

# Appleford School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Paul Clark
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	29 September 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**

Appleford School is a co-educational school for children with dyslexia aged seven to 14 years. The school is set in its own spacious grounds in the village of Shrewton. Boarding is divided between two houses for boys and girls and then sub-divided into dorms. The aim of the school is to work towards addressing the child's problems with literacy, to restore their self-confidence and to improve their self-esteem. The school works towards each child realising their full potential. The boarding provision aims to work with the children in developing their personal organisation skills and facilitating a growing sense of independence. Children are helped to prepare to move to their next school whether this be mainstream or another specialist school.

### **Summary**

The inspection found that children are protected by good systems of care which directs the practice of a well trained and supervised group of care staff. Children feel safe and happy and free from bullying. The staff ensure that the children develop to the best of their ability within a supportive and nurturing framework.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The school now keeps a dated record of all staff training undertaken on their personnel file. A written copy of staff supervision notes is kept by a supervisor and staff member involved.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

There are adequate numbers of toilets and bathrooms in both of the boarding houses to meet the needs of boarders and there are areas which ensure privacy when changing.

All boarders are registered with a local general practitioner (GP). Parents must complete a form giving the school details of their child's health history. They also sign an agreement to allow the school to seek medical intervention when a child needs emergency care. The GP is satisfied with the comprehensiveness of this health history document and the signed parental agreement. Routine dental and optician check ups are arranged by parents. Psychiatric assessments can be requested from the local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) team. There are lockable medication cabinets in each of the boarding houses suitable for the storage of medication. All staff who administer medication have been appropriately trained. There are first aid boxes situated in all areas of the school where accidents may be likely to occur, including a first aid pack for the sports field.

Each of the boarding houses has a well appointed medical room where sick children can be seen and where there are beds that infectious children can be isolated from the rest of the boarders. All children attending the school have special educational needs and plans of how these, and any other of their needs will be met is contained within their case files.

Bed linen is changed in full every two weeks or as often as may be necessary. Care staff are trained to support children who bed-wet in a discreet and caring manner. The school is aware

that their boarding houses are inaccessible to wheelchair users and their information documents inform prospective parents about this.

Breakfast, lunch and evening meals are prepared in house. Milk, juice, biscuits and fruit is available in the boarding houses during the evenings. Catering facilities and food storage arrangements are adequate. A menu plan was seen which indicated that a balanced and nutritious diet is provided. The catering manager ensures that occasional international cuisines are included in the menu plans. Children with special dietary needs are well catered for and there are good systems in place to ensure that staff recognise children with these special needs. Fresh fruit is always available. The dining area is cramped and enclosed causing a less than desirable eating environment both in terms of space and noise. The school have submitted plans to the local planning authority for this area to be extended without success and are currently reviewing their position on how to deal with this issue.

The school has a 16 seat mini-bus. All staff who drive must submit their driving licences for inspection and must inform the school if they accrue any driving convictions or penalty points. Drivers receive instruction from the bursar or the estate manager on the correct way to drive the mini-bus and are shown how to conduct the vehicle safety checklist.

The school has a full programme of evening and weekend activities for boarders which ensures that they have adequate exercise. The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme contains advice on healthy living, diet, and on general and sexual health. Boarders bring their own toilet requisites to the school and the school keeps stocks of these items should boarders supplies run out.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

All boarders have case files which contain key contact details and an assessment of their educational, health and social needs. These are securely kept in main form in the headteacher's office and in summarised form in the boarding houses.

The school has clearly written policies on child protection, dealing with bullying, making complaints. A record book of complaints is in place. The complaints policy does not advise parents or young people that they may make representation directly to Ofsted. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) child protection policies and procedures are available to staff online.

There is written guidance for staff on action to be taken in the event of a child going missing. All boarding house staff are trained in first aid, fire safety, child protection and in the administration of medication. Where necessary, this training is updated appropriately. The school operates a policy of 'zero tolerance' of bullying and copies of the school's bullying policy are available to all children and staff. Children told the inspector that they felt safe at Appleford school and that any bullying that they reported to staff would be dealt with effectively.

All accidents occurring to boarders are appropriately recorded. Records of medication administration are appropriate. The bursar ensures that an annual health and safety review of all parts of the premises is carried out. Routine fire safety checks on appliances and alarm systems are carried out. Fire evacuation drills are carried out at appropriate intervals. These fire safety items are recorded appropriately.

There are numerous posters in key places around the school which give young people the contact details of helping agencies and of the school's independent visitor. There is a payphone within the school campus which boarders could use to contact helping agencies discreetly.

Staff recruitment and vetting ensures that appropriate checks are made on all staff who come into contact with children on the school premises, including ancillary workers and contractors.

The school operates an effective system of behaviour management which rewards good behaviour and is even-handed in dealing with misbehaviour. There are recording logs for physical restraints, incidents occurring and sanctions applied. The inspector witnessed good staff and pupil relationships.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The school assesses children's educational needs and this is recorded in their individual education plan. This plan is appropriately reviewed. Children's social needs are also assessed and reviewed. There are weekly meetings of care and teaching staff where individual children's progress and development in terms of these plans is discussed.

The school's primary educational focus is on addressing the educational needs of young people with dyslexia and in improving their self confidence and self esteem. Care staff demonstrated a good awareness of this aspect of the condition and of the individual needs of young people.

The school provides young people with an extensive range of evening and weekend activities which include sports, games, crafts and musical activities. There are well equipped sports areas and the young people can attend local clubs and societies such as scouts, guides and brownies. Some young people are members of a local brass band. It is notable that there is no gender discrimination in terms of the girls access to all sports and they fully participated in such sports as football, with the boys.

Young people may attend local church services. The school ensures that the observance of different faiths is made available to young people who wish to practice them on an individual basis. The vicar of the local church acts as the school's 'independent visitor' and her contact details, as well as those of other supportive agencies are displayed at relevant places around the school. The school has access to counselling services for young people who may have emotional needs. This service is arranged in collaboration with the child's parent.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The school holds a school council meeting once a term where the views of young people are represented by their appointees. This forms a central consultation forum for the young people attending the school. Young people spoken to felt that this is a fair and appropriate forum for discussion and that their views are acted upon. There are also weekly house meetings in each boarding house where items raised about boarding are fed back to the school council.

The school appoints prefects on their merit. There is no evidence that prefects have a disproportionate amount of power over their peers and more evidence was seen that younger pupils go to prefects for support and advice.

Behaviour management systems are effective and thought by young people to be fair and proportionate. Excellent child and staff relationships are observed during the inspection. The school's admissions policy includes an introductory visit, two nights stay and a probationary period after which the placement is reviewed. An older pupil or peer is attached to a new boarder to act as a guide or mentor. Each young person attending the school has an individually written education plan which includes an assessment of their social needs.

The school conducts an annual questionnaire survey of parents to ask their opinions of the quality of care provided by the school. The school will also contact parents by email or telephone to make them aware of any matters arising affecting individual young people. Young people are only allowed to use their mobile phones at weekends but there are public telephone areas around the school and boarding houses where they may make calls or receive telephone calls from their parents. They may also use appropriately safeguarded and supervised information technology systems during the school day to contact their parents.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people wear school uniforms during the school day and change into their casual clothing during the evenings. All clothing has to be labelled by parents. An effective laundry system is in place. Towels and lower bed linen are changed weekly.

Parents supply young people with their toiletries but the school keeps a supply for young people should these run out. Parents may also provide young people with a lockable trunk for the safekeeping of personal items.

Parents provide young people with pocket money to spend on tuck and refreshments. This is held by the head of care who records any cash transactions. However, children do not sign to say that they have received this.

All of the living areas in the boarding houses had adequate space and were bright and airy and were furnished and decorated to a good standard. As mentioned earlier in this report, the dining area is cramped and enclosed making it noisy and the transfer of food potentially hazardous. The school bursar has a development plan for improvements to the buildings and an appointed maintenance worker attends to smaller repairs.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All care and teaching staff have been extensively trained to work with dyslexic children and associated disorders. The school makes no gender distinctions in terms of access to sports and other activities. The catering manager provides young people with opportunities to experience international cuisines and special diets are well catered for.

The school has an information website and an array of information documents for both parents, children and interested stakeholders. There is a Statement of Purpose which is regularly reviewed. The school have clearly written independent education plans for each child attending the school and this contains an assessment of their social needs and records their progress in meeting them. These confidential files are kept under secure conditions.

The school has a personnel file in place for each member of staff which records their application, recruitment and vetting. This also records their qualifications, experience and training undertaken. These files are up to date and clearly written.

The head of care is part of the school's management team and oversees care staff to ensure the wellbeing of boarders and the high standard of the living environment. Each member of the care staff receives supervision from the head of care. There is a high level of pastoral care within the school and good lines of communication between teaching and care staff. The head of care has 20 years childcare experience, she has a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in Child Care and is currently taking NVQ Level 4 in Management.

A daily record is kept of events taking place in the boarding houses. There is one owner of the school and the school is registered as a limited company. The owner acts as the Regulation 33 monitor and monthly unannounced visits take place followed by an action report to the headteacher. There is a friends of Appleford School fundraising body who support the school. There is a senior management team comprising of the owner, the headteacher, the head of care and the bursar.

Boarding house staff are encouraged and supported by the school to undertake NVQ Level 3 in Child Care

and over 80% of the care staff group currently hold this award.

## 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 information documents given to parents and young people about the school's complaints procedure advises them that they may make representation directly to Ofsted (NMS 4.8)
- ensure that children sign a dated record whenever they are provided with pocket money from the cash held by the school (NMS 16.7)
- ensure that the dining area is adapted to provide sufficient space for the safe transfer of food and that the space allows dining in a less noisy area. (NMS 23)