

Bridge School, Longmoor Campus

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	David Morgan
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Date of last inspection	29 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

The school was formed following the amalgamation of two maintained primary special schools in September 2006. This site provides education for boys and girls aged between two and 11 years of age who have severe or profound learning disabilities; some children also fall within the autistic spectrum. The children who attend the residential unit have all been identified as having severe learning difficulties with a wide range of other needs, including communication difficulties. Most children have had unsuccessful placements at other special schools.

The school is purpose built and includes teaching areas, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and an integrated self-contained residential flat. The residential provision is available between Monday and Friday for up to six children on a term-time basis. Currently, there are four children allocated beds and three were all able to contribute to the inspection non-verbally.

The school is based within a residential area near a major city and has easy access to open spaces. It is close to local amenities and children also access the wide range of leisure and other facilities in the city.

Summary

The overall judgement of care standards at this full, announced inspection is good, with no areas of significant weakness; all outcome areas were considered. There have been important improvements in areas such as monitoring and staff supervision, and steps have been initiated to improve care standards further. Equality and diversity issues are addressed well. Further improvements are necessary in staff training, staff supervision and certain recording to ensure standards are maintained and improved where possible.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

A significant improvement in the protection provided to children is by the appropriate application of risk assessments for individual children; also, staff recruitment practices are now more likely to identify any shortfalls in candidates. Safeguarding has also been improved by training ancillary staff in child protection matters. Monitoring of these and other matters has significantly improved by means of regular audits as well staff supervision meetings. These are important improvements in the service that impact positively on all areas of care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children have their health and intimate care needs addressed well. There is good attention to the actual and likely threats to the health of children, including, for example, the current swine flu epidemic. Staff work in close liaison with both the school and parents to ensure that individual health needs are met whether they are routine matters such as dental treatments and medicines or more specific issues such as physiotherapy. The good health of children is also promoted well by the meals they take. Children eat in the unit and also the school. They receive well prepared and nutritious meals in both places. In the unit there are particularly good steps taken to teach children to become more independent, for example, by involving them in meal planning,

shopping and meal preparation. Dietary intake and food presentation is adapted appropriately to meet individual needs and abilities.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The welfare of children in terms of both their privacy and staff awareness of safeguarding issues is promoted well. Minor issues are tracked in case a pattern emerges and this is good practice. There is effective communication with other agencies, too. Children are effectively protected from bullying and there are similarly strong measures in place to prevent children going missing, both from the site and whilst they are on trips. Recent revision of the risk assessments has improved safety in this area. Recruitment processes are now at a satisfactory standard and there are appropriate ways for people to make complaints.

Children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour individually through attention to their own circumstances and praise for acceptable and appropriate behaviour. The whole school uses routine opportunities to identify successes and uses positive handling plans when physical interventions are necessary. Physical interventions are undertaken appropriately and are of a low level, physical guidance type, which is to the credit of staff given the sometimes challenging circumstances. The recording of physical interventions, however, which has a minimal direct impact on children, does not follow the required format. This means there is insufficient security of records because pages are not numbered and, for example, there is insufficient consideration of the views of the children affected.

In terms of physical safety, thorough steps are taken to keep children, staff and visitors safe. The responsible staff are conscientious in their attention to fire safety and other measures. Safety is particularly important with the children because they have a range of disabilities and minimal verbal skills. Improvements are made where shortfalls occur. For example, there is now a protected space for pedestrians on the narrow drive into the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school's residential provision and its staff make an outstanding contribution to children's educational progress. Substantial effort is put into ensuring that the help provided to each child is coordinated between the unit, parents and school. This is a key factor in maximising the benefit children derive from both their care and their education. Educational opportunities are provided by the unit all the time, especially regarding social and behavioural skills. This applies equally to the leisure opportunities that children enjoy, such as meals in restaurants, which are extensive given that children are only here during the week. Children visit places of interest and attend any festivals that are being celebrated locally. These trips contribute to their understanding of different communities. Activities are linked to school topics and adjusted every week to meet the individual needs and wishes of children.

The unit provides a personalised service to a small number of children. This means there is excellent attention to personal needs and children have immediate access to staff support. Individual circumstances arising from gender, disability, race and religion are identified and addressed appropriately. This is supplemented by education in school regarding personal, health, social and sexual matters and citizenship. There is also close attention to the families of children. This leads to significant additional benefits regarding continuity of care to children

and practical and emotional support to parents and siblings that also benefits children. Two independent listeners are amongst other people who visit to represent the individual interests of children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is excellent provision for consulting children and their families. This applies to all aspects of children's welfare and education. The staff take a proactive position to ensure issues are addressed promptly and any difficulties are anticipated whenever possible. Children have a range of opportunities to describe what they want and how they feel, whether it be in groups or individually. Evidence of particularly good practice in this area includes the support provided to families whose children have recently left the unit, and sending photographs of children's involvement in events to help families understand the progress they have made.

In all cases, children experience well planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes. Although there is a low turnover of children in the unit, such events are handled well and take into full account the needs of each child. For example, the pace of admissions is controlled to suit individuals and includes short tea-visits before starting overnight stays. Parents of new children feel that admissions are handled extremely well and take into account their own sensitivities at such important times.

Children have their care needs assessed well and thorough plans show how such needs will be met in the unit. Children benefit from key workers who know them particularly well. The school is currently applying ways to more accurately track the progress made by children and this will help children achieve even more. Others, such as parents and independent listeners in particular, notice the major improvements that occur to children's skills whilst they attend the unit. For example, with certain children, improvements in their communication skills have had a direct impact on their toileting abilities, which has major practical and social benefits for children and also their families.

Children benefit from excellent communication between the unit and parents. This is a key feature of the service and involves staff in the complexities of working closely with families as well as children. Children themselves are only in the unit during the week and go home at week-ends but they have good opportunities to keep in touch with their families, either in person or by phone.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a well designed and pleasant building that provides sufficient space and facilities for their needs. It is well maintained and comfortable and provides an attractive environment for children and their visitors. Certain improvements have been made to the outside of the property, for example, to fencing. The accommodation is well decorated and furnished throughout and provides this sized group of children with a comfortable amount of communal space and spacious bedrooms; their bathing and toilet areas are of a good standard. Management takes into account the modest communal space when considering overall numbers. It is light, warm and attractive and provides children and visitors with a homely and welcoming environment with only a small number of institutional features.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Individual issues are taken into account and addressed when agreed with parents. Also, children are exposed to diverse community events as they arise and can be accessed during the time they are in the unit. Positive images of disability and race are displayed and encouraged throughout the school. Various religious festivals are celebrated throughout the school through art, music and movement, sometimes with parents attending.

Staffing levels in the day and night are adjusted to meet the needs of children. Overall levels meet or exceed the level required by the statement of purpose. For example, if, in an unusual situation, too many staff are ill, management review the opening times of the unit to ensure that adequate care standards are maintained. The standard of care is also addressed by adequate levels of staff training although some staff have not completed all their core training. For example, there are minor shortfalls in behaviour management, food safety and lifting and handling training; such gaps pose potential risks to staff and children. On the other hand, child protection training has been completed internally for ancillary staff, and vocational assessments have been completed for a high percentage of care staff. Such issues are now adequately monitored, along with other matters, in supervision meetings. However, the process does not completely cover the required matters and this leaves potential gaps in supervisors' assessments of staff.

Children and staff enjoy the stability of a school in which there is now routine monitoring and effective attention to difficulties, such as staffing shortfalls or illnesses. The new headmaster has overseen significant progress in this area and there is close attention to the operation of the residential unit by the management team.

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 the record of sanctions is in a bound and numbered book and addresses all the matters in this standard (national minimum standard 10.9)
- ensure staff receive the training and development opportunities they need (national minimum standard 29.1)
- ensure that staff supervision addresses all the issues raised in this standard (national minimum standard 30.4).