

Bramfield House School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Inspector | David Welch |
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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

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| 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

Bramfield House was established as a school in 1970. In 1986 it became approved as a school suitable for the admission of pupils for whom Statement of Educational Needs (SEN) are maintained. It has kept this status and remains approved by the Secretary of State under Section 347(1) and (3) of the Education Act 1996. The school has been under new ownership for about two years, the proprietors now being Acorn Care, a company that is involved with other residential special schools and therapeutic settings. The school is run on a day-to-day basis by the Head Teacher, supported by senior staff, teachers, and a team of pastoral and ancillary staff. The new owners have made considerable investment in the premises and have increased the staffing group significantly. The school is situated in a rural setting, on the outskirts of Bramfield - a small village in the northern part of Suffolk. The actual location of the school is between the villages of Bramfield and Walpole. The nearest towns are Halesworth, Beccles, and Southwold. The school premises comprise the main house, which includes the boarding accommodation, and a range of separate buildings used for teaching and recreation. The school is set in 10 acres of grounds used for sports and recreation, and there is also an indoor swimming pool and gymnasium. At the time of this inspection, a total of 38 boys were on the roll. Of these, 30 were boarders, with a further eight attending as day pupils only. Some boarders also go home for overnight stays during the school week. The school is open weekdays Monday to Friday, during term time. All boarders return to their own homes at the weekends.

Summary

The inspection was announced and fulfilled Ofsted's responsibility to continue to inspect services like this on an annual basis. All the key National Minimum Standards were examined in detail, together with a number of others, described in the body of the report. The outcome areas of Every Child Matters were used as a basis for considering how well the service is operating. In every outcome area the school was found to be providing a good service. At the inspection in September 2006, 12 recommendations were made that would improve the service. The providers were asked to respond with an action plan to meet them. This inspection provided an opportunity to test out the success of the provider's plan of action. All but two of the recommendations are met. The providers have yet to appoint an Independent Listener and some parts of the boarding accommodation and communal areas require refurbishment, maintenance or repair. Following on from this inspection, ten areas have been identified that, if action is taken, will further improve the quality of care provided for children and deepen others' understanding of how the school operates. Only National Minimum Standards 7, 11, 18, 29 and 33 were not examined in detail, although elements of all of them will have informed consideration of the others. None of these five National Minimum Standards are felt by Ofsted to be key to the welfare of children. The inspector's conclusion is that Bramfield House School is a good service that has demonstrated clear and tangible evidence of improvement over time and which provides a high level of care to the children.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The following improvements have meant an increased quality of life for children using the school: * Asbestos has been removed from the cellar and other areas. * New showers and toilets

have been installed. They are of a modular design, with doors, to provide privacy. * Additional staff have been employed to increase staffing levels and provide children with increased access to carers at all times of the day and night. * There has been some redecoration, making these areas more pleasant. * New equipment has been purchased such as wide screen television sets for dorm areas. * The Independent Flat has been developed for older pupils, with increased opportunities for them to practise life skills and take more responsibility for things like cooking and cleaning.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 14 and 15 were considered during this inspection. Staff identify the needs of individual pupils, make strenuous efforts to meet them and actively promote their health care. Children do live in a healthy environment. The inspector saw one shortfall relating to the administration of medication and this he discussed with the staff concerned. In relation to smoking tobacco, the school's pragmatic approach, which is intended to reduce consumption, is not explained clearly enough and should be. Catering staff provide meals for pupils that are healthy, nutritious and balanced, such that their dietary needs are well met. There are sufficient choices that include hot and cold dishes, and salads. The staff ensure that vegetables and fruit are available. Some innovative and exciting choices are provided, including 'continental' breakfasts once a fortnight. This gives pupils a different eating experience and widens their culinary horizons. Some institutional practices remain, however, and, while intending to create a calm and controlling atmosphere, these detract from the learning experience. The food handling and food hygiene qualification of the person in charge of catering is out of date.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 were considered during this inspection. Staff share personal details about pupils on a need to know basis and maintain a properly secure approach to confidential information. The staff do have an effective 'grapevine' system for keeping each other informed about changes to an individual pupil's circumstances. Staff keep case files securely under lock and key. These arrangements ensure confidentiality for pupils. Care staff are aware, and follow, protocols relating to the supervision of washing and showering by pupils, which, again, safeguards their privacy and dignity. The school has an effective complaints procedure. Pupils and their parents know what they can do to make known any feelings of unhappiness they may have with the care regime. The new owners of the school responded positively to representations by the Head Teacher and the Head of Care for additional care staff to be employed. Baseline staffing is good at all times of the day and night. The outcome for children is that more staff are available, supervision is tighter and they feel safe. Most of the school staff are child protection trained, which informs carers and safeguards and protects children. The school does not include domestic assistants and other ancillary staff in child protection training, however, and this reduces their awareness and ability to respond to any disclosure. Bullying is not a real issue at the school, being neither institutional, systematic nor sustained. The measures taken by the school reinforce an anti-bullying ethos. Pupils feel protected and can talk to a wide range of staff if they feel bullied by other children. The school has in place a policy and procedures to identify a missing child quickly. Care staff take suitable steps to dissuade, distract and, if necessary, accompany,

a child who decides to leave the site. The staff inform all relevant people if a child, having successfully left the site, refuses to return to the school. In this way the arrangements protect children as far as possible. The school encourages pupils to develop acceptable behaviour through contact with others outside, including members of the public. Care staff administer a points system designed to reward good efforts and achievement, whereby children can see and understand that positive responses are preferable to negative ones. Staff encourage children to perform and behave well. Parents report that what their children learn at Bramfield House has a very positive effect on them when they are at home. The records show there have been many incidents of physical restraint. The inspector was not totally confident that these were in all cases to protect the safety of the child concerned, others and, on occasions, to stop serious damage to property. Staff may be using restraint in some cases simply to preserve good order and discipline around the school. Staff must consider in every incident if the basis on which they are using physical restraint is sound. There is not always a sufficiently clear audit trail showing how incidents of behaviour management are resolved. Records do not always show that pupils' views about incidents of restraint have been sought and written down. The school protects pupils by carrying out risk assessments on individual children and on parts of the building and grounds where the potential for danger exists. The new owners have taken steps to remove hazardous substances from certain areas of the building with the result that children and staff live and work in a safer environment. Staff ensure that children know the drill if the fire alarm sounds. However, the children's understanding is diminished by not practising a fire drill when they are asleep and never using the fire escape. The recruitment checks are sufficiently robust to ensure that the likelihood of unsuitable staff being employed at the school is minimised.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 12, 13 and 22 were considered during this inspection. This is not simply a school where pupils happen to board for some time during the week. The care aspect of the school's function and purpose is given a high profile. The teachers and care staff work collaboratively to support each other and the children. The school's residential provision and activities contribute to the children's educational progress. Staff encourage children to attend the on-site school regularly, and on time, and to remain in class. The children see their teachers and the people who care for them before, at times during school hours and afterwards working together as a team, which reinforces the idea of school as an integral and important part of the working day. The older pupils have work experience to assist in their transition to life after school. Children have opportunities to enjoy numerous trips, outings and activities both in school and in the wider community. Children look forward and work towards involvement in activities off site, which expand their learning and experience and which are a powerful incentive to maintain good behaviour. The school's procedures protect pupils from exposure to unsuitable videos and films. The school's approach is to support children on an individual basis. The children have open-door access to a wide range of staff from the Head Teacher downwards if they have a problem. A previous requirement stated that the school must identify an Independent Listener. The Head of Care has yet to be successful in getting a suitable person in place, or establishing the most effective system by which the person concerned can become a familiar face to children at Bramfield House, such that they will feel confident enough to contact them if they are unhappy about something. The Head of Care is hopeful that an appropriate person will be available shortly.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 2, 9, 17 and 20 were considered during this inspection. Staff encourage and support children and their parents to be involved in the operation of the school and, in particular, in decisions about their lives. Parents report being able to contact the school with questions, having access to staff and being welcomed when they visit. The inspector observed practical steps being taken to establish a regular pattern of attendance with the participation and support of a parent. This enabled a pupil to overcome concerns about coming to school here and, specifically, staying overnight as a boarder. However, some institutional care practices still remain which undermine the pupils' movement into independence, self-caring and responsibility. Staff have good relationships with children based on honesty and respect. Staff deal openly with children and tell them truthfully where they have gone wrong and, importantly, what they must do to improve. Staff demonstrate an ability to balance the needs of individuals and fairness to the group as a whole. Disagreements are dealt with reasonably. Children know and understand the boundaries, which encourages them to feel secure. Children have written plans that accurately describe how they will be cared for when at school. This ensures a consistent approach by all staff. The children know who their key worker is and use him or her to talk to if they are concerned about something. Staff encourage and support pupils to take an active part in their reviews so their wishes are known. Contact with primary carers is not an issue at this school as no pupil stays for more than four nights before returning home. The staff have developed good skills to work with children and their families, including support during holiday periods.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 16, 21, 23, 24 and 25 were considered during this inspection. The children can wear their own clothes and staff assist them in managing their pocket money. When the flat is fully functioning older boys will be able to learn the skills required to take more responsibility for themselves. The provision of walkie-talkie radios ensures that staff and children in isolated or remote parts of the campus remain in touch with colleagues and with senior shift leaders, improving safety. This is a pleasant place to spend childhood school days and recent refurbishment by the new owners has improved the quality of the accommodation quite markedly. There is still some way to go before the dorm areas, some communal facilities and circulation spaces outside are entirely fit for purpose, but the commitment of the owners, and progress towards this in the last year, is clearly evident. Children for the most part sleep in very large dorms, which do give an air of space. However, the accommodation is multi-bedded and sharing bed space does not lend itself to a feeling of privacy and ownership by boarders. The newly-installed, modular showers and toilets has improved privacy for boarders.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

In this outcome area, National Minimum Standards 11, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 were considered during this inspection. There is a written Statement of Purpose. Also, there is a new 'mission statement', displayed in numerous places around the school. These two documents, together with others, provide information about the school's aims, objectives and values. While the

formal documents themselves could present some difficulty to children, and some of their parents, there is a Children's Guide that presents the information in a much more user-friendly form. Increased staffing numbers mean that more carers are available at all times to children and their parents. The staff roster, which provides care staff with some time off during the week, nevertheless ensures continuity of care for children. Staff use time built in to the roster for personal development. Eighty per cent of staff will, by the end of the next academic year, have been able to build on their practical experience by assessment at NVQ Level 3. All of the care staff will have been assessed in this way within two years, making this a very well qualified group knowledgeable enough to deliver care of a high quality. Staff are supported in their role towards safeguarding and promoting children's welfare. Supervision has achieved a higher profile, with emphasis on providing newly employed staff with more individual sessions. A revamped staffing structure will release another senior member of staff for supervision duties, thereby relieving the Head of Care of sole responsibility. The Head Teacher or one of her senior colleagues monitor records in line with the National Minimum Standards, ensuring that staff follow a stable and consistent approach with no idiosyncrasies.

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):

- provide clear, written guidance on the school's approach to managing smoking among pupils NMS 14
- include all staff in child protection training NMS 5
- provide staff with an opportunity to discuss whether the basis on which they use physical control and restraint is always sound NMS 10
- ensure that there is a clear, written audit trail for incidents of behaviour management and that pupils' views are recorded on the incident form NMS 10
- practice evacuating the building occasionally using the fire escapes and when children are in bed NMS 26
- continue efforts to identify, and put in place arrangements for children to have access to, an Independent Listener NMS 22
- update the food handling and food hygiene training of the person in charge of catering NMS 15
- explore ways in which children can take greater responsibility for aspects of their own personal care rather than rely on the more institutional practices associated with this area of care NMS 2

- continue with efforts to improve the quality of the physical environment, to include upgrading the lighting and some outside areas NMS 24
- explore ways in which the very largest, multi-bedded dorm areas could be separated to provide individual bed spaces with greater privacy and ownership NMS 24.

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)

Annex A

- 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.