

Edington & Shapwick School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Heather Chaplin
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Address	Edington & Shapwick School Mark Road Burtle BRIDGWATER Somerset TA7 8NJ
Telephone number	01278 722 012
Email	
Registered person	Jon Whittock
Head of care	Jon Whittock
Head / Principal	Jon Whittock
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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

Edington and Shapwick School provides educational and boarding facilities for children and young people aged from eight to 19 years who have dyslexia and may have associated language disorders.

The school occupies two separate sites five miles apart, and is situated in rural village communities on the Somerset Levels. Edington provides for children in the age range of eight to 13 years. They are accommodated in two boarding houses close to the school; Fairview and Chapel Hill Farm.

The older students aged 13 to 19 years are educated at the Shapwick site, and are currently accommodated in The Old Vicarage on the Edington site (Sixth Form boys), The Manor on the Shapwick site, Little Lawns and Greystone Cottage, both within walking distance of Shapwick, and also at The Lakes, which is a short drive from the two school sites at Meare. The school changes use of the boarding houses from time to time according to gender balance.

The school currently has 149 students on roll. At the time of the inspection there were 21 girls and 66 boys boarding, with 56 students attending during the day.

Summary

This was a very positive announced inspection, which took place over two days and involved a number of young people and staff.

The school achieves good outcomes for students across the full age range and in all boarding houses. There are some outstanding features, notably in the excellent provision of therapeutic support which helps students to reach their potential, and the quality of the recently refurbished boarding houses.

The school changed ownership in 2008 and the new Board of Governors is working hard alongside the two headmasters to make improvements. Work continues on refurbishment of the remaining houses and a great deal of new furniture has been purchased.

A total of 58 boarders completed questionnaires, and questionnaires were also sent to parents. The vast majority of the questionnaire responses were very positive, and the few that had less positive comments to make often said that they felt listened to and that the school would address any concerns.

One parent summed up the outcome for their child as follows, 'My son has been in private dyslexic schools since he was nine years old (he is now 15)...the improvement in him educationally and socially is wonderful. He adores his teachers and pastoral care. After only three months he told us 'for the first time ever, I love school.' I think this says it all.'

Three recommendations have been made, one of which, relating to the frequency of reporting by the Board of Governors, is a new recommendation. Work continues on some aspects of recruitment and medicines handling practice, and none of the recommendations relates to issues that directly affect students' safety and welfare.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The recommendations made at the last inspection have been partially addressed, so both have been repeated. The major improvement is to the quality of the accommodation, which met the standard at the last inspection and so was not subject to a recommendation, but now in some areas, but not yet all, as work is still in progress, achieves a very high standard for young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Health and dietary provision at this school is generally of a good standard. Dedicated staff meet health care needs well and exercise a high level of day-to-day pastoral care.

Parents made positive comments, for example 'since our son started at Shapwick.....they have always cared for his (health) needs to the highest levels...'

All staff have a current emergency first aid qualification, with the head of geography and outdoor pursuits holding the four-day first aid in the workplace qualification. There are good systems in place to ensure that students receive routine medical, optical and dental care when this cannot be arranged from home, but they go home every two to three weeks, so in many cases parents manage routine health appointments.

Students confirm that they are very well looked after when unwell at school. There was a minor issue of privacy in the sick room at Edington School, which is only very rarely used for boarders, and the headmaster agreed to remedy this. Sick rooms in the boarding houses are comfortable, suitable for the purpose and provide sufficient privacy to ensure confidentiality.

Both schools have a designated member of staff who manages the provision of homely remedies and coordinates health care. Neither is a currently registered nurse, although both are highly experienced in their work. They ensure that young people are able to access health care as required and liaise with parents on a day to day basis to maintain good communication.

These two staff are responsible for purchasing homely remedies and distributing them to the seven boarding houses. There are significant logistical issues due to the scattered location of the houses and the two schools, but the system seems to work well. Medicines are kept locked in secure cabinets in all but one of the houses, and all staff are clear about their responsibilities to manage them effectively.

The various systems in place in the seven different houses provide safe outcomes for students in that they all receive the correct medicine when they need it. However, recording systems for receipt of medicines, details of expiry dates, batch numbers, and reasons for administration are not sufficiently robust to provide the audit trail which would have to be produced in the event of any medical or legal issue arising in connection with medicines administration.

No staff have received updated training in handling of medicines, which would help the school to set up some more robust systems to support young people.

The quality of the food provided for students is of a very high standard and was almost universally praised. Menus are imaginative and flexible, and both cooks are willing to listen to

students' wishes and put on new dishes if requested. Shapwick School was awarded the maximum five stars for their last Environmental Health Department food hygiene inspection.

Students talked about a recent 'healthy eating week' and were keen to continue with the plan, modified slightly to provide the occasional treat. Students show a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and this is supported by plenty of outdoor activities, although some parents commented that certain older students spend a lot of time in front of computers and televisions at weekends. Generally, outcomes for students in terms of variety and quality of their food are very good.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Parents' questionnaires were positive about the school's capacity to keep students safe 'Excellent, I feel completely assured to his safety and well being whilst under the school's care.'

Students did not identify any specific issues about safety; as with many schools, a small minority said in their questionnaires that they had perceived themselves to be bullied, but in each instance they had also identified several staff by name that they could talk to about any concerns. The school has an effective anti-bullying policy and takes a strong stance on any proven incidents of bullying. Young people who were spoken to in person did not report bullying as an issue.

Continuing improvements to the boarding houses provide good bedroom and bathroom facilities which help to ensure students' privacy. The head of care is in the process of reducing the numbers in each bedroom to a maximum of four. Many bedrooms already have fewer than four boarders.

All information about children is handled carefully through a numerical coding system and is securely kept in locked facilities. There is closed circuit television on site to help keep students safe from intruders.

There is an effective complaints policy in place, which provides for contact with outside agencies. Only one complaint has been received relating to a boarder since the last inspection, and this is well recorded, but there are many positive comments; indeed these form the vast majority of the paperwork in the comments file.

The school does not yet have a central complaints log, which would facilitate management monitoring of issues, but the recording that is in place achieves the same objective. The headmasters are considering introducing a monitoring system to help keep track of any continuing issues.

Effective policies and practice are in place to ensure that children are protected from abuse, although they do require some minor updating to reflect changes in South West area local authorities' joint child protection procedures. The head of care is the designated person responsible for child protection, and has received training at an appropriate level for the role. He ensures that all staff are trained and updated when there are any changes to procedures or practice. The school has not made any safeguarding referrals since the last inspection.

There have also been no incidents of absconding, nor restraints since the last inspection. The school has a clear behavioural management policy which students understand. Behaviour was observed to be excellent throughout the inspection, with confident, appropriate and helpful young people very much in evidence.

The school places a very high priority on safety. All activities are risk assessed and signed off by the head master. Accident reporting systems are in place, together with separate risk assessments on all the boarding houses which identify any issues to be resolved.

Fire logs for all seven boarding houses had been well recorded, although in one instance fire drills were taking place once instead of twice a term, which is the frequency recommended by the fire service. The head of care said that this will be addressed, and so no recommendation has been made.

Three staff files were sampled, all of which related to staff appointed since the last inspection. Files are well managed and children are kept safe by the systems in place. However, staff are still starting in post prior to Criminal Records Bureau checks arriving, and in one instance there are significant gaps in employment history which have not been explained on the file, and identity information is incomplete.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children at this school benefit from an exceptional range of activities, ranging from indoor computer games and pool, to external trips at weekends making use of the local countryside and visits to nearby towns. There are good sports facilities at the school and students at The Manor often make use of these in the evenings. The school and boarding houses are full of photographs recording trips to adventure parks, the Ten Tors challenge over Dartmoor and holidays. A holiday to Egypt is planned this year.

All young people spoken to confirmed that they have a high degree of personal assistance available to them to help them address any difficulties with school work or personal issues. House-parents, teachers and the headmasters provide day to day support and students are made aware of how to contact Childline if they need to.

Parents confirmed that communication is good 'Our son's confidence has soared since being at Shapwick. We are constantly kept informed and updated of his progress and feel his needs are met above and beyond the duty of the staff.'

There is a large team of qualified and experienced speech and language therapists and occupational therapists available to provide individual support for specific needs, and the school has regular visits from a Clinical Psychologist who conducts sessions with young people as necessary.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Students are confident that they can talk to a number of staff members or to the head of care to make any suggestions for improvement and to have a say in the running of the boarding

system. There is a school council and their meetings are minuted. Students have been able to ask for some changes, for example the refurbishment of the changing areas.

Admissions to the school are well managed, and students are encouraged to visit and spend a day in school. A student is designated to meet them and show them around, and the same student meets them again when they arrive to stay, and helps them to settle in.

Students' educational and social needs are well recorded on individual education plans. The school provides good support for sixth formers who attend Bridgwater College, but who board at the school:

'Shapwick has offered our daughter a calm and welcoming environment, where good values are encouraged and demonstrated by the staff. The combination of boarding at Shapwick and lessons at Bridgwater seems to provide a good balance between encouraging independence and the security of a small, supportive boarding environment.'

Contact can be maintained with families and friends through pay phones, and all students go home every two to three weeks. In an emergency, boarding house staff contact families, and students can make outgoing calls if they need to do so. One parent said 'We have had close liaison with the house-parents and school and they work hard to ensure the child is always put first. They have good communication skills and if they have any concerns, pick up the phone and talk with parents, which is refreshing.'

Students have ready access to the number for Childline, and to contact names within school if they need to talk about something that is worrying them.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people confirmed that they can wear their own clothing outside school time and that they can go into town to shop at weekends, or staff will obtain any personal requisites for them. Parents said that they are pleased with the progress their children have made towards independence 'Our son had little to no financial skills when he started at Shapwick, even though we endeavoured to try our hardest. He now saves well and has a very good understanding of the economic plight.'

The physical environment in this school is varied, interesting and full of character to an exceptional degree. There are seven boarding houses in three villages on the Somerset Levels: Burtle, Meare and Shapwick. All of these are attractive historic buildings dating between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. This gives them a unique but homely atmosphere. Students all seem very proud of their boarding houses and are happy and settled living there.

From time to time there may be some minor maintenance issues associated with these older buildings, and one boarding house in particular has an ongoing programme of maintenance in place with a number of matters documented and awaiting repair.

The accommodation is currently being refurbished on a rolling programme to a very good standard, showing a major commitment to improvement. One boarding house at Edington has ground floor access to all rooms, which could potentially suit children with physical disabilities. A new boarding house, constructed to a high specification, is soon to be commissioned to

improve the accommodation further. All the boarding houses have attractive grounds, most with ready access to open countryside.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Outcomes for students in terms of equality and diversity are good. The ethos of the school is to encourage and support young people who have often experienced lack of understanding in previous schools, and help them to achieve their potential.

The aims and objectives are clearly stated in the school's admissions policy, which describes Edington and Shapwick as 'a specialist school catering for dyslexic boys and girls some of whom have additional needs for language and occupational therapy.' The school has an accessibility plan for disabled students, and is clear which areas would or would not be suitable for access by wheelchair users.

The school does not keep boarding welfare records in addition to individual education plans but the individual education plans are in sufficient detail to enable staff to look after students to meet their needs. All staff spoken to had a very good understanding of young people's needs and are well able to look after them to a high standard. Staff interviewed confirm that they are well supported in their work through regular supervision and access to both induction and ongoing professional training.

The school is very effectively managed and monitored by two headmasters, both with clearly defined leadership roles. This system has worked well for many years, with one headmaster being responsible for the academic syllabus and the other (head of care) for boarding welfare. The head of care is kept fully informed about every aspect of the day to day welfare of students. He is most supportive to students and parents with any issue with their child's education, and visits each of the seven boarding houses on most days.

The school was sold in 2008 and now has a new Board of Governors. There has been significant financial investment in new buildings and equipment since the school changed hands. The new chairman of the Board of Governors has been pro-active in initiating improvement, and has submitted a full report on his findings. Reports are not yet presented to the school every half term, but the new developments have been considerable even at this early stage in the new ownership.

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 medicines are stored, recorded and administered in accordance with National Minimum Standard 14.
- ensure that members of staff are not started in post until a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau check has been received, that any reasons for gaps in employment history are recorded, and that copies of full identity information are kept on file (NMS 27).
- ensure that a representative from the Governing Body visits the school at least twice a term and makes a written report of such visits (NMS 33.2).