

Ripplevale School

Inspection report for residential special school

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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

Ripplevale school is a special needs day and residential school for boys. The school caters for a maximum of 45 boys in the nine to 16 year age range. It is situated in the village of Ripple, near to the coastal towns of Deal and Dover. Although placed in a rural setting, the pupils are enabled to access all the necessary community resources, including leisure facilities through the school's transport provision. There are currently 13 boarders accommodated within the main building in well furnished and equipped bedrooms and they have access to three communal rooms for indoor leisure purposes. The school is set within its own grounds and has extensive hard court facilities for basketball and other games as well as a large playing field for football, rugby and cricket. The residential provision is managed by the principal, deputy head of care and a team of care staff. The school aims to 'enlarge pupil's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding and thus his awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment'.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection. The visit was conducted to assess the school's commitment to providing good outcomes for children in relation to the National Minimum Standards and best practice. The school demonstrates its commitment to a focus on the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes through its policies, procedures and guidance to staff, care planning and its implementation and the provision of essential resources. The pupils are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle and are supported to do so through excellent catering, providing a sensible healthy eating programme, good personal care and regular physical exercise. The safeguarding practice is very good. There are security features to protect the pupils whilst on the premises, risk assessments for off-site activities and staff are appropriately trained to respond to threats to the pupils' welfare. The staff have a very good understanding of the children's needs, relate well to the children and work in partnership with the parents. The school's decision to create a post of 'family liaison officer' has considerably enhanced the communication between the school and parents, and vice versa, and in so doing has enriched the support the staff are able to provide the pupils. There is good care planning practice and the implementation of the plans is regularly monitored and reviewed. It is a well managed school that supports the staff to attain the knowledge and skills to work effectively with the pupils and it continues to provide a high quality of care and social education for the young people.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Each pupil has a health plan, compiled by their link worker that contains all the relevant information required, such as information on allergies and health needs, to guide the staff in supporting the young person with their physical and mental health development. Many facets of the school's provision contribute to the pupils' healthy development. These include effective links with the child's parent through the link worker and the family liaison worker and a positive

approach to physical activity through the school's physical education, staff and links with a professional football club. There is effective health screening and the key worker keeps a brief record of the routine medical check outcomes. Whilst there is a very good link with the local medical practice the school has experienced some difficulty registering pupils with a dental practice. This has now been resolved and the pupils will be registered at a local dentistry from June 2008. The children receive daily support with their personal care and are encouraged to participate in learning new skills and managing their basic health. The personal, health and social education curriculum content supplements the practical contribution made in the residential units. It includes input on smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse and the potential dangers to health. The school has established positive links with external health agencies, such as child and adolescent mental health services. Where services such as CAHMS, for instance, have been slow in responding to referrals, the school has engaged a privately funded resource in the child's best interests. The staff, who have recently benefited from cognitive therapy training through this resource, stated that it has provided them with additional knowledge and confidence in helping the pupils with their emotional development and social behaviour. The catering staff work closely with residential staff to implement a healthy eating programme through the provision of high quality meals and individually prepared food to suit the children's dietary requirements. A designated senior member of staff controls the receipt of medication and disposal of unused medicines to the local pharmacy. Good medication administration, managed by properly trained team leaders and monitored by senior staff, reduces the risk of unsafe practice with children. The staff receive good guidance on health matters, through the school's policies, particularly the intimate care policy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The pupils are satisfied that staff respect their privacy by engaging in good practice and acknowledging that they sometimes desire to be alone. The staff have a good awareness of each individual young person's safeguarding requirements and make allowances for more discreet supervision where appropriate. Good intimate care guidance informs safe practice and the staff ensure that the children's dignity is maintained at all times. Whilst some of the bedrooms can be shared, the school is currently able to offer each pupil their own bedroom space. There is excellent guidance in place for the staff which gives prominence to the child's right to privacy whilst emphasising the importance of alertness to safeguarding issues. The school's complaints' policies and procedures have recently been reviewed and amended. The process for dealing with complaints is detailed step by step for both pupils and parents. There were no complaints registered in the past year and the pupils indicated that they have such a good relationship with the staff that they have no need to formally complain. There is excellent safeguarding practice supported by an up to date policy and regular training. The designated person responsible for child protection recently completed a refresher course specific to her role and communicated new information to staff. The same member of staff has responsibility for, as family liaison officer, maintaining regular contact with all the parents/carers. This is a particularly strong feature of the school's provision for pupils and for parents in providing telephone and face to face advice as well as, most importantly, facilitating early intervention practice through the link worker and other staff for the benefit of the pupil. There is a strong anti-bullying culture within the school aimed at managing incidents positively to support victims and the perpetrators. Termly anti-bullying questionnaires, completed by pupils, provide the school with information for evaluation of their practice. Anti-bullying features as a standing item on the school council agenda. There is a low incidence of bullying and the pupils confirm

that where it occurs, swift action is taken by the school. Parents are involved in the process of managing issues at an early stage and pupils stated that the school's firm approach has had a dramatic impact on the reduction of incidents over the past few years. Pupils indicate that they feel safe within the school and in the company of staff. There is some unauthorised absence but it is limited to pupils going absent within the school grounds or the immediate vicinity of the school. Procedures to respond to missing pupils are rigorously applied and a police spokesperson confirmed that the school has established good links with the local station and takes all reasonable steps to maintain the pupils' safety. There are clear policies on behaviour management which are designed to provide overarching guidance focusing on non-punitive measures. The staff apply the principles of the behaviour management approach with skill and confidence and implement the strategies sensitively and purposefully. Any physical intervention is carefully recorded and such incidents are monitored through a database so as to identify the reason for the behaviour and the effect of the management strategies. This behaviour monitoring through the EPAR system provides crucial information on behaviour patterns in order to assist the staff in identifying key issues for individual pupils. There is good health and safety practice, with fire safety measures implemented within the required timescales. Risk assessments are routinely conducted, kept under constant review and amended as circumstances dictate. The school is in a good location and not subject to unauthorised intrusion when the boarders are in residence, however, the staff are mindful of the possible risk to the children and are reminded by senior management to be vigilant at all times. The school is successful in its efforts to maintain positive links with the immediate community and the children benefit from participating in local leisure activities. Much importance is placed upon the selection and appointment of staff with the necessary qualities and experience to care for vulnerable children. There is a low turnover of staff each year. The recruitment process has been strengthened and efforts are continually made to improve it further in the interests of the children's safety and well being.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The organisation of the care staff rota supports the principle of good interdisciplinary practice and cooperation. The pupils respond to, and benefit from, the support given by the care staff to the education staff within the classroom setting and other curriculum activities such as physical education. The two staff teams engage in some training together, which helps them to engage a consistent approach. Each day is covered by two care staff teams, one focused upon the early part of the day, including the school day, and the other upon the latter part of the day and evening. An important feature of the daily rota is the period from 14:00 until 16:30 when both teams work together enabling link workers to engage pupils in essential one to one sessions related to their care plan objectives. Each child has a link worker and back up link worker responsible for coordinating the implementation of the care plan and ensuring that the child's needs are continually assessed and met. The staff have forged positive, meaningful relationships with the children and use their extensive skills to communicate with them and understand their needs. The staff engage the pupils in life skills learning activities, mostly in one to one sessions, and keep a record of their achievements, however, the level of detail related to what the pupil did to merit the achievement, is limited. The life skills programme is of particular benefit to pupils preparing for adulthood and many of the pupils commented on the life skills opportunities. The school has arranged accredited first aid and food handling training for the senior pupils.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The pupils have a range of opportunities to express their opinions and engage in consultation. This can be done informally throughout the day and formally through the school council and daily post school meeting. The minutes of these formal meetings indicate that the senior staff consider seriously the requests from pupils and the proposals they make regarding their life in the school. Each item discussed at the previous meeting is noted as 'achieved' or 'not achieved' and supported by a reasoned response. The pupils confirm that the staff listen to their contributions and respond in a reasonable fashion. The school also surveys the pupils on an annual basis with questions related to bullying, behaviour, activities and how they feel they are treated. Parents are also similarly surveyed with questions related to their child's personal development, behaviour and their views on how their child is being supported with specific reference to the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes. The strong links established by the school with parents, through the efforts of the family liaison officer and the link workers, supports the school to achieve positive outcomes for the young people. The pupils are encouraged to maintain weekly contact with their parents and can do so in private. All pupils return home each weekend and school holiday. Following admission to the school, each pupil has a six week assessment so as to enable staff, through observation and evaluation of performance, to identify the pupil's strengths and weaknesses. This, combined with the Statement of Educational Needs, annual review details and information from parents or their previous placement, is used to form the basis of the care plan. The individual care plans are well written and reflect the content of the SEN and other assessment information. They are discussed with the pupil following compilation and amended, if appropriate and in the child's best interests. They are updated regularly in acknowledgement of the young person's achievements or necessity to change the method of intervention. The young people benefit from the clear planning process and the one to one time they spend with their link worker in working on identified targets.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school's location provides the pupils with a rural living experience but also enables them to access various facilities in local centres out of school time. The pupils indicate that they like the facilities that the school offers and feel safe on the premises. There are positive links with the local community and pupils regularly attend the local youth club. The school has worked hard to improve relationships with neighbours, with much success. The pupils like their bedroom accommodation and enjoy the comfort of the communal areas and the leisure opportunities provided. The accommodation is well maintained, has benefited from some refurbishment and is a suitable living environment for the young people. The young people are consulted on improvements and encouraged to play a positive part in keeping the house clean and personalising their rooms. There are good quality furnishings throughout and the main lounge has recently been re-carpeted, re-decorated and provided with more comfortable seating.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's statement of purpose, although brief in its composition, provides all interested parties with the relevant information relating to the care and education of the children. Other documentation focuses, appropriately, on the range of need presented by the children and the

philosophy of care implemented in practice. All services incorporated in the statement are effectively met and senior management are continually devising ways of improving and developing practice, such as the database, which monitors behaviour management. There are sufficient staff in each residential unit, by day and by night, with children's needs dictating the appropriate level of staff available and their function. Where necessary, for instance, where there is a change in a child's circumstances or an increased level of risk, the staffing ratio is increased accordingly. There are good shift patterns, as mentioned previously, and the team makes efficient use of their time, particularly during the afternoon when they engage the pupils in life skills learning activities. There are a number of handover periods ensuring that the day and night staff are fully informed, whilst creating teamwork opportunities between care and education staff. The school is effectively organised and the managers at each level display good leadership contributing to teamwork and a focus on maintaining and improving the standard of care given to the pupils. The staff team is committed to supporting pupils in their efforts to manage their own behaviour and strive to attain the necessary skills to do so. Senior management strive to enhance staff knowledge in child development with a view to achieving this, as evidenced by staff through their acknowledgement of the usefulness of the current training on 'cognitive therapy'. Some staff have not yet completed National Vocational Qualification training although most are currently participating. There is regular internal monitoring by the Principal and the deputy head of care with a particular focus on care plans and the implementation of the life skills programme. The pupils benefit from support with their behaviour, identified through a quarterly review of serious incidents conducted as part of the monitoring process.

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 the complainant with an opportunity to register his views, on the complaint format, on how the complaint was handled (NMS 4)
- document more written evidence of pupil's individual achievements to support the record of their life skills learning (NMS 22)
- complete the 'action' section of the 1:1 report in order to stipulate how identified issues within the session will be addressed (NMS 17)
- ensure that all the care staff receive and complete the appropriate level of National Vocational Qualification training (NMS 31).

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.