

# High Close School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC011327          |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 20 September 2007 |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Merryl Wahogo     |
| <b>Type of Inspection</b>      | Key               |

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| <b>Head of care</b>            | Alexander Paterson   |
| <b>Head / Principal</b>        |  |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 18 September 2006  |

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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**

High Close School is operated by Barnardos. It provides for day attendance and weekday boarding for pupils aged from eight to 17 years, with most boarders being of senior school age.

The school takes young people who have been unable to succeed in mainstream school and may have been excluded from previous schools, and have statements of special educational need arising from emotional and behavioural difficulties. The range of additional specific special needs with which the school is working is broad, and may include young people with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, autistic spectrum disorders, speech and language difficulties and visual and auditory impairment.

Boarders are accommodated in four houses now with up to nine places in single bedrooms, but can accommodate an additional boarder sharing, for short periods. Each house has a designated staff team and unit manager. There is a separate unit for day and extended day pupils. The day unit has a separate dedicated staff team.

The ethos of the school is to reward good behaviours, within the overall context of a behaviour management system called Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) in which all care and teaching staff receive training.

### **Summary**

This was the annual inspection and took place over three days. Since the previous report was 'good' the inspection was proportionately lighter, covering only key standards.

Standards are high in all the outcome areas and the positive relationships between young people and staff are particularly noticeable. The school is unusual in having its own social work team who work closely with staff as well as external child protection bodies. Young people report good support from staff both in terms of their care and of their education. Staff report enjoying the high level of team work and good support from Barnardos and staff morale is high throughout. Staff ensure that the units all have their own character and are exceptionally homely in how they are furnished and maintained. There is an active school council which ensures that young people's views are heard and discussed. The school has made clear changes in response to some of the young people's ideas.

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 responded to a recommendation in the last report, by writing up individual risk assessments in the behaviour management plans. These are in addition to activity and location risk assessments.

All references are now clearly documented in staff files. The staff have developed new forms to ensure cross-referencing of sanctions.

Staff now ask young people if they would like to sign complaint forms to show whether they are satisfied with the outcome.

Staff record the administration of homely remedies on the reverse side of Medical Administration Sheets.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Staff keep detailed records of the health needs of individual young people within each unit. All medicines are safely stored and administered and this is recorded thoroughly and accurately. Very occasionally, however, there is no signature of a witness when controlled drugs are given. Young people are supported to attend medical appointments and the school makes every effort to secure necessary treatment. Staff do not have books within which to record the temperature of medication fridges but there are plans to have these put in place.

All staff within particular units are aware of individual health needs and act promptly when necessary. Staff receive training in both first aid and the administration of medication.

Unit staff are aware of particular health needs and one project worker was seen to respond promptly and appropriately to an urgent health need. Staff report buying homely remedies which an individual might need, but which has not been supplied by parents, when the young person arrives at the beginning of the school week.

Young people are provided with fruit which they can eat at break times as well as after meals, and all food is eaten within the units. Meals are varied, with plenty of choice for the young people and the provision of vegetables is plentiful. Each week one young person can make particular choices about the menu and with one exception boarders reported enjoying their meals. Young people can ask for second helpings of meat and vegetables, but can only have second helpings of carbohydrates if they particularly need it. This may be because the young person has been particularly active, or because they are underweight. The young people are mostly enthusiastic about meals and clear their plates, but a few dislike the current emphasis on fruit and vegetables.

Young people are given active support to stop smoking and it is not permitted during school hours, inside buildings or in full view of others.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Staff respect young people's privacy by knocking on their doors and waiting for an answer before entering. They also demonstrate an awareness of confidentiality issues and do not speak inappropriately about the young people. Young people have access to a private phone booth in each unit. Boarders, including those who are new to the school, volunteer information about the CCTV cameras in the corridors and all confirm that they are happy with having them there. Parents sign a consent sheet concerning these cameras, amongst other things.

The school employs its own social work team which works hard to liaise with parents, local authorities and all those involved with safeguarding children. School staff are able to consult the team manager when they have concerns.

Young people demonstrate clarity about how to make complaints and most say that they would talk to their key workers or unit managers in the first instance. One said 'I'd talk to [unit manager] 'cos I trust her'.

The school works hard to tackle bullying. Young people fill out a questionnaire about bullying, on an annual basis, which informs the way that staff tackle the issue. There are many posters about it around the units, including statements as to what it is. Some of these are the work of the young people themselves. Several young people confirm that staff are good at dealing with bullying and staff are able to explain several different ways of tackling it, depending on the particular incident. These methods include discussion of how victims might feel; completing relevant worksheets and sanctions. Staff have developed new record sheets for bullying incidents to show both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as all other necessary details. This allows monitoring of trends. One young person said 'The school really does not tolerate racism'.

Staff record injuries on body maps showing the location and size of bruises, but not the colour. This can be important in establishing the age of a bruise and therefore when the injury occurred.

Barnardos use a rigorous staff recruitment process that ensures that all possible checks are completed before new staff are in post and the head of care follows these procedures thoroughly. Unfortunately the requirement for fully checked references covering the previous five years can cause lengthy delays in some staff taking up their posts.

Boarders are able to explain sanctions and believe that they are reasonable and administered fairly. They are consistent across the units. Staff record sanctions, with all necessary details, to allow monitoring and young people are given the opportunity to sign the records to demonstrate their agreement that they are fair.

Staff ensure regular fire drills at least once a month and boarders are able to explain the procedure in detail. All details are recorded in the fire book.

Risk assessments were seen and are now completed for individual children as well as for activities and are regularly updated.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Unit staff support young people's progress in a number of ways. They ensure that they reach school or college on time and fully prepared. They also help with homework and key workers review progress towards educational targets as well as those set within the units. There is also good communication between residential and teaching staff. Equally, teachers supervise homework within the units, assisted by unit staff.

There is a counselling service operating three days a week, such that young people can see the counsellor on a drop-in basis outside of school hours or through referral and appointments. Although sessions take place during the school day, the counsellor is careful to ensure the young person does not miss the same lesson each week. The counsellor reports that staff are mostly very supportive now that they better understand her role. Young people can also receive help from a speech and language therapist who is reported to be really helpful to staff and pupils alike.

Several young people spoke excitedly about last year's school X-Factor competition; one notice board still displays photos of it. Two girls proudly practised their entry for this year's competition, using a video of the musical from which the song was chosen. Each unit keeps photo albums of school and boarding activities, which the young people and visitors can look at, at any time. A range of activities are available in the evenings, although they have to be earned by good behaviour.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Staff and young people all talk about the relaxed but respectful relationships between them as the best thing about the school. It is certainly evident in every unit and throughout school activities. When one young person was asked what the best thing was about being at High Close School they answered 'The staff; they're really kind'. Another young person said 'I like the help I get here' and another said 'My favourite person is my key worker, I can talk to her'. Another pupil said 'The best thing, I get out of the school, is football and education'. Similarly one parent said 'The school really pushes my child to succeed. She's turned herself around in the past year'.

Staff seek the views of young people on many issues both informally and formally. Two pupils from each unit attend the school council and represent their own views as well as those of other young people from their unit. They make lively suggestions for changes across a range of issues, such as the opportunity to wear non school uniform once a week, and these are discussed respectfully and are responded to positively wherever possible.

Young people do not have enough choice about the colours of their bedrooms and some have many different and clashing colours.

There is good communication between unit staff and parents. Parents confirm that staff ring them at the beginning and end of every week. Young people can make and receive phone calls with their families using the telephone booths in each unit.

New boarders are brought in for a trial period which the school calls 'a taster period'. Two such pupils showed the inspector around with evident enjoyment. One of them had absorbed a great deal of information already. For example, when asked about choice of duvet covers, this pupil said 'They have to be flame retardant duvet covers!'.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The residential units are spacious and well laid out, keeping staff and office areas largely separate from living areas. Staff have put a great deal of thought and effort into making units look and feel homely and different from each other. This is evident from the colour schemes and ornaments and pictures, especially in the entrance halls and lounges. This is important to young people for whom the environment can either trigger poor behaviour or calm them. Equally, ancillary staff keep the units spotlessly clean and young people express their appreciation of that.

Each unit has both a lounge and a games room so that it is possible for young people to choose a lively leisure activity or to relax completely.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

High Close has a clear statement of purpose including one presented in a child friendly way, showing aspects of the school and boarding accommodation.

Staff demonstrate detailed understanding of the needs of young people in their units and a caring attitude. This is shown by a truly individual approach to meeting each young person's needs. Unit managers meet regularly to discuss how to achieve consistency across the units and yet cater to each individual young person's needs. For example, all the units have adopted healthy eating menus but each unit has a different notice in the dining room about it. Unit managers have agreed that in general only second helpings of protein or fruit and vegetables should be given but, individual young people may be given second helpings of carbohydrates, depending on their particular circumstances.

Both school governors and independent visitors, from Barnardos, visit High Close regularly. They write reports and the independent visitor writes letters to the young people, showing her photo, which are displayed on the unit notice boards.

Staff files are kept up-to-date and complete but files for new staff have copies of the terms and conditions which lacked signatures.

The head of care keeps himself abreast of relevant developments in child care and safeguarding children and demonstrates a good knowledge of all the individual young people in his care.

Staff report good access to training and records show that they do receive all mandatory training as well as a considerable range of additional training. Both care and teaching staff were trained and/or updated in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention at the beginning of this school year. The school has good links with the local college which facilitates easy access to NVQ training and assessment, so that the school is able to maintain the recommended percentage of the staff group with NVQ qualifications.

Staff report good staffing levels and very little need for agency workers and this is confirmed by staff rotas. Where necessary staff will transfer between units to support each other in emergencies.

## 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 |
|----------|--------|----------|
|----------|--------|----------|

### Recommendations

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

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- ensure that temperatures in medication fridges are rigorously monitored and recorded, even when no refrigerated medication is being kept (Standard 14).
  - ensure that administration records have a code that can be entered to show why a witness is unable to sign for administration of medication (Standard 14).
  - ensure that the colour of bruises is recorded on body maps to help staff determine how old the injury is (Standard 5).
  - create a system whereby young people can have more say about the colours of walls and furnishings in their bedrooms (Standard 2).
  - ensure that new staff sign the copies of terms and conditions held on their files (Standard 19).
  - consider requesting Barnardos to reduce their requirement for references covering the last five years where two references have been obtained and any further references obstruct recruitment, to the detriment of the children (Standard 27)