

Meadows School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC024060
Inspection date	2 October 2009
Inspector	Lucy Ansell
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	London Road Southborough Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 0RJ
Telephone number	01892 529 144
Email	
Registered person	Mike Price
Head of care	Mike Price
Head / Principal	
Date of last inspection	15 October 2008

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Meadows School is situated in Southborough, Kent and is a non-maintained residential special school, owned by Barnardo's Children's Charity. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and at present looks after 18 boarders and has had a significant increase in the day-pupils.

The residential provision offers a separate house for girls, situated in a residential area of Southborough and two houses for boys. Both of these buildings are located within the school's grounds and the girls' house is within a short walking distance of the school, situated very close to the town centre of Tunbridge Wells.

Summary

This was a key announced inspection completed by two inspectors who looked at all the key standards over several days. Overall outcomes for the young people are good, with positive contribution being rated as outstanding, and the physical environment of the boarding houses also outstanding. The schools continued commitment to the welfare of the pupils is commended, and the staff team are well trained, competent and committed. Identified shortfalls include specific areas of record keeping, liaison between departments and quality and timing of supervision. The possible impact of staff dynamics has been raised and there are areas of monitoring that require more scrutiny and review.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The recommendations made at the last inspection have all been actioned. The school has implemented new recording and monitoring systems for incidents of bullying. The personnel files have been updated to include a front sheet with a photo and key information on residential staff. There is now a balance of staff arranged activities and free choice for pupils unable to take full responsibility for planning their own leisure time. The young person's handbook has been reviewed and revised.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health and medical welfare of boarding pupils is effectively promoted. Comprehensive individual health files hold clear and detailed information, resulting in pupils receiving the interventions and support they require to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Medication within the houses is safely stored and administered. All staff with a role in this regard, continue to receive ongoing training. Robust internal auditing processes ensure excellent standards are being maintained. Policies and procedures are effective and clear. They are subject to regular updates and ongoing review.

Liaison with appropriate external health care agencies ensures appropriate referrals are made, resulting in pupils receiving the input and support they require as individuals.

Boarding pupils have breakfast and evening meals in their own houses and lunch is provided by the catering team for the whole school in the canteen. A mixed response with regards meal provision continues to be received from pupils. They enjoy the food they receive in their own houses and attribute much of this to being involved by the staff with menu planning, shopping and cooking. There is no formal consultation process between the catering department and pupils. Residential and catering staff do share their menu plans, in an attempt to avoid the duplication of meals. Lunch time provision offers hot, cold and vegetarian options. Pupils were observed to be eating well, with a good number asking for a second helping. The catering team work in a clean, well equipped environment. Whilst team members demonstrate a good general knowledge about individual dietary needs, there is no clear, formal procedure in place to advise them in the first instance of pupils joining the school with specific food allergies. This omission presents potential health risks.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The working practice of the staff team continues to protect boarders. Clear procedural guidance is implemented to ensure information of a confidential nature is appropriately safeguarded and shared. Boarders enjoy sound relationships with their care givers and are confident to share their concerns and worries with them. Complaints processes for all pupils are effective and clear.

Sound and robust child protection policies and procedures continue to be a particular strength of the school. Concerns are swiftly reported and passed onto relevant external agencies, where appropriate. The school has a designated Child Protection Officer (DCPO), and the systems in place ensure a senior member of staff 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.

The topic of bullying continues to receive a high profile. The subject is covered in an educative manner throughout assemblies, PHSE lessons and house meetings. Staff are vigilant in looking for signs and symptoms and take appropriate action when incidents do occur. Pupils report low level instances and sound processes ensure effective monitoring is ongoing.

Instances of unauthorised absences are rare, albeit appropriate action is swiftly taken when occurrences do happen. The staff team understands and implements sound procedures in the event of a pupil absconding and the Head of Care makes appropriate notifications of all significant events to relevant external agencies when this is necessary.

The behaviour management system is clear and effective. Boarders understand how it works and respond positively to the incentives offered. Staff of all disciplines interact positively and respectfully with the boarders and they, in turn are encouraged to be considerate towards others. 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. The levels of physical intervention actually used in the school and units is very low. Positive handling plans are in place for those whose behaviour may necessitate the use of physical intervention. These plans are further supported with robust risk assessments and are subject to ongoing review.

The Bursar retains an overall responsibility for health and safety matters throughout the entire provision. Fire records and evacuation practises are all up to date, the school has adequate insurance cover, and electrical and gas appliances are safely maintained. Boarding houses continue to offer a safe physical environment.

The recruitment policy is sound. The school's recruitment process is robust and serves to ensure thorough vetting. Recommendations made from the previous inspection have been implemented.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school works on a 24 hour curriculum, which continues in the residential units to enhance development and independence skills. Educational achievement is supported by the residential staff and they promote pupil engagement and enjoyment of education. The school has two assemblies a day with all staff to ensure a constant flow of information, which assists the support of all students. There is not a whole team approach in identifying and setting educational and social targets for pupils.

The evening activities also help contribute to the encouragement of personal and social development. The quality of life for boarders is excellent and is about promoting their independence and ensuring they are always supported to make their own choices. Appropriate and meaningful leisure activities are provided. Activities include trips to local parks and leisure facilities, horse riding, drama group and youth club. Whilst staff are commended for the effort they make to ensure a wide range of meaningful activities is offered, it is of great concern to be advised by boarding pupils that they often refuse, "because you can't be bothered to go through having to do a risk assessment before you can go out." Written records demonstrate a cumbersome and lengthy process, as is required by the organisation, which prevents spontaneity and hinders this aspect of individual development.

Care files detail individual and specific needs of each boarder. This aspect is very carefully explored throughout the initial assessment process and thereafter, through annual reviews. The school continues to provide a high level of individualised support to boarders, which if not available from specialist staff in the school, is bought in. They are a crucial element of the individualised support delivered, in order for boarders to progress. Boarders are allocated with a tutor and a key worker, however; they are encouraged to develop appropriate relationships with all of their care givers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are given ample opportunities to express their own opinions and report any issues or concerns they may have through school council and house meetings. It was evident that pupils' views and opinions are valued and used in an effective way around the school. Comments received from boarders include 'the staff care for us', 'I like school there is lots to do'. Parents spoken to or comments received on the surveys, had no concerns about the welfare of their children and spoke highly of the school and its staff team.

The schools admission and partnership meeting decides whether they meet the criteria for admission, and if they are able to meet their needs. They then asks the pupil to show in their six week induction whether they would like to attend the school. The care files detail very

clearly the individual and specific needs of each boarder, targets and the reviews are clearly recorded. Individual risk assessment plans show strong evidence of allowing the young person control over their behaviours, how to control and manage them.

Boarders enjoy regular contact with their parents through various mediums, including telephone, mobile and email. Parents commend the level and degree of communication received from the school, via reports, phone contact from key workers, and communication books.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

All of the boarding houses which are on the school site were visited. These are well furnished and decorated to a very high standard, and the communal areas feel homely and lived in. Furniture and fittings are of a good quality and the boarders are consulted with regards to décor. The bedrooms have all been personalised and all have a single bedroom if they choose this.

The girls' house is in nearby Southborough and is within walking distance of Tunbridge Wells town centre, this has recently been renovated to bring it up to the same standard as the other houses. This is similarly of a high standard well furnished and decorated with a homely feel. Boarders are able to wear their own clothes outside of school time and can obtain personal requisites from a variety of sources; this is actively encouraged as part of budgeting and independence training. Every boarder has their own personal lockable storage facility within their bedroom to protect treasured items.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school provides clear and descriptive written guidance to all of its stakeholders in formats which are tailored to suit the intended audience.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school works hard to ensure all pupils can achieve and staff are inclusive in all situations. Boarding pupils are encouraged to try new activities and learn about different cultures and lifestyles. The staff team work in a anti-discriminatory manner which values individuality.

Boarding pupils positively benefit from the amount and quality of staff training in place. With NVQ targets now clearly exceeding the prescribed guidance, the Head of Care is exploring a variety of other options. Staff remain keen for good quality additional courses to be offered. The majority speak positively about supervision and appraisal processes, however, the quality of the written records and the frequency of such meetings is variable. Such shortfalls have the potential to further exacerbate individual tensions and relationship difficulties, as described by a number of team members. No written evidence of supervision meetings is in place for ancillary staff, albeit the line manager says he keeps his own notes.

The organisation is currently working to replace paper records with an electronic system and ongoing training is being provided. During this transition, there are occasions whereby handwritten / electronic records have gone astray or been duplicated and this makes case tracking difficult in some instances.

A number of monitoring systems are being soundly implemented, for example, health and safety processes, activities and the health needs of pupils. A robust approach ensures good outcomes and a safe environment. Other areas are less effective. The standard of record keeping pertaining to incidents and sanctions varies between the houses and this has not been identified either through internal audits or the Standard 33 visits.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure a formal system is in place for the catering department to be notified of any special dietary requirements and information of allergies. Improve the monitoring of pupils food intake (NMS 15)
- ensure systems are in place for consultation processes between the catering department and pupils (NMS 15)
- improve upon cross referencing for sanctions/physical interventions and clearer recording of the outcomes (NMS 10)
- ensure risk assessment paperwork is less complicated and restrictive (NMS 13)
- ensure a whole team approach in identifying and setting educational and social targets for pupils (NMS 12)
- review the quality, content and use of standard 33 reports (NMS 33)
- review supervision mechanisms and timescales for all staff involved in the residential provision (NMS 30)