

Bridge School, Longmoor Campus

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	David Morgan
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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

The Bridge School was formed following the amalgamation of two maintained primary special schools in September 2006. The Longmoor site provides education for boys and girls aged between two and 11 years of age who have severe or profound learning disabilities; some children also fall within the autistic spectrum. The children who attend the residential unit have all been identified as having severe learning difficulties with a wide range of other needs. Most have had unsuccessful placements at other special schools within the authority.

The school is purpose built and includes teaching areas, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and an integrated self-contained residential provision. The residential provision is available between Monday and Friday for up to six children on a term-time basis. Currently, there are four children and they were all able to contribute to the inspection.

The school is based within a residential area of Sutton Coldfield on the north side of Birmingham and has easy access to open spaces. It is close to local amenities and children also access the wide range of leisure and other facilities in the city.

Summary

During this key, announced inspection all areas of care were considered. Overall, the judgement is satisfactory although there is good practice in many areas of care and excellent practice in some. There is effective and important continuity of care between parents, residential unit and school, which has significant benefits for children and their families. Also, excellent work is also being undertaken in involving children in decision making, for example, in the school council.

The recommendations made at the previous inspection have been partially or completely addressed. Work is still underway on two and so recommendations are made regarding staff supervision meetings and staff recruitment processes as these operate at a lower standard than necessary. Recommendations are made regarding risk assessments, for children in particular, so that any issues are properly assessed and kept under review, and the best care possible can be provided. To the same end, a recommendation is made regarding staff training as there are certain gaps which could affect their own safety and, potentially, that of children.

No complaints have been received by Ofsted or the school since the last inspection.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in several areas affecting the welfare of children. For instance, there is now better monitoring by the governors and clearer recording of physical interventions, which are important contributions to keeping children safe. Children are also benefiting from staff having more frequent supervision meetings with their line managers, although this is not yet as comprehensive as necessary. Similarly, although improvements have been made to recruitment practices, they do not protect children as well as necessary. The statement of purpose now shows what the agreed staffing policy is so it is clear to any new children or their representatives.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children have their health and intimate care needs addressed well. Staff ensure there is appropriate identification of each child's health needs, which are then promoted strongly. Individual needs are addressed sensitively and effective efforts are made to ensure that there is as much continuity of care practices as possible between the school, residential unit and home. The privacy and dignity of children are given a high priority, for example, when staff are helping children bathe. Medication is well managed and staff ensure that medicines that affect the mood or behaviour of children are used as sparingly as possible to minimize any negative side-effects. Qualified staff visit the school to provide physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and also music therapy, which have a wide variety of benefits for children.

Children are provided with adequate quantities of well prepared food that are wholesome, nutritious and also contribute significantly to their health. Individual dietary needs are addressed and mealtimes are sociable occasions during which children learn important skills. Good practice is evident in several areas. For example, children are consulted about and have a choice of their evening meals in the unit (their midday meals are usually taken in school). Also, children are involved in preparing meals in the unit and helping to clear-up afterwards; some like to choose their own breakfast cereals at the shops. Take away meals are enjoyed regularly by the children too, and they make their choices via picture cards. These processes are part of a continuum of care that also contributes to substantial improvements in children's behaviour, which has benefits for them when they go out or whilst they are at home. One parent said: 'The unit has made my son progress a lot; I can't believe it'.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Appropriate systems are in place to help children or their representatives make complaints or to otherwise identify when children are unhappy with some aspect of their care. This is important due to the lack of verbal skills of all the children in the unit. The school and unit encourage and facilitate visitors, such as family members, to a significant extent, which helps to ensure that children's views are understood.

Such openness is appropriately balanced by good attention to children's privacy and confidentiality, which also contributes to ensuring that the welfare of children is promoted well and children are protected from abuse. All staff understand how to identify abuse and what to do about any suspicions, although not all staff have received formal training appropriate to their posts. Procedures are available for staff and the headmaster is amending them to include the latest Safeguarding Children policies. Children are effectively protected from bullying and the risks from absconding are kept to a minimum by high staffing levels and the security measures that are in place. There are close links with other agencies in the event that a significant incident does occur. One parent commented: 'Yes, the children are safe, and when they go out on visits'.

Positive steps are also taken to keep children, staff and visitors safe from risks posed by fire and other hazards, for example, by means of termly fire evacuations. There is close attention to detail, including, for example, ensuring the minibus is parked in the best position to leave the site efficiently, having sufficient staff on duty at night, and, ensuring that individual needs

can be met in the event of a night-time evacuation. A site manager closely oversees the property and grounds and ensures that a good standard is maintained. Improvements have been made recently to safety by the installation of hoists. However, in the residential unit there is insufficient use and understanding of risk assessments, especially with respect to children, both as a group and individually, which means that hazards for each child are potentially insufficiently assessed and reviewed.

There is satisfactory selection and vetting of staff to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers. However, although there have been recent improvements and most of the required issues are addressed, the recruitment process requires further refinement in a small number of areas. For example, although appropriate references for new staff are taken routinely, there is no direct contact made with referees, and the checking of qualifications and identification of candidates is inconsistent. This means that the measures to protect children are not as thorough as possible.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school's residential provision and its staff make a substantial contribution to children's educational progress. There is routine coordination of targets between school and unit so that the effectiveness of strategies is maximised, for example, regarding teaching social skills. Consistency is achieved through constructive daily discussions between teaching and residential staff about individual children's needs as well as through formal meetings. Such work is supported by close liaison with parents who are encouraged and taught, as appropriate, how to implement similar strategies at home.

Children have regular opportunities to enjoy purposeful activities within the unit and the local community. There is a good programme of activities and trips that occur regularly, which includes meals out, swimming and attending cultural events. Children make their choices through various communication systems depending on the individual, but mainly picture cards and signs. Choices are provided within an important, predictable routine which helps to teach many lessons, such as decision making and compromising. Children are helped to integrate into the local community as much as possible, given their ages and abilities, by hosting mainstream school visits and using local shops and amenities. All the children go home at weekends where they are involved in their local communities.

All children are given good, individualised support in line with their needs and wishes, for example, some children do not eat meat and others have their bedrooms prepared in certain ways. Individuality is also expressed in the bedtime routines and the degree of involvement of children in the running of the unit. Issues arising from age, gender and disability are well addressed. This is particularly effective because of the small size of the unit and the favourable staffing levels. Therapeutic input is provided by qualified staff and the residential staff support the curriculum regarding personal, health, social and sex education. It is to the credit of the school that eight hours a week additional support is purchased for families and children from an independent organisation.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is excellent provision for consulting children, and their families, about decisions. Such consultation is reflected in the written plans compiled for each child, which clearly outline how such needs will be met in the unit. A major example of the positive developments in consultation is the substantial work that has gone into creating and operating a unit council. The council was consulted about the refurbishment of the bathrooms, for example. In addition, there is valuable and imaginative work undertaken with carers and siblings during special meetings at the unit. Day-to-day communication with children themselves is undertaken in formats that the children understand individually but they are also taught new skills that parents can implement too, which contributes significantly to children's quality of life now and in the future. No child is assumed to be unable to communicate and they benefit from good relationships with staff.

The high standards of consultation reflect the excellent communication between the unit and parents. This is acknowledged and appreciated by professionals and parents alike. Such communication by staff is supplemented by a home/school liaison teacher and there are fortnightly open-house meetings of staff, children, parents and siblings. Parents consider that the links enable them to improve the care they offer their children at home and that this has benefits for the whole family, including, for example, in some cases, avoiding the need for children to go into care.

Good communication is also a key method by which the unit ensures that children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes. These only occur infrequently, because there are no emergency admissions, and new admissions come from amongst the day pupils at the school who are already well known. Continuity and stability is maintained by the fact that great emphasis is placed on ensuring compatibility between children and being as sure as possible that the child and his or her family will be able to benefit from the unit.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children live in a well designed and pleasant unit that provides sufficient space and facilities for their needs, given that they have a low level of physical disability. Out of school hours, the children also use the facilities in the school, such as the soft play room, and can use the playing equipment and field outside. The accommodation is well decorated, furnished and maintained and provides this sized group of children with a comfortable amount of space. It is light, warm and attractive. Children have the added benefit of their own bedrooms, which are personalised according to their individual wishes and needs. Bathing facilities are excellent and children inputted to the recent refurbishment.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Equality and diversity issues are addressed well. Issues arising from gender, disability and the wide range of other individual needs relating to equality and diversity are addressed appropriately, for example, by attending local religious events and playing different types of music in the unit. Children's needs, development and progress are reflected in their individual files, which they can see on request.

Children and others have access to a thorough, up-to-date statement of purpose that describes how the unit operates. It is also available in pictorial form to meet the needs of children and

reflects clearly the important integration of care and education between home, school and the unit. Amongst other matters, the statement of purpose reflects the staffing arrangements in the unit and the fact that children are looked after by a sufficient number of competent staff. Children benefit from a staff group that has received a satisfactory level of training overall. However, there are a number of required training courses that have not been attended by the appropriate members of staff, including ancillary staff. These omissions have the potential to either increase the level of risk to themselves or children, for example, in the case of first aid training, or affect the overall competence of the team. On the other hand, staff are well organised and a satisfactory number of care staff have a relevant professional qualification.

Despite improvements since the last inspection, not all staff are receiving adequate support through one to one supervision and appraisals. This means there is the potential for a negative impact on children's welfare if staff are not receiving the necessary formal guidance. Also, some policies and procedures are out of date, although staff do benefit from weekly staff meetings and regular contact with senior personnel to discuss practice issues. Children and staff enjoy the stability of a school in which there is routine internal monitoring by management, both formally and informally, as well as regular monitoring by the governors. However, the internal monitoring does not formally cover all the required matters and this contributes to the shortfalls identified in this report, such as in risk assessments.

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 risk assessments are carried out, recorded in writing and regularly reviewed, with respect to children's known and likely activities, risks arising from the disabilities of any child, and other issues in this standard (NMS 26.3)
- ensure the school's system for recruiting staff includes all the elements in this standard, including making direct contact with each referee, and checking identities and qualifications (NMS 27.2)
- ensure staff working in any capacity with children at the school have received training appropriate to their role (NMS 29.6)
- ensure all staff receive supervision from a senior member of staff each half term; that all staff have their performance formally appraised annually, and that they are provided with written guidance on procedure and policy that is kept up to date (NMS 30.2, 30.6 and 30.7)
- ensure the head or senior member of staff monitors and signs the required records to identify any patterns or issues requiring action (NMS 32.2).