

Southfield School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Merryl Wahogo
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Head / Principal	Mike Pedley
Date of last inspection	16 October 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

Southfield School is a purpose built secondary school for boys, aged 11-16, who have experienced behavioural and emotional difficulties. It accommodates up to 69 pupils, at any one time, 16 of whom may be resident in the hostel. Southfield school has its own grounds and is situated in a residential area not far from the Wokingham town centre.

Summary

This was the announced annual inspection. Whilst the Being Healthy outcome area is only satisfactory, reducing the overall judgement to satisfactory, most of the outcome areas are good with outstanding features. Enjoying and achieving is outstanding with the boys being particularly enthusiastic about the activities offered to them. Child protection is particularly strong in this school. There have been major improvements, initiated by the school, as well as those made in response to the last inspection report recommendations.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Staff have created a laminated front sheet for each boy's personal file, showing their current prescribed medication.

The Head of Care has put a lot of work into organising lunch times. Staff now set tables before meal times and there are new rules creating less movement around the dining room. There is, therefore, a calmer, more orderly atmosphere.

Boys can and do now record the extent to which they are happy with the outcome of a complaint or an instance of bullying.

The Head of Care has created a parental agreements form, which includes the information about the use of closed circuit TV (CCTV) on site.

The external visitor now occasionally arrives unannounced.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has received a Healthy Schools Award and staff are particularly proud of their non-smoking culture. Boys learn about issues such as sexual health in school and have access to relevant phone numbers. Staff keep records of all medical appointments and support young people to keep them.

Whilst most recording of the administration of medication is detailed and thorough, there are several mistakes and a storage error in relation to one particularly complex case. Staff have attempted to keep on top of this but the systems are not adequate. Although this has not resulted in any errors in administration, there is currently a small risk. However, following recent training, the Head of Care and one other member of staff are preparing a more robust system.

Senior management have made significant efforts to address problems around catering. This includes consulting the young people and discussing problems with the catering company. Whilst some boys and staff report that there have been clear improvements in the quality of the catering, nearly 50 percent of those surveyed remain very critical. Vegetables are not reliably available at each meal and are not always adequately cooked. Neither fresh fruit nor salad are on the counter to tempt boys. This means that boys are not routinely encouraged to eat healthily. The catering staff, however, do now prepare fruit in slices, having established that boys are more likely to choose it when it is in this form.

Whilst the school introduces young people to food from diverse cultures through the 'Hospitality and Catering' lessons, this diversity is not reflected in the menus. It is true that the tea time menus reflect the boys' choices to some extent, but they are repeated on a three weekly cycle which further limits the variety.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school counsellor reports that boys 'feel safe and supported within the school'. She also says 'I have seen that the students are treated with a lot of respect and that confidentiality is valued and well understood'. Boys are clear about respecting each other's privacy as well.

Staff record complaints thoroughly and appropriately. Child protection is high on the agenda for staff, and it is a significant part of the induction for new staff. There is great clarity about the need to consult the nominated person for child protection, who is the Head of Care. The latter takes his duties in relation to child protection very seriously and ensures he participates as effectively as possible in all local authority procedures affecting the boys in his care. This includes determinedly pursuing child protection concerns when the relevant social services do not respond adequately or quickly enough.

The Head of Care emphasises that bullying, by definition, is behaviour that is repeated and targeted. He has only recorded three such events since the last inspection. Whilst boys state that levels of bullying are much improved, their perception of what constitutes bullying is different to that of the Head of Care. This means that there is a risk that staff are not dealing effectively with behaviours that bother the boys.

Staff record absconding thoroughly and respond promptly and appropriately. The boys appreciate the support they get from staff in relation to improving their behaviour. For example, one boy said that Southfield School is good at 'helping us to control our emotions and behaviour'. Another said that it is good at 'changing people's anger'. Staff review how well each boy has done during the day in relation to his behaviour targets, at the meeting held after school. Boys demonstrate, as a result, a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Staff are good at reminding boys of what they have done well and the boys have picked this up and sometimes do the same.

Behaviour management policies are clear and staff adhere to them closely. Equally, recording is thorough so that cross referencing is easy. It is difficult, however, for an outsider to tease out the statistics relating specifically to boarders and incidents within boarding, from those occurring in school. Nevertheless, because boarding numbers are small, staff are well informed and handovers support this. Boys view both sanctions and rewards as appropriate and fair.

They do well at earning rewards in the form of pocket money and some choose to save most of it.

Staff put into practice most aspects of health and safety, including fire safety. Boys are clear about evacuation procedures. The senior management team have been particularly vigilant about working with contractors currently engaged in building work on-site. For example, they have ensured that contractors do not engage with the boys. The Head of Care has updated all the risk assessments for which he is responsible but the recording of some other updating is not thorough. For example, the risk assessment relating to Physical Education (PE), which is important because boys have access to PE areas in the evenings, has only been partially recorded as updated. This means that the school can not evidence that some of them have been done.

Recruitment practices are very thorough, though only one member of care staff has been recruited since the last inspection, as this is a particularly stable staff group.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There are good levels of communication and support between residential and school staff. Boys also benefit from access to college taster sessions. Staff, additionally, support the boys' transition, at this stage, by allowing them to stay at home on the evenings following their college days.

The school supports the boys' development via the use of a wide range of therapies, including art and drama therapy. The school counsellor says 'the students are encouraged to share their anxieties and difficulties within a secure framework'.

Boys and staff are particularly enthusiastic about the range of activities available to them. These will increase further when the current building work on a fitness suite and an art room is completed. Boys also love the residential weeks offered during the summer holidays and these will be available to all boarders for the first time this year.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are represented on the school council but do not yet have their own consultation meetings as such. They do though, informally tell staff about changes they would like. This means that the boys are perhaps not able to influence developments as much as they might otherwise.

The Head of Care is thorough in his approach to both admissions and transitions. Staff compile detailed plans including support from external agencies, including Connexions. These address acquiring independence skills and work experience. Plans are reviewed regularly and staff ensure that annual reviews take place appropriately. Boys go home every weekend. Nevertheless, staff conduct home visits regularly and these are viewed as critical in supporting the work that is done in boarding. Parents feel able to complain and the school responds appropriately.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Managers have had some hostel bathrooms and toilets refurbished and the others are in the process of being completed. The refurbished bathrooms are very modern and smart and the boys enjoy using them. There is also new carpeting in the entrance hall and up the stairs, which gives the entrance a more comfortable atmosphere. Additionally, there is new wooden dining room furniture which seems much less institutional than the previous tables and chairs. There is considerable excitement amongst the staff and young people about the fitness suite and art room under construction.

There is continued work by the boys in the grounds, with both flower and vegetable beds being well tended.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff do not tolerate racism or sexism and challenge any incidents they witness. The school is very strong in this area but that is not yet so well in evidence in boarding. Nevertheless, pupils recently selected some new pictures for the dining room and games room, which reflect diversity as well as being modern and bright. The small staff group reflects mixed backgrounds and a gender balance at senior level.

The boarding prospectus is well illustrated and has been improved by the addition of information about the age range.

Senior management recently recruited one new member of staff and this was done in a thorough fashion, including weekly supervision and an in depth induction program. Staff welcome the increase in their number, which allows much more flexibility within this very stable staff group.

Senior managers ensure that staff receive good levels of supervision such that the least experienced get the most frequent supervision. Staff are well qualified. One relatively new member of staff is completing the NVQ3 whilst the newest recruit has applied to start.

The Head of Care is meticulous about regular monitoring of records. If there is any concerning trend, he follows it up. One of the governors conducts external monitoring as required by regulation. This is highly valued by the school but the reports do not reflect the level of work that has gone into the visits. Additionally, they do not reflect monitoring of records. This means that governors can not be absolutely sure that recording and procedures are being carried out appropriately.

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):

- create a key for medicines administration records to explain when medication is not taken or administered. NMS 14
- revise stock control records to provide a clearer audit trail. NMS 14
- ensure that salads and fruit are directly accessible to the boys. NMS 15
- consider how to align the staff perceptions of what constitutes bullying with that of the boarders and adjust behaviour management accordingly. NMS 6
- ensure that regular meetings are established at which boys are consulted about boarding. NMS 2
- request the external visitor to monitor incidents and restraints more regularly. NMS 33
- improve the active promotion of equality and diversity in boarding. NMS 12