

Doucecroft School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Jan Davies
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Date of last inspection	15 January 2007

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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

Doucecroft School is an independent special school, owned and operated by the Essex Autistic Society, catering for children and young people affected by autism spectrum disorder. At the time of the inspection the school was able to provide places for up to 34 boarding pupils aged between eight and 19 years. The main school moved to a purpose-built site on the outskirts of Colchester in 2005. The new site has separate teaching, office and boarding areas. Boarding is divided into four units, all pupils have their own bedroom and each unit has a lounge and kitchen area. All of the accommodation and recreational areas are of a high standard. The school's Further Education (FE) department has remained in Kelvedon, about eight miles from the main school. Accommodation here is provided in single rooms. There is a large garden at the rear of the building with vegetable patches and fruit trees. The FE department continues to access nearby community facilities, in addition to social events in nearby towns.

Summary

This was an announced visit that took place over two days in December 2007 and included feedback to the Head and the senior staff team. Due to the nature of the children's special needs, questionnaires were not completed with children, however opportunities were taken to observe children at school, and talk with those who were able to communicate verbally. The young people and staff were helpful and accommodating throughout the inspection, and the inspector would like to thank everybody for contributing to the inspection process. The visit to the school, including the FE site, lasted 15 hours and additional time was taken to read the information requested from the school. This was the statutory key inspection of the school. All the 20 key National Minimum Standards (NMS) were inspected as part of this inspection. Additional standards were also inspected and outcomes are included in this report.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Staff are caring and good at working and communicating with young people. They get effective management support and school staff and boarding staff work well together to make sure the young people's needs are met throughout the day and there is a structural support to how the home operates. The staff have got better at writing notes about things that happen in the boarding houses and communication is good throughout the site. Care plans are more 'user-friendly' and allow for child involvement.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The Head of Care and staff follow the procedures regarding administering medication for young people. The system is well organised and ensures that the correct medication is taken to each individual young person's house and recorded as received. Senior staff administer the medication following training in the administration of medication from a local pharmacist. The Head of Care and senior staff have undertaken additional training with regard to specialist medication. Some young people take controlled medication. Children and young people live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted. Care and placement plans contain information about the young people's health needs and

actions that staff need to take. The young people receive information, advice and guidance with regard to personal health and social care as part of their education timetable. Additional support is also provided from educational physiologists attached to the Autistic Society. The teaching and boarding house staff sit and have lunch with the young people and staff are provided with clear information about the individual catering needs of the young people. The young people are supported in helping themselves and behaviour targets are monitored throughout the day, including mealtimes, as part of the individual expectations of behaviour for each young person.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Records relating to young people are held securely and young people have access to a payphone, which they can use privately. Staff respect young people's privacy and deal appropriately with confidential information. It is recommended that the school ensure appropriate consideration be given to filling the role of Independent Person for young people to access support external to the organisation. There have been no unresolved complaints since the last inspection. The inspector at the last inspection recommended that complaints information should be produced in formats that would give the young people a better understanding of how to complain. This has been done to an effective level. The school has made no child protection referrals since the last inspection. The inspection focuses the need for continuous staff training, with regard to child protection procedures, in order to update staff on any changes to the local authority child protection processes. This training is especially relevant for recently recruited care staff, as established staff have attended child protection awareness training. There have been no recorded incidents of absconding since the last inspection. The care files contain good information about the young people should any absence occur. The staff work with the young people in a caring and constructive manner that supports and enables the young people to develop appropriate ways of behaving and interacting with their peers and adults. The staff are well trained in working with the young people to manage conflict and challenging behaviour. The staff were observed to praise the young people, very much focusing on their positive behaviours and linking into the young people's individual behaviour management plans. The staff interact with the young people and reflect the stated aims and values written within the school's behaviour management policy. They work with the young people in a manner that respects and values the individual needs and actions of the young people in their care. Records of incidents of restraints are appropriately monitored. Children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses. Representations from parents and significant adults for children are very complimentary regarding the staff's way of working with the young people. The Autistic Society has undertaken a health and safety audit and recommendations were followed. The sampled health and safety records are clear, accessible and evidence that required checks and monitoring are undertaken. Fire drills have been held since the last inspection. The Head undertakes a review of the premises risk assessments. Young people are living in a school that provides physical safety and security. The staff recruitment files are well organised. There is good evidence of interview notes, checks regarding qualifications, references and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Recruitment records relating to all recently appointed members of staff were inspected. These records demonstrated that the vetting undertaken by the school met regulatory requirements. CRB checks had been completed before these staff started work in the school. The careful selection of staff and monitoring of visitors to the school prevent children being exposed to the risk of potential abusers. The privacy of children and young people is respected

and staff are consistent and positive with children and young people when promoting acceptable standards of behaviour.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Care staff provide support to the young people in the classroom as well as during residential time and teaching staff do after school duties to support the evening activity programme. The school operates a "24 hour curriculum" for the young people. The staff are very aware of their role in achieving this with and for the young people and are consistent in their responses with the young people, demonstrating a good understanding and knowledge of the individual plans for the young people in their care. The links between the school, boarding houses and parents are very good. Senior staff support meetings ensure a good cross over between the school staff and house staff. Clear communication systems in school ensure good sharing of information for all involved with the young people, including their parents. The daily routines for taking and collecting the young people from the school block take place in a relaxed and welcoming manner and staff help the young people move from one area of the school and routine to another in a calm and supportive way. Comments from a placing social worker included, "Staff liaise with parents to ensure continuity of care". The young people have the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of leisure activities and enjoy themselves. The staff are encouraging and positive in their comments and feedback to the young people. The activities are age-appropriate and the young people are supported in exercising choice as well as following their set programmes, as appropriate. The staff are very aware of the need to follow individual plans, as well as help some young people look at different activities and ways of behaving when in the company of other young people and staff. The school's residential provision supports educational progress and provides opportunities for children and young people to engage in a range of appropriate activities. Children and young people receive individual support, as they need it.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The interaction between staff and young people is warm and positive. Staff support the young people to make choices and to participate in the morning's routines and conversation. The interaction between the staff and the young people is relaxed and respectful and the atmosphere, homely. The young people like their boarding houses and are happy at the school. They are clear that they could talk to the head teacher or staff if they are unhappy. The young people on the FE site are more involved in the running of their house than at the main site. Clearly, this reflects their age and the expectation and need of staff to support them with their leaving school plans. The staff are well trained and aware of the different communication methods used by the young people and in their use of communication passports and folders with the young people. Care files are well organised and contain good information regarding the welfare and health needs and assessments of the young people. Relevant paperwork from placing agencies and schools are kept on files that are securely stored. The Head of Care is aware of the individual needs of the young people and undertakes initial assessments on young people with their families and social workers as part of the admissions process. The care plans contain good information for staff regarding the young people's behaviour management plans and individual targets. The staff follow identified targets for the young people in their care during the inspection. The current care plans incorporate a new format for care planning that supports

the young people in being more involved in producing their plans by using photographs, symbols or other forms of communication relevant to their individual needs and abilities. The young people do not have an allocated key worker, though the staff are aware of the individual needs of the young people in their allocated houses. The school currently uses a number of agency staff. The relationships between staff, children and young people are positive, the plans of care for young people are good and young people are supported in maintaining contact with their families. Children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run with no child assumed to be unable to communicate their views.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school accommodation, play and teaching facilities are of a very high standard and very well maintained. The main school site provides the young people with lots of space and different facilities including a swimming pool, sensory room, activity areas and lots of play space. The young people enjoy all parts of their living and play space. There is relevant specialist equipment and adaptations for the young people and the premises provide a very secure environment. Children and young people are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity. Children and young people live in well designed and pleasant premises providing sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs. The Kelvedon (FE) site is an older building. The bedrooms are personalised more so than at the main site. There are lots of evidence of games, music and age-appropriate décor chosen by the young people. The garden is pleasant and appropriate and well maintained by the young people, with staff support. Those young people applicable are well prepared for the transition into independent living.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school's Statement of Purpose reflects the services, aims and philosophy of the school. The name of the current designated child protection person and full details of complaints procedures consistently documented would ensure more clarity in information produced about boarding for parents and young people. The school has produced a new "welcome pack" for the young people using lots of photographs to better help their understanding. Clarity would be enhanced by all relevant information being updated to reflect the current post holders for significant roles in school. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people accommodated by the school at the time of the inspection. There is evidence of staff providing a good level of supervision and staff to children ratio is high. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of the young people's needs. However, there are still a significant number of agency staff being employed on shifts. New staff had recently been recruited and recruitment is robust so agency use should decrease. The staff proficiently use distraction and other management strategies with the young people and are very aware of the individual behaviours of the young people in their groups. There are allocated tasks including allocated time with the young people depending on their need and activity. They interact with the young people in a firm and pleasant manner when encouraging them to respect each other's space and right to being treated with respect. The staff receive supervision. Not all staff were clear, especially agency staff, about their expectation of frequency of supervision and actual supervision provided and some inconsistency exists across the organisation about the regularity of formal supervision. The staff verified induction training, including agency staff. Staff files are well maintained and

the training programme contains good evidence of induction training and commitment by staff to the training provided by the school. A number of staff say they received good training and are looking forward to doing their National Vocational Qualification Level 3. The Head of Care is aware of the need to work towards having the required proportion of care staff (80%) qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. The Head of Care is appropriately experienced and qualified. Care staff receive a variety of training, including first aid, administration of medicines, understanding autism and Makaton. Systems are in place for the Head of Care or another senior member of staff to monitor the records specified in the National Minimum Standards. Sampled records show evidence of this monitoring taking place. The school's governors regularly undertake unannounced monitoring visits and produce written reports. Children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently and all enjoy the stability of efficiently run school. The school should ensure that the required proportion of permanent staff access and are assisted to achieve qualification to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.

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):

- ensure all relevant information being updated to reflect the current post holders for significant roles in school. NMS 1
- ensure that the required proportion of permanent staff access and are assisted to achieve qualification to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. NMS 29
- ensure appropriate consideration be given to filling the role of Independent Person for young people to access support external to the organisation. NMS 4 (4)

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.