

Doucecroft School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Jackie Callaghan
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Doucecroft school is an independent special school, owned and operated by Autism Anglia. The school caters for children and young people affected by autism spectrum disorder.

The main school is a purpose built site on the outskirts of Colchester. It has separate teaching, office and boarding areas. Boarding is divided into four units, all students have their own bedroom and each unit has a lounge and kitchen area.

The school has two Further Education (FE) departments. One in Kelvedon which is about eight miles from the main school and, a department based at the Eight Ash Green site. The FE departments access nearby community facilities, in addition to social events in nearby towns.

At the time of the inspection the school was able to provide places for up to 35 boarding students aged between eight and 19 years.

Summary

This was an announced inspection that focused on the key standards. All outcome areas were inspected, with the inspection concentrating on the medication systems, keeping the young people safe, the school's behavioural management processes and how the school is managed. One minor recommendation was raised in Enjoying and Achieving which, as a result, was judged as good. All other outcome areas were judged as outstanding.

Students enjoy being at Doucecroft and benefit from clear, professional, effective and imaginative

management. This coupled with a staff team who are skilled, knowledgeable and enthusiastic provides all students with stimulating and purposeful education and care.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school was asked to, ensure all information was up-dated to reflect current post holders, and ensure that the required proportion of permanent staff access the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3. Finally, the school was asked to ensure that the role of the independent person be filled.

The school's documentation now contains the correct post holders and as a result, fully reflects the provision that is offered by the school. Staff are now accessing NVQ Level 3 training which means their skills and knowledge are being further developed to equip them to fully safeguard student's welfare.

The school have not been able to identify an independent person. This may deny students the additional opportunity to voice any concerns or issues that they may have.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students live in a healthy environment where their health and intimate care needs are consistently identified and promoted. Whole school initiatives and direct input around mental, physical and emotional health ensure students gain a superb understanding about the benefits of healthy living.

The school successfully fosters peer relationships that allow students to share affection, support and empathy. This was supported by the students with one student commenting that 'the staff and other pupils care about you'. Student's files contain signed medical consent forms, ensuring the school's staff have permission to provide first aid and over the counter medicines. There are efficient arrangements to ensure that medication is safely administered, ensuring that student's medical needs are fully met and their welfare is safeguarded.

Food is freshly prepared and enthusiastically appreciated by the students. Meal times are orderly, social occasions where they sit with their friends and staff members. Students enjoy the responsibility of clearing the tables and involvement in preparing their meals. Staff praise and encourage them to be involved, which successfully helps students to adopt a positive attitude towards food.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Students using the service require high levels of support and supervision from staff whilst carrying out personal care. Staff recognise that not all students are the same and ensure they have privacy, choice and control over the support they need and how it is delivered. The school has outstanding leadership that consistently promotes an environment where safety and student's welfare is paramount.

There is an effective system in place to record any concerns made known by students and others. This helps staff and students work successfully together to ensure care is continually cohesive. The head teacher monitors the complaints record to make sure that student's rights and entitlements are upheld and that the process is effective. Doucecroft has an anti-bullying policy and bullying is known by all to be unacceptable. Any issues are discussed openly within the school ensuring students are protected. Students say 'this school is fantastic, I feel safe and cared about' and 'I feel warm and safe'.

Students are greatly protected by the school's child protection systems, providing a safe and very secure environment that students enjoy. Staff receive wide ranging child protection training which includes the protection of children with disabilities. The school takes steps to ensure that students who are absent from the school without consent are protected in line with written policy and guidance.

Students who exhibit any behaviour that may challenge them in the environment are successfully supported through positive reinforcement to make changes in their behaviour. The school's behaviour management policy and strategies have, as their prime objective, the creation of a safe, supportive learning environment. There is very evident warmth in the relationship between the staff and the student's. Staff are very comfortable with their role of setting clearly understood boundaries while maintaining a high quality relationships between themselves and the students. Parental comments include 'they provide a perfect environment and we never have to worry' and 'the staff are friendly but firm and are very approachable'.

Students live in a school that effectively provides physical safety and security. The school regularly updates risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds including fire, student's behaviour, and activities. Students learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practise the emergency escape drill. Comprehensive safe procedures are in place to protect students with tests on the fire systems and other electrical equipment, ensuring students can exit swiftly and calmly in the event of a fire.

The school operates a meticulous staff vetting procedure and staff demonstrate a substantial awareness of the need to safeguard students. All files hold evidence of recruitment checks having taken place prior to staff being employed, which includes an appropriate enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Student's educational progress at the school is actively supported by the residential provision. They receive an excellent level of support. The school values, promotes and encourages all of their students to make the best of their educational opportunities. Students explore their potential and develop their personal interests because staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner.

Students receive individual support when they need it. Considerable effort is put into combining social, education, care and health needs into a package that not only meets individual needs but promotes development. A parent comments that the school are 'excellent at encouraging daily living skills'. Students freely initiate interaction and seek help from various staff members on duty. However, the school have been unable to identify an appropriate independent person who students can, if they choose, contact directly. It is clear that most students feel that they can approach staff, although, having a person who is independent of the school provides students with additional opportunities to share any possible worries or concerns that they may have.

The values that underpin school policy are that students, as the result of an education at Doucecroft, are able to contribute constructively to society and play a full role in it, whatever their chosen path. Encouraging each student's moral and spiritual discovery and expression is an important part of the work of the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school is committed to securing equality of opportunity through the criteria of an environment in which individuals are unreservedly treated on the sole basis of their relative merits and abilities. This is confirmed by a student who comments "staff understand me". Students are developing an awareness of others as they share and take turns, for example, when playing badminton.

Students are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. No student is assumed to be unable to communicate their views and the staff successfully use many communication aids to enable their voice to be heard. Staff overwhelmingly demonstrate that they value the views and opinions of all students and every

effort is made to assist with their communication. A student says 'staff are kind, fun and they listen'.

The relationship between staff and students is seen as purposeful and creates a supportive and caring atmosphere in which students feel secure and comfortable. They are robustly supported in their transition when leaving the school to return to their family or when moving onto other adult settings. This ensures that the student's welfare is a top priority. Students are supported by meticulous care plans which copiously reflect their individual needs and wishes. Plans include thorough risk assessments which enable students to maintain their levels of independence in a safe manner.

In accordance with their wishes students are enabled and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families. The school understands and truly values and fully recognises the importance of communication and contact with parents. This is confirmed by a parent who says 'we have an excellent exchange of information and we call our son when we need to'. Significant time is taken to build relationships and share information and practices with families. This excellent working partnership promotes students' welfare as they get consistent messages from both home and school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Students reside and learn in a fully inclusive environment which truly inspires them to respect and value their own needs and the differing needs of others. The standard of accommodation is excellent, providing a vibrant comfortable place for students which assists them with domestic style living. Students display high levels of confidence in the staff's care as time, space and resources are used with great success. They move freely around school, suggesting what they would like to do, for example, they request a short period of time to relax, which staff respect.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Students, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding students. Students are looked after by staff that prolifically understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently. This view is shared by parents who say 'staff provide fantastic care and supervision' and 'my son is well supported, well looked after and is a happy lad'. Students are kept safe and provided with excellent care as they have sufficient numbers of staff to look after them. Consequently, students are continually making excellent progress because staffing in the school is well organised and effectively managed.

Students receive dynamic care and the services they need from very competent staff. Their welfare, safety and developmental progress are strengthened because staff receive a systematic and planned induction and an excellent training programme. As a result, staff become sure of their job role and individual level of responsibility very quickly. Students benefit greatly from this positive approach as they are cared for by highly motivated, suitable and knowledgeable staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Equality and diversity is intrinsic in all staffs' practice and, as a result, outcomes for students are continually positive. The staff group

consider all aspects of their work and how stereotypes, attitudes and assumptions may prevent students from fully participating within the community. A parent comments that 'they treat all pupils as individuals and try to cater for their specific needs'.

Students and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run school. Systems for monitoring the operation of the residential school are excellent, and the school has an atmosphere of creative and focused direction with student's welfare clearly at the forefront.

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):

- Identify an Independent Person that students can access (NMS 22.8).