

# Doucecroft School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sharon Lewis
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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**

Doucecroft school is an independent special school, owned and operated by Autism Anglia. The school caters for children and young people with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders.

The main school is purpose built and is located on the outskirts of Colchester. It has separate teaching, office and boarding areas. Boarding is divided into four units, all students have their own bedroom and each unit has a lounge and kitchen area.

The school has two Further Education (FE) departments. One in Kelvedon which is about eight miles from the main school and a department based at the Eight Ash Green site. The FE departments access nearby community facilities, in addition to social events in nearby towns.

At the time of the inspection there was a total of 36 boarding students. Students' ages ranged from eight to 19. The majority of students were seen during the inspection. All were comfortable in their surroundings and indicated their satisfaction with the school. Five young people actively participated, providing tours of their individual houses. Positive feedback was additionally received from eleven relatives and two professionals.

### **Summary**

At this announced inspection all key standards were examined. The school continues to provide a high quality service to students. Students continue to excel in all areas of their lives. The school demonstrates a commitment to continual improvement. New initiatives focus on meeting individual needs. Students demonstrate tremendous growth both educationally and socially. Students thrive within an environment which promotes their independence and strengthens their self-esteem. The outcomes for students are exceptional. The school has strong leadership and practice stands out from its peers. Two recommendations are made to further enhance an excellent service. These relate to the physical intervention procedure and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training for some staff.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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

One recommendation was made at the last inspection. This related to identifying an independent person who students can access to discuss concerns. The school has explored various options. The key issue was ensuring the person could meet the diverse needs of students. Plans are in progress. It is hoped a senior staff member who previously worked at the school will accept this position.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Students receive excellent health support. Initiatives within the school focus on promoting the physical, emotional and mental well-being of students. Individualised care plans highlight health needs, risk assessments and professional involvement. Students benefit from the extensive range of specialist support. The school has access to clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists and a newly appointed occupational therapist. A great strength is the school's ability

to proactively recognise the mental health needs of students. Emotional well-being is of significant importance. Throughout the school are quiet areas. These include chill-out zones and sensory rooms; students greatly appreciate these. Parents additionally comment on the 'excellent pastoral care'.

Students benefit from a cohesive response to their health needs. The school follows a strict medical procedure. Staff appropriately store, administer and maintain medication. Students receive care from staff who have first aid training and specialist training in health issues. Staff record and monitor students' weight. They assess and address sensory needs. The school promotes an active lifestyle. Students are able to engage in a range of physical activities. The students' curriculum includes teaching on the dangers of alcohol and drug use. Staff respectfully and sensitively manage sexuality issues.

Students enjoy healthy, nutritious, appetising meals from a range of cultures. Staff have good knowledge of each student's individual preferences and allergies. Students are able to plan their own menus, shop for groceries and practice their cooking skills. Students enjoy the responsibility of clearing and setting tables. Meal times are a social occasion. All houses have designated dining areas which contribute to a homely atmosphere. Staff have good knowledge of student's individual preferences and allergies. An excellent resource at the FE unit is the catering tutor role. This enables young people to learn food hygiene practices and prepare meals for their peers.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Students benefit from the school's cohesive commitment to promoting their safety and welfare. Students state, 'The school are good at keeping me safe.' Staff treat students with dignity and respect. Students confirm they have adequate privacy. They greatly enjoy the independence of having their own room keys. The school has an effective complaints procedure. The school takes a positive approach to complaints, viewing them as a mechanism for further improving their service. Young people report any concerns to staff members. Safeguarding is of key importance. Staff receive regular child protection training and the policy is also given to parents. Training includes internet safety and the promotion of safe community access. Students also have accessible pictorial information regarding ChildLine.

The school proactively addresses bullying. The topic forms part of the personal, health and social education curriculum. It is continually part of school discussions. The school efficiently manages any issues. If necessary, they involve the clinical psychology team. The high staff ratio makes the bullying of others very difficult. Young people state that staff are, 'kind and supportive'. The school does not have an issue with bullying or absconding. Students receive familiarisation training in the local community. They also carry identification should they become lost. The school effectively liaises with parents when there are issues regarding unauthorised absences.

Students receive consistently focused support to develop socially acceptable behaviour. The school works in partnership with parents and professionals to develop individualised behavioural management plans. Students receive encouragement to take responsibility for their actions and the long-term aim is for students to develop self-discipline. The school aims to provide a safe and supportive learning environment. Regular diffusion, physical intervention and restraint training provide staff with the confidence to manage challenging situations. Policies and

strategies seek to promote the best interests of students with the aim of preventing injury and preserving their dignity. In rare circumstances the school may need to use the infringement of rights procedure. While there are no issues regarding behaviour management practice, the infringement of rights procedure is fairly brief, and there is not sufficient written detail to guide staff in the use of physical interventions. However, the headteacher and governors closely monitor all incidents. The school has achieved accreditation with The National Autistic Society.

The health and safety arrangements protect students effectively. The school benefits from support from the organisation's health and safety unit. There are up-to-date certificates regarding the servicing of equipment, gas safety and electricity. Pictorial fire procedures highlight what students should do in the event of a fire. Regular fire equipment tests and drills also promote the safety of students. The school regularly updates risk assessments. These relate to the premises, activities and individualised assessments for each student. The upgraded radio communication system also provides greater security for both students and staff.

There is a very thorough staff recruitment process. The school maintains detailed records of the selection process. The school shows a commitment to recruiting the right person for the job. The high calibre of applicants and staff retention training ensure students benefit from a stable and experienced staff team.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Students receive an excellent range of support. The school offers a wide range of opportunities for students to achieve both educationally and socially. The school develops the holistic needs of each individual student. Students have full and productive lives; their potential is maximised and they exceed expectations. They remark that they 'love it here'. Students benefit from a 24-hour curriculum. This identifies the importance of learning experiences which occur outside the traditional school day. Students have opportunities to develop their communication, social and independent living skills and problem solving abilities. Students work with staff to set specific targets. There is a culture of recognising achievements which builds on raising students' self-esteem. Students enjoy accredited work placements and community projects. These enable them to obtain a range of qualifications. Students are part of their local community. They use a range of facilities in the area. These include leisure and activity centres, youth and social clubs, the library and shopping centres.

Students state the staff are 'good at helping and understanding people'. They also describe staff as caring and they appreciate their help when they are upset. Students have access to a range of individualised support. Appropriate counselling and care is available to address the mental and spiritual needs of students. The school has very high staffing levels. Students are able to approach any staff member with concerns. An independent person is appointed as recommended in the last inspection. The school succeeds in providing an environment where students feel happy and valued.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The school's policies and practices incorporate the Every Child Matters framework. Students exercise choice throughout their daily lives. The school uses an excellent total communication system. This includes the use of object and visual cues. Students are able to contribute their

views at house meetings. Speech and language therapists are available where necessary to assist with facilitation. Students stated they 'feel listened to'. They are able to influence change and gave examples of where this had happened.

The school has excellent admission and leaving procedures. Staff complete a comprehensive initial assessment of the prospective student's needs. This involves working in partnership with parents and involved professionals. Young people and their families have the opportunity to visit the school. There are also regular open days. Extensive support is available to families. The school celebrates achievements and hold an annual leavers event.

Students benefit from the school's holistic approach to care planning. Care plans cover a wide range of needs. These include personal care, identity, sexuality, leisure and safety. They also highlight the strengths, personality and character of each student. Pictorial symbols enable students to detail their dreams and aspirations. Staff encourage students and their parents to contribute to the annual review of the young person's care plan.

The school enables students to maintain contact with their families. This is in accordance with student's wishes and individual circumstances. The school works hard at developing a good working relationship with families. A weekly diary is used to communicate events relating to each student. Staff additionally keep in contact through emails and telephone calls. The aim is to promote a consistent approach to the welfare of each student. The school respects the views of families and regularly consults with them. This contributes to the quality assurance system.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides an excellent living environment. Students live in clean comfortable individualised accommodation. The school has two sites. The main site is at Eight Ash Green on the outskirts of Colchester. It has a large campus with a school, boarding accommodation and administration offices. The premises of the main FE provision is in the village of Kelvedon. The school is convenient for transport links, leisure and other community facilities.

The living accommodation is divided into separate houses; this promotes family type living. Each house has a kitchen, dining areas, and a range of lounges. The accommodation is domestic in style, modern, spacious and homely. An efficient maintenance team respond promptly to requests for repairs. Each young person has their own room, which they are able to personalise. Young people are able to enjoy a wide range of facilities on site. These include a swimming pool, outdoor play equipment and sensory rooms.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a clear, detailed up-to-date prospectus. This includes a clear vision of the school, the facilities, boarding principles and practice. This is available for parents, students and staff. The school has a comprehensive website, which also provides a good overview of boarding arrangements. Feedback from students, parents and professionals confirm the school's success in providing a quality service.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school positively meets the unique and special needs of each student. The school's prospectus highlights that, 'All students are of equal value, regardless of race, gender, religion, cultural background or disability.' Equality and diversity is inherent throughout documentation and working practices. The school empowers students by offering an excellent range of communication methods. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education encourages students to value the contribution of others. The school excels in focusing on each student's ability and potential. This gives students the confidence to successfully develop the skills necessary for adult life.

Students receive support from an experienced, competent and cohesive staff team. High staffing ratios enable students to receive outstanding care. Care practices are creative and focus on meeting the individual needs of students. The organisation provides staff with a wide range of support, which makes them effective in their roles. This includes a comprehensive induction process, regular supervision and team meetings. The organisation acknowledges the stressful nature of the work and provides an excellent counselling service for staff.

The organisation has a commitment to developing the workforce. There is a programme of specialist and mandatory training. Performance appraisals are in progress. Currently there is an issue regarding training for all staff in a NVQ at level 3 in the care of children. Senior care workers have successfully obtained this qualification; other care workers have not had the opportunity to undertake this NVQ training. The organisation has been investigating this issue. This does not have an impact on the quality of care students receive.

Students benefit from strong dynamic leadership and an efficiently run school. The senior management team works well together. A middle management post is being created to further strengthen the care provision. There is a focus on creatively addressing issues and continual improvement. The school has a development plan which addresses educational and residential issues. Professionals describe staff as, 'passionate, very knowledgeable, helpful and approachable'. Parents comment on the excellent overall care, communication, facilities and management. Monitoring arrangements are very good. The school has autism accreditation and is subject to regular monitoring from the local authority and the board of governors.

## 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):

- provide further detail in the physical intervention policy about the circumstances in which physical intervention may be used. In addition, take in account the needs of the children and relevant current government guidance on approved methods of physical intervention (NMS 10.11)



- investigate further how staff will obtain a NVQ at Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies as the NVQ (NMS 31.4)
- identify an independent person that students can access. (NMS 22.8)