

# Ashley School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Angela Hunt
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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

The Ashley School is owned and managed by Suffolk County Council and is situated in a residential area on the northern edge of the town of Lowestoft. The school provides day and boarding facilities for young people with moderate learning difficulties between the ages of 7 and 16 years. Some young people also have emotional and behavioural needs.

The school has 125 planned places, with 127 pupils on roll, of which 42 are currently boarding for a maximum of four nights per week from Monday to Thursday. The boarding provision is provided for up to 28 pupils in two houses, one for girls and younger boys and the other for older boys.

Opportunities are also made available for up to 12 pupils to take advantage of the school's residential 'link service'. This takes place after school and aims to develop pupils social skills and allow participation in a range of activities. This provision is linked to the boarding houses and can be used as an introduction to boarding. The residential programme is led by a head of care and supported by four child care practitioners.

The school has a sports hall, drama hall, outside play area and classrooms. There is a covered, heated swimming pool. Other facilities include a dining hall and workshop, a greenhouse, music room, food technology room, a drama group, computer rooms and areas for building and horticultural activities. Other community resources the school accesses includes a climbing wall and ten pin bowling.

### Summary

At this announced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. In addition, standards under the achieving economic wellbeing outcome were assessed. A good number of boarders and staff who have a pastoral care role or input participated in the inspection. Surveys were also administered so as to seek the views from carers/parents and other stakeholders on the quality of service offered by the school.

This is a very good service in most respects with some outstanding features. Young peoples' welfare is enhanced by the exceptional relationships that exist between the residential care staff and young people, and between young people and their peers.

The overall care of boarders is outstanding. There is an extensive range of good quality activities offered to boarders both on site and external to the school. Boarders feel safe and well looked after and thoroughly enjoy the time they board at the school. The quality of boarding is outstanding in all outcome areas with the exception of economic well-being which is judged as good. This is as a result of environmental issues in the boarding houses which would inevitably benefit from a degree of upgrade and improvement.

There is a great emphasis on individualised support and a commitment amongst staff to promote young people's well-being and encourage the nurturing of independent living skills. Boarders have good access to medical care and information and there is a strong pledge by the school to promote the health and safety of boarders and staff.

The leadership and management are effective in maintaining high standards and encouraging further improvements in pastoral care. The school works hard with a wide range of outside agencies in order to meet the full range of young people's needs. Where gaps exist the school views bridging these as paramount, so as to ensure a high standard of service is afforded to individuals and to help prepare them for their future well-being.

The promotion of equality and diversity is excellent throughout the standards inspected. There is good insight into the individual needs of young people and clear plans in place to address them.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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

The last inspection resulted in two recommendations being made. This involved asking the school to update the contact details of Ofsted for boarders and to amend the child protection documentation to include the duty of staff to report actual or suspected abuse. Both of these have now been acted upon. The information for boarders and the child protection documentation has been amended to comply with the recommendations made. The steps taken by the school in response to these recommendations illustrate the school's commitment to comply and help to support the safeguarding of young people.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The school places great importance on health promotion and makes sure that boarders have excellent access to medical care and information. The personal, social and health education programme is delivered in classrooms, through care staff and through individualised sessions. Young people live in a healthy environment where their medical needs are clearly identified and very well met.

Boarders can be confident that their health records are securely stored. A visiting community paediatrician and community nurse provide direct assistance to the school with health care issues; through the access to fortnightly surgeries and via the delivery of relevant ongoing training to staff. Relevant medical information is sought as part of the admission process and appropriate medical information consent forms are in place. Robust staff practice relating to the safe and appropriate handling of medicines ensure a clear audit trail and an efficient record to indicate when a request for new stock is needed. Comprehensive policies and procedures on health care matters underpin the excellent practice in place.

Young people are provided with a healthy and nutritious diet and encouraged to develop health eating habits, through the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the verbal reinforcement given by staff. Individual dietary requirements are well catered for and drinking water is readily available throughout the school day. The school has a well-equipped main dining room and the staggered routine of year groups attending ensure the smooth delivery of the midday meal. The main dining area is kept to a high standard of cleanliness and this is to be commended. While the school is awaiting a report following a recent environmental health officer visit of the main kitchen, it is understood that the outcome was very positive and that there were no significant issues raised in terms of food hygiene practice or food storage. Other meals taken

by boarders are accommodated in their respective houses. The mealtimes in houses are delightful sociable occasions in which boarders are actively involved.

While the school's practice is to request parents or carers to collect in situations where their child is feeling unwell, an appropriately equipped room is available to accommodate a boarder while awaiting the arrival of their parent or carer.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' privacy is well respected and personal information is handled by staff with sensitivity and value. Boarders demonstrate a good awareness of the school's approach to any instances or suspicions of bullying. The overall consensus amongst boarders is that they felt safe and well cared for. Procedures for behaviour management and safeguarding are robust and well known to staff, parents/carers and boarders. Good support mechanisms are in place to enable individuals to develop inner controls so that they are motivated towards improved behaviour. Welfare notes and observations of care practice are indicative of young people being encouraged to develop a proper awareness of their rights and responsibilities and those of others.

The school takes their responsibility to safeguard and protect young people extremely seriously. There is a designated child protection officer within the school who is complemented by the additional support of two qualified teachers. The school has a clear procedure for dealing with allegations and suspicions of abuse which is well known to staff. Staff are aware of their individual responsibilities in safeguarding young people and there is a strong system in place to support the delivery of appropriate ongoing training. One stakeholder summarised this by stating, 'The safety arrangements are to a high standard, we cannot fault them.'

Staff receive appropriate guidance and training regarding personal care and show great sensitivity in the practice afforded to boarders towards gender specific issues.

The school's complaints procedure is readily available to parents/carers and boarders. In addition, boarders are very clear about the range of people they can approach in the event of any worries or concerns. In response to the previous inspection, information on safeguarding has been amended from 'responsibility' to 'duty' so as to more accurately reflect the staff team's duty to report actual or suspected abuse.

Clear written guidance is in place regarding the action to take in the event that a young person goes missing without authority. Appropriate records are maintained of significant incidents and adequate arrangements exist within the school to ensure suitable monitoring and follow up of such instances.

Health and safety matters are given high priority within the school. The health and safety records are maintained to a very good standard and risk assessments, policies and procedures further support the high emphasis given in promoting a safe environment. Records kept provide evidence that fire drills take place across the school. In addition, boarders demonstrated a clear understanding as to action they are required to take in the event of a fire to keep themselves safe.

Unsupervised access to the boarding houses is prevented by the strong security and effective monitoring of visitors. In addition, key pad systems throughout the school further promote young people's safety and risks from unauthorised access.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders enjoy an extensive variety of activities out of school hours. Boarders talk with great excitement about the activities available to them and of the good time they have when boarding at the school. Residential staff demonstrate immense energy and enthusiasm to promote young peoples' well-being. Their drive and commitment result in high levels of engagement from young people. From the discussions held with young people, the wide choice of leisure opportunities available to them combined with the valuable input provided from staff result in promoting their self-esteem and provide individuals with a real sense of achievement and great personal pride.

The routine in the two boarding houses is nurturing, enabling and fun. Boarders are keen to be involved in daily tasks around their respective houses. They talk positively of the life skills they have developed as a result of boarding and of the positive reinforcement provided from staff.

The personal support boarders receive from staff is exemplary. Boarders are very complimentary about the care provided to them by the residential staff. Surveys from parent/carers and stakeholders further support that the standard of pastoral care is of high quality. For example, comments received included, 'My child looks forward to his nights in the "house" and is never disappointed by the activities or outings arranged by the staff!' And, 'we would like to thank all the staff who are involved in the residential they do a great job...our daughter has turned many corners thanks to all the hard work.'

The school's own nurture group and the 'pupil and family support' work that takes place from the school further support young people and their families. This combined with the outreach work undertaken constitute real strengths of the school and inevitably play a valuable role in contributing to the progress individuals make.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have good opportunities to contribute their views in a variety of ways. This includes methods such as surveys, house meetings, involvement in staff recruitment through their input at staff interviews, contribution to the community and talking to staff. As a result of consultation with young people changes have been made. For example, the opening of houses at lunch time, an increase in climbing and cycling activities to meet popular demand, and an improved range of activities.

There are excellent opportunities for boarders to maintain contact with their parents and carers on the nights they stay in the boarding houses. Welfare notes clearly indicate the times communication takes place. In addition, the school works hard to maintain good communication links with parents and carers. The school actively welcomes contact with parents and carers, with an extremely flexible approach to this clearly evident. The school works hard to support parents and the 'strengthening families programme' and other work undertaken with families

further supports positive engagement to improve outcomes for young people. The surveys received confirm the encouraging work undertaken by the school. For example, 'the schools outreach team are excellent and can be contacted regarding anything.'

A written handbook for young people tailored to the individual outlines key information about the residential provision. The school's 'link' provision allow for the gradual introduction of young people being away from home and is another asset of the school. In addition, opportunities exist where there is a need for individuals to visit the boarding houses before the school day. This further supports the nurturing and supportive ethos running throughout the school.

Young people's needs are subject to ongoing assessment and written care plans clearly identify individualised needs and how these are to be met. A key worker system combined with effective team work complement the good work undertaken with young people.

Staff are well supported and encouraged to promote their development through accessing appropriate training opportunities. The school places importance on continuous personal development by the records in place, their commitment to training and the ongoing monitoring of training both undertaken and planned in the future.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The nature of the living space and overall environment is pleasant, comfortable and safe. Boarders have access to lockable storage to store personal possessions. There is a range of communal areas throughout each of the two houses as well as space to enjoy a degree of privacy, when they can be alone or withdraw in pairs or smaller groups. Common space allows socialisation and a space where groups can mix and carry on a variety of more active or quieter pursuits. For example, pool, table football, board games and watching television. The hall in the main school is also used by boarders for watching films on a large screen and the sports hall for more active pursuits. Each boarder has their own personal space which they have personalised by displaying toys and pictures. While one of the two houses accommodates both boys and girls, there is separate gender accommodation within the house. In addition, the use of alarms in areas together with a good level of supervision ensures appropriate use of accommodation where mixed gender usage exists. In the context of trying to make the best of the limitations of the residential buildings; the building accommodation is a barrier to achieving best practice for boarders. While there is a good standard of decoration, cleanliness and housekeeping throughout the two boarding houses, there are some environmental issues in the boarding houses which would inevitably benefit from a degree of upgrade and improvement. This includes the shower facilities and sleeping areas.

There are sufficient toilet and washing facilities in each of the two houses and some baths in addition to showers. Appropriate locks are provided to ensure that showers and bathrooms afford boarders proper levels of privacy.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Strong leadership and clear lines of accountability promote the good quality boarding provision evident in the school. There is an excellent system of monitoring standards with comprehensive



regulation 33 reports and an active input from governors who take their responsibilities seriously. The regular meetings which take place amongst the residential care staff and the good communication between the leadership team and governors ensure information is shared efficiently and effectively.

Policies and procedures are comprehensive and subject to ongoing review. While the Statement of Purpose has recently been revised it does not explicitly outline all the matters in line with the national minimum standards. However, the information that has been omitted can be found in alternative documentation in the school which is easily accessible.

Robust recruitment and selection procedures together with a well-established induction programme assist in delivery of good quality care. There are very good levels of training opportunities available to staff and a strong emphasis is attributed to promoting continuous professional development.

Appropriate staffing arrangements are in place across the two boarding houses and those staff responsible for pastoral care demonstrate a strong commitment to improve outcomes for young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All young people in attendance have learning difficulties and a statement of special educational needs. Young people are integrated well into the boarding provision and staff work hard to accommodate individualised needs. Inclusive practice underpins the pastoral care provided. The school is also effective in promoting inclusion of young people in the community through its outreach work and through their links with mainstream schools. Young people receive an individualised service and the school works hard to combat stereotyping of the school. The positive reputation in the community has inevitably increased as a result of the good work undertaken. Staff have an excellent knowledge of the young people in their care and their commitment and enthusiasm ensures young people's needs are consistently met. Themes in assemblies, projects, and displays throughout the school further support the school's commitment to promote equality and diversity and raise awareness of differences and individuality. Excellent support systems exist and policies encompassing equality and diversity are easily accessible.

## 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):

- review the Statement of Purpose to include all matters as outlined in the service specific national minimum standard (NMS 1)

- give consideration to upgrading and improving the shower facilities and sleeping areas in the boarding houses. (NMS 24)