

# Mulberry Bush School

Inspection report for residential special school

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC013039
<b>Inspection date</b>	10 February 2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Christopher Garrett
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	Mulberry Bush School Ltd Abingdon Road Standlake WITNEY Oxfordshire OX29 7RW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01865 300202
<b>Email</b>	john.diamond@mulberrybush.oxon.sch.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Mulberry Bush School Limited
<b>Head of care</b>	Carol Day
<b>Head / Principal</b>	John Tuberville
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11 March 2009

---

© Crown copyright 2010

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## 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

Mulberry Bush School is run by a charitable trust and is approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families as a non-maintained special school. It provides 38 weeks of residential care and education, as well as a number of day placements for up to 40 boys and girls aged five to 12 years, who have experienced severe emotional damage in infancy and early childhood. The school specifically provides therapeutic treatment for children who have serious emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The school is situated in a village in rural West Oxfordshire, five miles south of Witney. Four houses provide the residential accommodation and are located around a 'village green', the classrooms are in close proximity and the layout of the site creates the spirit of a community.

### Summary

The purpose of this visit was to conduct an announced, full inspection of the residential provision. During the inspection all of the key national minimum standards for residential special schools were inspected.

The school provides an outstanding standard of care for the children. The children attending the school have complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. The children are looked after by an integrated team who provide consistency in care and in the management of behaviour. The school is committed to staff development and staff have access to a comprehensive and varied training programme. This ensures that they have the skills, knowledge and expertise to meet needs of the children. The school is a reflective service and makes good use of the inspection process and its quality assurance systems to review and improve its practice. There is excellent management oversight of the work in the school, which ensures that the children are safe and that their needs are routinely met. A significant aspect of the school is its commitment to listening and consulting with the children. This enables the children to affect change and make the views and feelings known. Children enjoy their residential experience.

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 that its vetting procedures are in accordance with the national minimum standards. The school has reviewed and revised its vetting procedures. These now exceed the minimum standards. All staff employed by the school who have contact with the children are required to have a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau check in place before they are allowed to take up their posts. These arrangements help to keep the children safe from abuse.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There is a strong emphasis within the residential provision on the encouragement and promotion of a healthy life style. The school has well established robust systems which ensure that the children's good health is promoted. The children's health care and medical needs are identified and these are clearly set out in their integrated treatment plan (ITP). The school nurse has

responsibility for the oversight of the children's health and medical needs. The nurse carries out an annual medical for all of the children and organises medicals for the looked after children as required. The children can access a number of specialised services arranged by the school including psychotherapy, speech and occupational therapy. The school ensures that children attending specialist services prior to admission continue to access these while at the school. All of the therapeutic social workers have completed some level of first aid training and this arrangement, along with the availability of the nurse, ensures that the children have access to a qualified first aider at all times. The arrangements for the storage, administration and dispensing of medication are robust and safeguard the children. All therapeutic social workers are trained in the safe administration of medication. The children feel that they are well looked after if they feel unwell.

The school is committed to the promotion of healthy eating. Children and staff are provided with healthy food that meets their dietary needs. The school has taken positive steps help all the staff and children develop a understanding of the importance of healthy eating. Children understand the importance of eating vegetables and fruit and of limiting the amounts of sweets and fizzy drinks that they have. Menus are well planned and offer a good variety and are adventurous. A vegetarian meal alternative is always available. Medical and cultural diets are catered for. The children are encouraged to try different foods. There is an established system in place for children to feedback their views and comment on the meals that are provided. Meals are prepared in the school kitchen and are eaten in the residential houses. Staff have their meals with the children and make considerable effort to make these social and orderly occasions. Each of the houses have the facilities for the children to do some cooking.

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

The provision is outstanding.

A consistent theme that is central to the school's ethos and values is ensuring that the children live in a safe, secure and caring environment. Excellent practices and procedures have been established to safeguard the children and to promote their welfare.

The therapeutic social workers have developed sensitive practices, and the residential accommodation has been arranged in a way that demonstrates a high respect for the children's privacy. Appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained. Many of the children have their own bedrooms, and toilets and bathrooms are fitted with appropriate locks. There are ample private and safe spaces available within the school and the houses for children to meet privately with their family and others. Staff knock on the bedroom and bathroom doors before entering. A number of the children require some level of assistance with their self-help skills; this is provided by the staff with sensitivity and respect. Subject to any agreed restriction the staff encourage and support the children to make telephone contact with their parent, carers and significant others. Details of any restrictions are made known to all of the staff and are recorded in the children's ITP. Written information on the children is kept confidential and secure and electronic records are password protected.

The children have confidence that the staff will listen to their concerns and complaints. The children have access to a child's complaints procedure and are encouraged and supported to use this to raise concerns. All issues are routinely investigated by senior staff and children are made aware of the outcome. Almost all of the children who have made use of the complaints procedure have accepted the outcome of their complaint. There are a number of forums including

daily and weekly meetings which children can also use to raise issues. An independent advocate attends the school regularly and is available to all children. There is a phone line in each house giving open access to a national advocacy helpline. Parents, carers and stakeholders are provided with details of the school's complaints procedure. There have been no recent complaints made against the school.

The school has robust, tried and tested procedures in place that ensure the children's welfare is promoted and that they are protected from abuse. The school has established good links with the local children's assessment team. The school ensures that all of its staff have the knowledge, understanding and skills required to respond to an allegation or suspicion of abuse. Regular training is provided to the whole staff team on child protection and safeguarding awareness. Staff are fully aware of the procedures that are in place and demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in responding to an allegation or suspicion of abuse. The response to any child protection concern is led by one of the school's two designated people. The designated people have completed appropriate training for this role. Therapeutic social workers are given guidance on how to make a referral directly to the children's assessment team if a designated person or senior staff can not be contacted. These arrangements ensure that the school can act promptly and decisively in response to any child protection concerns or issues. There are systems in place for all significant events relating to the protection of children to be notified by the school to the appropriate authorities.

The school has a consistent and proactive response to bullying. A large majority of the children indicate that they have either experienced bullying or have seen it taking place with the school. The children indicate that bullying is always challenged by staff. Children feel that bullying is taken seriously and that adults stop it from happening and sort it out. The school has established an effective system for monitoring bullying. There are established strategies to help children explore and understand the reasons why they bully and the impact that their behaviour can have on others. The school's bullying panel is an innovative strategy. Children are encouraged to explore their behaviour with the help and support of their peers. Data collected by the school shows that the frequency of bullying in the school is decreasing. The arrangements made by the school provide a consistent message that bullying is not acceptable.

The school has developed robust procedures to respond to occasions that children go missing. These are fully understood by the staff. All children have an individual risk assessment that documents whether they are likely to display this behaviour. This means that the levels of supervision can be adjusted accordingly. A local protocol for responding to incidents has been agreed with the local police. Children are made aware of the dangers of leaving the safety of the school and staff.

The school provides residential services and provision for severely emotionally troubled children. The children can display a range of anti-social and aggressive behaviour. The effective management of their behaviour is an outstanding feature of the school. Staff are given training to develop the skills and knowledge that help them to understand, manage and respond to the children's behaviour. The provision of integrated behaviour support teams and comprehensive treatment plans ensures that there is a consistent approach to behaviour throughout the school. Staff help and encourage the children to reflect on their behaviour and to understand how some of their behaviours are dangerous to them and others around them. Children who make progress in managing their behaviour receive public praise and recognition. There is an emphasis on restoration and reparation and there is limited use of sanctions. When used, sanctions are

fair, appropriate and are matched to the level of a child's ability to understand his or her behaviour. The children develop an awareness of what level of behaviour is expected from them. The vast majority of the children feel that the rules are fair and are aware of the consequences if they display unwanted or unacceptable behaviour

The children can display significant anti-social and aggressive behaviour. Staff are provided with regular training on the use of physical interventions including the use of de-escalation and distraction techniques and the use of restraint.

All sanctions and significant incidents, including the use physical restraint, are routinely recorded and monitored. There are some inconsistencies in establishing the views of the children regarding incidents of restraint and on the sanctions that they have been given.

The school takes positive steps to keep the children, staff and visitors safe from fire and other hazards. Established systems are in place for the regular checking and servicing of fire safety and detection equipment. A fire risk assessment is in place and has been reviewed. A process of assessing the children's need for a personal emergency evacuation plan is in place. The school has responded positively to concerns raised by the children and staff regarding the number of times that fire alarms have been maliciously set off. There is a programme for practice evacuations to take place. All therapeutic social workers have received some level of fire awareness training.

There are fully established systems for completing a full range of risk assessments relating to on and off site activities. This helps to ensure the safety of the children. The majority of stakeholders make positive comments on the steps taken by the school to keep children safe. The children say that staff give them advice on how they can keep themselves safe. Security measures within the school are good and contribute to the protection of the children, and provide a safe and secure environment.

The school has reviewed its staff recruitment and vetting procedures. These are now robust, thorough, consistent and exceed the requirements on the national minimum standards. Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place for staff, trustees and non-contracted staff. These are updated every three years. The identities of all visitors are checked. These arrangements help to safeguard the children and prevent them from being exposed to potential abusers.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The residential contribution to education is very well established. The school offers an integrated programme developed by all of the departments within the school. Treatment teams, which include the child's teacher and key worker, have responsibility for overseeing the children's individual treatment plans. Regular meetings and continuous monitoring ensure that the child is engaging with the plan and that his or her needs are being met. The therapeutic social workers ensure that the children regularly attend and arrive punctually at the school. Children receive exceptional support during the transition times from house to class, and class to house. The therapeutic social workers are familiar with the educational needs and progress of the children. They support parts of the children's individual education plan that need to be carried out in the houses. The residential provision has taken an active part in supporting a recent reading initiative.

Children receive outstanding individual support when they need it. The school provides a range of services as part of the children's ITPs. Where it is felt to be supportive the children have access to speech and occupational therapy and psychotherapy. The school ensures that children continue to access any services that have been arranged place prior to their admission. The school's family professional network team also provides individual support to children by networking with their families and other professionals working with them. A large majority of stakeholders comment on the regular communication that school has with them. The children have access to an independent advocacy service which they can contact directly about personal problems or concerns. A large majority of the children indicate that if they had a worry that they would tell an adult.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children are consulted about the day-to-day running of the school, and key decisions which affect their daily life and future; their views are fully integrated into the care practices. There are a number of established forums which the children can use to raise issues and to express their views and opinions. Children routinely contribute and participate in their statutory reviews. Their views are sought as part of the school's quality assurance programme. There is ample evidence that the children are listened to and that they are able to exert influence and bring about changes.

All admissions to the school are thoroughly and sensitively planned and the children, parents and carers are fully involved with the process. The referral and admission processes are coordinated by the family professional network team and include a home assessment and an introductory visit; during this visit the child is allocated a buddy. Staff from the assessment house meet with the parents or carers and gather information on the child, including their likes and dislikes, routines and anxieties. During the first week the children are given a personalised calendar which details an gradual introduction into their classroom.

The leaving process is sensitively planned. The planning includes the development of a leaving calendar and the production of a record of the young person's time at the school; the record is developed in a range of formats. The children have a specific leaving assembly that a child's family or carers are invited to. A number of stakeholders specifically comment on the support that is provided during this period of transition. The family professional network team offer continued support to the family or carers after their child has left the school.

Each of the children has a comprehensive current ITP which clearly sets out the child's assessed needs and details how these are to be met. Each ITP is overseen by the child's treatment team which consists of the child key worker, teacher, family team member and therapist. Staff from other departments routinely contribute to the plan. ITPs include children's placement objectives, current targets and recent significant achievements in their house and class. They are based around the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children and core educational areas. Children's ITPs are regularly updated following any significant events and reviewed by the school through internal case conferences and statutory reviews.

The staff are fully aware of the importance of the children being able to maintain contact with their families and carers. The children's ITPs include details of any contact restrictions. Staff encourage children, subject to agreed restrictions, to have regular telephone contact with their parents, families and friends. Children are able to use a cordless phone and are able to move



into a private space to make and receive their calls. Parents/carers comment positively on the communication that the school has with them. Families are encouraged to visit children at the school. There are ample spaces including a visitor's flat for the children to be able to meet their visitors in private.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The standard relating to young people about to leave care being prepared for the transition into independent living is not applicable in this setting.

The school provides sufficient space and facilities to meet the needs of the children. The group living accommodation is provided in four individually designed houses. These are paired together and this allows easy and quick access for staff to move from one house to another. The houses have a range of communal spaces that are put to good use. Activity spaces are well equipped with a range of age appropriate equipment, books and games. The children have access to supervised computer games. Each house has a kitchen/dining room where all meals are eaten.

Accommodation is domestic in style. However, the state of decoration and repair is of a variable quality across the houses. Some areas show signs of wear and tear and there is some malicious damage. There is a system in place for all maintenance issues to be prioritised. The large majority of the children each have their own bedrooms. Some of the children advise that they have been consulted on the colour schemes in their rooms; the children are able to personalise their rooms if they wish.

The school makes use of audio visual equipment to monitor the children's movements during the night; details of its use are detailed in the school's 'Welcome Booklet'.

The houses are set up around a large central lawn which provides good communal space where the children can play and be supervised. Each of the houses has its own secure garden. These provide a good space for outdoor play and are equipped with age appropriate play apparatus. Additional adventure type play equipment has been added to the central lawn and there are two climbing walls that the children have supervised access to. Children have access to the school's recreational facilities, which include a sports hall and an all weather sports pitch. The school has taken positive steps to reduce risks inherent to the building. For example, some roofs have been fitted with devices to deter children from climbing on them and windows have restrictors fitted to prevent children from climbing out of them. Additional restrictors are being fitted to prevent the young people damaging the opening windows. There are sufficient numbers of baths, toilets and showers for the numbers of children in each of the houses. The school is part of the way through a programme of refurbishment to all kitchens and bathrooms.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Information on the school's ethos purpose, values, organisation and what it sets out to do for the children is detailed in a number of booklets that are provided to parents, carers and significant others. One of these provides a useful explanation of the terminology used in the school. The school has a website that provides a comprehensive range of information. The children have access to a handbook which provides a range of information about the school. This is produced in a colourful and accessible format and is also available on an animated and

narrated DVD. Collectively the information provided enables the children their parents and other interested parties to determine the range of services the school provides and understand how it operates.

The school is organised and managed in a manner that delivers and maintains a outstanding standard of care. The head of group living and her deputies are experienced and qualified. The head of group Living provides good leadership and has the expertise, skills and knowledge to effectively manage a residential provision.

There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the complex needs of the children and to support them in their activities. Each of the houses are allocated a team of therapeutic social workers. The numbers of therapeutic social workers have been increased to cover absenteeism and provide additional supervision to the children; this reduces the use of agency staff. These arrangements help to ensure consistency and continuity of care, and allow for relationships to be nurtured between the therapeutic social worker and the children. Staff teams are culturally diverse, gender balanced and reflect the backgrounds of the children.

The school's commitment and investment in staff development and training is outstanding and a significant feature of the school. The school ensures that staff have the opportunity, time and resources to acquire the skills and knowledge required to look after children with complex emotional and behavioural needs. Training is coordinated and organised by the school's training department. Regular training and study days ensure that professional development is on going; staff comment positively on the training provided. Staff currently completing their induction state that the support they are being given is good, and the range of training is helping them develop skills and knowledge needed for their role. The school's foundation degree course has been devised to exceed the competences required at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. This meets the specific needs of staff working in a therapeutic community. Currently, there is a shortfall in staff who have completed NVQ at level 3 or training that meets the same competencies. This shortfall is not seen to have an impact on the care being provided to the children.

Staff supervision is an established and integrated part of staff development. This is provided regularly in groups and on an individual basis. Peer support is provided through regular team and reflective meetings.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is ample evidence that the school is fully committed to promoting equality and diversity in practice. Equality and diversity underpins the ethos and values of the school. All of the children are valued as individuals and all are given the same opportunities. Children are made aware of different cultures and beliefs and participate in different festivals and celebrations. The school makes sure that the children's specific needs are met through assessments and integrated planning. Within the teams there is good balance in terms of gender, age and ethnicity which reinforces positive role models for young people.

The school has developed effective quality assurance and monitoring programmes. Information gathered from these exercises is used to improve facilities and practice within the school. There are established systems in place for the head of group living and her deputies to effectively monitor key records and to observe practice within group living. Objective monitoring of the care provision is undertaken. The trustees routinely conduct unannounced visits to all

departments in the school. Each visit has a specific focus and key documents are checked. Trustees meet with staff and the children. Reports are made following each visit.

## 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
----------	--------	----------

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the children's views are sought following incidents of restraint and the imposition of sanctions. (NMS 10.22)