustained high standards of education and care at Hill House School. They strive to provide for pupils' specific needs, seizing every opportunity for pupils to develop. Learning is an integral part of everything that happens, so that pupils gain maximum benefit from being at the school.

The curriculum supports pupils extremely well. It helps them to develop highly relevant knowledge, skills and attributes to enhance their future lives. Leaders have thought very carefully about how to do this in an accessible and ambitious way. Learning enables pupils to achieve goals well beyond those in their education, health and care plans.

Leaders' work to support pupils' behavioural development begins long before they join the school. Specialist support ensures that staff understand pupils' particular needs and how to meet them. When pupils become anxious, staff expertly help them to manage this. They do this in a way that minimises distress for the child and limits the amount of learning time lost. Over time, pupils become increasingly effective at managing their own emotions. Parents we spoke to during the inspection noted the profoundly positive effect this has on pupils and their families.

Language and communication are at the heart of the school's curriculum. Visual resources help pupils to access their learning and 'own' the structure of their day. Leaders provide pupils with sensitive opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings. This enables pupils to influence how their learning programmes evolve around their interests. Throughout the day, pupils practise their learning when interacting with adults and other pupils. Every opportunity to learn is seized.

Pupils and adults share books every day. Pupils enjoy interacting with the pictures and learning from the stories. The small school library provides them with access to an engaging selection of books. Structured reading programmes enable older pupils to learn useful language for everyday living. This gives pupils greater independence in the community, such as when visiting the local library or choosing items from a shopping list.

Staff constantly look ahead to what will help pupils to be successful in their adult lives. They seek meaningful opportunities for pupils to contribute to their own school community. For instance, pupils help to deliver resources around the school site and grow produce to be cooked in the school café. Older pupils practise using these skills in less-familiar contexts, such as by volunteering at the local shop or walled garden. This gives them valuable experience that opens up future options for them. Leaders nurture pupils' interests and talents, giving them vibrant experiences of music, dance and sport. At times, this leads to future work experience or involvement in community projects.

The sixth form provides a highly effective transition for students as they move from the lower school towards leaving the school. Staff are mindful that students will need to learn to be as independent as possible. Over time, they help students to become less reliant on the adults around them. Students learn useful life skills such as how to keep their clothes clean. The relevant qualifications that students gain give them vital currency when exploring options for their future. Leaders use impartial and appropriate careers information and guidance to help students with this process. They help them to manage the transition from the safety of the school environment in a positive and effective way. As a result, students go on to sustain supported placements in the community, often near to their families.

Leaders invest, notably, in ensuring that staff have the knowledge, skills and experience that they need. Education, therapy and care staff learn from each other, helping them to work cohesively in pupils' best interests. When visitors come in to work with pupils, leaders invest in their training. This ensures that they understand pupils' particular needs and how to meet them through their work.

Governance has improved since the last inspection. The proprietor has helpfully developed structures and systems within Cambian. These help hold school leaders rigorously to account for the impact of their work. This ensures that the school's legal duties around the independent school standards and The Equality Act 2010 are met consistently well.

Despite the school's many strengths, leaders are committed to helping the school to be even better. They reflect accurately on further work that they feel would enhance subject-based learning even further. They seek advice from beyond the school to support their work, liaising with other local experts and carrying out research through their link with Southampton University. This enhances the school's work considerably.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a deep understanding of pupils' potential vulnerabilities. They take their responsibility to keep pupils safe extremely seriously. High-quality training ensures that all staff remain constantly alert to possible risks. Leaders react swiftly and thoroughly to any concerns that may arise, keeping detailed records of their work.

Giving pupils a voice is an important part of this work, so that pupils are able to share any worries or anxieties. Pupils rightly trust the adults who care for them and know them well. Changes in pupils' behaviour are spotted quickly, helping adults to act in pupils' best interests.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	116565
DfE registration number	850/6031
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10123969
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	17
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Chris Strong
Headteacher	Kate Landells
Annual fees (day pupils)	£103,600
Telephone number	01590 672147
Website	https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/hill-house-school/
Email address	hillhouse@cambiagroup.com
Date of previous inspection	20–22 June 2017

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Most have a range of additional needs. Most join the school after a period away from education or a series of unsuccessful placements in other schools.
- Almost all pupils reside full-time at the children’s home on the same site. The children’s home is registered and inspected separately to the school. At its last inspection in January 2019, it was judged to be outstanding.

- The school does not use any alternative providers. It does take pupils to access facilities and resources at a local secondary school and a local sixth-form college.
- The school is part of the Cambian group, which provides specialist education and behavioural health services for children. The proprietor is managing director of education for the Cambian group.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant deputy headteacher, and with groups of education and therapy staff. The lead inspector also spoke to the proprietor on the telephone and met with the regional education director for Cambian. She also met representatives from Southampton University and from the school's professional learning community, which provides leaders with an external view of standards in the school.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication; mathematics; physical education; and personal, social and health education. This involved speaking to teachers and subject leaders, visiting lessons and looking at learning journals.
- We reviewed safeguarding arrangements by looking at the school's central record of recruitment checks on staff, relevant policies and records of concerns raised about pupils. We also explored how safeguarding is promoted in the school, including through the curriculum and staff training.
- We observed pupils throughout the day, including when visiting the school café at lunchtime.
- The lead inspector met with a parent and spoke to two others on the telephone. She also observed a pupil feedback session delivered by the school's speech and language therapist.
- We took account of 27 responses to the staff survey. We also considered one response to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janis Rogers

Ofsted Inspector

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