

Sunnydown School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC013896
Inspection date	18 January 2010
Inspector	Margaret Lynes
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	6 February 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

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 and day school for boys aged 11 to 16 years, who have an emotional and/or learning difficulty. The school is fully maintained by the Local Education Authority and currently accommodates 70 learners on roll, of whom 34 are weekly boarders. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs and a number have social communication disorders, such as Asperger's Syndrome. The boarding accommodation is separated into two areas; the juniors reside in the main school building and seniors occupy the first floor of a teaching block. All of the boarding accommodation is warm, well equipped and furnished to a good standard. The school is situated in a pleasant residential area, with shops, community facilities and public transport services close by. The grounds are spacious and well maintained and include a basketball court, astro-turf sports pitch, raised garden beds and a play area.

Summary

This is an outstanding school. Outcomes for individual children and young people are excellent and demonstrate individualised care and support that reflects a child or young person's needs exceptionally well. All the key national minimum standards are met. There is consistent use of self-evaluations and any improvements identified are managed in a timely and effective manner. No recommendations have been made.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made following the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school actively promotes the physical, mental and emotional needs of each child. They are provided with guidance, advice and support relating to health and social issues. As all boarders return home weekly, responsibility for each child to receive medical, dental and optical treatment remains with their parent/carer. Where there are specific health needs that have to be considered by care staff, these are incorporated into the care plan. All care staff are trained in first aid.

The school has obtained a healthy school status and a sportsmark award. The children are encouraged to participate in activities such as basketball, street dancing and football. A number have taken up membership of a local gym.

There is a robust medication administration procedure in place, and up to date records are maintained. Staff are enabled to undergo training in safe administration of medication. The children do not, as a rule, self medicate however the head of care was clear that this would be determined on an individual basis and if a child had the ability to do so safely, then it would be considered.

The children are provided with adequate quantities of suitably prepared, wholesome and nutritious food. Staff have recently embarked on a food analysis project, which when complete

will provide an instant breakdown of all menus on offer, and the nutritional value of each. Some of the children are also involved and talked enthusiastically about the project.

The dining room and furnishings are suitable for purpose, and meals were observed to be well managed, lively social occasions. The children have set tasks to do at mealtimes and set to these with enthusiasm. Boarders are able to prepare light snacks in the kitchen in the boarding house. They are also enabled to take part in cooking classes as an activity, and often help catering staff prepare the evening meal. The children are consulted as to menu content, and all students are encouraged to voice their opinions about meal choice via the school council. Several meals were sampled and a cooking class was observed. Both were enjoyable!

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children's privacy is respected and information about them confidentially handled. Staff are provided with procedural guidance on pupil privacy, including entering shower/bathing areas, and when it might be necessary to search a child's belongings. There is some information about each boarder on display in the boarding house. This is by consent, and sits alongside similar pen pictures of staff. Boarders said that they found them to be a good way to get to know other boarders and staff, and saw them as a welcome addition to the multitude of other information on display. Boarders have either a small lockable safe or a lockable drawer in which they may keep their valued items.

Boarders commented that they knew how to make a complaint if they wanted to, and they also expressed confidence that the staff would ensure that any issue raised would be promptly dealt with. A child friendly complaints procedure is provided, and a complaints log maintained. There have been two complaints since the last inspection. Both were appropriately dealt with.

There are systems in place in the school which aim to prevent the abuse of children. Allegations of potential abuse are promptly, appropriately and thoroughly investigated and responded to. The school's child protection policies and procedures are consistent with local safeguarding board procedures. One member of staff is the designated child protection officer. Unprompted, boarders were able to inform the inspector who this member of staff was, and that they were able to go to him if they had any concerns. All staff receive an annual update on safeguarding practice, and have a more comprehensive training session every three years.

The school has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying. This policy is available and known to staff and children. None of the boarders stated that they were being bullied or had witnessed bullying, however three of the 29 questionnaires that were returned by boarders included comment that some bullying had taken place in the classroom. This had been fed back to the headmaster. Boarders also commented that staff would take immediate action if any bullying did take place.

The school has written procedures identifying the action to be taken if a child is absent without authority. There have not been any such incidents.

The children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive criticism of inappropriate behaviour. There is a strong emphasis in the school towards focussing on rewarding good behaviour rather than punishing poor behaviour. Boarders were keen to show off the rewards system and talked animatedly

about the tokens they could win, and what they could be exchanged for. Sanctions are rarely applied but boarders felt that when they were applied they were fair. Appropriate logs are maintained for sanctions and restraint. There has not been any restraint used for several years. Staff are provided with written guidance on behaviour management techniques and appropriate punishment.

The school provides the boarders with a safe and secure environment. Access to the boarding houses is restricted, and boarders stated that they felt safe. There were no apparent hazards to health and safety in the school or grounds. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place in relation to the school premises and also for specific activities - both on site and in the community. These are regularly reviewed. Fire, gas and electrical safety checks were all up to date. Testing of portable electrical equipment is currently underway. A premises committee meets regularly to ensure that areas of concern are flagged up and the appropriate authorities informed.

Recruitment of new care staff is robust, and includes checks of identity against an official document and obtaining an enhanced criminal records bureau check. References are verified and there is a written record of the interview. It was excellent to note that the boarders were involved in the recruitment process. There are no adults living on site who are not employed by the school, and there are no gap students currently working at the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's residential staff actively support the educational progress of the boarders. Care staff are aware of individual educational targets and have an input into reviews. Some teaching staff are involved in after school activities and some care staff are involved in reading sessions. Homework sessions are supported and boarders are provided with a timetable so that they know what subjects they should be covering and which teachers will be available to assist. It is clearly stated on the rota that the boarders can request 1:1 help, and they are not to worry if they run over the allocated homework time.

All boarders are given support in line with their individual needs. Staff actively promote the involvement of all boarders in social groups and offer support to those who do not easily fit into the resident group. There is a strong emphasis on caring, and this was evident in the behaviour of the boarders towards each other. They were all very positive about the school, and stated that they were given all the support they needed. There were a lot of staff they could go to with a problem, not only their keyworker. Boarders added that there were always staff around and they could also talk with the independent visitor or the child protection officer.

There is a skills for life programme in place which the boarders spoke of with enthusiasm. They said they were able to learn a wide variety of skills which would help them when they left school. Two boarders gave an excellent tour of the school and spoke animatedly about all of the activities they could take part in. The school is clearly child focussed.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

All pupils are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. Each boarder has an allocated keyworker whom they meet with every

week. They are involved in their care plans, and review them with their keyworker every three weeks. Weekly school committee meetings are held. These are chaired by a pupil, and each form has an elected member. Some of the school council sit on the local youth council. There is a very strong ethos in the school regarding communication and the sharing of ideas. Students views are actively sought. There are a number of suggestion books in the boarding houses. Boarders stated that they can write in these any ideas they might have, and also use them to air any concerns that they feel unable to speak about directly with staff.

Ofsted questionnaires were received back from 29 boarders. Staff had assisted them in completing the forms. All were positive, and boarders had made comments including "I feel part of the family and can learn like everyone else"; "I think it is the best school I have been at because the staff understand us....the rules are fair....I am glad I am here"; "I am listened to and helped"; and " care staff respect me".

Admission and leaving processes are planned. New students receive a personal letter of welcome from an existing student before starting at the school. They are provided with a helpful information booklet, which the students helped to put together. This answers questions such as what is the food like; what activities can I do; who is the school advocate; what will I need for games; and what will I need for lessons? New boarders are allowed to settle into boarding in their own time, even if this means that sometimes they go home at bedtime rather than actually stay at the school. In such cases their bed is always there for them.

Boarders who are due to leave are invited to put together a profile of their time at the school and this is displayed on the 'gallery wall'. They also have a transition review which explores what help, guidance and support they might need when they move on from the school. The head of care this year produced an album for each leaver containing pictures of their life at the school through the years. They were very well received.

Each boarder has a detailed care plan. It includes reference to their likes and dislikes, what the boarder would like to learn, a wish list, a plan for moving from the junior school to the senior, a list of things each boarder is able to do for himself, and the individual focus for the boarder for each week. There is a reward system in place which promotes positive contribution. Boarders spoke highly of this system and proudly showed the tokens they had gained.

Boarders are enabled to keep in contact with their parents during the week. All boarders return home at weekends. Staff have replaced payphones with mobile phones so as to facilitate contact between boarder and parent. Boarding staff maintain close links with parents. They have instigated school to home books in which staff write a brief entry about each boarder's week at school. Boarders take the book home each week, and parents are invited to respond. Staff comments in these books were notable both for their positivism, and for the efforts staff made to ensure that they found something good to say about each boarder each week. Negative issues are not written in a poor light but rather as something that everyone can work on to improve. Sometimes staff put pictures of the boarder in the book for parents to see. Parent comments in the books indicated that they clearly appreciate touches like this, and that they found the feedback invaluable.

Ofsted questionnaires from 20 parents/carers were received. They demonstrated how satisfied the respondents were with the school. No negative comments were made. Some of the positive comments included "since being at the school our son had grown from being a quiet and shy

boy into a confident young man"; "I can in no way fault the school. The staff both teaching and care staff are exceptional"; "(my son) has achieved so much academically and socially I no longer worry about how he will cope in the outside world" and "the school strives to meet the needs of the individual".

Ofsted carried out visit in November to assess parent/carer and school links and the positive impact this can have on supporting young people's achievements and development. The school was rated as outstanding in this regard.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders commented that the premises were good and they were clearly very proud of their school. Boarding accommodation was clean and well maintained. Dormitories are large and un-crowded. Boarders can personalise their areas. Effective precautions are taken to ensure the security of the school from access by unauthorised persons. Boarders stated that they felt secure. The boarding accommodation is not purpose built however staff have taken considerable steps to make the area child friendly, welcoming, cheerful, homely and functional.

The school maintains strong links with the local community and promotes positive interaction between boarders and community based leisure facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a clear Statement of care principles and practice which accurately sets out what the school aims to provide. This gives parents and children a good understanding of what to expect. The Statement was recently updated.

Care staffing levels are adequate to meet the needs of the boarders. Although the deputy head of care is currently on maternity leave, additional teaching staff have been drafted in to assist in after school activities so as to ensure continuity of care for the boarders. The names of the members of staff on duty each evening are clearly displayed in the boarding house, and boarders demonstrated that they knew where to find this information. They were also clear how to summon a member of staff at night.

Staff are provided with an informative care manual, and this is supplemented by a detailed school policy and procedure manual. They include procedures regarding sanctions, child protection, care planning, anti bullying, equal opportunities, discipline, child protection, lone working, staff recruitment, drugs, alcohol, smoking, whistleblowing and health and safety. The staff discipline policy refers to the possibility that staff may be suspended pending investigation into any child protection allegation. One new member of the care team has recently been recruited. They are due to start a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level three course shortly. The remainder of the care team have either an NVQ level three or four award. Staff are able to access a variety of training courses which enables them to keep their practice up to date. Recent training includes safer recruitment, handling medication, food safety, first aid, child protection, fire safety and awareness and youth counselling. Care staff commented that they felt supported and received regular supervision. Ancillary staff expressed the same sentiments and stated that they felt part of the school team. They have also been enabled to attend training courses, including an NVQ in catering.

Children and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run boarding provision. The head of care carries out regular quality monitoring audits, and self assessment. An annual school profile is produced which outlines what the successes have been for the school that year; what they are trying to improve; the progress made by the students; how they are meeting the individual educational needs of the students; what the students have fed back and what the school has done about that feedback; and how the school is working with parents and the community.

External monitoring is carried out by an active governor group. Regular visits are carried out and reports written. The school is also visited half termly by the county council, who also report on their findings. The reports for the last year have all been positive.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school has recently achieved an inclusion quality award. Independent advocates visit the school regularly and provide a summary of these visits periodically. These reports have also been positive.

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

There are no recommendations.