

Notton House School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Thomas Webber / Wendy Anderson
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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

Notton House School is a well established residential school which provides residential accommodation and education for up to 60 boys aged nine to 16 with emotional and behavioural difficulties. All pupils referred to the school have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The home is owned and operated by Bristol City Council.

The school is in a rural area of Wiltshire, close to the market town of Chippenham with easy access to the mainline railway and M4. The residential provision promotes healthy, physical, emotional and social development for the young people in a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

Summary

This announced key inspection took place over three days by two inspectors, covering all of the Residential Special Schools' key standards. This forms part of the annual inspection programme to examine the standard of care provided to young people.

The care practices established by Notton House School ensure that good outcomes are achieved for young people accommodated and a good standard of care is provided to young people. This was endorsed by the questionnaires received prior to and comments made during the inspection by the young people and their parents/carers.

Recommendations made during this inspection relate to administrative improvements within the recording systems adopted by the school.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Thirteen recommendations were made at the last inspection. Of these most have been complied with. The recommendation regarding the installation of the fly screen to the kitchen is still outstanding but is being dealt with. Further recommendations have been made with regard to the lack of sufficient recording within the physical restraint log, staffing levels and staff supervision, as the previous recommendations have not been complied with.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people live in an environment where their emotional and health care needs are clearly met. Young people have access to and are supported to attend all health care appointments to meet their needs with appropriate records being maintained. Individual health care plans and medical consent forms are also established for all young people. An in-house Occupational Therapist post has been created since September 2008. The Occupational Therapist also contributes to the welfare of the young people by providing them with individual support to assist in developing their self-esteem and dealing with specific emotional and behaviour issues. Support is also provided to young people's parents through parenting groups. Lessons in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and the school nurse deliver information to young people on personal relationships and the physical aspects of sexual relationships, safe

sex, and sexually transmitted diseases. All young people attend a 'Dangers of Smoking' session, with its message further reinforced by PSHE lessons and the school's non-smoking policy.

Safe medication storage practices are maintained with all medication, including controlled medication, being kept securely in facilities in line with best practice. Staff administer all medication to young people with appropriate records being maintained in line with agreed practices previously established. The school intends to review its current systems and practices in light of new guidance particularly in relation to the recording and administration of controlled drugs.

The school actively promotes healthy eating for young people with relevant information being displayed on various notice boards. The menus are prepared in consultation with the young people, primarily through the school council and they are also surveyed periodically. A satisfactory and varied four weekly menu is established which caters for the preferences, cultural and dietary needs of the young people. The menus provide young people with choices at all mealtimes and a selection of fresh fruit is readily available to them on a daily basis. Young people were unaware of the meals being provided as menus are not readily displayed within the lower school. Food is plentiful and most young people commented positively about the quantity of food provided. Mealtimes are conducted within a relaxed, social and congenial atmosphere. Concerns were raised by young people in respect of the cleanliness of the crockery and cutlery and hairs being found in food in the upper school. This was recognised by the head teacher who is addressing the issues.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school actively promotes the rights of young people by ensuring that their privacy is respected with staff knocking on young people's bedroom doors before entering. Suitable locks are fitted to young people's bedroom doors as well as to all bathroom, shower and toilet doors to aid their privacy and dignity. Opportunities are available for young people to meet with their families and visitors in private as well as making and receiving telephone calls. All young people's information is kept securely and staff are clearly aware of the issue relating to confidentiality. The school provides staff with guidance on respecting young people's privacy and confidentiality and the sharing and recording of information within the school.

The school has established clear policies and procedures for dealing with any complaints which are referred to within the school's Statement of Purpose and Young People's Guide. Copies of these documents are given to young people and their parents/carers prior to admission. Ofsted's contact details are readily displayed on each of the residential units' notice boards and are now appropriately reflected in the school's Statement of Purpose and Young People's Guide. The school supports and promotes young people to raise any issues openly and the process of making a complaint is clearly understood by them. Young people commented that they are able to raise any issues with staff if they are unhappy and they feel that their concerns are taken seriously and dealt with. Records maintained by the school reflect this. The staff handbook contains details of how staff should respond to concerns raised by boarders and briefing on this is included in the induction for new staff. The school is in the process of developing a more robust system for the recording of complaints and disclosures for easier monitoring purposes and to ensure that the outcome is always recorded.

Young people live in a safe environment where their welfare is promoted and they are protected from abuse. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of the young people and how to safeguard them. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place in respect to child protection. All staff have either received child protection training or receive child protection awareness through their induction programme. Information regarding this area of practice is covered in the staff handbook, together with a procedure for staff who may need to respond to an allegation or disclosure. The school has developed a good working relationship with the local child protection service as well as those in Bristol.

The school maintains a zero tolerance in respect to bullying. As a result, an anti-bullying policy is established which is conveyed to young people prior to admission. Young people are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying to themselves or others. Although staff and young people acknowledge that incidents of bullying do occur on occasions, these are promptly addressed by staff and suitably recorded. A restorative justice approach is being used by the school to assist in this area. The school has an extremely well thought out pro-active approach to bullying with surveys being conducted each term involving all the young people and staff. This enables the school to ascertain who are bullies and who are bullied. The surveys also assist the school in determining whether progress in addressing this specific issue is successful. There has been a decrease in bullying and young people are reported to be more open and able to speak about it within the school. Young people commented that they feel safe at the school.

A robust system is established for the reporting and recording of any event where a young person goes absent without authority. However, there is a lack of consistency in staff recording all information within the pro-forma. All absentees are recorded and monitored with all relevant parties being informed.

Staff assist young people to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement and reinforcement of the school's rules and expectations. The school has clear policies and procedures regarding behaviour management and focuses on positive behaviour with an appropriate balance being achieved between rewards and sanctions and physical intervention when necessary. The school operates a comprehensive points system to encourage positive behaviour which is used within both the educational and residential units. All staff and young people have a clear understanding of this system. The appointment of the Occupational Therapist and the integration of the emotional literacy programme has made a significant impact on the behaviour of the young people. Young people also commented positively about their improving behaviour.

The school has a 'timeout' room which is used to provide young people with space and time to calm down. Use of this room is strictly monitored and can only be used with the approval of a member of the senior management team. Staff are trained in the use of physical intervention and records are maintained where this method of control is used. However, significant gaps in recording the duration of the intervention are evident. The sanction books used within the different parts of the boarding provision of the school are inconsistent with each other and do not meet all of the criteria as detailed in the Standard.

The school has established clear health and safety policies and procedures to ensure that staff and young people are appropriately safeguarded. The school takes positive steps to keep young people and staff safe from the risk of fire and other hazards in accordance with Health and Safety and Fire legislation and guidance. A tour of the premises identified no significant health

and safety issues. Young people and staff regularly practise fire evacuation procedures and the various health and safety and fire safety records are kept up to date. Detailed risk assessments are carried out in respect of all activities undertaken by young people, and of the building. A generic risk assessment list is also established for all young people. However, young people's individual risk assessments do not always provide sufficient detail where specific risks or concerns have been identified.

The school has established suitable staff recruitment practices for the careful selection and vetting of all new staff to ensure the protection of young people. The files of the seven members of staff recruited since the last inspection confirmed that all relevant checks had been carried out, apart from two members of staff. This deficiency related to the lack of satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks being received prior to their appointment. However, one member of staff had recently undergone a CRB check and both members of staff were reported to have been supervised at all times.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people primarily attend Notton House's school provision, although some attend college and work placements. The education and residential staff work closely together to ensure that a holistic approach is undertaken towards the care of the young people and good communication systems are established between them. Daily verbal and written handover meetings are established to ensure a cohesive approach, so that residential staff can contribute and participate in the educational progress of the young people. Where necessary, teaching staff meet with key workers and vice-versa to address any particular concerns regarding any young people. All young people are statemented and targets of the young people are reviewed annually. Work undertaken during the school day is encouraged and built on by the residential staff who also assist the young people with their homework. Connexions Advisors also visit the school and attend the young people's reviews, particularly the transitional review for work experience.

The school provides young people with a wide range of activities where they are able to choose from several options each evening, which are monitored to ensure that they are age appropriate. Young people normally return home at weekends but a programme of weekend activities and outings is available for those who remain on site. The school also has activity weekends and activities during some of the holidays so as to offer support to the young people and their families. Young people commented that there is always a lot to do but some feel that during the winter months, although there is still a good range, it is not as varied. Some young people access the local youth clubs and cadets or those local to their homes which the school provides transport for.

The school provides individualised packages of care for young people. The individual needs and wishes of the young people are clearly identified in a variety of plans, with the school providing help, support and guidance as required. Young people are provided with a key worker and sessions between the young people and their key worker take place on a regular basis. The input of the Occupational Therapist linked with the emotional literacy programme is having a major beneficial impact on the young people accommodated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged and supported to make decisions and contribute to and influence the way the units of the school are run. Young people are given every opportunity to express their views and opinions through a range of forums. These include house meetings, individual key worker and Occupational Therapist sessions as well as raising and discussing any issues on a day to day basis. Young people are fully consulted on their care plans and reviews. An active and effective school council operates which meets regularly, seeking the views of other young people on issues under consideration, and which continues to be instrumental in improving the facilities within the school.

Young people live in a nurtured, structured and supportive environment where clear boundaries exist. Positive and relaxed relationships exist between the staff and young people which is based on mutual respect and understanding. Residential staff celebrate the progress and achievements of young people and are very committed to the care of them. A warm, friendly and relaxed atmosphere has been created where young people can freely express their views about a range of issues which are listened to by staff. Staff undertake their duties in a caring and professional manner and young people are relaxed and at ease in their company. Young people commented very positively about the care and support provided to them by the staff which was reiterated by young people's parents/carers and past parents.

The school has a comprehensive admissions process for young people. Information regarding prospective placements is considered by the senior management team in the first instance. Pre-admission visits are made to the school by young people and their parents/carers and representatives from the school undertake a home visit. Prospective young people and their families are shown around the school and the decision to offer a place is dependent upon the young person's commitment and the ability of the school to meet their needs. The transfer from the Lower School to one of the Upper School groups is managed to reduce the possibility of rejection by the new group. Support is offered to young people during and after the move.

Appropriate care plans are established for young people which identify how their needs are met on a day to day basis and contains input from them. Young people's care plans are also regularly reviewed and updated. Young people are involved in the planning of their formal reviews and are expected to attend them. Parents/carers of young people are also fully involved in the reviews.

Staff are committed to supporting young people to maintain contact with their homes during the week. The school holds a number of parents' evenings throughout the year. Parents/carers commented that good communication is maintained with the school working closely with them by keeping them well informed of any incidents and the progress made by the young people. Opportunities are available for young people to make and receive telephone calls to their parents/carers in private.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Most boarders return to their own homes at weekends. Uniforms are supplied by the school with young people wearing their own choice of clothes out of school hours. The school will also, in certain circumstances, supply the boarder with casual clothing. Valuables are locked away at the request of young people. Young people's pocket money goes into their own accounts in cash boxes, which are kept in the safe.

Notton House School is set in a rural area of Wiltshire, just south of Chippenham. Accommodation is divided between a modern, purpose built Lower School and the Upper School, which is in the original manor house. Young people live in one of seven residential units within the school which are divided into the lower and upper school.

The premises are maintained to a very good standard, being clean, tidy and comfortable. The accommodation is also decorated and furnished to a very good standard. Attention has been given to creating a homely environment for the benefit of the young people. The limitations of the buildings mean that young people are accommodated within bedrooms which provide single and shared facilities. Suitable locks are fitted to the bedroom doors and young people are able to personalise their bedrooms/individual spaces to their personal tastes. Residential accommodation in the upper school is divided into five small units, each clustered around communal lounge and kitchen facilities.

The units provide sufficient communal space together with sufficient bath, shower and toilet facilities to meet the individual and collective needs of the young people. All these doors are fitted with appropriate locks to aid the privacy and dignity of the young people. Some of the toilets are also fitted with auto lights so as to avoid dark spots where bullying may occur or where the young people may feel frightened.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Diversity and equality are promoted well in all aspects of the service. However, young people's individual records do not sufficiently cover their cultural backgrounds and needs.

A clear Statement of Purpose is established which describes the level of service provided to young people. This together with a copy of the school's Young People's Guide provides young people and their parents with clear information they need to know about the school.

Young people's records contain all the relevant information and are securely stored. The school maintains individual books for each young person which provides a continuing record of their stay at the school. The school also maintains the range of general records required which are clear and sufficiently detailed.

The school is committed to providing sufficient staff on duty throughout the day and night to meet the individual and collective needs of the young people. However, higher staffing levels are provided within the lower school units to meet the specific ethos and structure of this part of the school. Lower staffing levels are provided within the five other units within the upper school. However, only one member of staff is on duty within each of the upper school units to meet the complex individual and collective needs of the young people, with two further members of staff to cover all units. This does not sufficiently promote the continuation of the high level of nurturing provided in the lower school. Staff turnover continues to be low. Agency staff are not used, with the school relying upon existing staff and classroom assistants to cover for any short term staff shortage. This ensures that consistency and continuity of care is maintained. Management cover is always readily available as well as providing an on call system during the day and at night.

Young people are looked after by a staff team who are trained to meet their needs. New staff are provided with an induction programme and residential staff are also supported and encouraged to update their knowledge and skill base by attending appropriate training. This includes some joint training days with education staff. The Head of Care has considerable experience of working with young people. He has undertaken relevant management courses and is currently undertaking the Registered Manager's Award. The Head of Care is supported by two Deputy Heads of Care, one of whom holds the level 4 in Management. They both have considerable years experience in the care of young people. One of the team leaders holds the Registered Managers award. Although, at least 80% of the residential staff team have not achieved the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in the Care of Children and Young People, 71% of the staff are qualified. Another three members of staff are currently undertaking this qualification and are due to complete it by July 2009 taking the numbers of qualified staff to 88%. This ensures that young people receive care from a sufficient number of qualified staff.

Young people are looked after by a staff team who are themselves properly managed and supported in safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Effective systems have been established to ensure good communication is maintained between different staff disciplines within the school to ensure that young people receive consistency of care. Regular staff meetings and daily handover meetings are held which enable staff to keep up to date with regard to all issues pertaining to the residential units and the young people. An open door policy is established within the school where staff feel well supported and receive both formal and informal supervision. Annual appraisals and formal and recorded supervision is provided to staff at the recommended intervals. However, no formal supervision records are maintained for new staff.

Appointed Governors undertake monitoring visits of the school once every half term. The majority of these visits are unannounced and a written report is produced. However, the reports lack sufficient detail and the format does not cover all the areas of Standard 33.3. The school also receives visits from the Sector Advisor and the Educational Welfare Officers.

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 all documentation relating to the absconding log is consistently recorded by staff (NMS 8)
- ensure that all records relating to physical intervention and sanctions are fully maintained (NMS 10)
- ensure that all relevant recruitment checks are undertaken for new staff before they begin employment within the boarding provision (NMS 27)

- ensure that a review is undertaken of the staffing levels in the upper school to meet the complex needs of the young people (NMS 28)
- ensure that all new residential staff receive formal supervision at the required intervals and that records are maintained of these sessions. (NMS 30)