

Fred Nicholson School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Dorrit Andrews
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Date of last inspection	27 January 2009

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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

This school is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council catering for pupils with complex needs aged from seven to 16 years. Situated in a residential area on the edge of a market town, the school takes pupils from a wide catchment area.

There are currently 106 pupils on roll, 22 of whom presently board. Pupils may board for up to four nights from Monday to Friday. However, the majority stay for two nights per week. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls in single bedrooms and dormitory areas in groups of four or less. Boarders have access to a range of school facilities to support the boarding 'Life Skills' programme. These include the library, gymnasium, school grounds and club room. Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff.

Summary

This was an announced inspection and all key standards were inspected. A large proportion of boarders participated in the inspection and contributed their views. Outcome areas for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and organisation are all judged as outstanding. The remaining area, economic wellbeing, is judged as good.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and contributes highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. Staff are highly committed to their role and have access to good systems of support, guidance and training opportunities to assist them in safeguarding the welfare of boarders. Contact with parents is valued and encouraged and a range of initiatives is established to support effective working with families.

A highly effective activity programme is in place to support the development of boarders' life skills, confidence and self-esteem and their classroom based learning. Boarders comment positively on the direct benefits of the activities they enjoy stating 'I am becoming fitter', it is 'helping me with my number work and reading' and 'I learn to do things for myself'.

Boarders continue to receive outstanding pastoral care and individual support. Their views are sought in relation to the day-to-day life of the school and the boarding provision and they feel listened to.

Records and documentation are well maintained overall. However, not all monitoring reports carried out by the local authority and governing body comment on the areas required. A recommendation has been raised in relation to this matter.

All recommendations raised at the last inspection have been addressed.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the school was asked to ensure that the record of sanctions includes all information required and to ensure that records are signed to show that monitoring has taken

place. Recording of sanctions has been reviewed to include the required details and monitored records are now signed by designated staff. The school was also asked to ensure that monitoring visits undertaken by the local authority take place at the required frequency. Monitoring visits are now shared by the governing body and the local authority and are taking place at the required intervals. The action taken in response to the recommendations raised support the safeguarding of pupils' welfare.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical and emotional health needs of pupils are promoted and supported extremely well in partnership with other professionals, including a visiting counsellor, specialist health staff and a clinical psychologist. Pupils receive excellent advice, guidance and support on a range of health and social issues and are given opportunities to discuss matters openly with care staff. Of particular note is the school's excellent 'Protect Me' programme which covers a range of topics with pupils in relation to keeping safe and includes workshops, discussion groups and quizzes.

Health care plans are in place and parental consent to medical treatment is obtained. Details of emergency health care needs are passed to escorts accompanying pupils on school transport in order that staff are suitably informed and can respond accordingly. Pupils remain with their own General Practitioner and the school has emergency access to medical and dental treatment if required. First aid and epilepsy training is provided to staff and regularly updated. Clear procedures are in place for the administration of medication and staff receive appropriate training. Medication is securely stored and records sampled are in good order. Regular reminders are sent to parents and carers regarding medication matters and good links are established with health professionals regarding medication changes and any monitoring arrangements. Pupils return home when unwell.

The school provides pupils with healthy and nutritious meals, and systems are in place to monitor individual eating patterns. Catering staff know individual pupils well, are very supportive and offer assistance with cutting up food and encouraging pupils to try new dishes. Arrangements for evening meals are slightly different to those for lunch and encourage pupils to develop their independence skills, such as making a cup of tea and serving themselves. Pupils contribute to menus and boarders are provided with opportunities to plan, shop and cook as part of the evening life skills programme and help with preparing after school drinks and snacks. Drinking water is available throughout the day and evening, and milk and toast are provided for all day pupils on arrival at school as many travel long distances. Pupils refer positively to the range of food provided and to favourite meals.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' privacy is respected and information is confidentially handled. For example, boarders report they are able to keep their belongings safe, records are securely stored and staff promote pupils' private use of the telephone where appropriate. Staff recognise children's needs for privacy and are careful not to intrude unnecessarily. Personal care needs are responded to sensitively and discussed with the child and parents to secure agreed support. Pupils' own understanding of privacy is explored with them as part of the life skills programme.

Pupils are encouraged to raise any worries or concerns they may have at an early stage and are aware of what to do if they are unhappy. Information regarding the school's complaint procedures and help lines are readily available and provided to boarders. Complaints are appropriately recorded and responded to. No complaints have been received by Ofsted in relation to the school.

Policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils and effective partnerships are well established with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children. All staff receive appropriate child protection training as part of their induction and refreshers thereafter. The head of care has attended external training in her role as 'designated person' and governors also receive training. Good records are maintained of child protection matters and there is robust monitoring of identified concerns by the head of care in liaison with children's services professionals. Comprehensive 'keeping safe' discussions take place with pupils and include issues such as mobile phone and internet safety and ways of coping with situations in which they may find themselves. Pupils benefit greatly from this work and it is praised by parents.

Bullying is not tolerated and is not identified as a problem at the school. Work is undertaken throughout the school community to discuss issues openly and to support pupils in their understanding of feelings and to deal with these. Topics include anger management, dealing with conflict and tolerance of others. The services of a counsellor is also engaged one day a week to support individuals with identified needs and a new drama activity is providing opportunities for pupils to explore issues further. Pupils are forthright in their comments and report 'bullying is not allowed here because staff sort things out before they become a problem' and 'staff are in the playground and help keep us safe'. Individual risk assessments consider potential issues around bullying and pupils report that staff listen and deal with matters well.

Staff are vigilant in their supervision of boarders and the monitoring of their whereabouts. Appropriate procedures are in place for staff regarding the action to take if a pupil goes missing, including a working protocol with the local police. Where there is a history of absconding, a risk reduction plan is in place. There are no incidents of boarders being reported missing.

Pupils are helped to develop socially acceptable behaviour through positive encouragement and reinforcement. Behaviour management training is provided regularly to all staff and includes de-escalation strategies and the use of physical intervention. Behaviour plans are in place which outline triggers and identify strategies for dealing with behaviour effectively. Few sanctions are used by care staff and physical intervention is rare. Staff set aside time with pupils to discuss and reflect on incidents involving the imposition of sanctions and the use of physical intervention and pupils' comments are recorded. Good records are maintained, expectations are reinforced regularly and pupils consider these to be fair.

Risk assessments, policies and procedures are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Records demonstrate that regular safety and servicing checks are undertaken to fire, electrical, water and gas installations. Fire drills take place at different times and boarders are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety matters affecting them including out of bounds areas, effective washing of hands and safe behaviour in practical lessons and activities.

Robust procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff and the monitoring of visitors and contractors. In addition, some members of the governing body and senior staff team have completed safer recruitment training. These practices reduce potential risks to the welfare of pupils.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are provided with a stimulating and nurturing environment and clearly benefit from their boarding experience. Excellent opportunities are made available to develop boarders' life and social skills thereby supporting their educational progress. For example, care staff support pupils in preparing themselves for school, provide opportunities for shopping and handling money and developing reading skills. A small group of teaching staff undertake evening duties and value the opportunity to see the 'whole' child. Pupils also report that they enjoy this time with teaching staff as they 'get to know everyone better'.

Care staff cover duties in the school's support unit, occasionally support in class and are familiar with the educational needs and progress of boarders. Good communication systems across the school community contribute effectively to pupils' welfare. For example, a member of the care team attends daily briefings in school and information is appropriately shared between both teams to support the individual needs of pupils.

Pastoral care is a strength of the school and boarders receive outstanding individual support. Care staff have good knowledge of the children in their care and are highly committed to their work. The school's activity programme has very clear aims and objectives in providing purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop personal skills in a meaningful and fun way. Boarders report that they can speak to a member of staff of their choosing and identify a wide range of adults across the school community to whom they feel able to go with any worries. Effective working partnerships are established with the local authority and a range of external professionals to the benefit of pupils, their families, carers and the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to contribute to planning for their future and the development of the school community. A range of opportunities are available for consultation and include one-to-one sessions, meal times, use of surveys and activity time. Changes made as a result of listening to boarders include the provision of more whole group activities such as drama, cooking and community trips. Staff have also consulted boarders in the re-writing of the complaints information and in the compilation of menus.

Clear arrangements are in place for the admission of pupils and these are handled with care and sensitivity in relation to the individual child, their family and the existing group of boarders. Good information is provided to parents and pupils about the school and residential provision and boarders report that staff help them settle in.

Pupils have their needs assessed effectively and written placement plans outline how these needs will be met. The plans are comprehensive, regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with pupils, parents and the local authority. For example, the personal care needs of pupils are sensitively discussed and individual pupils are encouraged to nominate staff, with whom they

feel comfortable, to support them. A key worker system is in operation to monitor individual placement plans and coordinate information. A highly effective activity programme is in place to support the development of boarders' life skills, confidence and self-esteem. Activities are linked to each of the Every Child Matters outcome areas and accessed by all boarders. Provision is also made to target identified needs of individual pupils such as personal hygiene, keeping safe and interactions with peers.

Boarders are able to retain contact with their families and carers and can make and receive calls in private. Some boarders have a regular arrangement whereby a parent telephones each evening when they are boarding. Staff maintain effective communication with parents and carers with regard to pupils' progress as well as any concerns; this can include home visits. The school employs a parent support worker who in addition to providing specific support to individual families, assists parents and carers in liaising with other staff at the school and offers information advice. Parents are highly positive in their comments about the school and report that staff are 'very good at sorting out any problems you may have' and 'help with independence and supporting parents' role'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is pleasantly decorated, furnished, clean and well maintained. Staff work hard to provide a welcoming environment for boarders and encourage contributions to the layout of communal rooms and the personalisation of sleeping areas. Boarders state that their rooms are comfortable and provide adequate privacy. Residential routines are clearly displayed in both written and pictorial form on communal notice boards and for individuals where necessary.

Good provision is made for the storage of boarders' personal possessions, including a lockable drawer. Great care is taken to maintain the allocation of sleeping areas to the same boarders each time they board to promote continuity and self-confidence. No problems are reported of items going missing.

Sufficient showers, baths and toilets are available to boarders; separate facilities are provided for staff. Specific allocation of washing areas is currently in place within the girls' accommodation to support individual routines.

Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. A large communal sitting area and kitchen is also available and is used for group meetings, snacks after school, supper and playing quiet games. Boarders also have access to a range of school facilities to support the evening activities programme. These include the library, school grounds, gymnasium and club room.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and contributes highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. Staff are highly committed, very experienced and competent in their role. They have very good knowledge of the pupils in their care and understand their individual needs.

A comprehensive school brochure is provided to parents and interested parties. A new pupils' guide to boarding has been produced and a version for parents is nearing completion which will include updated details of staff qualifications. Pupils are particularly pleased with the presentation of their new guide and the range of photographs and illustrations used.

Good training opportunities are made to staff through whole school development days, the National Vocational Qualification framework and attendance at external courses. Topics include child protection, health conditions, first aid and behaviour management. External support is provided to the headteacher and a system of regular staff supervision, appraisal and team meetings is established. Written guidance is available to staff through the school's policies and procedures and a handbook is in place for care staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff acknowledge the individual experiences and needs of pupils and provides them with effective individualised support to help them progress and develop. The school positively promotes the involvement of all pupils. For example, the school is learning Makaton in response to the needs of new pupils and pupils state that everyone is given the opportunity to represent the school at sporting events. A working group, involving governors, reviews equality and diversity practice and procedures within the school.

A duty rota and staffing policy is followed in practice and boarders know who is responsible for them at specific times. A member of care staff sleeps in each of the boarding areas at night and a photograph is placed on the sleeping-in room door to remind pupils who is on duty. Pupils know the location of sleeping-in rooms and feel confident in contacting staff during the night. Arrangements are in place for covering duties at times of staff sickness and absence through the school's own pool of staff.

Good systems are in place for the monitoring of children's welfare and the operation of the boarding provision. The headteacher prepares a report for the governing body each term and regular checks are made of records by the head and deputy head of care and reports compiled. Regular monitoring visits are conducted and shared by the local authority and designated governor and reports prepared. However, not all reports comment on the areas required.

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 all monitoring visits conducted by the local authority and designated governor include all matters detailed in national minimum standard 33.3 (NMS 33.3).