

Ramsden Hall School and The Heath Site,
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

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

Ramsden Hall School is currently on two sites, one in Billericay and one in Colchester. They are about 31 miles apart. There is a single governing body and one Head Teacher for both sites, which are owned and managed by Essex County Council. The school offers day provision and residential accommodation on both sites from Monday to lunchtime on Friday during term time to boys who have a Statement of Educational Need (SEN) who may also have emotional and behavioural difficulties that significantly affect their schooling. The school aims to reintegrate pupils into their local communities and works closely with pupils' main carers to achieve this. Only rarely will boarding be thought appropriate for pupils younger than Year 7 and, whenever possible, it is gradually reduced as pupils move into their final years at the school. Ramsden Hall School at Billericay is a converted Victorian mansion standing in 14 acres. It provides residential, teaching and office accommodation. Boarding pupils are accommodated in four separate year groups within this building. Bedroom accommodation remains multi-occupancy and each year group has a lounge area. A sports hall, an outdoor swimming pool, additional classrooms and other recreational facilities are located in the grounds. Some staff live on site in separate accommodation. The school's extensive grounds are well used for outdoor pursuits. The school has a minibus and uses this for outings and activities off-site and to access community leisure facilities. At the time of the inspection a building programme had just started to provide up to date teaching and studying facilities with the current sports hall as a hub. When building work is complete, the classrooms will move out of the main house, freeing up accommodation which will be refurbished and adapted to provide single bedrooms and improved facilities for boarders. Ramsden Hall School on the Heath site at Colchester is situated in very different surroundings, being in the suburbs of the town within a large residential estate. It was purpose-built in the 1960's. Classrooms are located in a single storey building. The adjoining residential accommodation, on two floors, is divided into a number of units, known as flats, where boarders have single bedrooms each with a wash hand basin. Recent alterations to the layout have provided a number of small, quiet sitting areas shared between each pair of flats, which has improved the homeliness of the accommodation. The school has a football pitch, a basketball court and an indoor gymnasium.

Summary

This inspection was announced and intended to consider what progress had been made on each site to meet the recommendations made following the last annual inspection in July 2006. It also provided an opportunity to examine the school's operation against all of the key National Minimum Standards. The inspector also considered a number of other National Minimum Standards. The outcomes for children in all but one of the Every Child Matters areas were good. Only in economic well-being was the outcome just satisfactory. This relates in the main to physical characteristics. On one site this is the result of institutional and structural problems and on the other site to some lack of privacy owing to the layout of sleeping and washing arrangements. Real efforts have been made to address some of the previous shortfalls, however, including a programme of redecoration and change on one site and the introduction of individual shower cubicles on the other. The school's situation, on separate sites over 30 miles apart, makes true integration at every level difficult, but senior staff are working hard to establish corporate policies and procedures and to encourage and establish a consistency of approach across the two sites.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection, the school was asked to ensure that a written record is made of the action taken and the outcome of any complaint. The National Minimum Standard is now met with complaints and the outcome of any investigation always being recorded. Also the school were asked to include in the complaints procedure all of the elements of NMS 4. The complaints procedure now complies with the National Minimum Standard. It was also asked to ensure that a written record is made of the decision-making process in relation to any potential child protection issue. The National Minimum Standard is now met with the Heads of Care being deputy Designated Persons. A recommendation was made that the school ensures that all instances involving the use of physical intervention are recorded and that records contain sufficient detail to evidence compliance with National Minimum Standards and the school's own policy on the use of physical intervention. The National Minimum Standard is now met with all staff having refreshed their 'Team Teach' training, based on de-escalation. The recommendation was also made that the school continues with plans to implement more detailed, individualised guidance on behaviour support and physical intervention into pupils' placement plans. The National Minimum Standard is now met with every boarder having a Personal Handling Plan (PHP) in which they are involved. Also, the school were asked to develop the behaviour management and physical intervention policies to cover the purpose and use of the 'Base'. This National Minimum Standard is not met in full for, despite the school developing some guidance, there remains some confusion in some staff minds on one site about the distinction between the 'Quiet Room' and the 'Base' and how they are used. They were asked to consider how the ambience of the 'Base' can be improved. The National Minimum Standard is now met as the relevant room on each site has been decorated by children in colours and designs of their choice. The National Minimum Standard relating to the development of care plans to provide clear direction for staff is now met. Every child now has a care plan that provides information for staff on what needs have been identified and how staff will meet them. The school was asked to make the boarding environment more homely and ensure that pupils can undertake personal care in privacy. Despite efforts to improve the privacy of washing facilities and the ambience of boarding houses on one site by developing quiet sitting areas between each pair of 'flats', the National Minimum Standard is not met in full. Institutional features remain that detract from the homeliness of the provision. On the other site, the provision of multi-occupancy dormitory accommodation continues until such time as a programme of new building frees up accommodation so that single bedrooms can be introduced and bathing, showering and toilet facilities can be made more private. The school was asked to ensure that the frequency, duration and content of one-to-one supervision for staff meet the requirements of National Minimum Standards. This has now been done and care staff are now supervised every half term. New members of staff have supervision more frequently. Linked to this, the school was also asked to ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised on an annual basis. Most appraisals are now complete so the National Minimum Standard is met. They were also asked to continue to work towards achieving the required level of care staff qualified to NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. The National Minimum Standard is not yet met in full as the proportion of care staff with National Vocational Qualification at level 3 or currently enrolled, and completing the course, is slightly less than 50%.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Care staff are sufficiently aware of each child's physical, emotional and health needs and ensure that they are met in a suitable way. Care staff provide support in ways that preserve the privacy and dignity of the children. They are trained in first aid so that minor accidents can be dealt with swiftly and knowledgeably. Staff deal with personal hygiene issues sensitively to protect children from potential embarrassment. Primary carers retain the responsibility for ensuring that their children have regular dental, hearing and visual checks. However, the school assists in this whenever necessary, ensuring that children are health screened by the nursing service and a visiting doctor. The school's procedures for receiving, storing, administering and recording medication are sound, so children are essentially protected from the risks associated with this important aspect of their care. The school's catering staff provide children with balanced, nutritious and appetising meals that meet their dietary needs in a healthy way and which are acceptable to them. The work that care staff have done to support and encourage children to try food items that may be otherwise unfamiliar to them has been effective. Few children have opted out of eating what is on offer. Mealtimes, while structured and ordered affairs, are also enjoyable and reasonably relaxed occasions, providing children with a pleasant, social experience.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school keeps children's main records safe and secure in the administration offices so their confidentiality is protected. Because the school provides children with a phone card, pre-populated with numbers of their choice, they can make calls in private from the telephone booths to the people they want to contact. They can also contact helplines if they wish, as the numbers are displayed prominently for them to see. While care staff assist some children by rostering in what order the facilities are used, they do not intrude when children are showering or bathing, so they can undertake these activities in private. The school has a well-developed complaints procedure, which children understand how to access. Complaint forms are easily available to help them with this. The school has provided child protection training for its staff so they understand how to deal with disclosures from children without compromising further investigation by the authorities. In this way the welfare of children is protected and safeguarded. There is some bullying in the school, but staff confront every instance when they see it so that children learn that it is not acceptable. Staff also attempt to introduce an anti-bullying culture in which bullies are not tolerated and it is 'OK to tell'. They do this by talking to children, in some cases by using a game designed for the purpose and through the secret bullying ballot in which children identify others who they feel are being nasty to them. Some children go missing on occasions, but the school's policies and procedures protect them. Staff are aware of which children might go missing and what to do if this happens. Care staff are supportive of children who abscond or fail to return to school after a break at home and deal sensitively with these situations so they are not prolonged unnecessarily. All care staff are trained in the 'Team Teach' programme of behaviour management, which has a considerable and significant element of de-escalation and distraction, so children are not physically restrained unless it is necessary to do so for their own, or other's, protection. Staff maintain suitable records which describe what happened prior to, during and after an incident of restraint so it can be monitored by senior staff. This has the effect of identifying, if they exist, any trends or patterns. Both sites use a withdrawal facility, variously described in the school's documentation, but at one site some confusion remains in staff minds about exactly what this is and how it is used. There

is no evidence to suggest that this confusion has led to children's safety being put at risk; indeed it is to children's benefit that they are able to have 'time out' when they want. The written guidance relating to them is not sufficiently clear so that staff understand how the 'Quiet Room' is used. Children on both sites know about, and understand, the importance of fire safety arrangements. They practice fire drills so that in an emergency they will be able to evacuate the buildings quickly. The buildings have been inspected by the appropriate fire safety authorities; in fact, fire fighters have visited one of them to familiarise themselves with the layout should they be needed in future. The school has assessments of areas of the buildings and grounds that might potentially be hazardous and has taken steps to minimise risks to children and staff. The school has sufficiently robust arrangements for visitors to both sites, and recruitment procedures, including checks on applicants, to ensure that children are protected from exposure to potential abusers. However, not in every case have full employment histories been provided so that the school can identify, and discuss, any gaps. The school is aware that it is good practice to retain photo ID on all staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff who provide care for boarders outside the classroom work together with their teaching colleagues to encourage children to develop personally, socially and educationally. While not themselves being required to have a presence in the classroom, care staff provide active support and encouragement for children to attend, remain and achieve in school. Older children have a chance to do work experience that provides an insight into what it is like to be employed. The children have ample opportunities to engage in activities both on and off the sites which allow them to develop sporting and other interests, keep fit and fill their leisure time with enjoyable recreation. Care staff know what individual needs children have and make good efforts to meet them. On the Ramsden Hall site, in particular, nurturing sessions provide the chance for children to talk about their life experiences on a one to one basis, which leads, in some cases, to further referral to specialist health care services.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are encouraged and supported by staff to be involved in decisions about their own, and the group's, lives. They do have a say, where possible, in how the school is run. This extends to personal things such as food, clothes and activities, but also includes decisions about their bedroom and general décor, which gives children a sense of 'ownership' and belonging. Care staff have considerable direct contact with parents and other people significant in children's lives so that consistent and appropriate care can be provided in line, whenever possible, with children's wishes. Boarders have sound relationships with care staff based on honesty, mutual respect and much evident warmth. As their care is shared between primary carers and the school, this is important, as it bears upon the development of the trust they have in the adults looking after them. While the staff use quite a few 'endearments' and pet names to children there is no evidence that this encourages them to take advantage of care staff, who maintain professional boundaries. Children move into boarding either from day provision at the school or directly from another setting. Staff manage these arrangements sensitively and in a planned way, so the experience for children is as comfortable as possible. In only the rarest cases will a child board before Year 7. And, it is the school's policy that the oldest children will not board so that they can begin the process of living full-time with their primary carers back in their

local communities. Children do not stay overnight at the school unless their needs have been assessed and a decision taken that they can derive benefit from the boarding experience. The school maintains written plans that specify how the individual needs of children will be met so their care will be appropriate. Staff are aware of placement plans and in some cases draw up 'pen pictures' to assist them in the day-to-day arrangements. Children have a keyworker within the school to provide them with particular advice, support and guidance. Children can attend and contribute to reviews of their care so they are aware of what is being planned for, and with, them. The school positively encourages children to maintain contact with family and friends, where no restrictions on these exist. In reality, contact is not an issue at the school as no child spends more than four nights a week away from his primary carers. The school moves quickly to support children who are unhappy or who have concerns about being away from home by making, where necessary, alternative arrangements, including flexible boarding. The staff have direct contact with parents to discuss any particular welfare concerns relating to their child.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Both sites are described by staff as 'cashless' schools. However, children do have access to material rewards and can 'spend' pocket money. They bring their own personal clothing to school, which they store in their rooms, and can wear it once the classroom day has finished so can develop their own style and individuality. The staff assist some children by advising them on their personal hygiene so they can live alongside their peers in comfort. Older children do placements that gives them a window on to the world of work. They are unlikely to be boarders, however, as the school's policy is for the oldest children to be in their local community and living full-time with their primary carers. The younger children who do board are given some life skills teaching such as simple cookery, keeping their bedrooms tidy and bringing down their laundry. They have less opportunities to develop other skills such as washing and ironing their own clothes, securing benefits, health care and support or shopping. So younger children have to wait until they are older and further up the school to receive help in developing the knowledge and skills needed for any likely future living arrangements. The boarding accommodation on neither site is entirely suitable in that one, while reasonably modern (1960's design) has institutional characteristics that detract from its homeliness and the other (of country-house proportions) has multi-occupancy bedrooms that do not allow sufficient privacy for children. However, much work has been done on one site to introduce shared lounge and sitting areas and to improve the decoration so that the facilities are more pleasant for children than previously. On the other site there is a construction programme to provide up to the minute school buildings and planned refurbishment that will, in time, free up additional space in the main house so that children will have single bedrooms and upgraded bathroom/showers and toilets. This will go a long way to improving boarding facilities that will safeguard privacy and dignity. Two lounges for younger boarders on one site are provided with soft lighting that contributes to a calming ambience for children before they go to bed. On the other site, improvements have led to the development and furnishing of a number of quiet sitting areas where children can be on their own to read, listen to music or play games if they want. These developments have improved the homeliness of the provision and make for a much more pleasant residential experience for children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has written documents that give stakeholders the required information about what it is like for children to live here for part of the week, who will look after them and what services they can expect. The written material does not establish any conflicts between the school function and the boarding provision, which allows a continuum of care for children staying here overnight. The school keeps secure case files on each child that have the required information, reflecting their individual needs, wishes, efforts, achievements and performance. Clear and accurate records are also held on the staff and children that contain information about events affecting the school and children resident here. Care staff understand the needs of individual children and they meet them consistently. When everybody is available for duty, staffing levels are adequate, with care staff being available when children go to bed and when they get up, thereby providing continuity of care. At one site, however, there are difficulties for management in providing a suitable gender balance among care staff, although this is mitigated by male colleagues who do 'extraneous duties'. Boarders know who is on duty at all times. Carers are available during the night should children feel ill or need comfort. Care staff are themselves supported and supervised at the required intervals so safeguarding and promoting children's welfare. Senior staff are available on-call and will provide back-up on shift if needed. There are clear lines of accountability from the governors to the Head, through to the Head of Care Standards and Heads of Care on each site, so individuals are aware of their responsibilities. Staff rosters allow care staff to meet as a group on each site on a weekly basis to discuss individual children and to inform each other about changes to routines and to care arrangements. Care staff have access to training courses and the school is taking steps to ensure that as many staff as possible have been assessed at National Vocational Qualification Level 3, are currently on this course or due to enrol shortly. This underpins their practical experience with theoretical input and benefits children in their care. Care staff rotas allow for daily handovers so staff coming on shift are brought up to speed with the events of the day or night. There is also time for staff to complete records so colleagues can read what has happened and senior staff can monitor the operation of the boarding establishment. The fact that there is one governing body, one Head and one Head of Care Standards for both sites means that there is a consistency of approach that assists the stable running of the school. However, this is not an easy arrangement with the two sites being over 30 miles apart. While senior staff from each site meet together quite regularly, this is not something that the two care staff groups are able to do nearly as often so a feeling of 'oneness' is difficult for them.

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 that all staff who have direct contact with children show an understanding of the school's policies on measures of control, discipline and physical restraint, in particular, how and in what way 'Quiet Rooms' are used (NMS 10.19)

- ensure that applicants for posts at the school provide a full employment history so that any gaps can be identified and a satisfactory explanation for them sought (NMS 27.2)
- ensure that the daily life of the school provides opportunities for all boarders for the development of knowledge and skills needed by children for their likely future living arrangements (NMS 21.2)
- continue efforts to provide residential accommodation and facilities for boarders which creates a pleasant and as far as possible, a homely environment (NMS 24.2).

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.