

Ashley School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 seven 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 of which 29 are currently boarding for between one and four nights per week. The boarding provision is provided in two houses, one for girls and the other for 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 childcare 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 include a climbing wall and ten pin bowling.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced full inspection in which all key standards were assessed. This school has been judged as good with one outcome assessed as outstanding. Staff provide a high level of quality care which young people positively respond to. Health needs are very well met as is consultation between staff and young people. Privacy and confidentiality is respected. Young people benefit from well-considered educational and residential plans which provide young people with manageable targets. This is a particular strength of this school. Relationships between staff and young people are positive and nurturing. Staff have suitable training and development opportunities to care for the young people to a high standard. Staff are confident and competent in meeting the diverse needs of young people. Young people enjoyed their time staying at this school and gained from this experience. The residential provision is managed very well.

Areas for improvement have been identified at this inspection with five recommendations made. Medication was not always stored securely which could present as a health and safety risk to young people. Risk assessments for young people do not include the potential impact on bullying. Whilst there were no concerns regarding bullying noted at this inspection, the lack of a risk assessment with regards to young people's behaviour is an area for development. Environmental concerns were identified with regards to very hot radiators in which the risk of burn injury had not been appropriately assessed. Planned target dates with regard to a recent environmental health inspection were exceeded. It was not clear what arrangements the school had in renegotiating these dates with this service. The Statement of Purpose for residential provision has been amended following last year's inspection. However, it remains a recommendation as it does not currently meet national minimum standards.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were two good practice recommendations made at the last inspection. One recommendation has been met whilst the other remains outstanding and is repeated in this report.

The shower facilities have now been improved and are considered suitable for use. Young people say they enjoy the new showers. The school's Statement of Purpose, whilst updated from the last inspection, does not include required information as reflected within the service-specific national minimum standards. This means it is unclear, for example, what the admission criteria is for young people to board at the school and the names and relevant professional qualifications of staff.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school actively promotes the health of each child and meets their individual dietary needs well. Menus are planned and available to all young people who also contribute to this. Staff help young people make informed choices over healthy eating. Young people say they enjoy the food and are able to make snacks when they wish. Meals are communal activities in which young people and staff can talk about the day. The variety of meals reflects the present dietary requirements of the young people. Suitable arrangements are made to ensure young people with specific dietary needs are catered for. For example, there is the preparation of gluten-free meals. A young person said 'the food here is really good'.

The local environmental health service has recently assessed the storage and preparation provision of the school. Recommendations from this visit have not all been implemented within the timescale advised. It is, therefore, unclear what arrangements have been made with the environmental health officer as to when all recommendations will be completed.

Young people's health needs are managed well. Young people with particular health

concerns are cared for in line with their care plan. Staff are trained in first aid. Support and guidance for young people on matters relating to their personal health is supported through the curriculum and residential care staff. For example, this helps young people with their hygiene and understanding of relationships. The pupil and family support service, run by the school, provides both individual and group support to young people to help them with such areas as self esteem or problem specific concerns. Young people, therefore, have a range of opportunities to talk with someone about issues that concern them.

Medication administration is safe and well organised. Records are accurate and regularly monitored. However, storage of medication is inconsistent, with liquids kept in unsecured fridges that are accessible to young people. This means that medication is not always kept safely within the houses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Competent and experienced staff provide young people with a high level of care and safety. Privacy is respected and sensitive information confidentially managed. Young people are aware of the complaints process through clear and child-friendly systems. For example, a confidential letter box is available in both houses for young people to post their concerns to the head of care. A young person said that they know what to do if they wanted to complain. Records on complaints include what action was taken and the outcome. Such records are regularly monitored.

Relationships between staff and young people are friendly, good natured and respectful. Behaviour management takes into consideration young people's individual needs. Records provide details on all aspects of the use of sanctions or physical restraints. There are very few times in which the use of restraint is necessary. Staff are trained in effective de-escalation techniques as well as an approved use of physical intervention. A young person said 'Staff are kind to us and help us with our behaviour'.

There are robust and well understood safeguarding procedures in place. Staff receive training on child protection and are confident in both identifying and referring any concerns about the welfare of children. The school has a good track record of effectively responding to previous incidents.

Young people say that bullying is not a problem at this time. There is information, in both houses, for young people about bullying and what to do if they encounter such behaviour. The policy on managing bullying is available to all staff. A code of practice is available which the school council review and fully contributes to. However, individual care plans do not include an evaluation of the potential for young people

to be either the victim or perpetrator of bullying. Whilst it is clear that staff are very knowledgeable about each young person, the lack of risk assessment on bullying may compromise this good work.

Health and safety checks are managed well. All appliances are maintained within correct timescales. Fire safety is regularly undertaken and risk assessed. However, the high temperature of radiators in one of the houses is of concern due to the risk of scalding. The lack of suitable assessment of risk may impact on the safety of young people staying in this house.

Recruitment and selection procedures meets a high standard of practice to ensure young people are cared for by adults who have been appropriately vetted. Young people play an active part in the recruitment process of care staff. This demonstrates how the service engages with young people to find the best candidates for the role. Visitors are asked to sign in and out of the houses and identification is checked. This ensures there is suitable safeguards in place to protect the young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Care staff and the school's residential provision and activities actively contribute to individual children's educational progress. Care staff actively support children's education, ensuring regular attendance, punctuality and a minimum of interruption during the school day. Education plans are reviewed annually and provide realistic targets for young people to meet. Progress is effectively monitored. Residential and educational staff work well together providing young people with a continuity of care. There is a culture of high expectations within the school and residential areas. Young people engage positively in education with the emphasis on a 24-hour curriculum. A young person said 'I like going to this school; it helps me to learn new things'.

Recreational activities are well planned and suitably risk assessed. Young people enjoy a wide range of activities that are of interest to them. There is a good level of resources available for young people within the school houses. For example, young people say they really enjoy playing in the large sports hall which they can use in the evenings. A parent wrote that 'my child enjoys staying in residency and I am aware that they are encouraged to do physical activities in the evening after school, such as swimming, going to the park or beach'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Placement plans include essential information for staff to care for the young people safely. The plans reflect the presenting needs of young people as realistic and achievable targets which are regularly reviewed and updated. Daily records present

as factual and relevant. Young people are able to read these records on request. Therefore, children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school.

Consultation between staff and young people is good. There are weekly resident meetings as well as keyworker sessions to help young people express their views. Informally young people can and do raise issues with staff. A particular positive aspect of both houses is the feelings board which young people, including staff on duty, can write on to say what mood they are feeling at the time. Staff show a genuine sensitivity of the needs of the young people. This helps the young people develop a sense of belonging and a feeling that they are valued and included.

Young people are encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families. A telephone is available that has been programmed with speed dial facilities to support young people to contact family members. Young people say they find this works very well for them. Parents are able to visit their children at the houses. There are private areas in the homes where young people and parents can see each other. Therefore, children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while living away from home at school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The residential provision of this school meets the needs of young people well although the accommodation presents as somewhat institutional due to the original design and layout. However, staff and young people have made a significant impact on improving the interior of both houses through decoration and educational displays on the walls. Shower facilities have been upgraded and young people are very positive about this. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Transitional planning and arrangements for young people to move from the school is well established. There is a system in place to support young people moving from the school to colleges around the area. Young people benefit from the support from external agencies that help them prepare for further education, training or work. Preparation for independence is an integral part of the residential experience. Staff work with young people to help them gain the skills required for adulthood, such as budgeting, shopping and cooking a meal.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The management and leadership of this setting provides young people with a stimulating and enriching experience of both residential and educational support. Staff demonstrate a high level of knowledge about the complex needs of young people in their care. Young people respond very positively to staff and clearly benefit from the staff team's energy and resourcefulness.

All members of care staff are qualified to National Vocational Qualification at level three or its equivalent. Training for staff is regular and specifically addresses the skills necessary to care for young people. Staff receive at least monthly supervisions and weekly staff meetings. For new staff the frequency of formal supervision is increased. Therefore, young people are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently.

The school has a written Statement of Purpose, which describes what the school sets out to do for those children it accommodates, although this does not provide details as required under national minimum standards. This was raised at the last annual inspection and remains an area for improvement.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The staff team promotes individuality, ensuring young people have a nurturing and positive experience of residential life. Young people's differences are celebrated and respected. The ethos of the school is for young people to aspire to their potential. Both houses make considerable efforts to reflect diversity through positive information and representations of different cultures as displays on the walls. Young people actively participate in the creation of such displays thus improving their understanding of how people different from themselves live.

Monitoring of the residential provision is robust, exceeds national minimum standards and provides consistent feedback to senior staff and residential workers. Records are reviewed to check for any trends or patterns within practice. Senior staff use the feedback from the monitoring process to develop the service with a detailed residential improvement plan. The school is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers a high level of childcare.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure prescribed and 'household' medication, other than that kept by individual children keeping their own medication, is kept securely in a locked cabinet and in a labelled container (NMS 14.9)
- ensure the local environmental health service has assessed the storage and preparation provision of the school and any recommendations are implemented within the timescale advised (NMS 15.5)
- develop recorded risk assessments of the times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying including bullying amounting to abuse by other pupils is greatest and take resultant action where feasible to reduce or counteract the risk of bullying (NMS 6.5)

- ensure hot water temperature at taps accessible to vulnerable children does not exceed 43 degrees Celsius and radiator and hot water pipes accessible to vulnerable children do not have a surface temperature exceeding 43 degrees Celsius. Lack of vulnerability is determined by written risk assessment (NMS 26.8)
- review the Statement of Purpose to include all matters as outlined in the service specific national minimum standard. (NMS 1)