

Helen Alison School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Inspector | Lucy Ansell |
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| Date of last inspection | 8 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

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| 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

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society, moving to its present site in Meopham in 1991. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders aged 5-19 years of age.

The school is situated on the edge of the village in a semi-rural area close to a park with an adventure playground, shops, mainstream schools, library and railway station. The residential provision is situated several miles away from the school building on the Overcliffe at Gravesend.

The residential provision comprises the Junior and Senior Houses and two flats based in a third house occupied by senior pupils of the school. All of the houses are Victorian and are within close proximity of each other.

The aim of the school is to 'provide education specifically geared to meet the needs of children and young people with an autistic spectrum disorder in a safe, stimulating and structured environment to enable each individual to reach his/her fullest potential and to prepare him/her for adulthood as full and equal members of society'.

Summary

This was a key announced inspection completed by one inspector over several days. The school was judged as outstanding in all outcome groups except economic well-being which was judged as good. The young people's physical, emotional and mental health needs are clearly identified and promoted under being healthy. The school's arrangements actively promote students' safety, protection and well-being in staying safe. The outstanding judgement in enjoy and achieve was due to the individual support and encouragement given to all the students to ensure they are able to succeed in their chosen activity. The placement plans are of an excellent standard and ensure the needs of the young people are met in positive contribution. The senior management team, staff and overall school ethos contributed to the outstanding judgement in organisation. Three recommendations were made, two concerning the ongoing refurbishment in the houses, and one concerning the waking staff being first aid trained in all the houses.

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 was asked to ensure it had sufficient trained child protection officers across the different sites of the school; the school has now trained up additional staff and has six staff members who are able to provide excellent cover as situated across the three sites. This has also meant that the senior staff member on call is now also a trained person in safeguarding.

The school was also asked to ensure they have a vehicle more suited to community living. The school has purchased a people carrier which the staff and students are pleased with because it means staff can drive this and access the community with the students in a less conspicuous way.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Health care plans are kept under constant review, along with written records of all medication, any accidents, or first aid given to safeguard the young people. Medication transfers and administration is sound; they have an organised and competent system. All drugs are stored individually with individual records kept. Monitoring and auditing is very good, with excellent practices in place. Consents are in place for each child which covers first aid and homely remedies. Training in medication administration and first aid is provided for all senior staff running a shift, but they do not have enough first aid cover in each house at night time. Parents are responsible for all routine and specialist medical appointments, but the school can support if required. The school liaises with appropriate external health care agencies to ensure appropriate referrals are made, resulting in pupils receiving the input and support they require.

The young people enjoy healthy nutritious meals that meet their varying dietary needs. The kitchen is clean and tidy with food stored correctly. The main meal of the day is provided by the school kitchen and the houses provide the evening meal and breakfast. The menus offer a varied and balanced diet, with choices from culturally different foods available. All staff have a good understanding of the dietary needs of each child. Staff receive training relating to food hygiene.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff practice respects the students' privacy and confidentiality, and the school's policies and procedures support this practice. Staff are also supported by clear policies with regard to intimate care. All information is stored in locked cupboards in both the school and the houses.

The school's complaints procedure is freely available throughout the school and houses, and is provided in a clearly written form or in an accessible picture form for students. The school proactively responds to concerns and complaints, and detailed records are held of all complaints received. The school ensures that practice changes as a result of complaints or concerns. An external agency provides advocacy for students and their services are clearly advertised throughout the school.

There are no ongoing safeguarding concerns at this time. The safeguarding policy and procedures continue to be clear and detailed, and support good practice. The school works closely with its local authority designated officer, and the policies and procedures reflect the local authorities own procedures. Extensive training in safeguarding is provided and the head of care provides additional training, ensuring that all staff have a good understanding of safeguarding. The school has six designated child protection officers.

The school provides clear policies and procedures with regard to countering bullying, and for the absence of a student. There have been no incidents of unauthorised absences from the school. The school has started to complete recordings of any incidents of suspected bullying in a dedicated log book. The organisation has bought out a book on bullying for autism spectrum disorders and much ongoing work on perceptions of bullying has been completed with the students. The questionnaires completed by the students state 'they feel safe, with plenty of people they can talk to'.

Staff are trained in behaviour management, but prefer to actively use positive reinforcement, praise and redirection to support students. The school has its own psychology team who are there to support the staff and the students. Specialist behaviour management programmes are

written to support students. These may include elements of physical restraint as a second stage, and are kept under constant review. Specific multi-disciplinary meetings are held if there are specific or urgent concerns about a student's behaviour, or when a new programme is written. The psychology team receive all incidents that are recorded in the behaviour logs. They then analyse these to provide specific information which may help to reduce the incidents or refer students on to specialist services.

The management of health and safety at the school is overseen by the school bursar, supported by the head of care and headteacher who takes an active role in the organisation's health and safety forum. Staff undertake a range of generic and specific risk assessments, which are reviewed and updated as required. Risk assessments undertaken for students include details of actions taken to minimise the identified risk. Fire evacuations are completed regularly and a report is written about each evacuation. All gas and electrical installations are inspected and checked as required.

A sound recruitment procedure is actively followed and no staff take up post until all of the relevant checks have been received. Personnel files are neat and orderly and evidence the school's excellent recruitment procedures. Criminal records bureau checks are undertaken for all new staff and then three yearly as required, and at least two references are sought and followed up by phone checks. Key staff have undertaken the safer recruitment training.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The education of the young people is actively promoted. The school has developed the curriculum this year to include more project based learning and life skills, and it will be individually tailored to a student if required. The curriculum is multi-sensory and flexible to the children's needs, and is worked on extensively throughout a 24 hour curriculum. The school and houses have excellent communication and share staff who work between both sites. The home, school and the parents maintain communication through a book which travels with the child. This is updated daily and identifies all key issues. All care plans hold the required educational paperwork.

The young people are encouraged to engage in lots of different types of leisure activities and develop confidence in their skills. The children are well supported and supervised by the staff when undertaking activities. Regular activities include horse riding, archery, bowling and cinema. The young people are also involved in the local community and have strong links with local schools. They make good use of the local facilities and enjoy going to local parks and leisure centres. The residential students are encouraged to undertake individual activities, for example, fencing, trampolining, youth club and scouts. One group of students have also nearly completed their Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Staff speak with knowledge and authority regarding individual children's backgrounds and any health needs and are clear regarding their future plans. This includes identifying any religious and cultural needs a young person may have. They ensure that the children have the individual support they need through the use of staff meetings, behaviour management meetings, comprehensive and informative daily staff handovers, and multi-disciplinary working. Each child has a key worker matched to them who provide them with individual support and liaison between the school, their families and other professionals.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Students 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 students include: 'the staff care for us' and 'I like school there is lots to do'. Parents spoken to, and their comments received on the surveys, showed they had no concerns about the welfare of their children, and spoke highly of the school and its staff team.

The school's admission policy is for referrals accepted from pupils who have a primary diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder identified on the statement of special educational needs. If the needs of the child can be accommodated within the resources and they would benefit from the aims of the school, then they have a properly planned introduction to allow a smooth transition into school. They then complete a baseline assessment within the first six month period to clearly understand the student's needs. The care files detail very clearly the individual and specific needs of each student, with focused targets and reviews clearly recorded. Individual risk assessment plans show strong evidence of allowing the young person control over their behaviours, and how to manage them.

Students enjoy regular contact with their parents through various mediums, including telephone, mobile and email, which is clearly recorded on file. The parents are also encouraged to visit the houses if they wish. 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 good.

The outside of the two residential houses are in need of painting and repair. This has been identified by the school. The inside of the houses upstairs are on a rolling programme of redecoration and the bedrooms are being refurbished and personalised by the students. The bathrooms, it was noted, are also looking in need of a redecoration, due to the lack of any home comforts because of low arousal. The downstairs was very homely and comfortable and at this time of year decorated with lots of Christmas decorations. Both houses have access to the gardens which are astro-turf on one side for football matches, and grass and benches the other side. The houses have off road parking with clearly marked walkways for the students.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

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 outstanding. The school works hard to ensure all pupils can achieve and staff are inclusive in all situations. Residential students are encouraged to try new activities and learn about different cultures and lifestyles. The staff team work in an anti-discriminatory manner which values individuality.

The students are looked after by staff who are an experienced cohesive team that are able to meet their needs in a consistent manner. Staff keep a very helpful daily log, which ensures that

all important information is passed on from shift to shift, and is passed to the teaching staff. Students positively benefit from the amount and quality of staff training in place. Staff commented that they had very good access to training, including training specific to boarding, and that this was inclusive, with all levels of staff seen as valuable and have something to contribute. National Vocational Qualification targets now clearly exceed the prescribed guidance. Regular staff meetings take place, and boarding staff receive supervision on a regular basis and yearly appraisals, and have personal development plans. They are provided with detailed policies and procedures and staff handbooks.

The school benefits from an excellent headteacher and senior management team who offer stability, efficiency and clear leadership. The organisation of boarding is very good with regular monitoring of records carried out by the head of care and head of residential services. The school has evolved its on call system to ensure it has specialist staff to provide advice, and staff who live close and can immediately respond. The school's self appraisal and general quality assurance systems are also very good, and include regularly seeking the views of students. Any deficits picked up by any member of the staff team are dealt with immediately. The national minimum standard 33 visits reports on behalf of the governing body are comprehensive and robust, and provide useful guidance to the senior 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 each building and each staff on shift on the waking nights holds a current first aid qualification (breach of national minimum standard 14.9)
- ensure the bathrooms create a homely residential environment (breach of national minimum standard 24.2)
- ensure the exterior of the residential houses is maintained in a good state of structural and decorative repair. (breach of national minimum standard 24.3)