

Hillside Special School

Hitchcock Place, Sudbury, CO10 1NN

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Determined, purposeful leadership by the headteacher has helped the school to grow from strength to strength.
- The common sense of purpose and shared responsibility is a thread that runs throughout the school. All staff work in unison to do the best for each individual pupil.
- This means that every pupil does well, the vast majority exceptionally so.
- Teaching is very well planned. It is the fine detail that teachers put into their lessons that makes it so effective.
- Consequently most teaching over time is outstanding. When teaching is good, it is really good as there is so little to improve.
- The sixth form is good and gives students a highly individual education.
- Information and communication technology is a particular strength of the school.
- Given the difficulties some have controlling their behaviour, pupils behave in an exemplary manner around the school and in lessons.
- Those pupils who have problems with their behaviour are given first-class support to help them overcome their difficulties.
- Pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and learn to look after themselves. All parents and staff agree pupils are very well cared for.
- Governors know the school well so they are able to ask the headteacher the right questions to make sure the school is doing all it should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons, most of which were seen together with senior leaders. They also visited parts of lessons, snack, lunch and break times and assembly. They watched pupils arrive at and leave school as well as practise their reading.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and other leaders, a group of staff, some pupils, several parents, the Chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority.
- A range of documentation was examined including information about health and safety, teachers' performance, pupils' progress and behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took note of the 11 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the school's own recent questionnaire to parents.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Tomkins	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hillside School caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties, many of whom have associated medical, sensory or behavioural needs. Some pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism spectrum disorder.
- Most pupils have statements of special educational need apart from part-time pupils in the assessment nursery who are being assessed. Many of these also attend mainstream nurseries. These pupils either transfer to mainstream or join Hillside School full-time.
- Most pupils attend the school from south west Suffolk, including the towns of Haverhill and Sudbury and their surrounding villages. Almost all are White British and speak English as their first language. A very slightly above proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from a family with a parent in the armed forces).
- Some older pupils also attend Priory School as they are studying for additional qualifications. Key Stage 4 pupils go to West Suffolk College once a week for work-related courses. Most pupils leave at the end of Year 11 to join local colleges with specialist provision.
- The school provides an outreach service alongside two other Suffolk special schools to support pupils with special needs in mainstream.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by:
 - fully implementing and securing the school’s existing plans to extend outdoor learning opportunities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - extending opportunities for those pupils who are able to be fully involved in assessing their own learning and deciding what they need to do next.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, because of the way staff work closely with parents and colleagues in the mainstream nurseries where pupils have shared placements. The large number of children able to attend mainstream schools with support when they leave nursery is a testament to this.
- Pupils who stay at Hillside to join the Foundation Department are very well prepared for joining the Primary Department. Meticulous assessment of pupils' progress gives teachers a very clear idea of what pupils need to do next to extend their learning. The outdoor learning spaces are not as well developed as they could be and the school has plans to improve these.
- The few pupils who remain at the school for their sixth form education access personalised programmes of study that are very carefully planned to meet their profound and multiple learning needs. They do well alongside other secondary pupils who also benefit from a teaching approach that concentrates on using the senses to learn.
- Pupils have lots of opportunities to practise their everyday mathematical skills in practical settings, such as weighing out ingredients in food technology or working out how much their bus pass will cost. They read instructions, whether it is in the written word, or using symbols and use computer programmes to 'write' stories using pictures, if they are unable to use pencils and paper.
- The small numbers of pupils with medical needs are particularly well supported by specially trained support staff, who make sure their needs are met so that pupils are able to carry on with their lessons alongside their classmates.
- Pupils with autism spectrum disorders in addition to their severe learning difficulties make substantial progress in overcoming any barriers to learning posed by the challenges they face. For example they are helped, to wait their turn patiently to use the microwave in food technology.
- Because individual needs are so well planned for, almost every pupil does well, whatever their starting points, with the vast majority achieving exceptionally well. Extremely careful checking of pupils' progress towards challenging targets means it is rare for individuals to fall behind and over time all groups of pupils do well, although some do even better. Many pupils are involved in negotiating their own targets for improvement.
- Pupils do especially well in English, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in Key Stage 4 in mathematics. Information and communication technology is a particular strength of the school which has identified a group of 'gifted and talented' pupils to take part in more challenging activities. Some more-able pupils attend another special school to help them gain more challenging qualifications, while the recently reorganised 14-19 accreditation scheme is helping students build up credits towards useful qualifications at college or in sixth form.
- The school has used its pupil premium very effectively to provide extra support across all key stages, so that all eligible pupils make expected or better progress and in many case do better than their classmates. Year 7 catch-up funding is used to help pupils keep up with their peers in English.

- The primary school sports funding has been used to release a specialist physical education teacher to show non-specialist teachers new ideas. This has helped boost teachers' confidence and improve their teaching.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Senior and other leaders' observations of teaching show that teaching has got even better over the past two years so that most is now outstanding. A lot of outstanding teaching was seen during the inspection and when it was good there was very little that could be improved upon.
- Teachers carefully plan their lessons so that no detail is overlooked. Small things like making sure a clear bucket is used in a lesson about capacity so pupils could see jugfuls of pasta being poured in, is an example of this.
- Staff work very well together and learning support assistants always know exactly what to do, partly because teachers' planning is so good, but also because they use their initiative to move around the class and help those pupils who need it.
- Teachers and support staff use questions really well to check how much pupils have learnt and to push them a little bit further. For example, in one secondary art lesson a pupil saying he wanted to paint a tree was not good enough, he had to tell his support assistant exactly what sort of tree he was going to paint.
- All staff have very high expectations of pupils, who rise to the occasion. Pupils who are able to, are encouraged to think more deeply, for example by primary-aged pupils being asked to explain what a fair test was in a mathematics lesson.
- Lessons are fun and interesting, so that pupils are really involved in their learning, including some of the most challenging pupils in the school. Teachers take care to make sure pupils are in the right frame of mind to learn, either by playing calming music after playtime, or perhaps by just making sure pupils feel physically comfortable.
- Teaching is imaginative and although teachers plan lessons carefully they are also confident enough to change their plans. For example, in one secondary science lesson the teacher took a group of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties outside with big umbrellas to experience the sounds and sensations of a sudden heavy shower.
- Teachers make sure all pupils have access to high quality learning, such as pupils with physical difficulties using a switch to operate a hairdryer in science to watch some wax crayons melting. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge means they have all the right information at their fingertips, such as what they need to do to create a perfect landscape in art.
- All staff use signs, symbols and other methods of alternative communication such as switches, interactive whiteboards and computer tablets exceptionally well to make lessons accessible to all.
- As well as the excellent teamwork, staff's very good relationships and empathy with pupils is the cornerstone of the school's success. Teachers plan work that helps pupils understand what they are being taught. For example, in one secondary religious education lesson where pupils were

learning about Sikhism they were helped to think about how the names Singh and Kaur could be applied to their own situation and to relate it to the theme of belonging.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Considering the difficulties many of them experience with their behaviour, they behave in an exemplary manner around the school and display very good attitudes towards their teachers in lessons.
- Older pupils are quick to volunteer to do the washing up or tidy up after snack time. They also look after one another and tell a member of staff if one of their friends needs help.
- Staff are excellent role models for pupils and because they expect pupils to behave well they do. In the classes for the youngest pupils, they quickly learn what is expected of them as staff turn around potentially disruptive behaviour.
- Individual behaviour plans help those pupils needing additional help to manage their behaviour. These easy to follow plans are consistently carried out by staff and are carefully and regularly checked to make sure they stay relevant.
- Pupils take pride in their work and those who use workbooks are encouraged to keep them neat and tidy. They are careful with equipment and resources, such as a group of primary pupils who took great care in handling a saxophone and violin that their teacher had brought into school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is also outstanding. The high ratio of well trained staff, many of whom have specialist training in first aid, administering medication or providing highly individual care for pupils with complex health needs means pupils are kept very safe.
- All the right procedures are in place to make sure all staff and visitors know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's well-being. The local authority and governors regularly check that health and safety is well managed in the school so that any minor shortcomings identified are swiftly addressed.
- Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that the adults around them will look after them. Parents agree with this wholeheartedly. Those who are able to explain what bullying is say there is no bullying in school and that staff help them learn how to keep safe on the internet, for example by clicking on the icon of Hector the dolphin to indicate to staff there is something on screen they do not like.
- Highly skilled teaching of a very well planned programme of personal, social and health education helps pupils learn to look after themselves, whether it involves learning to manage their own behaviour in class or travelling by bus to the shops.
- Pupils have lots of opportunities to think about ways to keep healthy, by choosing from healthy salad options at lunchtime or taking part in a range of sporting activities, such as the school marathon, a sailing competition or gaining first place in an inter school gymnastics competition with other county special schools.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Calm but uncompromising leadership by the headteacher sets the tone for the whole school. Complacency is not an option at Hillside.
- There is a sense of shared responsibility that is intrinsic in the fabric of the school. Senior and other leaders, teachers, support staff and governors all work together as a team. There is never a sense of something being someone else's job.
- Teachers do not mind senior leaders or subject leaders watching them teach, because they are eager to improve and do their best for each individual pupil. This means there are regular opportunities for teachers to improve their skills because of the advice they receive and the very good training.
- The very well thought-out curriculum is both practical and imaginative, providing useful work-related experiences, as well as opportunities for competitive sport for all abilities. Carefully thought out activities such as creating a historical timeline of famous artists from Van Gogh to Andy Warhol in art gives pupils' learning experiences depth.
- Staff have built up excellent relationships with parents who are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent said they 'couldn't have asked for a better school' and another that the school was 'the best thing that has happened' to their child.
- The school provides outstanding opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have opportunities for quiet reflection, learn the difference between right and wrong and learn to take responsibility for their environment. For example the school council wrote to the local authority to ask for a better range of eco-friendly cleaning products to be available in their catalogue. Pupils of all abilities learn about other cultures sometimes in a sensory way such as smelling or tasting herbs and spices from different cultures.
- The local authority provides regular, relevant and skilled advice and challenge through its school advisory service.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Experienced governors know the school well and are able to ask the right questions to make sure the school continues to improve. They carefully check information about staff performance and make sure teachers are doing their job and have the appropriate pay.
 - Governors make sure the school is doing all it can to help pupils do their best and know about the impact of pupil-premium funding on the achievement of eligible pupils. They are very involved in the life of the school, for example by attending parents' evenings.
 - Governors make sure current national safeguarding requirements are all met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124903
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	431261

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	3
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pauline Lucas
Headteacher	Sue Upson
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2009
Telephone number	01787 372808
Fax number	01787 375249
Email address	head@hillsidespecialschool.suffolk.sch.uk

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