

Mulberry Bush School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Christopher Garrett
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Address	Mulberry Bush School Ltd Abingdon Road Standlake WITNEY Oxfordshire OX29 7RW
Telephone number	01865 300202
Email	john.diamond@mulberrybush.oxon.sch.uk
Registered person	Mulberry Bush School Limited
Head of care	Carol Day
Head / Principal	John Tuberville
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Mulberry Bush School is run by a charitable trust and is approved by the DfES as a non-maintained special school. It provides 38 weeks of residential care and education, as well as a number of day placements for up to 40 boys and girls aged five to 12 years, who have experienced severe emotional damage in infancy and early childhood. The school specifically provides therapeutic treatment for children who have serious emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school is situated in a village in rural West Oxfordshire, five miles south of Witney. Four houses provide the residential accommodation and are located around a 'village green', the classrooms are in close proximity and the layout of the site creates the spirit of a community.

Summary

The purpose of this visit was to conduct a key inspection. This focussed on the Key National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools and followed up on the recommendations made following the last inspection.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has partially succeeded in addressing the recommendations made within the last report. Records show that the fire systems are being tested routinely and that this is being recorded in the fire log. However, currently the school does not have a service agreement for the regular servicing of the emergency lighting system. An examination of a sample of staff recruitment files showed that the school is routinely seeking telephone verification on references that it has received. There is no evidence that career gaps had been discussed or clarified with applicants.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There is outstanding identification and promotion of the health and intimate care needs of each child at the school. As a therapeutic school, children's physical, emotional and mental health needs are identified and promoted. Each child's Integrated Treatment Plan (ITP) includes a medical health plan which details any medical alert information and their health and medical needs. The school has a very clear and comprehensive medicine administration protocol, covering the administration of prescribed and 'household' medication to children. All medication is administered and recorded in accordance with this protocol, and kept securely. All staff have completed first aid training and their competency to issue medication to children is assessed. Children's health and medication needs are managed centrally, and overseen in each of the school's houses, by the school's registered nurse. She maintains each child's central medical file that contains parental permission for all of their health treatment. Children are registered with a local General Practice with male and female doctors. Children with particular health problems receive special provision from the school and visiting specialists. The school nurse participates in the school's programme of personal, social and health education for children, that Ofsted rated excellent in their 2004 inspection of education at the school. Children surveyed

commented that when they are unwell they are able to stay in bed, see the school nurse and a doctor, and are given medicine.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Mulberry Bush School has established practices and procedures and issue guidance to staff that help to ensure that the children living there are kept safe and protected from harm. All of the staff spoken to demonstrate an informed awareness of their responsibilities in safeguarding young people. Policies and guidance are available on the school's intranet. The therapeutic care workers (TCWs) show a very high regard for the privacy of the children and for maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality. Staff knock on bedroom and bathroom doors before entering. Staff are conscious of gender issues and arrange the supervision of the children at sensitive times accordingly. Children's files and confidential information are kept secure and electronic records are password protected. Staff spoken to are aware of the procedures to follow in the case of having to search a child's room or property and for the need for this to be done sensitively. However staff advise that searches rarely have to be undertaken. Sleep-in staff currently use an auditory monitoring system to monitor the bedroom corridors during the night. Some bedroom doors have buzzers fitted to them to alert staff when these are opened during the evening. Information regarding the use of the door buzzers is included in the children's integrated treatment plan. Specific detail on the use of the monitoring systems is not included in the school's statement of purpose. A number of children have agreed restrictions on contact in place and the details of these are available on the intranet. Children are able to make use of an office cordless phone to make and receive calls. However this can only be accessed with permission from staff and all of the children's calls are monitored. Information about how to contact national help lines and the school's independent visitor are displayed in the houses. Staff take seriously the concerns and complaints made by the children. The school has a clear complaints procedure and information about this is available to children. This procedure works in practice and the children indicate that they are happy about how issues are looked into and the outcome following this. Formal complaints made by the children are logged by the school. An examination of this showed that the school has processed 20 complaints on a variety of issues since the last inspection. There are a number of forums for the children to raise concerns which include regular evening meetings, handovers, community meetings and through the school council. There is an expectancy amongst staff that the children will raise concerns at these times or directly with them. The majority of children who submitted pre-inspection questionnaires indicate that if they had any worries that they share them with an adult (member of staff). Comments made in the children's questionnaires include 'I would sit with an adult in the kitchen and tell them' and, 'I would ask an adult to talk to me away from the children'. Information of the school complaints procedure is provided to parents and significant others in documentation provided by the school. A number of questionnaires received from parents/social workers/placing authorities comment positively on how issues and complaints raised with the school are dealt with. The home has a very clear procedure for responding to child protection concerns and has very good links with the local Children's and Families Assessment Team. A senior practitioner from this team liaises with the school and is available for consultation on potential child protection matters. The school's response to child protection issues is co-ordinated by two members of the Conducting Management Group who have been delegated the responsibility for being the designated people for child protection. Both staff are new to this role and are currently being supported by the Director who had previously been the designated person. Advice received from the designated members of staff

is that one of them has completed training specific to the role and the other will be undertaking this in the near future. An examination of training records shows that Child protection is part of the foundation training (mandatory) provided to all staff and that this is routinely updated. Staff have access to comprehensive guidance on the child protection procedures on the school's intranet. All of the staff spoken to are fully aware of their individual responsibilities in responding to any potential child protection concerns or allegations. Information relating to child protection matter and records of consultation with the assessment team are kept in a secure cabinet. Children confirm that bullying does occur within the school but indicate that staff are proactive in acting on any information about this taking place. A review of data collected from questionnaires recently circulated by the school to the children asking about their experiences indicate that between 80% - 100% felt that the adults sort out problems relating to bullying or incidents of racism. Staff acknowledge that bullying occurs and have developed strategies to manage this. Assessments and reports identify children who are at risk of bullying or being bullied. How this is managed is incorporated in their ITPs. High levels of risk or concern are flagged up on the school intranet. Incidents of bullying are referred to a weekly monitoring meeting where an integrated team consider what strategies should be used. These include referral to a bullying workshop where the children meet with members of staff to reflect on their behaviour. The school has produced an anti-bullying policy and anti-bullying posters are on display. The acknowledgment by staff that bullying can take place and the way that this is managed is a contributory factor in providing a safe and secure environment for the children to live in. Information on the school's response to children leaving the premises or the supervision of staff without permission is included in guidance titled 'Guidelines For Absconding and Contacting the Police' which is available for all staff on the school's intranet. Children who may put themselves at risk by absenting themselves are subject to a risk assessment. Where a high level of risk is identified this is flagged up on the intranet and the children are closely supervised by the staff. Incidents are recorded and logged. An examination of the logbook showed 11 incidents had been recorded since January 2007. Only one incident required the Police to be notified as in all other cases the children had returned after a short period of time and in most cases staff had been monitoring their whereabouts. Staff advise that children are seen after an incident to consider the reasons for their absence. The current records do not contain details or the outcomes of these meetings. The school has adopted an integrated behaviour programme which works in practice. Each child has a Integrated Treatment Plan which sets out how his or her behaviour should be managed. Staff have access to guidance handling difficult behaviour and the use of sanctions in a policy on the intranet. Parents and significant others are provided with information on the schools management of behaviour in documentation given to them during the admissions process. There are numerous forums for all staff to meet discuss and plan strategies for the children to help them understand and to manage their behaviour. The school places a great emphasis on encouraging appropriate behaviour by recognising, rewarding and celebrating acceptable behaviour. The children are encouraged to respect and help each other. This is a consistent feature throughout the school day and care time. Children are encouraged and given the opportunity to reflect on inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour. Some behaviour may result in sanctions being given. The majority of children indicate in their pre-inspection questionnaires that they feel that the school rules are fair. Sanctions are recorded in the general daily file. This format makes the sanction entries difficult to identify and to monitor. The children are unable to record their views on the sanctions that they have been given. Sanctions that were identified were seen to be fair, appropriate and proportionate. All of the staff are trained in the use of de-escalation techniques and safe physical interventions (Proac-SCIPr(UK)). This training forms part of the staff Foundation training and is updated

annually. The school has one trained SCIPr(UK) trainer within the care team. Significant incidents including restraint are recorded in a bound book. All incidents are categorised and the records are reviewed on weekly basis. Data collected from these reviews is submitted to the Wednesday monitoring meetings where staff review the incidents and consider what strategies are to be put in place. This can include asking members of the School Council to meet with a particular child to discuss their behaviour and the impact that this is happening on the rest of the children. Emphasis is given to the level of risk associated with the incidents and to the children's perception of the school responses to their behaviour. Data collected by the school demonstrates that the 'children's behaviour improves during their time at the school'. An examination of the children's complaints log showed that a number of children had raised issues (eight) over restraint. Documentation showed that this trend had been identified and questioned by a senior member of staff. The Director explained that all such complaints are considered by a designated person before being handed back for processing by the school. The home takes steps on a day-to-day basis to ensure that children, staff and visitors are safe from the risk of fire and other hazards. Records show that regular testing checking and servicing of most of the fire safety equipment is taking place and that practice evacuations are routinely being held. However, currently there are no arrangements for the emergency lighting to be serviced. An examination of records show that the care staff are given advice on fire precautions and basic fire awareness as part of their foundation (induction) training. Each of the living areas and the school has a designated Fire Marshall whose responsibilities include checking fire exits and fire doors and assisting in evacuations. Records show that the school's fire risk assessment was updated in November 2006. Checks and servicing are routinely undertaken on other areas including boilers and portable electrical appliances. The school owns a number of cars and mini buses. An examination of a sample of files showed that each vehicle has a current Ministry of Transport test certificate in place. Each of the children's Integrated Treatment Plans contains details of individual risk assessments. These are based on assessment and observation and identify potential difficult and dangerous behaviours that may be displayed by the children and how these are best managed. Details of children whose behaviour poses a high level of risk is posted on the intranet and these assessments are regularly reviewed at the Wednesday monitoring meetings. An examination of the general risk assessment folder showed risk assessments in place for a number of activities but not all of those currently being accessed by the children. There are few environmental risk assessments in place. A number of potential hazards in and around some of the houses were identified during a tour of the premises. Security to the grounds has been improved with new fencing and visitors to the school site are required to sign in at the main office and to wear a visitor's badge during their visit. Following recommendations made during the last inspection the school states that it has reviewed its recruitment and vetting procedures. An examination of the files for the most recently recruited members of staff (six) show that all of the application material has been verified by the school and that written references had been obtained. However in one case the school had not asked one applicant to submit a formal application and had accepted only one reference being obtained. There is no evidence of career gaps having been discussed and clarified with applicants. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks had been completed for all recent appointments and advice was given that these have been completed for all staff. The safety of the pupils is enhanced further by the decision made by the school to conduct retrospective CRB checks on all of its staff. Advice was given that a number of the CRB checks are now over three years old.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff give practical and emotional support to the children, who all have a statements of special educational needs. Staff talk of the school as a community and each of it's members being their to help and support each other. Contributions are valued from all staff and children. Systems are in place for regular communication to take place between the school and the houses. The children's Integrated Treatment Plan includes details of their Individual Education Plan which sets out educational targets for the term. The ITPs are fully accessible to all staff. The therapeutic care workers assist in educational programmes during the school day and in care time when required. The majority of the children indicate in their pre-inspection questionnaires that they get help with their school work and that they have space in the houses in which to do school work. Children have access to range of age appropriate books and toys and to computers . The school ensures that the children are able to access individual support when they need it. The school has links with a range of external agencies who provide services to help meet the needs of a number of the children. Internally children can access services provided by the school psychotherapists and occupational therapist. Care staff will assist in Life Stem work. An independent visitor from the organisation Voice and Children in Care visits on a regular basis and the children have access to a contact number if they wish to call and talk to him at other times. Each of the pupils has an allocated key worker whose responsibilities include liaising with families, overseeing medical appointments, monitoring contact and contributing to and attending annual reviews and other statutory meetings.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Staff demonstrate that they place great value on the views and opinions of the children. There are a number of forums that have been implemented and developed by the school through which the children are able to express their thoughts and air their views and feelings about major life decisions and the day to day running of the school and the living group units. These include circle time in school, evening meetings in the houses, community meetings and panel meetings. These also provide the opportunity for the children to reflect on how the day has gone and to be kept informed about news and events. Children are actively encouraged to contribute to these meetings and to listen to each others' views. A number of the children comment on how they had been consulted about issues relating to the decoration and furnishing of the residential houses. The school also has a school council which is a forum for the children to be able to have their say and influence the manner in which the school is run. A school council meeting was observed and it started with the school council members agreeing on an agenda. Discussion took place on a variety of issues and recommendation and actions by the council were agreed. Staff are present to help the children keep on track and to offer advice. The meetings are minuted by an Administrator and copies of these are posted on the school intranet. Documentation showed that the school council has been involved in the recruitment of staff, assisted in the school's bullying workshop and have set up fund raising events. The children are encouraged to attend annual reviews and are supported in these by their key workers. All of the children who submitted pre-inspection questionnaires indicate that they are involved in meetings about their progress and future plans. A number of parents comment positively about how the school listens to the children. Comments include 'My son's feelings are respected. He is involved in his reviews and his opinions are welcomed'. Another commented how their daughter, 'sits on the school council which has given her a sense of responsibility and a voice about how things are run'. Each child has a Integrated Treatment Plan which is accessible to all staff on the school's intranet. These plans are an excellent tool providing comprehensive information for each of the children on a range of areas, including health,

education behaviour and levels of risk. Individual needs are identified along with details of how these are to be addressed and who has specific responsibility for overseeing that this takes place. The residential staff, educational team, family team and Shifford behavioural support team all contribute to the plan and have a shared responsibility for monitoring and reviewing it. This integrated approach enables staff from different departments to be kept fully informed about the plans and progress of each of the children. Children are encouraged to keep in contact with their family and significant others (subject to any agreed restrictions). Staff readily give practical support to make contact possible. Arrangements for maintaining contact between the children and their family, friends and significant others are explicitly addressed in their integrated treatment plan. Details of any restrictions on contact is included in the plan and posted on the intranet. Staff indicate that they are aware of any agreed restrictions that are in place. The school has it's own Family and Professionals Network Team whose responsibilities include liaising with agencies and providing on going support to parents throughout their child's placement. A number of pre- inspections questionnaire received from parents, placing authorities and social workers comments positively on the communication between the school and them. A number refer to it as being 'excellent' and one parent commented on how the 'School contact me whenever they feel my involvement is needed'. Children are able to meet with their parents at school in private and comfortable surroundings. Arrangements can be made for some visitors who live a distance from the school to stay overnight.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children, parents and staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for children living at the school. This is achieved by a number of documents, including the school's written statement of purpose, prospectus, information booklet for parents and carers, and children's handbook and welcome booklet. The school is in the process of reviewing it's written statement of purpose, which currently does not include details of the school's use of audio surveillance systems. Children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently. The school has a staffing policy and is staffed accordingly. The school aim to work to a ratio of three children to one member of staff in each house, and staff rotas and visits to houses showed that this is usually achieved. More staff support is available if needed. There is a good gender balance across the care staff team and on individual shifts, and identified shift leaders. A member of staff sleeps in each house overnight, with a manager on-call. Continuity of care for the children is the guiding principle when staff absences are covered. Staff are able to understand and consistently meet the children's needs because of the training and staff development the school provides them with. The school has a training manager who is responsible for the co-ordination of staff training, which includes training by external professionals. The school's foundation and principal training programmes for staff take approximately two years for them to complete, and are followed by an on-going development training programme. Each programme is cross-referenced to relevant national occupational standards and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and is assessed by managers and supervisors. The school's 'renewable' training schedule includes training in child protection, physical intervention and first aid, but not safety with medicines. Staff have training and development portfolios and appraisal targets that are an on-going part of their supervision. Children receive the care and services they need

from competent staff. Within group living, there is a head of group living (who has been at the school for 11 years), two deputy heads, house managers, senior practitioners, therapeutic care workers and a therapeutic support team. Only a small number of these staff have completed their Level 3 Caring for Children and Young People NVQ, because staff development at the school focuses on the school’s training. The school is currently seeking to have their training validated by an external body, so that care staff will have qualifications equivalent to and above this NVQ. Children and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run school. Since the last Commission of Social Care Inspection of group living at the school, there have been significant changes to the organisation and it’s personnel structure. In light of this, the school provided a study day for staff to reflect on these changes. The school’s director and head of group living have been in their posts since September 2006. The chair of the school’s trustees commented on how well they have fitted in to their new roles. The school holds weekly monitoring meetings with representatives from across the school, where data gathered on significant incidents of harmful behaviour (from records in the houses and the school) is monitored to identify any trends or patterns regarding children. The internal monitoring arrangements for other records, however, is less clear. The head of group living submits a report to the school’s education and treatment sub-committee each term, and group living is reported on in the school’s development plan. The school’s trustees carry out monthly monitoring visits.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the children's access to the phone.NMS 9
- ensure that there is a written record of the discussions held with children following incidents where they have gone absent without authority. NMS 8
- review the recording of sanctions. NMS 10
- ensure that the emergency lighting system is serviced regularly NMS 26
- ensure that there a written explanation made of any career gaps for staff employed by the school. NMS 27
- update all Criminal Record Bureau checks every three years. NMS 27
- Complete the current review of the school’s statement of purpose and revise it where necessary NMS 1
- include safety with medicines training in the school’s programme of training for staff. NMS 29

- ensure that 80% of the staff have completed National Vocational Qualification Level 3(caring for children and young people) or have qualification which demonstrate the same competencies as this NVQ.
- ensure that the internal monitoring of group living records includes the monitoring of all the records listed at the intervals specified. NMS 32
- Conduct an audit and review of on site activity and environmental risk assessments. NMS 26

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.