

Cuckmere House School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Valerie Packham
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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

Cuckmere House School is a specialist SEN (Special Educational Needs) College for boys aged between five and 16 with an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is maintained by East Sussex County Council and is situated in Seaford. A Pupil Referral Unit is also provided within the school for junior pupils and there is a Primary Behaviour Support Service to support pupils in other schools, as well as other initiatives aimed at supporting young people to access education. The school's residential provision, Tower House, is located in a separate building in a residential area of Seaford, approximately half a mile from the main school site. Up to 12 boys can stay overnight at Tower House and generally stay between one and three nights during the school week. There is extended day provision for both primary and secondary pupils at Tower House.

Summary

This inspection was carried out on an announced basis and the school was inspected against the key National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools. Individual outcome areas of Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution, Economic Wellbeing and Organisation were assessed. Additionally, the promotion of equality and diversity was inspected. Recommendations have been made regarding improving the format for consent for non prescription household medications and ensuring that medication records for young people who no longer attend the school are removed from the working file. The lock on a toilet in Tower House needs to be changed to make it accessible to staff from outside in an emergency. As part of the recruitment process, direct contact with referees should be made to verify references.

The school provides an extremely high standard of care for children and young people within an environment where they are protected from harm. Children are treated with respect as individuals, and are enabled to achieve positive achievements. Sound policies and procedures support and encourage good practice. Tower House is a suitably furnished house that is maintained to a good standard. Young people are able to access a wide range of exciting activities and enjoy their stays at the residential facility. There is close monitoring of the school's residential provision, and the welfare of its students. Young people feel they can express their feelings, views and wishes openly, both individually with care staff and in more formal areas such as the school council. Close liaison between staff and parents and carers ensures information is readily shared and allows for a consistent approach.

The senior management team provides excellent leadership which is reflective of the high standard of practices seen throughout the school. The residential provision is well managed, there is a consistency of staffing, excellent relationships with parents, and high staffing levels to ensure the needs of individual children are met. The staff are skilled at working with young people with behavioural difficulties. They receive excellent opportunities for training, support from a range of staff within the school, and operate effectively as a team. Communication across the school is excellent. Residential and education staff work closely together to the benefit of children.

Parents and carers value the services provided by the school for children and young people as well as the holistic approach of supporting the whole family. Comments made to Ofsted by parents include; 'They are just brilliant people' and 'They are passionate about the children'.

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 areas of improvement identified at the February 2008 inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students at the school have detailed individual plans which identify all aspects of their health needs. The school staff work well in monitoring and addressing both the routine and specific health needs of students. Children have access to a range of specialist health related professionals as required. There are very good systems in place to promote all aspects of the young people's health. The school has achieved Healthy School Silver Award, Sports Mark Gold Award and ECO Schools Silver Award in recognition of their commitments to promoting health.

Policies and procedures which provide suitable safeguards for the welfare of students are in place for the management and administration of medication. Staff are trained in first aid and the administration of medication. Appropriate consent is obtained regarding the administration of prescribed medication and the administration of first aid. Parents provide a written note giving consent for administering home medications. This is in contrast to the consent for prescribed medications form, which is more robust. Prescribed medication is securely stored and records are maintained. Medication records are not always removed from the administration of medication file, even when young people have left the school. If a child is unwell they are expected to go home.

Children enjoy meals which are varied and nutritious. Pupils eat in stages with care and teaching staff eating with them to provide sensitive and unobtrusive supervision of their behaviour. They are provided with choice at meal times and are encouraged to eat a healthy diet, with healthy snacks and fruit available. There is a healthy tuck shop at school and a horticultural area on the school site for growing vegetables. Staff are suitably trained in food handling and hygiene, and support students in the preparation of some meals at Tower House. One child commented during the inspection that he had been taught good table manners at the school. Parent and carer consultations have shown approval of the school's approach to promoting a healthy lifestyle. Cooking evenings for parents/carers and their children are successful.

Physical exercise is promoted by the many activities on offer. Popular activities include using the trampoline and attending a boxing club. There is a computer game at Tower House which helps children find out about their own level of fitness and allows them to devise a programme to help improve it.

Theme nights are held throughout the year to celebrate events from different cultures and beliefs. Young people have a Tower House 'passport' which is stamped when they experience eating foods from around the world. There are also fruit tasting sessions and quizzes on vegetables as part of promoting healthy eating.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff awareness is good in relation to maintaining confidentiality yet information is shared when necessary to ensure the safety and protection of children and young people. Robust policies and procedures help to ensure that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained at the school. The privacy and dignity of all children is managed sensitively and effectively. Tower House provides space where young people can relax and find privacy away from others if they wish. Each young person using the residential provision has his own room. Systems are in place to ensure the safety of all young people around the school.

The school has a complaints policy which is known to children, parents/carers and staff. Staff have a good relationship with the pupils, enabling them to deal with concerns as they become evident. The school focuses on informal resolution of matters wherever possible. The young people are clear about who to speak to if they are worried or want to complain.

A child protection and safeguarding policy is held by the school. Staff possess a sound understanding of the procedures and their responsibility to protect students from harm. All staff have been trained in child protection. Links are held with the local social services duty teams and there is good liaison with them when required. Staff are aware of how to keep themselves safe when working with the young people. Students are monitored well in Tower House which has restricted access and all visitors are required to sign the visitors' book.

Children confirm there are low levels of bullying at the school. Effective strategies are in place to help pupils develop responsible behaviour. The high staffing levels, vigilance and working practices adopted by the school contribute towards reducing opportunities for bullying to occur. Staff work with pupils to develop their understanding of diversity and the importance of tolerating others.

Policy and procedures are in place to inform staff on the action to be taken when children are absent without authority. A clear system is in place whereby any significant events relating to the protection of children are notified to the appropriate authorities.

The school achieved Specialist Schools and Academies Trust status in September 2004 as a lead practitioner of behaviour modification. The adherence to a reward/sanction principle is combined with monitoring academic and behavioural achievements. Parent and carers are fully involved in this and children know what is expected of them. One young person commented, 'The behaviour rules are fair. They are to keep us safe'.

All staff enjoy working with the children and see them in a very positive light. Staff receive training on physical interventions and are provided with refresher courses. Sanctions and restraints are recorded and are only carried out as a last resort. Staff communicate effectively with pupils, are clearly conversant with the particular needs of each pupil, and demonstrate good skills when managing behaviours.

Risk assessments are maintained and reviewed for all aspects of the grounds and premises. Risk assessments are also carried out for any activities away from the school site such as trips out. Permission for activities is obtained and clear records are maintained. Health and safety policies and procedures are rigorous and are closely monitored. Fire safety procedures are in place and

children know how to evacuate the school and Tower House. Records are maintained on the testing of fire equipment. Any maintenance jobs are done promptly, with priority given to health and safety matters.

A high proportion of staff have worked at the school for a number of years. Although the school follows a thorough recruitment process, it has omitted to evidence that telephone enquiries have been made following the receipt of written references.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Students benefit from the school's holistic approach which encompasses residential and educational staff working closely together. Students receive outstanding levels of individual support from staff within the school. A wide range of specialist external services also provide support for individual students according to their needs. Comprehensive and regularly reviewed plans are in place to address all aspects of identified need. Individual needs are well met and are kept under constant review. Children and young people are supported to achieve to their full potential at the school. Tower House plays an important part in reinforcing positive behaviour and in contributing to the educational and social achievements. The close liaison between care staff and education staff enables a consistent approach to the care of the boys. Staff know the boys well and are aware of their individual needs and targets. Young people confirm they are given help to follow their interests and hobbies and reach their individual targets. Very good plans clearly detail individual needs which have been drawn up and are based upon comprehensive assessments. Children understand the purpose and contents of their individual social plans. Children receive individualised support in line with their needs and wishes. All members of staff are available to the children and young people, should they need to talk about anything. Young people undergoing any particular personal stress, are given appropriate support at the school. An independent person is available for children to contact directly about any problems at the school. The school provides personal, educational, social and health education through the curriculum at age appropriate levels.

Senior management staff meet and greet the children and young people as they arrive on Monday mornings, in order that any issues may be picked up upon and dealt with quickly. There is a good staff/pupil ratio which gives adequate supervision and enables staff to spend quality time with individual pupils. The school has an 'open door' policy which means young people may approach any member of staff. Clear boundaries are set to ensure appropriate, but warm relationships are maintained between staff and children. All staff communicate effectively with the pupils, are conversant with the particular needs of each pupil, and demonstrate good skills when managing difficult behaviour. Care staff liaise closely with teaching staff to provide a holistic approach to address the needs of the young people. The support provided for individual children lies at the heart of the school's approach. The consistency of care supports and promotes the development of the security, self-confidence and responsibility of each pupil.

Children are provided with opportunities to engage in activities within the school and at the residential provision, as well as in the community. There is an excellent activity programme which provides opportunities for pupils as part of the extended day programme. These activities take place in school buildings and grounds, as well as at Tower House and offsite using community facilities. The activities assist the young people develop emotionally and socially with the support and guidance of staff. Young people enjoy the extended programme with

such activities as rock climbing, rock pooling and swimming. Children and young people are able to put forward suggestions for different activities and these are acted upon when possible. When young people leave Tower House they are presented with a record of achievement which is a colourful and special keepsake.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school works in close partnership with parents/carers, and records demonstrate that there is regular communication, that parents are kept suitably informed, that they are appropriately consulted, and able to contribute to the decision making processes affecting their child.

Comprehensive assessment procedures ensure sufficient information is gathered prior to a young person being admitted and the school works closely with external agencies and parents in order to prepare students for when they move on to further provision. Plans for individual students are well written documents which clearly identify needs in a particular area, and how needs are to be addressed. There is very close monitoring of students' individual social plans and records clearly indicate the progress students are making. The school works closely and cooperatively with the young people, parents/carers and the placing authority through the review process. Families and carers are regularly consulted and are listened to. There are very good channels of communication between relatives/carers and the school. Staff engage with relatives/carers when dropping the boys home and by weekly telephone calls. Staff suggest ways for parents and carers to implement behaviour strategies to support a consistent approach to managing challenging behaviour. Parents/carers are invited to meet with care staff at school events, with transport provided if required in order to facilitate attendance. An informative newsletter is regularly issued to parents and carers. The last survey to parents and carers in October 2008 resulted in positive responses.

The school emphasises the importance of consulting with the boys. The children can express their views by the school council meetings, group, daily and annual review meetings. Children are able to approach members of staff with their views about their day to day care. A high level of contact is maintained with family/carers and friends as young people do not routinely stay at Tower House on every weeknight. Parents/carers are free to contact the school at any time. Staff set clear, consistent boundaries within which the young people are secure while still able to express their individuality. Young people are under close supervision, but strategies used by staff to promote responsible behaviour are sensitive and respectful at all times. The care staff group is stable and offers consistency in their relationships with the young people. Views of stakeholders are gathered regularly throughout the year.

A particular strength of the school is the level of close partnership working with parents and carers. Parents and carers appreciate the individualised care and education the children and young people receive. In addition, parents have commented on the superb support provided to the whole family.

Staff value children's opinions and involve them in making decisions on matters that affect them. Young people have appropriate elements of choice in their day to day lives, within the constraints of the structured routines. Clear boundaries are set to ensure appropriate, but warm relationships are maintained. There is a good pupil/staff ratio which gives adequate supervision and enables staff to spend quality time with individual pupils. As a result of listening to children, the school has purchased a particular computer game for Tower House and football goals for

the school. The school emphasises the importance of consulting with children. Young people's views are sought throughout their time at the school and decisions about their care are discussed with them. The school council is a forum for children where items are thoroughly discussed and an immediate response given if at all possible. Children and young people are provided with important information such as how to complain, sanctions, expectations of behaviour and routines. There is a strong sense of community at the school. Children and staff enjoy mutually respectful relationships. The boys feel fairly treated, they are able to approach staff with concerns or personal matters and feel listened to.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Students at the school benefit from a very good residential facility. Tower House provides a safe physical environment which is extremely well maintained and has been made as homely as possible. All students are provided with their own bedroom and there are sufficient bathrooms and toilet facilities. However, one toilet has a sturdy bolt and staff are unable to open the door from outside in case of emergency. Tower House is well decorated, clean and tidy. All bedrooms have space for clothes and possessions. Bedding is supplied by the school. Young people feel comfortable when they stay at Tower House. The general standard of repair, décor, fixtures, fittings, furnishings and equipment is of a high standard. The residential provision is kept under constant review and repairs are undertaken swiftly. The house is undergoing a refurbishment process. Since the last inspection for example, a new gate has been erected in the garden and some windows have been replaced with double glazing.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school became a federation in September 2008 by joining with St Mary's School, Horam. Both schools are managed by the Executive Headteacher for this school.

Students at the school benefit from residential provision that operates efficiently and is well organised and managed. The Statement of Purpose is well presented and is reviewed on an annual basis. It clearly states the manner in which the residential provision contributes to the whole school approach in meeting pupils' needs. There is excellent information provided for parents and carers which is up to date and accurately reflects the services provided.

The school's staffing arrangements, both day and night, ensure the welfare of students is extremely well protected and promoted. Staffing levels are sufficient to provide appropriate supervision both on and off site, to support students related to their individual plans. Children benefit from the continuity of care provided by dedicated teams of staff. The school provides excellent support for its residential staff group who operate effectively as a team. They all have job descriptions which accurately reflect their roles and there are clear lines of accountability. Staff receive formal supervision, are subject to annual appraisals, and have personal development plans. The school's residential provision is organised, managed, and staffed in a manner that delivers a very high standard of care. The school benefits from a team of established and experienced care staff who provide continuity of care that is valued by the pupils. Care staff are provided with extensive training opportunities and are well equipped to meet the needs of pupils in their care.

There are systems in place which provide for effective monitoring of the residential provision, its overall operation, and the welfare of individual students. Records are detailed, up to date and generally well maintained. The school is well managed and the senior management team demonstrate excellent leadership skills. The Executive Headteacher and his team have established a culture of open communication at all levels. Systems and processes are working well and provide evidence of the promotion of the welfare of the young people and offers them the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding.

Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Young people receive an individual approach which is designed to meet their needs. All staff have good knowledge of the young people they are working with, ensuring their needs are consistently met. School documents demonstrate knowledge and commitment to ensuring equality and fairness is explicit and followed through into guidance for all staff. Senior management and staff are committed to promoting equality in their day to day practice.

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):

- review and revise the system for recording consent for non prescription household medications and ensure that medication records for young people who no longer attend the school are removed from the working file (NMS 14.18, 14.20)
- change the lock on a toilet to make it accessible to staff from outside in an emergency (NMS 25.5)
- make direct contact with each referee to verify references (NMS 27.2)