

North Hill House

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Sarah Talbott
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Date of last inspection	8 October 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

North Hill House is a purpose built, specialist residential and day school for up to 56 boys aged seven to 18 years of age who have an autistic spectrum or associated disorder. The school currently has 22 day pupils and 34 boarders. All of the pupils are placed by Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) following a statement of special educational need, or by local authorities who identify them as 'Looked After Children' (LAC). The school is part of the Priory Group which is a national agency. The activities of the school are overseen by a Board of Governors. Residential accommodation comprises four small group living units known as 'floors'. The school also has two off-site houses providing residential accommodation for up to five sixth formers who may be attending local colleges. The school and the sixth form houses are situated close to the town centre of Frome.

Summary

This was an announced inspection and one inspector spent three days at North Hill House. The inspector was able to interview staff including the deputy principal, deputy head of care, head of the post 16 department, a member of the board of trustees, care staff, the independent listener and the facilities manager. The inspector was able to observe floor and team meetings and joined the young people for lunch and breakfast. The inspector had access to all residential units and the school grounds. The inspector had access to policies and logs, case files and personnel records. As part of the inspection process staff and parents of boarders were offered the opportunity to anonymously complete pre-inspection questionnaires, with 11 received by the inspector. Comments from the questionnaires have been incorporated into the report and inform judgements made. Judgements contained in this report are made from evidence obtained from pre-inspection material and from that gathered during the inspection.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

In the inspection period it is noted that records of fire drills are now signed by the officer recording the drill. One other improvement required by the inspection report of October 2007 and concerning the introduction of Ofsted's contact information in the young person's guide, remains outstanding.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The kitchen is able to provide a variety of special diets including dairy and wheat free diets. A daily vegetarian option and salad bar is also routinely available and fresh fruit is found both on residential floors and in the dining room. The Facilities Manager reports routinely consulting with the school council regarding menu construction, with the school's 'tasting committee' comprising six young people, given the opportunity to taste new foods which are to be considered for menus. The Facilities Manager reports awareness of new nutritional standards that are to be implemented in September 2008, and has prepared information on changes for both young people and their parents. She also reports trialling a computer programme that will facilitate identification of the nutritional content of foods. Evidence is seen of twice daily checking and recording of fridge and freezer temperatures. Probing and recording of the

temperatures of hot food is also undertaken. In November 2007, the organisation conducted its annual unannounced audit of kitchen practice, awarding the kitchen 93.25%. An environmental health inspection undertaken in the same month, reports hygiene standards to be high with good hygiene practices in place. A five star rating was given. Parental permission is sought for emergency medical and dental treatment and for the administration of homely medication. Each young person is seen to have a confidential and securely held medical file and all young people are registered with a local GP. The school's policies on the Administration of Prescribed Medication, the Administration of Controlled Drugs, Self Medication and Homely Remedies were shared with the inspector and found appropriate. A member of staff has been appointed to oversee medication administration and evidence is seen of both the appropriate storage of medication, the correct recording of medication administered to young people and of medication received from and returned to a young person's home. While the school retains some medication that may be administered as and when required, for example, for a sore throat, the list of items has yet to be reviewed and agreed by the local GP. Self medication where appropriate, is available to the young people. The school reports undertaking a risk assessment of the activity, secures parental permission and provides a structured training programme for the young person. All young people have a lockable drawer in their bedroom for the storage of the medication. First aid training is undertaken by St John's Ambulance, with first aid boxes located throughout the school and residential areas. A named member of staff is responsible for regularly checking contents. The school's Misuse of Substances policy was shared with the inspector and is seen to provide detailed guidance to staff on the management of an incident involving alcohol, drugs or solvents. The school's policies on smoking, and drugs and alcohol are reportedly reinforced through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) classes and through informal discussion and support. Sex and relationship education is also provided through the PSHE curriculum. The school's Soiled Clothing Policy which encourages the use of laundry bags which dissolve in the washing machine promotes infection control and shows a sensitive approach to the handling of soiled linen. The school employs four therapeutic therapy services - speech and language, occupational therapy, behaviour and counselling and an educational psychology service. A young person's initial assessment at the school routinely includes assessment by the team of therapists allowing an appropriate intervention programme to be introduced if not already detailed by the statement of special educational need. In addition, further psychiatric and psychology services can be obtained through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or through referral to the Priory adolescent mental health services.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school's Privacy Policy recognises that many young people have significant issues in the area of safety, privacy, care of possessions and security with the policy providing guidance to staff in the management of these. Confidential records relating to the care of a young person are seen to be securely stored. The school's Bullying Policy notes the particular vulnerability of some young people. The policy includes guidelines for countering bullying and procedures to be followed in the event that an incident occurs. Advice to parents is also available. The issue of cyber bullying is not addressed by the policy. It is also noted that there are no bully/drop boxes which can be used to anonymously draw attention to particular behaviours, although guidance and support for young people is found both in the New Kid's Handbook and on notice boards. The school's Child Protection policy was shared with the inspector and provides guidance to staff in the handling of a disclosure. Staff guidance is also available on the school's intranet

system and child protection is seen as part of staff's mandatory training. Although staff demonstrate an awareness of the concept of whistle-blowing it is not explicitly addressed by the policy. Every residential floor has two child protection lead officers. The school has three ongoing child protection issues. Guidance for young people in the 'New Kid's Handbook' on the complaints procedure is seen to be both child friendly and informative. CSCI contact details, however, need to be amended and replaced with that of Ofsted. It is noted that young people are able to meet weekly with their pastoral tutor which provides an opportunity to discuss concerns, and a contact number for the school's independent listener is found both in the New Kid's Handbook and in telephone booths. Young people spoken to by the inspector confirm knowing how they might raise and address concerns/complaints. No complaints have been recorded in the inspection period. The school's Absconding policy was shared with the inspector and is considered detailed and appropriate. The school's Promoting Positive Behaviour, Behaviour and Sanctions and Restrictive Physical Intervention policies were shared with the inspector. The policies emphasise that poor behaviour is a barrier both to learning and teaching and that staff should avoid giving attention to negative behaviour. A young person's Behaviour Management Plan is therefore used to identify strategies and techniques that can be used if behaviour deteriorates. Rewards are issued for positive behaviour and the North Hill House Rewards Scheme booklet provides details on rewards that can be exchanged for items including book tokens and music CDs. Sanctions do not include loss of points. New boys will adopt a Time Out Procedure first introduced at their assessment, but as soon as possible thereafter they are encouraged to develop their own personal procedure. The school's physical intervention log was shared with the inspector. It includes summarised but appropriate information and allowed tracking of a randomly selected incident. It is noted that where an incident has occurred between two boys but has been resolved, staff complete a 'resolution certificate' which is seen as a formal ending of the incident and can be used to remind the young people of what they have agreed to do/say in order to 'make up'. This is seen as good practice. Staff guidance is available on lone working. Evidence is also seen of procedures and guidance on police involvement with young people attending the school. The school's risk assessment folder was shared with the inspector. It contains appropriately detailed risk assessments completed for residential areas in addition to a range of situations including the risk of a young person absconding, use of agency staff, the making of allegations by young people, bullying, violence and leisure activities. It is noted that staff are asked to sign and date a document indicating that they have read and understood the assessments. As one parent records, 'Staff always keep (my child) safe and happy in all environments when doing different activities'. Evidence is seen of weekly fire alarm tests with fire evacuation procedures practised every term. A night time evacuation occurs annually. A fire risk assessment was last undertaken at the school in April 2008. The school's Control of Substances Hazardous to Health folder (COSHH) contains details of 30 products and provides information on first aid measures, handling and storage, exposure control and personal protection involving these products. The Security and Intruder Procedure requires that all staff and young people sign in and out of the school. All visitors must also sign in at reception and wear a visitor's badge. The school has one main reception entrance with other doors, excluding fire doors, operated by a swipe card. The school's Crisis Management and Emergency Planning policy details a variety of different situations including building based, health based and broader environment based incidents. Staff guidance for the management of such incidents is considered appropriate. Four staff files were reviewed by the inspector and found to contain appropriate documentation. Evidence is available to indicate that Criminal Records Bureau checks are routinely renewed every three years. This is seen as good practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school follows the national educational curriculum and encourages all young people to take GCSEs when ready. Staff on residential floors oversee homework. Importantly both care staff and learning support assistants spend time in all areas, thereby developing a sense of consistency for the young people between residential and educational settings. All young people have a statement of special educational need. The school encourages participation in a wide range of activities which are designed to meet the individual needs and interests of the young people. After school activities include gym, badminton and swimming. Evidence is also seen of weekend activity plans which include independent shopping, cooking, local walks and a visit to Yeovilton Air Museum. One parent records, 'My son was already a Scout when he joined the school and staff have made it possible for him to continue by joining the Frome troop'. Another parent records 'The school has tried hard to find an outside group my son can join. He now goes to Fire Cadets and is having a brilliant time. The support and partnership between care staff and Fire Cadets has been essential to this success'. The New Kid's Handbook provides information on the range of individuals that a young person can approach for support. Each young person is appointed a pastoral tutor with whom weekly tutorial sessions are held. The school's Independent Listener, who is appointed by the school but not on the school staff, visits the school every half term and her contact number is found in telephone booths within the school and in the New Kid's Handbook. Staff are seen as friendly, respectful, motivated and caring and this has been observed by parents, one of whom records 'All staff are keen to encourage the boys... All pupils are treated as individuals'. The move of boys between floors is also seen as sympathetically and sensitively handled, and actively involves parents. The approach taken by staff aims to reduce/eliminate anxiety about the move and shows good practice. The school is also seen to encourage regular communication with parents ensuring that they are kept well informed of their son's progress. As one parent records, 'The whole school is very open in its approach and communication is quite exceptional'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school's Communication Policy which was shared with the inspector recognises that communication is central to a young person's ability to participate effectively in education, social and behavioural experiences. It notes that because of a hidden difficulty in interpreting body language, some young people may engage in inappropriate behaviour. North Hill House aims to promote awareness of communication skills and provides prompts and visual support in order to reduce a young person's reliance on adult intervention. Pay phones are in evidence on residential floors and young people may also use their own mobile phones to remain in contact with friends and family. Evidence is seen of floor meetings occurring every two weeks, at which young people are able to raise and discuss issues of concern. Other avenues of consultation open to a young person include participation in the student council which meets every half term, the 'tasting committee' and pastoral tutor sessions. It is also noted that the Priory conducts a Student Services Survey. This was last undertaken in Spring/Summer 2007 with the subsequent report drawing upon questionnaires received from Priory Schools including North Hill House. The survey is conducted annually with responses to questions on the quality of caring, learning, surroundings and teaching analysed by an external consultant. The Priory also seeks feedback from parents. The files of four randomly selected young people were reviewed by the inspector. Each showed evidence of a detailed three day assessment undertaken

prior to admission, and included assessment of academic abilities and care needs. An occupational therapy assessment is also undertaken. As noted above each young person has a statement of special educational need and from this document a health and placement plan is generated. The plan details individual care requirements and includes an assessment of cultural, religious and racial needs, contact arrangements with the young person's family, health needs, specific treatment therapies or remedial programmes in relation to physical, emotional and mental health, intimate care requiring staff help and behaviour support, including use, where necessary, of restrictive physical intervention. All files show evidence of placement review, incorporate comments made by parents and include new objectives set for the forthcoming year. A young person's personal tutor file is seen to include a profile of the young person, provide details of the current timeout procedure or de-escalation techniques and provide information on current rules/routines, for example, table manners. An Individual Care Plan (ICP) provides long term aims for the young person in addition to term objectives and targets. Incident and accident forms are also included, as are written reports of weekly pastoral tutorials. Evidence is also available to indicate regular monitoring and auditing of the files by a senior member of staff. The school has detailed procedures for supporting a young person through the admission procedure. Parent and student guides are sent to the family as well as information on routines, rights and responsibilities. A member of staff will also contact the family if the young person has a residential placement, in order to begin the process of developing relationships. On admission an interim health plan will be agreed with parents which will later be further developed and ratified by the school, placing authority and where appropriate, the young person. The use of restrictive physical intervention will also be discussed. Prior to leaving North Hill House a Connexions advisor will have met with the young person to discuss further education/employment options.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Residentially the school is split into four small units or floors (Beech, Elm, Willow and Maple) consisting of a number of bedrooms clustered around a large floor lounge and small kitchen area. Each bedroom has an en-suite shower room and while there are some twin bedrooms, all but two of the young people accommodated at North Hill House have single rooms. The lounge is split into separate areas for dining and watching TV, with the kitchen allowing for the supervised preparation of drinks. There is a public telephone and each floor has a locked office for the appropriate storage of confidential information. Windows above ground floor are seen to have window opening restriction blocks. The floors are well decorated, furnished and maintained, and display much evidence of art work completed by the young people. They are seen to provide a homely, comfortable environment. Maple floor groups all Year 11 students together, allowing independence and self help skills to be emphasised. Oak area can be accessed by young people as part of a de-escalation programme and comprises two time-out rooms. Both are plainly furnished, one is a padded crash pad, with the second described as a chill zone, the latter used by young people who are considered less likely to self harm. The school has recently opened Stoneleigh - a previously underutilised area of the site. It currently accommodates administration staff, some classrooms and therapy rooms. The school's transition plan is developed for young people from the age of 13 years, giving an appropriate period of preparation for semi-independent living. The school's independence training programme includes a number of different activities including visiting a local shop and independent travel to local towns. The programme has four levels and aims to ensure the acquisition of confidence and necessary skills. One parent reports, 'My son has started to learn how to go to the town

and buy himself something from a local shop... but only when he feels ready. He is working on his independence slowly but surely. He is never pushed, he does it in his own time'. While conducting the inspection the inspector visited the two staffed houses used by the school for the accommodation of post 16 students. These are off site and consist of adjacent detached houses in the town of Frome, each with three bedrooms. Again, the units provide warm, comfortable, appropriately furnished and maintained accommodation. The units further promote independence with staff supporting attendance at local colleges of further education. Although the young people were not available for interview, staff conveyed a careful, sensitive approach to independence that aims to ensure that a young person can live and function effectively in the wider community. Activities engaged in include budgeting, cooking, shopping, cleaning of bedrooms and laundry. Self medication is also encouraged. The school expects that an additional four bedded unit will be operational as of September 2008 (Rosedale), providing intermediary accommodation between that provided by Maple floor and the Post 16 houses.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's Statement of Purpose, Parents' Information Guide, New Kid's Handbook and Sixth Form guide for young people moving into post 16 accommodation were shared with the inspector. The Statement of Purpose describes what the school sets out to do and the manner in which care is provided. While informative, the Parents' Information Guide does not contain information on the complaints procedure or provide Ofsted's contact details. Information on the school's bullying policy is also not included. The information is, however, found in the guides for young people. The inspector was also provided with information that a student receives when moving onto a new floor. It provides basic rules for the floor, information on daily routines and covers such things as mobile phone use and what to do if you are being bullied. It is seen as good practice. Staff report regular supervision with a senior member of staff, occurring every two weeks for those who have not completed their probationary training and thereafter every half term. The practice extends to the Facilities Manager and Acting Principal. Staff report belonging to a motivated, supportive team, with a member of staff reporting that colleagues 'are there to support you'. Staff meetings tend to be unit specific, but minutes of the meetings are recorded. Evidence is seen of the school's training matrix which provides a ready overview of training undertaken. Mandatory training is seen to include child protection, physical restraint, fire prevention, health and safety, food hygiene and medication administration. Foundations for Growth which operates in addition to the mandatory programme provides further training in a range of topics including crisis management, infection control, the Every Child Matters agenda and report writing. In addition it is noted that the contract of employment requires care staff to obtain the National Vocational Qualification in Caring for Children and Young People Level 3 (NVQ3) or 4. Currently 55% of care staff hold NVQ3 or above. The school has two NVQ assessors on the staff team. Waking night staff are required to do a one day shift every half term thereby ensuring that they are comfortable and aware of day time routines. Night staff are also actively included in training regimes including NVQ3, and are required to attend six training days per year. Evidence is seen of monthly inspection reports produced by the school's Regulation 33 inspector. The inspections are unannounced and reports show a detailed inspection. In addition, the Acting Principal reports auditing floor records every half term including records of staff supervision.

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 the list of homely medications retained by the school are reviewed by the local GP (NMS 14).
- ensure that the Bullying Policy is expanded to include the concept of cyber bullying (NMS 6).
- ensure that CSCI contact details relating to the complaints procedure and found in the New Kids Handbook, are replaced with that of Ofsted (NMS 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.