

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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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 setting is a residential special school registered as a children's home. The service offers a comprehensive, integrated, specialised education and care package for children aged between eight and 18 years diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder that usually includes associated complex needs. The service is provided for both full-time and respite care of students who are not permanently looked after .

Care is provided in a safe, well-staffed, structured environment that has been carefully designed and constructed to an exceptionally high standard.

Children and young people admitted to the school follow their own bespoke programme of care and education in an atmosphere of high expectation whilst being treated as a valued individual. The school has a wide range of on-site facilities and young people are provided with access to educational, psychiatric and paediatric consultants for professional care advice and support.

Summary

This was a full inspection that concentrated upon all of the 25 key National Minimum Standards. The inspection looked at areas related to young people's health, how they are kept safe, helped to achieve and provided with individual support. The way in which young people are consulted, how their care is planned and how the service is staffed and managed were also considered.

This residential special school, registered as a children's home, is judged as a good service with some outstanding features and numerous examples of good practice. The needs of very vulnerable children with learning disabilities continue to be well provided for in a high quality environment where individualised plans are progressed by competent and enthusiastic staff. The school and staff team are well organised and managed. The school's management is forward looking but always responsive to young peoples needs. Input from children's families and placing authorities is encouraged and partnership working is very evident.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The management team are in the process of improving the recording methodology used for controlling behaviour, specifically relating to the application of physical restraint to confirm how they keep young people safe from harm.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The quality, variety and preparation of children's food at the school is promoted by the attention given to ensure that all aspects of procurement and delivery is of the highest standard. This has been recognised by the service attracting a Gold Healthy Eating Award from environmental health inspections acknowledging a consistently high standard of practice compliance and food hygiene. Children enjoy fresh, wholesome, locally sourced food that is prepared in a manner that meets individual dietary needs. Health promotion includes a full dietary assessment that

evaluates medical, nutritional, cultural and religious needs, including healthy eating. Individual houses include practice kitchens where students can learn aspects of food preparation and keep a selection of their own favourite foods.

The school provides excellent medical and health care for young people because all health and disability needs are identified with action being taken to ensure appropriate levels of attention are received from both the care staff and the school's medical team of qualified nurses. The school has dedicated 'sick bays' in both living blocks. The school additionally employs strict infection controls with visitors to the site to reduce the potential for communicable diseases being passed on to vulnerable young people.

The health needs of young people are well recorded within comprehensive Health and Wellbeing files. Health plans relate specifically to the particular medical needs of children and young people, for example, by fully recognising and addressing medication and any particular allergy related concerns. Inclusive advice, is collated through consultation with children's parents, health professionals, key worker and social worker confirming partnership working. The school and its medical team are able to address most health related eventualities having established excellent links with local health care professionals and disability consultants.

Children's health is afforded the highest priority as the school follows the Options Group policies on health promotion amending these where applicable to better recognise and respond to the particular needs of young people with autism. These include guidance on drugs, alcohol, smoking and healthy eating.

The school looks after the children in a safe and caring environment. The reporting and recording of all accidents and incidents are proficient. Professional advice from the local primary care trust has informed the school's medication, administration and management procedures and effective security and prescribing practice prevents maladministration of any medicines. Health records confirm that parents are fully involved with the wellbeing of their children because case records include emergency medical treatment consents and give written permission to administer or withhold medication. No children or young people are currently permitted to self-medicate.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people are being cared for with respect and in a manner that promotes their dignity. This is demonstrated by the way that care staff communicate and interact with young people in all aspects of their daily living. Individualised care routines recognise the impact of learning difficulties and the need for focused supervision to ensure the ongoing safety of young people. Staff comply with guidelines for promoting privacy wherever it is safe to do so. All students have individual rooms that are specially equipped to be compatible with their particular needs. As young people settle into their environment and care routines, greater levels of stimuli are introduced to their life as part of a risk assessed, phased programme. Although many young people present poor communication abilities all are actively encouraged to maintain regular contact with their families. High levels of confidentiality are promoted by written information being kept secure and sensitive data is effectively protected. Staff receive formal company training on developing effective recording practice.

Young people's safety and welfare is actively promoted because staff follow sound policies and procedures for safeguarding children from abuse and bullying. The home adopts local safeguarding children board guidance and processes to inform its own practice with vulnerable children.

There is an effective complaints policy and procedure in place. These describe how complaints may be made about the service by young people or any adults advocating on their behalf. All concerns are taken seriously, effectively addressed and receive a formal response from a manager. The home records a substantial level of compliments and positive comments from its stakeholders and parents of residents.

The whole school staff team receive an induction programme that includes safeguarding training. Training enables all staff to recognise signs of abuse or potential abuse and to respond appropriately to any allegations of poor practice. Training is structured to recognise the particular vulnerabilities of students because of their disability. The school adopts a whistle blowing procedure that includes guidance on responding to allegations about staff members while keeping young people safe from any suspected poor practice.

Young people are effectively safeguarded because the school adopts practical environmental measures and specified staff procedures for responding to all situations where young people may go missing. A high staffing ratio, physically secure campus and student's individualised risk assessments effectively prevent the opportunity for children to put themselves at risk by being unsupervised at any time.

The school operates a holistic approach to behaviour management that broadly includes aspects of dealing with bullying, relationships between staff and young people and the effective management of conduct associated with a learning disability. The school presently adopts the British Institute for Learning Disability accredited PRICE methodology for managing challenging behaviour and promoting the minimal and safest use of physical restraint with children. All care staff are trained or have scheduled training courses equipping them to understand and recognise a generally diverse range of challenging behaviours likely to be exhibited by young people. The school effectively evaluates all incidents to inform future practice. Ongoing improvements are being actively introduced to recording systems to more fully confirm compliance with minimum standards.

The school site is equipped with a sophisticated modern fire detection sensor system. Staff and young people regularly practise fire drills and fire equipment is checked in accordance with guidance. Scheduled environmental checks and a responsive on-site maintenance programme helps to confirm that children live in safe surroundings.

The school has an established and effective recruitment policy and procedure that incorporates comprehensive checking of all individuals who may come into contact with the very vulnerable children and young people being looked after. The recruitment process fully meets the minimum standards in the manner in which staff are interviewed and how background detail is presented on personnel files. The school employs strict controls with visitors to the site to prevent unsupervised access to vulnerable children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive very good support from the school because there are good information sharing processes between residential, medical and teaching staff. The assessment of young people's needs are thorough and holistic, informing the multidisciplinary care team about what support needs young people require to address their autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis. Effective individualised communication is a key component in shaping each student's package, being regularly updated with any changes being shared with children's families and the relevant placing authority.

Young people's needs are identified and well met by the school by the provision of a high staff to child ratio and access to a broad range of on-site sensory stimuli equipment. Young people additionally receive regular counselling and access to paediatric and psychiatric assessment from retained specialist consultants.

Students are encouraged to take controlled risks with the support and guidance of their key carers and staff team. Risks are known, assessed and minimised, for example, by having well supervised access to public and community resources and leisure pursuits. Young people's choice is actively promoted, for example, by staff being aware of mealtime preferences and particular activities and personal routines that affect the emotional state of mind of individual children. Staff actively advocate on behalf of students to improve the facilities they have access to, for example by influencing the purchase of a customised trampoline, recently erected in the grounds to improve young people's access to fun and exercise.

The school is extremely active in meeting students' equality and diversity needs and promoting the rights of children and young people with disabilities. Children and young people are treated with equal concern, for example, by the way in which they are integrated into everyday public life by going shopping or attending community recreational facilities. Staff enable students to use the local community to shop and access recreational facilities whilst being mindful of any potential risks. Young people are practically assisted by being stimulated and encouraged to extend their emotional and physical boundaries.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

It is evident that young people at the school are appropriately placed because their needs are comprehensively assessed from a multi-agency perspective prior to any admission being considered. The care, educational and medical needs of young people are recorded in comprehensive placement plans that indicate how the school will holistically address them. Each young person's placement plan is a working document that is regularly and thoroughly reviewed to ensure they are receiving full benefit from the service being provided. The plan is recorded from a 'first person' perspective that narrates how the young person prefers their particular care and recreational needs to be provided by their carers.

The school recognises the importance of language for young people with autistic spectrum disorder and correspondingly employs specialist speech and occupational therapists. This provision reinforces the providers commitment to improving students' ability to make their views known through the range of media preferred by the student. School procedures reinforce that the rights, views and opinions of young people must be considered as well as those of the child's parents, social worker or advocates. Despite having impediments with language and understanding no young person is presumed not to be able to communicate

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school is rurally located in an area convenient for travelling to a broad range of community, recreational and leisure facilities, retail outlets, transport networks and health related services. The school can remain self-contained in its own provision of resources to meet children and young peoples needs while actively preparing them for greater and safer levels of integration and socialisation.

The accommodation provided for children is exceptionally well designed and constructed specifically to address the needs of children and young people with special needs arising from autistic spectrum disorders. The school facilities, including the individual bedrooms used by children, have been developed following specialist clinical advice to deliver an environment where there is minimal physical or emotional risk to children. All requisite support services have been provided with a similar high level of concern for detail and life enhancing functionality. Students live in a hygienic, extremely well-equipped home with ample individual and communal space available both indoors and out. The countryside location compliments the promotion of a calm and healthy living space in which children may be safely nurtured. Extensive grounds are well used for exercise and practical learning with students. The residential living space continues to evolve, responding positively to the changing group needs and core age range since the school commenced operations. This confirms the management's vision to develop a service that recognises and adapts to the broad range of children on the autistic spectrum. Both houses at the school present as being well suited to the needs of their particular residents by showing signs of ownership.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a comprehensive Statement of Purpose that specifies what care will be provided by the school and how this will be delivered. This key document is regularly reviewed identifying changes to the organisation, environment and staff teams. It is readily made available to all parents, placing authorities and other stakeholders.

Care staff receive day-to-day and regular support from an established management structure within the school. The Manager's post is presently being overseen by the Centre Director with the assistance of a Registered Manager from another of the providers school. Sickness absence has compromised the frequency of staff supervision and the formality of team meetings. The school's multidisciplinary team meetings are occurring fortnightly and cover a set agenda including the holistic needs of the children being looked after.

The school has a comprehensive induction process for all of its staff. Care staff receive statutory and specific training that considers the particular and complex needs of children with autistic spectrum disorders ensuring that children are looked after by knowledgeable carers. The in-house training of staff is dynamic and all staff are aware of the high expectations being made from them to become qualified. The school's training matrix confirms that all statutory training is being accessed and any new unqualified staff are accessing National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 training very quickly assisted by the appointment of assessors. The overall skill levels within teams are well matched to the needs of the children and importantly includes capacity for supporting and mentoring less experienced staff.

Internal systems of management monitoring for the service are effective in evaluating the day-to-day functioning and care provision of the school. Adjustments are being made to the recording format to better comply with national minimum standards. A school development plan and a workforce development plan have been produced identifying intended care and education objectives within the next year. The school are planning to introduce a social pedagogue scheme as a part of this development confirming its progressive stance alongside seeking national accreditation for its work with autism.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is because the school overtly respects individual difference and makes exceptional provision to ensure that no child or young person, irrespective of their disability, origin or any cultural difference is disadvantaged from accessing any aspect of the service. The service promotes young peoples right to the best possible service. Staff are knowledgeable and receive appropriate training to develop their practice in caring for the special needs of the young people.

The files of young people are confidentially stored and arranged in a manner that makes them functional to managers and staff. They are divided into discrete volumes that are complementary and retain high levels of functionality in the workplace and confidentiality for third party information. The quality of recording is high and content is relevant to care provision.

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, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
28	ensure that all staff receive regular and recorded supervision within the timescales prescribed by the National Minimum Standards. Include the duration of the supervision session. Regulation 27 (National Minimum Standard 28.2)	28 October 2009

Recommendations

There are no recommendations.