

Stone Bay School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC023693
Inspection date	19 November 2008
Inspector	Patrick Gough
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	17 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

Stone Bay School is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of Broadstairs, near to shops and beaches, on an elevated site overlooking the sea. It is owned and managed by Kent County Council. There is ample space for car parking, on and off the road, to the front and side of the premises. There are large and secure gardens at the rear of the school, with seaside views and a number of play and leisure facilities. The school provides specialised education for children and young people aged 11 to 19 years who exhibit communication difficulties, moderate to severe learning difficulties, challenging behaviours and Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Currently the school uses nationally accredited schemes, including Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), to support its planning, teaching and monitoring of students' achievement. The residential accommodation is divided into three separate units, as well as a Lodge in the grounds where young people can further develop their independent living skills. Both waking night and sleeping-in staff are available to care for the students each night. The staff rota ensures that senior residential staff are available throughout most of the day.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection. The visit was conducted to assess the school's commitment to providing good outcomes for children in relation to the National Minimum Standards and best practice. There were no actions recommended at the previous inspection. The school provides a high level of quality care for students with very complex needs. It achieves this through a coordinated approach to understanding their needs and the creation of individual programmes to help them with their communication difficulties and challenging behaviour. The care and education staff work well together and share responsibility for the implementation of the various programmes. Each student has a care plan and evidence of practice can be found in daily records. The students' medical care is well managed and their health is promoted through healthy eating initiatives and good opportunities to engage in physical activities. The school's safeguarding practice is supported by a clear policy and procedures, regular training and effective staff supervision and vigilance. Considerable efforts have been made to establish positive links with parents and external agencies. The school successfully manages the transition of students on leaving school, to carefully selected living and further learning provisions. The school is well managed and senior staff provide effective and strong leadership. The staff are very committed to their role. They have a good understanding of the nature of the students' needs and are skilful in determining strategies and interventions to support them.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommended actions made following the previous inspection, however, the school has developed many aspects of its service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school continues to develop a positive approach to health care with the introduction of new health plan formats to monitor the students' ongoing care. The staff, in collaboration with parents, use plans effectively and successfully to identify interventions that support the students

to adopt better eating habits and sleeping patterns. Staff have acquired the necessary knowledge pertaining to each student's health needs so as to determine the most appropriate individualised measures to take to assist them. Students are registered with local health and medical providers unless a parent specifically requests that they remain registered within their home area. Specialist services are accessed by the school to address students' individual physical, emotional or mental health requirements. Some care staff are engaged on a NVQ course at level 2 on healthy eating whilst another is pursuing an NVQ level 2 course in aromatherapy. The desire, expressed by staff, to become more knowledgeable on nutritional standards and to develop their expertise in holistic approaches demonstrates their determination to support students whose health development is affected by their primary disability. A senior member of the care staff is designated to take responsibility for the control of medicines in the school. All senior staff with responsibility for medication administration have received the appropriate training to do so and records reveal that it is done properly. There are effective protocols in place to manage receipt of medication into the school and records of the proper disposal of unused medicines are kept. The students are provided with a varied selection of meals throughout the week. The menus indicate that much thought has been given to achieving a nutritious content, whilst giving the young people food which they like. Many of the students have different dietary needs and both care staff and catering staff work in unison to ensure that individual needs are properly provided for. The catering staff work hard to ensure that whilst they include essential ingredients in meals for those with special dietary needs, they are presented in the same form as those for the rest of the pupils. The head of catering has attended training on national nutritional standards and has incorporated guidance in the menus. The staff work closely with the students' parents, acknowledging parental views and their knowledge of their child's likes and dislikes. One parent commenting on her child's care, stated, 'I feel confident that his dietary needs are respected and met to a degree that I didn't feel was possible within a residential school'. The staff also impart useful strategies so as to encourage continuity of good eating habits in the home. The older students prepare 'vegetable boxes' which they sell to staff each week. They buy the vegetables from a local farm and select the produce for each box.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The staff provide the necessary level of direct support sometimes two to one for some pupils but, where it is appropriate, provide discreet supervision to allow social integration. The number of shared bedrooms has been reduced significantly, with the school recognising the individual needs of the students and the benefits of single occupancy rooms. Some inventive thinking has contributed to changes in the bedrooms and the communal areas leading to increased privacy for the students, such as the decorative frosted glass on bedroom windows and residential unit entrances. The policy on intimate care outlines guidance for staff providing personal care for vulnerable children. The policy and guidance available to staff on safeguarding the students is in line with national guidelines and has been ratified by the local education children's safeguarding service. Given the vulnerability of the students, the staff provide excellent supervision and support to assure each young person's safety and well being. Many of the young people present challenging behaviour which potentially might be abusive to their peers. The staff, however, have achieved a very good understanding of each individual's needs and behaviour patterns. This, combined with the level and quality of their interaction with the students, contributes to very good safeguarding practice. There is always the potential for students to endanger themselves by leaving the building without staff knowledge. The school has established good strategies and practice to maintain the students safety, mainly through

good staff ratios and a high level of vigilance. There is a low level incidence of complaints from the students. Whilst there is an adequate process to enable students to register concerns other established forums, as well as the staff's ability to communicate with students and recognise their signs of distress, work very well. The positive approach to managing challenging behaviour continues to be a major strength of the school. The staff successfully support the students to modify their behaviour through raising their self esteem and creating an atmosphere of tolerance. The various changes made to the living environment, mostly in consultation with parents, have enhanced each individual's living experience. The staff within the residential units and the classrooms work well together on communication strategies which, supported by the communication facilitator, enable the students to communicate more effectively reducing some of the frustrations which often lead to challenging behaviour. Individual behaviour management plans, which incorporate the views of the parents, highlight the precise strategies that are most effective for the child. The staff throughout the school purposefully apply the strategies in their daily practice and monitor their effectiveness through data received from the behaviour management database. The staff indicate that this evaluation system is invaluable in determining the support required by each individual student and a greater understanding of their needs. Risk assessments are routinely conducted and reviewed; ensuring the young people receive the necessary resources to maintain their safety and access to the community and valuable learning experiences. Staff are alert to possible dangers as indicated by a recent incident outside the premises, which was duly referred to the local police. Good security features, reviewed regularly, prevent unauthorised intrusion and supports efforts by the staff to prevent unauthorised absence. The school implements the recruitment process to good effect, ensuring that prospective employees do not have access to the students until they are properly vetted in accordance with national guidance.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There are working practices in operation which promote good multidisciplinary approaches. Behaviour management plans and communication programmes are agreed following consultation with parents and deliberation within the teams in the various settings in the school. Management systems, such as the behaviour management database, and facilitators support the staff to achieve consistency of practice whilst promoting the use of initiative and individuals' skills. Staff from each discipline engage in core training modules on INSET days and staff from the classroom setting, particularly some learning support assistants, work alongside residential care staff in the students' living environment. The apprenticeship scheme is hugely successful with former apprentices currently permanently employed in the school and the residential units. There is useful daily liaison between care staff and teachers via handover each morning and 'home/school' books. Each student has a key worker who coordinates colleagues' implementation of the respective plans, health, behaviour and communication. There are excellent links with parents who are almost unanimous in stating that 'regular communication (with parents) is a particular strength of the school'. This is in the form of a fortnightly letter, weekly telephone calls and regular review meetings. The support for the students is individualised and involves close support, sitting alongside the student or respecting the student's personal space or independence with direction from a distance. Considerable thought is given to methods of practice to be used with each student recognising their anxiety, sensitivity and their socialisation difficulties. External agencies feature prominently in the school's efforts to meet the assessed and observed needs of the students. The community health nurse visits fortnightly. Work experience settings are explored and links with adult services are established through an

excellent partnership with Connexions, facilitating the smooth transition from the educational setting to further learning. One parent lavished praise on the school for supporting a student through a mental health issue commenting 'the school made my son and the entire family their number one priority'. Members of the governing body take an active interest in the school and the students benefit from monthly visits from the independent listener. The school has established good links within the local community through the use of local businesses and engaging the students in leisure activities. The staff have established close working relationships with the students and have an excellent understanding of their disability and the measures to assist them.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Much consideration is given to the method of communication most appropriate for each individual student. Relevant resources, such as picture exchange cards and Makaton symbols, are used effectively on the advice and guidance of the communication facilitator. All the staff engage in training designed to enable them to communicate, on various levels, with the young people. The students are encouraged to express their views, concerns and anxieties through activities and 1:1 interaction and formally through their representatives on the school council, most recently convened on 7/11/2008. Members of staff support the representatives to contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way and action is taken by the school on a range of student ideas, such as the suggestion to start a youth club, the request for floodlights and a positive response to students' requests to visit various centres. The admission of each student is considered carefully and every effort is made by the school to prepare the student and their family. The prospective student is visited in his own environment, with the parents fully involved in the discussions and information giving. Due care is given to introducing the student to the school setting as well as the impact their admission may have on current placements. Each key worker is responsible for coordinating the assessment of the student's needs and then formulating a plan designed to provide for their care. The individual residential plan identifies specific needs and incorporates health and social care objectives. The behaviour management plans are particularly relevant and contain information and guidance on likely 'triggers' for behaviour and preferred interventions and strategies. Although the evidence of the link between the implementation and the identified plan targets is not documented in one place, there is reference to the students response in various documentation such as the daily log and the 'progress file'. A new daily log format is currently in operation and supports good record keeping. Fortnightly reports are sent to parents indicating progress and achievements relating to health, behaviour and social interaction. Whilst the staff rightly focus on 'spending time with the students' further development of the care plan process would enhance their recording of evidence. Parents indicate that they are always made welcome at the school and are encouraged to visit and play an active part in their child's progress. Some students return home each weekend and all students see their family on a fortnightly basis.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Although one social worker indicated a weakness in the school's approach to preparing students for transition, there was overwhelming evidence to support excellent practice. Students aged 14-19 years focus on independent skills engaging in the nationally accredited scheme, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), with staff using the scheme

coursework to support its planning, teaching and monitoring of students' achievement. The school works closely with agencies such as Connexions, as well as parents, placing authorities and respective Adult services in an effort to secure the most appropriate placement for the student prior to the end of their school placement. There is a designated Connexions representative for the school who attends the latter three review meetings of each student leading up to their transition. Reports prepared for these reviews indicate that the school and the Connexions representative work in partnership. They prepare the student and parents and other interested parties, particularly the suggested adult placement, so as to achieve a smooth transition. One student's social worker, commenting on the transitional process, stated that there is 'good contact with Connexions advisor'. Adults care management is involved in transition'. Some parents have written to the head teacher expressing their gratitude for the support given by the school through the transition period. One parent, commenting in the inspection survey on the successful transition of his son, stated, 'this enormous step was achieved through the expertise, sensitivity and support of Stone Bay staff and has been/is a huge success'. Each residential unit has its unique identity forged by the individual students and the staff working with them. Whilst the units adhere to and implement the principles of the school's philosophy of care, each staff team adapts the general features of the school's stated purpose to fit the needs, capabilities and potential of the young people placed there. The staff work hard to create good living environments through liaison with parents and engaging the young people, where appropriate, through consultation on choice of colour and other preferences, such as lighting and privacy features. The students' bedrooms are decorated, furnished and individualised according to their wishes. There is an emphasis on providing accommodation and communal facilities that the young people feel comfortable with, and 'at home' in, and an environment that supports the school's aim to enable the young people to have an enjoyable time. Within the communal areas of the residence there is much evidence of essential and day to day information in various forms of communication. The residences are colourful, well equipped and reflect the interests of the young people who live there. Throughout the accommodation for the residential pupils, the bathroom and toilet facilities are of a high standard and adequately meet the requirements of the young people, in terms of privacy, dignity, comfort and safety.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's statement of purpose provides all interested parties with the relevant information relating to the care and education of the children. It focuses, appropriately, on the range of need presented by the children and the philosophy of care implemented in practice. All services incorporated in the statement are effectively met. Senior management are continually devising ways of improving practice, such as the database which monitors behaviour management. Although the staffing has been somewhat disrupted by staff absence, mainly through illness, senior managers ensure that there are sufficient staff in each residential unit, with children's needs dictating the appropriate level of staff available and their function. Where necessary, for instance, where there is a change in a child's circumstances or an increased level of risk, the staffing ratio is increased accordingly. The school is proactive in seeking new staff to replace leavers and is currently engaged in a recruitment drive. The intensive nature of the care staff role has an impact on some workers' ability to sustain their management of the role. The management and staff are to be commended for the high level of commitment they demonstrate. This is acknowledged by many of the parents, with comments such as, 'the care and attention provided by the residential staff is exemplary'. Additional to the required level of staffing, the

school continues to offer a number of young adults an 'apprenticeship' so that they can gain the relevant experience and attain the appropriate qualification to aspire to permanent positions on the staff team. A number of previous 'apprentices' have secured permanent positions within the school and make a very positive contribution to the care of the students. There are two team leaders in each residential unit to ensure that there is continuity of leadership. The children receive daily information about staff on duty and are informed of any changes, through 'communication boards'. The night 'waking' staff are competently managed by a team leader who is accountable to the head of care. Their role has been further developed and they have been better integrated into the care staff team through the efforts of senior staff. The staff are scheduled to receive regular formal supervision and appraisal, however, this has been inconsistently provided of late. The team leaders have recently engaged in training related to the supervisor's role and as a result of that initiated a review of the supervision process. The head of care has produced a new policy which includes formal supervision guidelines and a contract; subject to ratification by the governing body this is due for implementation in the Spring term. All the staff are complimentary about the way they are managed and confirm that they receive very good informal support as required. The school is managed very effectively by a head teacher and senior management team whose enthusiasm and commitment to providing a high level of service to students and their families is replicated in the various teams. There is a good care staff structure in place with the large team managed by a competent head of care and qualified and experienced team leaders. The school has maintained its commitment to staff development and all care staff have achieved NVQ at Level 3 or are currently completing the course. There is a designated NVQ training coordinator within the school who liaises regularly and purposefully with a link person within the local College. This ensures that appropriate training courses are accessed and the staff receive the required mentoring. Some staff are engaging on a 'healthy eating' course whilst another is participating in an aromatherapy module. Six staff are qualified to train colleagues on physical intervention techniques and this training is offered to staff in other mainstream schools in order to support children with additional needs in those settings. Training on communication methods such as makaton is a requirement for all staff, including for instance catering staff, so that they can respond effectively to the students. The care staff describe training as 'excellent'. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The monitoring process is overseen by the head of care who checks and signs behaviour management records on a regular basis. Measures are taken to ensure that there is a consistency of approach across the residential units to maintain equality of service. Great care is taken to assure quality and maintain individual approaches and responses to meet diverse needs. Team leaders are responsible for monitoring the care practice in their own units, particularly the implementation of care plans. A member of the governing body visits the school each term to inspect the care practice and prepares a report, a summary of which is sent to parents. Link governors play an active part in monitoring specific aspects of the school's provision, as evidenced in a report on an audit of the medical care. The head teacher and the senior management team are also actively involved in the monitoring process and have a thorough knowledge of each child's needs and how the care practice contributes to meeting those needs. Quarterly visits are made by a designated independent visitor from the authority responsible for carrying on the school. The report on the findings provides a valuable assessment of current practice and useful guidance for further improvement.

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):

- implement the new supervision process so that all care staff receive regular formal supervision (NMS 30).