

New College Worcester

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Andrew Hewston
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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

New College Worcester (NCW) is a non-maintained special school and exists to provide an appropriate education for young people with a visual impairment, primarily within the 11 to 19 age range. Students are able to access the National Curriculum and progress to study beyond 16. There is a strong emphasis on supporting the development of independence skills necessary for young people, including mobility, living skills and access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The college provides a boarding environment, but is able to offer educational opportunities to a limited number of local children, dependent on teaching group size. Up to 108 students of both sexes can be accommodated across the site.

Summary

This is an announced inspection of the residential provision at the school and has been completed over a three day period. Questionnaires have been received from a range of people linked to this provision, including staff, parents and young people. Staff and young people were also spoken to throughout the period of the inspection.

The school ensures that young people receive a consistently good level of care while in residence at the school. Young people are supported with healthy living through a good awareness of health needs and an effective school nurse. Appropriate systems are in place to ensure that young people are safe within the school, through both practical checking of health and safety areas and a range of child focussed procedures. Young people enjoy an outstanding range of activities and links between the school and care side are of an equally high standard. The development of care planning by the residential staff is linked to assessments of need within the school area and these findings are linked well by the whole staff team. Young people enjoy the physical environment that they live in at the school, despite some areas needing attention. The overarching awareness of the need to develop young people's independence skills is strong within the whole of the school and this is appreciated by the young people. The management of the school ensures that regular checks are completed in a range of areas relating to the residential provision and this in turn develops the level of care that is delivered to the young people.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection highlighted seven areas in need of development. The school has responded to these and all but one has been fully completed. Medication training has been updated for staff to include specific medication needs of individuals and an improved recording system relating to those young people that absent themselves without permission has also been developed. Systems to support young people's safety have been improved through more robust recruitment procedures and the implementation of an updated fire risk assessment. Placement planning has continued to be developed within the residential units and there are now improved systems to record the views of sixth formers within weekly meetings. Staffing ratios are currently sufficient but there have been periods where these have been dependant on community service volunteers to provide an appropriate level of supervision of young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health needs for the young people are well supported by the staff throughout the school. Specific health needs are assessed on admission and then monitored throughout their time at the school. Each young person has a health plan that is in line with the expectations of the standard and this forms part of the care plan package held by the care staff team and additionally monitored by the school nurse. The school nurse has good links to additional external health services local to the school and also regional health authorities working specifically with individual pupils. This ensures a continuity of health provision for young people and is specifically necessary with regard to those with complex health needs. Support for young people's mental health needs is provided through referral from the school's visiting General Practitioner.

Young people are supported with receiving medication. The school nurse ensures that all necessary staff have completed training in medication administration. They are also involved in the auditing of medication and how it is recorded. There are sufficient staff that have completed differing first aid certification and their names are available. The school supports differing medication administration regimes and employs additional night wake staff primarily for this function. Risk assessments are in place for those young people that administer their own medication and appropriate storage facilities are also in place.

Food provided by the school is of a standard that complies with recent changes in guidance relating to school meals. Some young people state that they are unhappy with the meals, but when this issue is discussed they accept that the loss of doughnuts on the menu is also related to promoting their health. Menus are acceptable and give appropriate choice to young people. Specific diets are catered for, and although there are some recordings of mistakes being made with food, the kitchen staff rectify this situation. Mealtimes are pleasant sociable occasions, taking place primarily within the school cafeteria and also within the home units for breakfast and at weekends. Additional meals such as birthday parties also take place in the units, where staff also ensure that healthy eating is promoted. Care staff involved with the preparation of meals have completed food hygiene training.

Young people in the sixth form are involved with independence training and feeding themselves. Staff support young people with the development of appropriate menus, purchasing food and cooking meals.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people are afforded appropriate privacy within the school. All young people have access to different communication systems to talk to parents, including payphones within all of the residential areas. The new night wake post raises a need for clear privacy guidance within the sixth form area, although is not assessed as a safeguarding concern.

All young people are aware of their ability to make complaints within the school and are able to identify a number of staff that they would approach if they were unhappy. All young people are given information regarding complaints on admission and additional information is around the school. Recordings of complaints are variable in their quality. All basic information is available although there needs to be some clearer recordings of outcomes and referencing towards where additional information is recorded. Some concerns raised within the questionnaires and during

discussions are being responded to through the refurbishment of the sixth form kitchen areas, although there is a lack of the recording of these concerns within the sixth form meeting log.

All staff within the school have completed training in safeguarding procedures and are aware of how to respond to disclosures or concerns. Safeguarding training also forms part of the school's induction programme for community service volunteers (CSV) that support the young people. No safeguarding referrals have been made since the last inspection from the school. Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and guidance is available for staff.

The school has an appropriate policy with relation to bullying. Young people state that bullying is not a problem within the school and where conflicts occur between themselves the staff help support both the victim and perpetrator. Assemblies within school have raised the ability of young people to receive support regarding bullying either through the staff team or the school's counsellor.

The senior staff team are aware of the need to contact a range of authorities in response to significant events within the school and boarding provision to raise awareness of ongoing safety issues for the young people. Such reports are received by Ofsted.

Incidents of young people absenting themselves from the school without permission are low and recordings show that staff respond appropriately. Full recordings are completed on such occasions. The school has a policy in place to support staff and young people regarding absence without permission that has been developed in line with local police protocols.

The staff promote positive behaviours throughout the residential provision by a range of additional measures of control. The recordings of sanctions show that staff respond appropriately to poor behaviour, with sanctions generally only being used in response to behaviours that negatively effect the residential experience of other young people. Sanction records are of an acceptable standard although there is some variation in the referencing of incidents within the young people's care plan. Staff have completed training in the use of restraint. All recordings are made within suitably numbered log books.

Health and safety documentation within the school is of a high standard and clearly shows that the school has a strong commitment to ensuring the safety of the young people and staff within the school. All required checks are completed including fire safety checks and risk assessments.

The school has a robust recruitment system that ensures all staff have been thoroughly checked prior to starting working at the school. Areas of weakness highlighted at the last inspection have been rectified and retrospective information has been gained as required. All volunteer staff are also fully checked prior to working with young people on an individual basis.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school ensures that there are very strong links between the educational and residential sides of the school. Information is shared well between the two areas, with pastoral team leaders from within the school meeting regularly with the residential staff to ensure that information is shared. There is also a 'provision map' that highlights specific areas in need of development within the residential and education areas to ensure effective strategies are in place to support

young people. Care staff contribute appropriately with educational reviews and young people's annual reports. There are appropriate areas within the residential provision that allow for private study and additionally young people can use the school facilities for a period in the evenings.

Young people are able to discuss a wealth of activities that they are involved in, either in the school grounds or externally, including Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and using the school's swimming pool. The school has a team dedicated to developing opportunities for young people to be involved with in the evenings, weekends and the school day. There is therefore a strong structure in place to promote young people's involvement with both team and individual achievements. Young people are also able to relax and take part in non-directed time, enjoying time with their peers. All activities are appropriately risk assessed, supervised and promote independence for people with visual impairment.

There are a very good range of structures in place to support young people in the residential areas of the school. Young people are able to identify different staff that they would talk to if they wished for support. The school's counsellor and the school nurse are available to respond to specific needs and if necessary they make referrals to external support agencies. A new reciprocal arrangement with a local residential school ensures that there is an independent person available for young people although there is a need for greater clarity regarding the specific ways that young people can be contacted without having to go through a staff member. Information regarding young people's preferred communication systems is recorded within the care plans.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Each of the residential homes ensures that young people's opinions are listened to and responded to. This is completed through regular house meetings, key worker sessions and the review process. Parents are surveyed every two years regarding the working of the school and are also involved in a range of meetings relating to the residential provision.

Relationships between staff and young people are positive and professional. There is a general consensus of acceptable boundaries with regard to behaviour. This is observed throughout the time of the inspection.

The care planning process which was in its infancy at the last inspection has developed into an effective tool that highlights individualised care provision for the young people. All young people have a care plan that is in line with the expectations of the standard and pulls together health plans, communication needs, activity arrangements and individualised risk assessments. All care plans link to the young people's educational statements and there are also targets set for individual development of skills within progress plans. Each young person has a specified key worker and records show that formalised meetings are attempted on a fortnightly basis. For some young people and staff such regularity is seen as excessive and staff need to ensure that such meetings are not overly formal to alienate the young people and as such decreasing the effectiveness of such a relationship. All young people have annual reviews and there are positive recordings of young people having a direct input into plans that affect their life at the school.

All young people have regular contact with parents or other family members. Some contact arrangements are clearly recorded within the young people's files, however there is a lack of

clarity regarding when contact occurs with some young people. Staff are able to discuss in detail the contact arrangements in place to support young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has developed a very good system for improving life skills which will support them after leaving the school. This transition development is constantly being used throughout young people's career at the school. Both care and education staff are fully involved with developing young people's independence and projects such as the independence skills award programme are supported both within the school and home areas. One young person states that the school promotes 'preparation not separation.' Young people within the sixth form accommodation have a greater degree of independence but are still restricted by necessary rules and expectations laid down by the school. Such expectations are not overly constrictive despite some of the protests of young people and are in place to promote the safety of the young people.

Accommodation for young people is of an overall good standard. There are variations in the standard of accommodation with some care staff teams putting a greater emphasis on decoration and comfort than others. This variation is mirrored within the sixth form where newly refurbished areas are of a higher standard than those awaiting redecoration. Decoration is being carried out within all of the sixth form areas on a rolling programme. All residential areas are well resourced and have pleasant areas for young people to eat, sleep and relax. The grounds of the school also offer a good range of areas for young people to relax or play. The vast majority of young people that were spoken to, or who answered questionnaires were happy with the accommodation that they lived in.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a Statement of Purpose that is in a clear format, without jargon and understandable for parents and social workers. The statement is reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Each of the boarding areas have their own handbook, giving young people an awareness of what life is like living in the different areas. These handbooks are available in a variety of formats to meet the needs of the young people.

The school has an appropriate staffing policy detailing the required levels of staff within the residential areas. Staffing at the time of the inspection is in line with the policy although there have been periods where there has been a reliance on CSV staff to meet the staffing levels required by the Statement of Purpose. This reliance requires CSV staff to be appropriately trained and fully competent in their role, which is difficult to achieve in their initial period at the school. The lack of such available CSV staff has the potential to affect the safety of young people and other staff. A concern regarding staffing numbers was raised as part of the last inspection.

All staff have completed an induction course at the school and there is a good range of training courses that have been offered to the staff team. The care staff team is made up of a good range of experienced and trained staff. All of the staff team have either completed or are in the process of finishing the National Vocational Qualification in Caring for Children and Young People at Level 3, with the school currently having an 80% completion rate.

Staff are supported through a range of meetings with senior staff. All staff have regular supervision meetings, and the minutes of pastoral meetings and care staff meetings show that staff are able to develop a good awareness of ongoing issues with the young people and life in the school.

All pertinent school records are monitored by the senior management team. Regular appraisals of the current situation regarding the boarding provision allows for the development of improved practice. Clear developments have been made regarding the awareness of the expectations of the standards since the last inspection. Additional monitoring is completed on a half term basis by the school governors.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school's equality and diversity policy is in place and supported by differing equality statements. The headteacher completes monitoring with regard to equality within the school and action points are incorporated into the equality and diversity action plan. Young people's care plans develop an awareness of young people's religion and how this can be supported within the school and care side.

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 an appropriate policy is in place with regard to privacy and the use of night wake staff within the residential units (NMS 3.2)
- ensure records of complaints are consistent throughout the boarding provision (NMS 4.3)
- ensure all behaviour management recordings are duplicated within young people's files (NMS 10.17)
- ensure the school's independent person is able to be accessed independently or through an independent third party (NMS 22.8)
- ensure contact details are clear within young people's records (NMS 20.3)
- ensure the schools staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of the young people and to provide levels of supervision that are safe for young people and staff. (NMS 28.3)