

Furness School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Lucy Ansell
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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

Furness School is a residential / day special school for 84 secondary aged pupils experiencing Emotional and Social Development needs; it is maintained by Kent County Council. The school is situated in semi-rural surroundings on the outskirts of Swanley, Kent. The buildings are mostly Victorian but the recent modernisation and building work have ensured the building is able to provide top class facilities.

In the last year a new school building, The Learning Centre, has been added which provides for ten students with more specific learning and behavioural needs in a modern learning environment. The refurbishment programme for the three houses provides the boarders with single en-suite rooms or single rooms with their own adjacent bathrooms. There are 24 residential places. The children have access to a large playing field, sports hall and weights room and a conservation garden in the grounds.

Summary

This was an announced inspection completed by one inspector over several days. The school meets all of the key National Minimum Standards, and Economic Wellbeing was judged as outstanding.

The boarding provision has completed its renovations to an excellent standard and is homely and comfortable. The school's overall structure and the strong relationships that exist within the boarding houses contribute effectively to the protection and promotion of pupils' welfare, self-esteem and confidence. The previous recommendations made were also followed up; these had all been addressed, but will require continued development. The new recommendations focus on development and monitoring of paperwork and staffing levels.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Care plans have improved and they have an index to show where all relevant information is kept, but this is still developing to become more comprehensive and robust. The staffing rotas have been changed to take residential staff off the school pupil support rota to enable them to complete their administration tasks. The medication policy has been updated and staff have received refresher training in medication administration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The meals provided by the school's chef continue to be of an excellent standard and the school has maintained its Healthy Schools status. The food served is wholesome and nutritious and a variety of choices are offered, including excellent vegetarian options. The boarders confirm the catering manager seeks regular feedback from them with regards to menus and quality. Favourite foods, allergies and other dietary requirements and preferences are recorded, reviewed and provided for in practice. The main kitchen is clean and the area is well equipped and maintained. The catering team is qualified in food hygiene and the chef is trained to provide the nutritional content of all meals. Snacks and drinks are provided within each residential area

and all the meals are eaten in the houses which are lively sociable occasions. The boarders state that 'the meals are nice and tasty' and 'you always get a good choice of what to eat'.

The school does not have individual medical care plans for each pupil. Any medical information held is part of the overall care plan, and this is not particularly comprehensive and lacks annual reviews of information held. The care plans contain signed parental consent forms for medical treatment and first aid. The school also maintains a record of any allergies and the current medication being administered. Parents give the school written permission to administer homely remedies. Only some of the staff team is first aid trained, but the duty rota reflects there is always a qualified staff member on duty. The school is able to support access to regular health care services, and specialist services when needed alongside the main carers. Staff are competent to administer medication, and receive bi-annual testing of their competency. Clear 'cross-referencing' systems for the administration of controlled drugs and other medication are in place. The storage and logging of the medication and the medication administration record sheets demonstrate competent practice. The school ensures a robust safe system is in place for transporting any medications to and from school and home. Most boarders chose to stay with their own doctors but the local GP surgery can offer emergency advice and appointments as required. The boarders would go home if they were too unwell to be attending school. The school has recently started to offer an in-house counselling service which has been a great success and the effects on attendance and behaviour are starting to be noticed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The working practice of the staff team serves to protect the privacy of boarders and clear procedural guidance is implemented to ensure information of a confidential nature is appropriately safeguarded and shared. The new en-suites or adjacent bathrooms help to maintain privacy for the boarders and there are plenty of lounges and quiet areas.

The boarders know how to make representations and state they are confident that if they had any concerns and issues they would be effectively listened and responded to. They are fully conversant with the role of the independent listener and the Ofsted inspector. The complaints form is being revised into a child friendly, easy to use format which will be included in the new induction pack.

Sound and robust child protection policies and procedures within the school protect the pupils. Concerns are swiftly reported and passed onto relevant external agencies, where appropriate. The school is looking to train another senior staff member so they have two Designated Child Protection Officers (DCPO), to ensure a DCPO is always on duty. The level of knowledge on this topic throughout the entire staff team is of an excellent standard and inset training days ensure this topic is covered on a thorough and ongoing basis.

Similarly, the topic of bullying receives a high profile. Posters with information on bullying are advertised throughout the school and policies and procedures for the staff team cover the approaches to be used. The boarders reported that whilst incidents of bullying do happen they feel safe within the school and particularly their boarding houses. All incidents are logged and monitored by the head teacher.

The school has its own student inclusion team which patrols the school grounds and helps the school staff deal with any incidents. This helps ensure that pupils are rarely absent without authority.

The behaviour management system has been updated and is clear and effective for each age group. The boarders understand how it works and respond to the positive incentives offered. Staff of all disciplines interact positively with the pupils and they notice and report on all behaviour, encouraging high expectations and consideration towards staff and peers. The written guidance in place pertaining to the management of challenging behaviours is clear. As a result, staff implement safe boundaries and only impose sanctions and consequences which are appropriate to the behaviour exhibited. There have been no incidents of restraint within the last year in the residential houses. Positive handling training is refreshed termly.

The implementation of sound and robust health and safety policies and procedures serve to protect staff and boarders. Fire safety precautions are rigorously implemented and the boarders know the fire evacuation procedures; these are practised regularly. Robust risk assessments of the premises have been completed. Monitoring systems are in place for conducting room by room risk assessments, including the risk of fire, and are updated annually. Health and Safety checks had been completed by the site manager. Legionella testing is up to date and the hot water mixer valves are tested every year along with the PAT testing.

The content of the staff files is exemplary. They consistently hold all the relevant paperwork in a clear and concise manner. There is rigorous selection and vetting of staff who work with the boarders. All staff have had enhanced disclosures/police checks through the Criminal Records Bureau. Checks on identity and qualifications have been completed along with full employment histories. Written references are followed up by telephone verification and applicants cannot start work until all of the required paperwork and checks have been completed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The residential team's contribution to education is supportive, and all the houses have school linked computers to ensure good internal communications. Teaching and residential staff liaise closely, however, this is normally on an informal basis. Care staff are also proactive during the day, giving practical and emotional support to any boarders who have difficulties with attendance and punctuality. However, the care plans lack joined up targets between education and care, and lack formal recognition of educational progress.

The boarders are actively encouraged to take part in leisure activities both inside the school and in the community, linking with life skills, vocational courses and work experiences. They are encouraged to try out new activities and interests which they may not otherwise get a chance to try. The parents surveys and the boarders spoken to clearly indicated that boarders enjoy the activities, and that the staff are 'brilliant'. Parents comment that boarders' socialising has improved.

The residential staff work extremely hard to ensure boarders get the individual support within the boarding provision, however with low staffing levels in the houses this is not always possible. The care plans and individual timetables identify how support to students will be provided and who will respond to that need. Staff were observed making every effort to find services and activities to fit the boarders' needs. The notice boards around the houses display the outside

agencies and services that they can use without needing to refer to staff. The boarders were also able to tell me about the week's holiday they had just completed and all the different activities they had been able to do. The staff and pupils agreed that it had been an 'awesome', if tiring, week.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders believe their views and opinions really matter and say they are effectively listened to. Forums include an active student council and each boarding house holds meetings when they need to discuss school/boarding issues. The families of the children say they feel listened to and are consulted regularly about things that matter for their opinion. The school actively promotes inclusion, with lots of activities and careful selection into the houses.

All admissions to the school are planned between the local authority and the head teacher. New admissions and their families have been involved in the planning, and most visit the school before they are placed and have seen the boarding facilities. The school works hard at preparing the boarders with the necessary life skills and confidence for leaving the school. Each young person has a link worker who is directly responsible for their care planning.

Each young person has a care plan. This details how their needs are to be addressed, based upon an individual risk assessment. However, these new care plans do not clearly define what target is set for the young people or staff to work on. There are also no clear indications of monthly reviews or details of any progress made. Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a fairly new working document that is still being reshaped and formed, the care plan does not contain clearly recognisable medical and education sections. However, the introduction of the photo diaries provides a clear record of boarders' stay at the school and will become a special keepsake for them to take away at the end of their school life.

Regular contact with parents is maintained, using written contact books for younger boarders and telephone calls from link workers for the older boarders. Most boarders have a mobile phone or maintain contact through the communal phone which they can use to speak to family members.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

All the residential units were toured during the inspection. The bedrooms have been refurbished, with new lampshades, curtains, throws, tables and armchairs. All rooms are now homely and personalised with pictures and personal articles. Most boarders now have a single bedroom with an en suite bathroom, unless they choose to share, as some of the younger boarders do, and then they will use an adjacent bathroom.

Some of the houses have large boards which show big collages of recent trips out. Lounges are comfortable and equipped with games consoles and DVD players. All the houses have large dining rooms where all meals are taken. Facilities around the school include a sports hall, weights room, 13 acres of grounds with a science garden, sensory garden and woodland. There is also a club recreation building but this is let to a local play group during the day.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a clear prospectus of its principles and practice in regard to boarding, available for all stakeholders. It is writing a boarders induction book and all boarders will have a copy at the start of the new term. The general school records are efficiently and effectively organised and are maintained to a good standard.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school actively promotes anti-discriminatory practice through policies, training and team discussions and staff awareness of issues of discrimination is strong. They promote through working practice that each child is unique and a valued individual with the right to respect and positive self image. The young people’s care plans also support this commitment

The care team has depleted in numbers and yet the boarding provision continues to grow, and now the staffing levels are becoming unsafe. The boarding provision is staffed by an experienced and competent team, who are now struggling to consistently meet the individual needs of the boarders. Staffing levels ensure adequate cover for boarders, but this is not sufficient to meet the needs of the pupils who further require one-to-one support to ensure their safety and that of the other pupils. Whilst the staff are happy to provide cover for short term emergencies this is not a long term strategy or solution.

The staff training programme includes a good induction. There are plenty of training opportunities for the staff and they have development meetings which identify training needs. The care staff attend the school’s five inset training days and various external training courses as required. Most staff have achieved or are working towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People, and several staff are hoping to continue on to the NVQ at level 4. Staff are clear about which manager is responsible for their support. They confirm that they receive supervision and that they feel very well supported by the senior staff.

The new head teacher has been in post for about a year and the changes implemented within the school are also bearing fruit in the boarding provision. The head of care has made improvements within the paperwork and continues to ensure paperwork is developing and the residential team are able to promote positive outcomes for all the boarders.

The council continues to supply a Standard 33 visitor, who conducts termly visits, resulting in a written report which provides valuable support and guidance to the school.

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 the staffing levels are able to meet children's individualised support needs (NMS 22)
- ensure staffing levels are appropriate to fulfil the school's statement of purpose, to meet the needs of the children and to provide levels of supervision that are safe (NMS 28)
- ensure there is a statement of the school's functions in relation to the residential setting which is in a format which could be understood by children (NMS 1)
- define what target is set for the young people and staff to work on along with clear indications of monthly reviews or details of any progress made (NMS 17)
- ensure the school appoints a second Designated Child Protection Officer (NMS 5)
- ensure each child has a clear written health plan which is regularly updated (NMS 14)
- ensure staff work together to identify ways of encouraging each child's personal, social and educational development and achievement (NMS 12)