

Bowden House School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Inspector | Paul Taylor |
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| Date of last inspection | 22 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

This is a residential special school maintained by a local authority. It is currently providing education, care and accommodation for up to 38 boys, with an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, between the ages of 10 and 16.

The school appointed a new head-teacher from September 2007 who has overall management, with the support of the head of education and two heads of care.

The school and residential accommodation is on one site situated in large grounds. The boarding facilities are located on the upper three floors. The school is a weekly boarding establishment, with several residential weekends to offer special activities and events.

Summary

At this announced inspection key standards were assessed. Bowden House delivers a good standard of care which has some outstanding features. The staff team work consistently across the whole academic and care curriculum and the pupils are very well supported. The staff work extremely hard to support and develop pupils who have, at times, complex and challenging needs. Individual support to the pupils is excellent and it is clear that their opinions are valued and listened to. The staff team are committed and well managed and this results in a school which promotes the wellbeing, safety and development of the young people.

Four recommendations were made as a result of this inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Four recommendations were made at the last inspection. Recording of incidents of bullying now includes how the situation has been resolved. Additionally pupils who have been the victim of bullying endorse the report if they are satisfied with the outcome.

Risk assessments have been reviewed and updated with regards to the premises and activities. Fire drills are now promptly recorded.

Incidents of physical intervention do not always contain all the details required. This recommendation remains.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The food offered to the pupils is varied and healthy. The catering staff are well aware of any specific dietary needs whether these are based on religious, cultural or medical grounds. The pupils are offered a choice of menus. The menu gives the pupils the opportunity to enjoy foods from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. They also have the opportunity to prepare and cook different foods especially if it is related to specific cultural and religious festivals. Pupils can voice their opinions about the food and their preferences in formal settings, such as the school council, and informally with tutors and care staff. Feedback about the variety

and quality of food is very positive from the pupils. Most recently a change has been made to the menu which now includes a surprise breakfast each week. This can range from bacon sandwiches to croissants, and came about following requests from pupils.

Health needs of the pupils are very well met. Appointments with health professionals are arranged and specialist input is gained to ensure that the young people's emotional and physical health is promoted. The school has a general practitioner who visits on a weekly basis and who liaises closely with key members of staff with regards to any ongoing health issues throughout the week. Close links with other health care professionals such as educational psychologists and the children and adolescent mental health service ensure any particular issues associated to mental health and wellbeing are addressed in a swift and cohesive manner. All young people have written consent from their parent or guardian with regards to the administration of medication or first aid.

A counselling programme has been established over the past year or so which offers young people an opportunity to engage in one to one sessions with a trained and experienced counsellor. A specific room has been made available with young people being referred by their key workers, tutors or indeed themselves. Although a confidential service, appropriate liaison is maintained between all parties to ensure staff are mindful of how young people may be feeling. Those young people engaged in such support clearly engage in the process and feel it is worthwhile and helpful to them.

The school has a rigorous system for ensuring that the administration of medication is closely monitored and regularly audited. A self contained medical room is available which has been equipped with a good standard of facilities. These include medicine storage cabinets and a medicines fridge. All medication is stored securely with any controlled medicines being kept and administered in line with current legislation and guidance. Staff receive training on the administration and storage of medication and only such staff are involved in dispensing them.

The health of the young people both physically and emotionally is valued and promoted to an excellent standard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is clear policy and guidance in place for the staff to follow in relation to ensuring that the confidentiality and privacy of the pupils is protected. Staff are aware of this and know with whom they can share sensitive information. Additionally, all confidential information is kept securely stored.

Pupils are confident to express their opinions. They have a number of avenues they can follow to voice their complaints. These include members of staff, key workers, tutors, members of the senior management team, and visiting governors. Parents are also given information on how to complain. Good records of how complaints have been addressed and resolved are in place.

The school has clear guidance in place for the staff to follow in the event that they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. All members of staff receive training to ensure that they are aware of their obligations. Records are kept of any issues which have had to be pursued in relation to pupils welfare. These include details of all agencies involved and how the issue has been resolved.

The pupils are very aware of what behaviour constitutes bullying. If incidents of bullying do occur the pupils are confident that members of staff will deal with this. The dynamics between the pupils can at times be volatile and the staff work hard to manage the behaviour and to ensure that any differences can be resolved. The school promotes a sense that the whole community is responsible to challenge and eliminate bullying.

The school has a clear policy and procedure in place for when children go missing. The incidents of absence without authority are low and records indicate that pupils remain within the school grounds or return to school quickly.

Members of staff receive training in the method of restraint used by the school. Records of restraint are on the whole good, although there are occasions when the length of time that a pupil is held is not always contained in the report. Occasionally the behaviour of a pupil leads to them being held whilst they are lying on the ground. The staff are conscious that this is not an ideal situation and approach such incidents carefully and with the pupil's safety being held as paramount. However, they have yet to receive training in this type of restraint. Emphasis on de-escalation ensures that the members of staff understand that physical control is a last resort.

The school follows an ethos of mutual understanding and respect for others within a culture where the expectations of behaviour are both well known and for the most part, adhered to. Wherever possible punitive responses to inappropriate behaviour is avoided with young people being given every opportunity to 'put things right' in a positive fashion. Members of staff are patient and understanding and positive behaviour is acknowledged and rewarded. Staff clearly know the individual needs and behaviours of the young people in their care and in doing so are able to respond sensitively to challenging or negative behaviour. Sanctions are recorded appropriately and are reviewed and monitored by senior members of staff and the chair of governors.

There are numerous risk assessments in place with regards to ensuring the safety of the children. The assessments cover activities and the outdoor areas of the school. Fire safety is ensured via regular checks on equipment and alarms and fire drills are regularly carried out. The fire risk assessment of the premises, which is meant to be carried out by a representative from the organisation which runs the school, is not up to date.

The recruitment system operated by the school ensures that all members of staff have had the correct checks carried out prior to commencing work.

The school's approach and systems ensure that the welfare and safety of the boarders is valued and promoted to a good standard.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

An excellent whole school approach ensures pupils are able to engage fully in their education. Very clear communication exists between care and education staff which ensures each pupil receives consistent guidance and care. Care staff keep abreast of the progress each pupil is making by maintaining regular contact with their teachers. The heads of care share an office with the deputy head of the school thus allowing for continued and open communication regarding all aspects of each pupil's progress, behaviour and wellbeing throughout the day.

Handovers occur between staff at the start and end of each school day and this ensure good cross disciplinary communication between care staff and teachers.

Care staff are clearly aware of the particular physical, social and emotional needs of each pupil they care for. Should a pupil require additional support to meet their needs, referrals are made in good time to appropriate services. The school liaises closely with a number of specialists including psychologists and counsellors. The interaction between pupils and staff was observed to be spontaneous and warm. All pupils appeared at ease in their surroundings and showed no reluctance to initiate conversation. They confirmed they could ask for support or help from any of the boarding staff as well as their key workers. It is evident that they value the care and attention they receive from staff.

Pupils benefit from having opportunities to engage in an outstanding activities programme both within the school and in the local community. The school are committed to enabling them to gain experience, confidence and enjoyment from the Leadership Experience programme run throughout the school week. Such a robust curriculum allows pupils to participate in a large variety of activities including fishing, camping, outdoor pursuits, and vocational skills work including building and mechanical trades. They clearly engage well and appear enthusiastic and committed to the tasks. A well established evening activities programme ensures pupils are kept meaningfully occupied after the school day has finished. Regular events include trips out swimming visiting leisure centres, cooking in the boarding kitchens and playing in the school grounds. The activities programme is subject to regular review and changes with the seasons.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are given a number of opportunities to express how they feel about life at the school. Consultation takes place individually and collectively, with pupils routinely meeting with their key workers and teachers, completing questionnaires and being able to raise issues with members of the school council. The school council provides an effective vehicle for discussing issues of common concern and pupils feel that they are listened to. Recent matters brought up at school council meetings by pupils has led to changes to breakfasts and the introduction of improved packed lunches for outings. It was clear that the pupils were vociferous and capable of expressing how they feel. Informal meetings and discussions often take place with care and teaching staff during mealtimes and throughout the day. The heads of care and deputy head teacher have an open door policy and any pupil within the school can access them directly.

The specific needs of pupils are assessed rigorously as part of the admission process. The school aims to address each individual's difficulties in a holistic way by integrating the work of teaching and care staff. An excellent system is in place which include comprehensive care, independent learning and health care plans. Such documents provide a detailed and clear overview of how each young persons individual's needs are to be met. All documents are held centrally allowing care and teaching staff ease of access at any time. Care plans were seen to be completed to a high and consistent standard.

The school has a well established admissions policy and prospective young people are invited to undertake trial visits along with their parents or carers. The education social worker plays a key role in admissions and reviews and maintains regular contact with parents and carers of each pupil. Recently a new project has been initiated whereby the educational social worker

and head teacher set up a parent evening in London to provide opportunities for parents and carers to chat informally about the school and any issues they may have. It is hoped that such a move will help establish a forum which parents and carers may find easier to access and thus improve further communication between home and school.

Boarding provision is on a weekly basis with most pupils arriving on a Sunday evening or Monday morning and departing on a Friday afternoon. There are good lines of communication between school staff and parents and carers. Pupils confirmed that they can maintain regular contact with their families and friends during the week if they wish.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The members of staff responsible for the maintenance of the school premises work hard to ensure that the quality of the premises are maintained to a good level. The school is a large old building and there is a rolling refurbishment plan to ensure that natural wear and tear is addressed. Additionally to this rolling program the maintenance team respond promptly carrying out emergency repairs.

The pupils are able to personalise their bedrooms with pictures and posters and this encourages a homely domestic feel to the living areas.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a prospectus which describes what it intends to deliver and the underlying ethos behind the running of the school.

The school's staffing arrangements ensure the welfare of pupils is protected and promoted. Staffing levels are sufficient to provide appropriate supervision both on and off site and to support pupils in relation to their assessed individual needs. Pupils benefit from the continuity of care provided by the close working achieved between both teaching and care staff.

Training for the staff team is regular and varied. The staff team receives training every 'inset day' and this includes subjects such as behaviour management, child protection, first aid and drug awareness. There is a rolling program for National Vocational Training (NVQ) Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People and over 80% of the staff team have achieved this qualification.

Staff receive on going support from senior members of staff on an informal basis. Formal supervision does not occur on a half termly basis. Members of staff report that senior members of staff are approachable and operate an 'open door' policy. The care team meet regularly as a whole body so that communication of information is achieved across the board. The care staff also have the opportunity to meet with teaching staff briefly, every day when they take the young people to school and collect them at the end of the day. This ensures that any incidents of note are passed on so that the young people can receive the support and attention that they need. Policies and procedures are available for the staff should they need specific guidance on any area.

Senior members of staff regularly monitor and endorse key records such as risk assessments, records of sanctions and restraints, minutes of meetings and any significant incidents and accidents. The senior managers meet regularly to ensure that the school is operating in a cohesive manner and that any issues of note are shared promptly and effectively. The small size of the school means that key members of staff are able to quickly respond to any issues, such as individual pupils coming to note for poor behaviour or struggling within the school.

The school has an active board of governors who meet regularly and also visit the school on a very regular basis. Visits undertaken by the chair of governors are the subject of reports which include recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

Promotion of equality and diversity is good. The individual needs of each young person are known and promoted and difference in cultural background is seen as an opportunity to learn from each other. The approach of the staff and ethos in the school ensures that young people are able to learn about differences in culture, beliefs and background and that differences are to be enjoyed and celebrated.

The systems operated in the school together with close communication achieved between key members of staff, ensure that the care of the young people is monitored to a good standard.

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 all the details required in the recording of an incident of restraint are included in the reports. (NMS 10.14)
- ensure that all members of staff have received training in restraint techniques which are used in the school. (NMS (9.12)
- review and update the fire risk assessment for the school. (NMS 26.3)
- ensure that all members of the care staff receive supervision individually every half term. (NMS 30.2)