

High Close School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC011327
Inspection date	30 April 2009
Inspector	Merryl Wahogo
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	22 May 2008

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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

High Close School is operated by Barnardos. It provides for day attendance and weekday boarding for pupils aged from eight to 17 years, with most boarders being of senior school age.

The school takes young people who have been unable to succeed in mainstream school and may have been excluded from previous schools, and have statements of special educational need arising from emotional and behavioural difficulties. The range of additional specific special needs with which the school is working is broad, and may include young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, autistic spectrum disorders, speech and language difficulties and visual and auditory impairment.

Boarders are accommodated in four houses now with up to nine places in single bedrooms, but can accommodate an additional boarder sharing, for short periods. Each house has a designated staff team and unit manager. There is a separate unit for day and extended day pupils. The day unit has a separate dedicated staff team.

The ethos of the school is to reward good behaviours, within the overall context of a behaviour management system called Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) in which all care and teaching staff receive training.

Summary

This was the annual unannounced key inspection. Standards in every outcome area are outstanding. Although High Close was also judged to be outstanding last year, the senior management team have ensured that there is continued development and improvement. The young people are unusually proud of their school and enjoy all it has to offer 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 recommendations made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Staff prepare clear health plans for all young people which include everything from diet and exercise through to appointments with medical professionals. They support these plans thoroughly via close monitoring by key workers and unit managers.

Staff record all aspects of the administration of medication with exceptional accuracy and attention to detail, ensuring an easy audit trail. They also store medication in accordance with all guidance and regulations from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Young people confirm that they are well looked after if they have a minor illness but that they are returned home if it is something more serious. One young person said 'They take care of us and are really sympathetic'. Another said 'It is really easy to see the doctor if I need to'. This means that young people and their families can be confident that they are receiving the best possible health care.

The school has now achieved the Bronze Healthy School award and the International Healthy Schools award. All the young people consulted are aware of the healthy eating agenda. For example, many young people pointed out that they are not allowed fizzy drinks or unhealthy snacks before six o'clock. Most young people are enthusiastic about meals, which are tasty and have plenty of fruit and vegetables available. This is true both in the dining hall and in the units, where young people have a say in the menus for the evening meals.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The high level of trust in staff, demonstrated by the young people suggests an unusual amount of confidence that staff will respect every aspect of their privacy. Staff rooms are kept locked at all times, unless staff are present. Boys and girls have bedrooms in separate ends of the units and are respectful of each other's privacy in relation to not entering these areas.

There have been very few complaints made since the last inspection. Staff have dealt with complaints thoroughly and have recorded the process in detail. This means both that young people and their families find little to complain about and that the system is transparent.

Staff keep records of all child protection concerns confidentially and are well aware of the school's procedures for making referrals. The Head of Care monitors child protection concerns and the school has passed concerns on to social services appropriately. Young people report clear teaching about how to keep themselves safe. For example, 'They tell me if I'm offered sweets then to walk away' and 'help us study on our safety'. This means that young people are not only kept safe whilst at school but are more likely to keep themselves safe in the future.

Bullying is taken very seriously at High Close School. The school has introduced an effective new bullying charter. There are annual consultations with the young people and their collective works are displayed in both the school and in the units. A thorough debriefing for the young people involved in any incident, is a critical part of the strategy. This all means that young people are developing insight and awareness of the meaning of bullying and being bullied. Staff make detailed records of all instances of bullying, including any racism. Records allow staff to identify any triggers or patterns in bullying.

There is a detailed policy and a thorough procedure for identifying all the relevant points of action that need to be taken when a young person is absent without authority. Staff record all incidents on a database which can be monitored.

The school has recently adopted Team Teach as their school behaviour management package. Staff say that they feel much more comfortable and confident using this package for physical restraints although they still use some Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) de-escalation techniques. Staff record all sanctions and measures of control thoroughly, including young people's agreement to the sanctions. These are always used appropriately and individual records show that current methods are effective in decreasing incidents requiring either sanctions or restraints. Staff report that the computerised system allows easy access to information about behaviour trends for young people in their particular units. One young person said High Close is good at helping us 'to control our anger'.

The Head of Care has established with the local fire service, a fire safety project called the 'Phoenix Project'. This has been targeted initially at girls and is used in part as a team building

exercise. Equally, personal safety training, in a project called 'R U Safe?' has begun, involving the most vulnerable girls in the school. This allows young people to learn about safety in an enjoyable and stimulating way and increases their contact with a range of external professionals.

Staff conduct and record fire drills and fire checks regularly and thoroughly. The school has acted on all the requirements of the fire service, following their last inspection. Young people and staff can describe fire drill procedures clearly and accurately.

Recruitment procedures and recording are extremely thorough, including verbal checking of all references. This means that young people and their families can be confident that staff are of a good standard and are safe to work with children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff report increasingly good relations between care and teaching staff. The Head of Care has ensured that unit facilities and procedures make it as easy as possible for staff to support young people in their learning. One young person said High Close is good at 'teaching kids, setting them up for working life, being there if you need, staff are good to have a laugh with. There are so many things I can't think of them all'. This means that young people are aware of the impact their education will have on their future.

High Close provides exceptional opportunities for young people to engage in exciting activities, both within school and outside. For instance, there is now a school choir and several young people can go horse riding. A number of young people are working towards either the bronze or silver awards in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Furthermore, the school continues to provide trips to Goa during which young people meet and learn about Indian children and their lives. They also take a group of young people on a skiing trip every year. There are notice boards around the school with excellent displays of photos and text about these trips, as well as displays about school performances and award ceremonies. Staff and young people alike demonstrate enormous pride in their achievements.

High Close takes young people with a diverse range of impairments and ensures the provision of any equipment or other resources necessary to support the placement. Equally, staff are encouraged to learn whatever may be necessary in order to be able to work in a constructive way with each young person. Individual support to young people is backed up by tremendous support for families. This is evidenced by the knowledgeable and compassionate way in which staff speak about families.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Staff recognise when young people have communication difficulties and work with teachers and speech and language therapists to overcome these problems. They consult young people through meetings with their key workers, group meetings in the units and the school council. Young people confirm that they feel staff listen to them well. One young person says she can make her views known and have a say about what happens 'they will always ask on what you feel about High Close and will always listen'. Unusually, this school consults the young people annually about bullying and displays the results clearly. This means that young people do indeed feel that it is their school and speak of it proudly.

The school has introduced the role of unit prefect. Young people explained that this just meant they took extra responsibility for maintaining high standards in the unit but they didn't have any power over other young people.

Not only do staff ensure that they have and record all the necessary information to support placements at the school, but they also think carefully about which unit will best suit any new young person. This is reviewed and, in consultation with the young people, staff will move young people to a different unit if they do not settle well. This means that most young people are very happy with their placements or happy to have been moved to a different unit. Through a clear process of rewards, as well as sanctions, young people demonstrate good understanding of what they are needing to achieve.

Placement plans are extremely detailed and include both standard records and highly individualised documents. There are risk assessments for each young person with a complex analysis of the kinds of events that trigger poor behaviour. There is also an indication of the difference between their behavioural norms and what they do during a crisis. Furthermore, there are clear behaviour management strategies for staff and behavioural targets for the young people. Staff invite young people to attend their reviews, consulting them about their targets and keeping them informed of their progress. This means that staff have the greatest possible clarity about how to work well with the young people and that the young people are clear about their own progress.

Unit staff, as well as the senior management team (SMT) strive to create the most constructive relationship possible with families. Most young people go home either every weekend or every other weekend, but families are encouraged to keep in contact with the young people by phone. This means that young people are enabled to feel at home in their units and that staff minimise their anxieties about their family homes.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school has introduced an independence scheme which now spans all year groups. The young people understand that they are helped, using small steps, towards independence at the younger end of the school. This is followed by more traditional ways of promoting independent living for the older children. The school plans for young people after the age of 16 through the use of an After Care field social worker as well as Connexions. Equally, they work with the families to prepare them for the return home of their children at that stage. One young person says she is encouraged to save money 'so that when you leave High Close you leave with some money, that you don't have to rely on people'.

The units are spacious and particularly bright and homely. All four units are maintained to exceptionally high standards, whilst retaining individual features. Much of the young people's own art work is displayed in corridors and stairwells. The fact that they do so little damage to their surroundings speaks highly of how much they value the units in particular. Some pictures and photos are from Mediterranean and African countries, celebrating a degree of diversity.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school is excellent at acknowledging and providing for diverse needs. High Close has responded very well to the challenge of including young people on the autistic spectrum. Equally, the SMT have a recruitment policy such that the staff group reflect the diversity amongst the young people. In the staff group this includes diversity in relation to disability, gender and racial and cultural background. High Close also promotes staff from diverse backgrounds, where appropriate, so that some are represented at the senior level.

There is a clear Statement of Purpose that has recently been updated to reflect the change to behaviour management using Team Teach.

There is a highly developed sense of team work throughout the school. This means that youngsters benefit from consistency and a positive atmosphere. Staff are tired, due to a large increase in pupil numbers since last September. They work exceptionally hard and cooperatively however, agreeing to support school staff to help the young people settle. The SMT confirm staff reports that the extent of the support needed is reducing now that the new intake have settled well. The SMT commend care staff for the commitment they have shown. They are also making a room in school available for care staff to do their admin work when they are not needed in the classrooms. This will reduce back down to a more sustainable level the amount of contact time for care staff. This all means that staff have gained an even more comprehensive understanding of the young people as well as improved relationships with teachers.

Staff receive regular supervision as well as weekly team meetings and daily handovers. Supervision sessions are very thorough and are recorded in detail. Staff report that these are useful and that the Head of Care and unit managers are all very approachable and supportive. This means that young people benefit from particularly competent and confident staff. Equally, the Head of Care is a highly visible presence in all the units, as well as the school and young people clearly feeling comfortable to interact with him.

Given the dedication of the staff team, agency and relief staff are rarely used to cover shifts. All residential staff have or are in the process of completing NVQ 3 or 4. This means that the young people receive consistent care, from a suitably qualified staff team, and are able to build effective relationships with staff.

Unit managers and the Head of Care regularly monitor records and record this thoroughly. This means that they keep up to date with any patterns or trends, ensuring young people are responded to appropriately at all times.

There are two external visitors who visit High Close each term. Their visits cover a wide range of topics and always include speaking to young people and staff. The visitors also send a letter to the young people along with their reports, which are displayed on notice boards in the units and in the school. These are currently not being dated so that young people cannot tell if they are new or old. Unit managers, however, report that young people really enjoy receiving these letters.

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):

- request monitoring visitors to date their letters to the young people. NMS 33