

Ashley School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC024573
Inspection date	14 October 2008
Inspector	Dorrit Andrews
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	The Ashley School Ashley Downs LOWESTOFT Suffolk NR32 4EU
Telephone number	01502 565 439
Email	admin@ashley.suffolk.sch.uk
Registered person	Suffolk County Council
Head of care	Lorraine Dupen (Head Teacher)
Head / Principal	n/a
Date of last inspection	22 November 2007

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

The Ashley School is owned and managed by Suffolk County Council and is situated in a residential area on the northern edge of the town of Lowestoft. The school provides day and boarding facilities for children with moderate learning difficulties between the ages of seven and 16 years. Some pupils also have emotional and behavioural needs.

The school has 125 planned places, with 127 pupils on roll, of which 29 are boarding for a maximum of four nights from Monday to Thursday. Boarding accommodation is provided in two houses, one for girls and younger boys and the other for older boys.

Opportunities are also made available for up to 12 pupils to take advantage of the school's residential 'link service' after school to develop their social skills and participate in a range of activities. This provision is linked to the boarding houses and can be used as an introduction to boarding.

The school has undergone some additional building work recently that has seen the provision of a new sports hall, drama hall, outside play area and more classrooms. There is a covered, heated swimming pool. Other facilities include a dining hall and workshop, and greenhouse areas for building and horticultural activities.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection and all key standards were inspected. The majority of boarders present participated in the inspection. A small number of parents were also spoken to.

The quality of boarding at The Ashley School is outstanding in all outcome areas with the exception of 'economic wellbeing' which is judged as good. There is strong leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement to enhance the outcomes for pupils across the school.

Children are provided with a high level of individualised care and outstanding pastoral support. Their views are actively sought and are listened to. Positive behaviour is promoted as is citizenship and kindness to one another. Children's health needs are responded to well and there are very good working partnerships with other professionals.

Staff provide children with a range of challenging activities and opportunities which equip them with new skills and a sense of achievement. Good management systems are in place in relation to staffing and staff support.

Records and documentation are well maintained overall. However, the contact details of Ofsted need updating for residential pupils. In addition, the school's child protection policy refers to staff responsibilities rather than duties regarding the reporting of actual or suspected child abuse. Recommendations have been raised accordingly.

The recommendations raised at the last inspection have been addressed.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection asked the school to seek expert advice regarding the administration of medication, to ensure that individual children's detailed records are appropriately kept and to ensure that restraint records contain all the necessary information. The school was also asked to ensure that recruitment checks include checking all gaps in an applicant's employment history and that references from professional referees are sought. Each of these matters has been attended to. The actions taken in response to these recommendations support the safeguarding of children's welfare.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical and emotional health care of boarders is promoted. Children receive advice, guidance and support on a wide range of health and personal care issues through the teaching environment of the school. Additional support is available from care staff and visiting health professionals. Parents particularly appreciate the staying safe work undertaken with their children and the sensitive approach to maintaining good levels of personal hygiene.

The school holds a medical history of each pupil and parental consent to medical treatment is obtained. First aid training is provided to all groups of staff and regular updates are accessed. Qualified first aid staff are always available on duty. Staff follow clear procedures for the management and administration of medication both on and off site and during residential trips away. Appropriate records are maintained and medication is securely stored. Referrals to specialist services are accessed through the school's Community Paediatrician who holds regular clinics at the school for children and families. Children return home when unwell and parents report good communication from the school regarding health and medical matters.

The school provides boarders with a balanced and healthy diet. Special dietary needs are catered for and systems are in place to monitor individual eating patterns. Drinking water is readily available throughout the school day and children have access to snacks, fresh fruit and drinks in the boarding houses. Meal times are well organised with clear routines to promote the development of social skills. Practical assistance is given sensitively and older children support younger years in clearing away plates and cutlery. Themed days are a regular feature and are used to celebrate other cultures and special events. Children are particularly proud to have recently sampled different foods from India. Local community groups such as the fire brigade and Royal National Lifeboat Institute have joined the school for lunch as a means of raising safety awareness and building community relations.

Menu suggestions from children are communicated direct to the Catering Manager or through the School Council and members of staff. Displays around the school and in boarding areas promote children's health and well-being and celebrate involvement in physical activities, cookery and interests. There are no outstanding recommendations from the environmental health service and all catering staff receive appropriate training for their role.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children's privacy is respected and information about them is handled sensitively. Staff receive guidance and training regarding personal care and are sensitive to gender issues when dealing

with children of the opposite sex. Children are able to meet privately with parents and can make and receive telephone calls without permission.

The school's complaints procedure is provided to parents and pupils. However, the contact details of Ofsted need updating for residential pupils. No complaints have been received since the last inspection and no parent or pupil has contacted Ofsted regarding any concerns. Parents feel able to raise matters and feel they are listened to. Pupils identify a range of adults whom they can approach with their worries and are confident that staff will help them.

Policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils, and staff are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities. However, documentation refers to the "responsibility" of staff rather than the "duty" of staff to report actual or suspected abuse. All staff receive child protection training upon joining the school and regular updates thereafter. 'Staying safe' work is undertaken across the age groups in the boarding houses as well as in school and covers a wide range of topics. Strong links are maintained with other agencies concerned with child protection.

Bullying and unkindness between pupils is not tolerated and is not identified as a problem at the school. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of children and there is a whole school approach to the promotion of citizenship and kindness. Individual risk assessments identify potential conflicts which are linked to handling strategies and the setting of targets. Children speak positively of the school's anti-bullying campaigns in understanding the impact of bullying and of the introduction of friendship awards nominated through the school council.

Written guidance is in place regarding the action to take if a child goes missing. There has been no recorded incidents since the last inspection. Any previous history of such behaviour is risk assessed upon admission to the school.

Details of the school's behaviour and discipline policy are provided to staff, pupils and parents. A system of rewards is also in place. Staff receive regular behaviour management training, including the use of physical intervention. Acceptable behaviour is encouraged and is based on establishing positive relationships with children. Interactions between staff and children were seen to be genuinely caring and supportive. Appropriate records of sanctions and the use of physical intervention are maintained and monitored.

Health and safety matters are taken seriously by the school. Risk assessments, policies and procedures are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils. Records show that regular safety and servicing checks are undertaken to fire, electrical, gas and water installations. Regular fire drills take place across the school community and pupils are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Health and safety policies and risk assessments are regularly reviewed and pupils are made aware of safety matters affecting them.

A record of visitors is maintained and proof of ID is requested where appropriate. Suitable procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff. Small groups of pupils are involved in the school's recruitment process by conducting tours of the school and talking to candidates.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress. Care staff are familiar with the educational needs and progress of the children in their care and contribute to children's annual reviews. The daily life of the Houses provide a range of opportunities for children, appropriate to their age, to develop knowledge and life skills within an emotionally supportive environment. The activities' programme develops children's social skills, increases their confidence and self-esteem as well as providing opportunities to keep active and to relax. Children report feeling a great sense of achievement in their involvement with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, participation in residential camps and learning to look after themselves. Parental comments also endorse the positive outcomes of boarding for their children.

Pastoral care is a strength of the school and children receive individual support in line with their needs. A range of services is available to support children and families at times of difficulty and personal stress. These include the school's own nurture group and Pupil and Family Support Team based at the school. Good inter-agency links with health and social care professionals also contribute to programmes of support. Children report that they can speak with a member of staff of their choosing and identify a wide range of adults to whom they would go with any worries.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to contribute ideas to the running of the Houses and school. Formal and informal opportunities are available. These include talking to staff, review meetings, House Meetings and the School Council. Staff utilise different methods of communication to engage with children and to assist them in making everyday choices. Parents are also consulted and state that their opinions are sought

Admission and leaving processes are planned and are handled sensitively. The school's provision of 'link' activities gradually introduce children to being away from home and also provide families with additional support. Transition Plans are regularly reviewed and involve leaving care services where appropriate.

Children's needs are assessed and written plans outline how these are to be met on a day-to-day basis. The plans are regularly evaluated and updated with individual children and can contain targets instigated by the child, such as developing a particular life skill.

Children are supported to maintain suitable contact with family and friends and are able to telephone home through appropriate arrangements. Regular contact is maintained with parents with regard to positive progress as well as concerns. Parents and family members are also welcome to visit.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are provided with a good standard of accommodation which is well maintained and decorated. Staff work hard to provide children with a welcoming environment and encourage the photographic display of children's celebrations and achievements. No children with physical disabilities are accommodated at the school.

The school endeavours to maximise the space available and carefully considers the use of existing buildings in how best to serve the needs of children. The public use of school facilities does not have an adverse effect on the care of children at the school. Usage by local schools and community groups is formally managed and monitored by the school.

Very positive links with the local community are promoted and maintained. A wide range of local amenities are regularly accessed and there are strong links with a number of local schools.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of its residential provision for pupils. There is good leadership and a commitment to continuing to improve the school's facilities to enhance the outcomes for children. Details of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils are made available to parents, children and other appropriate parties. Documentation is regularly reviewed. The name(s) of the designated member of staff for child protection and the names and relevant qualifications of care staff are being updated following recent changes.

Staffing levels outside teaching time are sufficient for the number of boarders, the different age groups and the activities they are involved in. Staff report that staffing levels are increased or targeted where appropriate to meet pupils' needs. Children are made aware of who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times. They also have knowledge of where staff sleep at night and feel able to call upon staff if necessary.

A House duty rota is followed in practice and suitable arrangements are in place for duty cover in times of staff sickness and absence. Staff are able to call for assistance and back up support is provided by the duty Senior on site at night. Residential tasks are undertaken by male and female members of the team thus promoting positive role modelling.

Staff are appropriately supported and guided to enable them to safeguard and promote children's welfare. A system of staff supervision and appraisal is in place for staff and external support is provided to the Head Teacher. Written guidance is provided to all staff and is kept up-to-date. Job descriptions are in place and staff know who they are accountable to.

The Head Teacher has taken on the interim role of Head of Care as the post is vacant. Despite some recent staff movement, the team continues to maintain a consistent and stable environment for children. Good training opportunities are made available to staff, including child protection, first aid, National Vocational Qualifications and wider pastoral matters.

Systems are in place for the monitoring of boarders' welfare, both internally and by the local authority.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- update the contact details for Ofsted for residential pupils (NMS 4.7)
- ensure child protection documentation includes the duty of staff to report actual or suspected abuse (NMS 5.4)