

# Mulberry Bush School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC013039                             |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 04/02/2011                           |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Christopher Garrett / Bridgette Lowe |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Key                                  |

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| <b>Head/ Principal</b>         | Carol Day   |
| <b>Nominated person</b>        | John Tuberville   |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 10/02/2010  |

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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

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|---------------|---|
| 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 Education 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 overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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

The overall standard of care for the boarders is outstanding. Individual outcome groups relating to being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic well-being and organisation are assessed and judged as outstanding.

There is ample evidence that the school continues to fully engage with the inspection process and uses this along with its own effective monitoring systems to reflect and improve on the care practices and provision within the school.

The children are looked after by multi-professional team who have a good understanding of their complex needs. Members of the team work well together and this ensures consistency and continuity of care. The therapeutic social workers are trained and qualified and are well supported by their household managers and the head of group living and her deputies. There is excellent management of the residential provision which ensures that the children are safe and that excellent standards are maintained.

The children have good relationships with the staff and feel that staff take an interest in them and care about what they are doing. Appropriate boundaries are maintained and consistent messages are given to the children.

The safety of the children is paramount and they are protected by robust practices and procedures that are known and by all of the staff.

There are no recommendations made following this inspection.

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

The school was asked to ensure that the children's views are sought following incidents of restraint and the imposition of sanctions. There is evidence that the children are asked to comment on significant issues and all measures of control. This provides some insight in to how they are feeling, view their behaviour and assists in evaluating the effectiveness of the measures of controls that are used.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The physical, emotional and mental health needs of children are identified and met to a high standard. The children's medical history and specific needs are identified prior to admission and are well documented in the children's integrated treatment plan. The school's nurse has recently left and the school is in the process of recruiting a new qualified school nurse; interim arrangements are in place and have had no negative impact on children's health needs being met. All medication is securely stored and the administration recording is of a high standard. All the records have photographs of the children and there are appropriate safeguards in place regarding the administration of controlled medication.

The school has excellent arrangements to secure specialist medical services because it has a therapy team including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychotherapists and music and drama therapists. Excellent links with local child and adolescent mental health services ensure that the children's emotional and mental health needs are met to a high degree. The schools therapeutic community staff team all work together to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved for each child.

Children are provided with a choice of healthy and varied food with children eating all meals in their individual houses. Snacks are provided in the boarding houses and there are good opportunities for the children to learn to shop, prepare and cook for themselves. Children commented positively about the opportunities to purchase and prepare food that they could then cook with the school chef. Children are encouraged to try new foods and often have cultural themed meal nights where a range of foods can be sampled. Good behaviour at meal times is rewarded and children can earn a night out at a restaurant of their choice should they achieve their target. Children commented that they 'liked' the food and, 'I've even tried salad!'

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

The provision is outstanding.

Safeguarding is a clear priority in the school. Established procedures and practices ensure that the children are protected from abuse, their welfare is promoted and that they live in a safe, caring and nurturing environment. Highly effective systems ensure that their behaviour is effectively monitored and the school promptly responds to any identified trends, patterns and significant changes or incidents.

The therapeutic social workers show a high regard for the privacy of the children and for maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality. Staff are deployed in a manner which ensures that while all of the children receive a high level of supervision, it is delivered in a sensitive and non-intrusive manner. The children can have private time on their own if they wish. Staff are aware of any agreed contact restrictions in place for the children. Good arrangements are in place which ensures that all of the children can make and receive phone calls that cannot be overheard by the rest of the group. Some of the children require assistance with their personal care. Staff follow practices and procedures that ensure this is provided sensitively in an age-appropriate manner and with due regard to the safety of both the children and staff.

Most of the children know how and feel able to complain if they are unhappy or have a concern. The school has an established and very clear complaints procedure and information about this is readily available. Children are encouraged to raise any concerns or issues and these are generally shared directly with the staff. However, most of the children are fully aware of the formal procedures for making complaints and are supported by staff if they choose to do this. All complaints made by the children are dealt with effectively and they are routinely advised of the outcome. Records indicate that the children are satisfied with the manner in which their complaints are dealt with. All children have unrestricted access to a private phone that allows free calls to be made to national advocacy agency. This ensures that they are able to contact a person or organisation independent of the home without having to make reference to an adult.

The school receives very few formal complaints from external agencies, parents and carers. Those that are received are dealt with promptly and effectively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

The school has a very clear procedure for responding to child protection concerns. The school is fully committed to ensuring that all of its staff have a good understanding of how to recognise and protect children from abuse. Appropriate levels of training is provided to the whole staff team and this is regularly updated. Staff demonstrate that they are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and the procedures to follow in response to any allegation or disclosure of actual or potential abuse. The response to any child protection concern is led by one of the school's designated people who have completed appropriate training for this role.

The school has established good working links with the Local Safeguarding Children

Board and contribute to its purpose. A representative of the board advises that, 'the school routinely seek advice and support'. Some of the staff are trained as trainers and are a part of the board's multi-professional training team. The staff deliver child protection training at the school and make themselves available to provide training to other settings and agencies.

The therapeutic social workers are fully aware of the vulnerability of the children living in the school. Staffing levels ensure that the children and are kept safe, receive appropriate support and are consistently supervised. Individual behavioural risk assessments routinely review the possibility of the children going missing and their propensity for bullying.

Effective observation, reporting and monitoring of the children's behaviour and their interaction with each other, ensures that any incidents of bullying are identified and challenged. Positive strategies, including compulsory attendance at workshops, are used to address bullying. Children are encouraged and supported to reflect on their behaviour and to develop and understanding of the impact that this has on others. Children are given guidance on cyber bullying. Access to school's computers and the internet is carefully monitored and supervised.

Positive steps are taken by the school to deter the children from being absent without permission. Consequently this is not currently an issue at the school. Children are aware of the school's boundaries and have regular discussions how to keep themselves safe. Staff are fully aware of the dangers that a child places themselves in if they leave the safety of the school. The levels of supervision provided to all of the children is a contributory factor in reducing the possibilities of them going missing. The school has agreed a missing person's protocol with the local police. This is understood by all of the staff. While there is evidence that some children do test the 'boundaries', these incidents are dealt with effectively by the staff. There has been only one recent occasion which has had to be notified to the police. All incidents are treated with the same importance. Children are routinely debriefed and given the opportunity to discuss with an independent adult about the reasons for them wanting or pretending to run off.

Children attending the school have a complex range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some children display aggressive, anti-social, inappropriate and unwanted behaviours. The management of the children's behaviour is highly effective and is an outstanding aspect of the school. The emphasis is on restoration and reparation. Children are supported in developing an understanding of their behaviour and in considering the impact that this has on others. The children learn that there may be consequences to their behaviour. Multi-professional integrated treatment teams are responsible for the implementation and overview of individual treatment plans. These set out agreed strategies to use in response to identified behaviours. This arrangement ensures that there is consistency in the management of behaviour throughout the school.

Some children display behaviour or act in a manner that represents a danger to themselves or others. Staff receive training on the use of positive handling

techniques in order to manage this behaviour. A recent review of the positive handling techniques within the school has produced positive outcomes for the children. Individual positive handling plans clearly identify agreed strategies and restraint holds and take into consideration a child's medical as welfare needs. Staff make greater use of de-escalation techniques and consequently there is less use of restraint. Placing authorities and parents and carers are given full details of the school's use positive handling and restraint. The school no longer uses supine restraint. A placing authority comments positively on the action taken by the school stating that it demonstrates the school's 'willingness to learn and adapt'.

All measures of control including the use of fair, age-appropriate sanctions and physical interventions along with other significant incidents are routinely recorded and monitored. Children are routinely taken through the records and given the opportunity to reflect on these and to consider what might be done to make things better. Children are encouraged to comment and to offer their views on each incident, though they do not always take the opportunity to do so.

The arrangements for the monitoring of behaviour within the school are excellent and are a major contribution to the effectiveness the school's management of behaviour. Staff are kept fully informed of any emerging patterns trends and changes in specific behaviours. Individual tracking sheets provide details of progress and changes and for these to be viewed against a significant anniversaries and events. This enables staff to anticipate potential issues and to put in place strategies to help support the children through these periods.

The home 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. The children and staff are briefed on the home's emergency fire procedures and regularly participate in day and night time evacuations. Recent steps taken by the school have improved on the standards of fire safety provided to the children. A new fire risk assessment is in place and has been reviewed. All of the significant findings identified by the assessment have either been, or are in the process of being addressed. The large majority of therapeutic social workers have undertaken fire marshal training. This ensures that there are always staff on duty who can take on the role and responsibilities of a fire marshal in the case of a fire emergency. Personal emergency evacuation plans have been implemented for each of the children. These ensure that staff are fully aware of those children who many require assistance and support during an evacuation.

Regular health and safety audits are completed on the residential accommodation and action is taken on any indentified issues. There are fully established systems for completing a full range of risk assessments relating to on and off site activities. These arrangements help to ensure the safety of the children. Security measures within the school are good and contribute to the protection of the children, and provide a safe and secure environment.

The school's recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough, robust and cover and in some areas exceeds the requirements of the national minimal standards. Criminal



Record Bureau (CRB) checks at an enhanced level are completed before staff take up their employment. There is a process for updating these checks every three years. These measures are a significant contributory factor to the safeguarding of the children and help to ensure that they are not cared by staff who may cause them harm.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The education, care and therapy teams work together very effectively to encourage the children's development and achievement in all areas of their lives. The communication across teams is strong with regular meetings held in order for care staff to discuss children's progress and link in with other teams within the school. The school's intranet gives an up-to-date picture accessible to all staff of any issues throughout the day. The children's integrated treatment plans are drawn up in collaboration with all key staff to ensure they are fully implemented in both education and care. Excellent developments with care and education staff has resulted in key workers having a greater understanding of their key child's educational ability and topics they are working on. Homework has recently been introduced and welcomed by some children. Regular daily handovers between care staff and education staff ensure the community are aware of any issues that may impact on the child's day.

The children have opportunities to take part in an extensive range of activities both on and off the school site.

Children receive outstanding levels of support from a wide range of individuals at the school. All boarders have a key worker who has a great understanding of their needs and can advocate on behalf of the child. There is access to a wide range of therapists on site whom the children know well and an independent listener who visits the children and they can access through dedicated telephones within each home. Children spoken to say that they feel well supported at the school and feel that there are people that they can talk to. One child said, 'they are the best staff team ever'.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children's views are actively sought and they are encouraged to make decisions about their lives. They are able to influence the way the school is run and changes are made as a result. The school council meets on a regular basis and there are house meetings, group meetings, key work sessions and questionnaires carried out. All children are encouraged to give their views and they feel that the school listens to them. School council members displayed a pride at being on the council and welcomed the opportunities to make changes around the school and act as a positive role model for other children.

The school has excellent processes for handling admissions and the transition to future placements. Home visits are made as well as 'getting to know you' visits to the school, and comprehensive information regarding prospective children is obtained before admission. Transition planning onto children's next placement is well thought out and thorough with the school advocating in the best interest for the child. The family team workers remain in contact should the family require their support for up to six months following the child moving to future placements.

The written integrated treatment plans outlining children support needs and how they will be met are of high quality. The child's views are incorporated into the plans. The work undertaken on a daily basis is excellent with staff demonstrating an excellent knowledge of the children and areas to be worked on.

The family team workers maintain regular contact with parents/carers and work to build positive relationships. Children are encouraged to contact their families by telephone and/or e-mail. The availability of a visitors flat enables families/carers to spend time with their child at the school setting thus maintaining strong family links for the children.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The residential accommodation at the school is of a high standard and is well suited to the needs of the children. Children live in four houses on the main site with one being an assessment intake unit. At the time of inspection all the children have single bedrooms which are well personalised. However, there are opportunities for children to share if this is deemed appropriate and thorough risk assessment is carried out. Since the last inspection the school has continued with its planned ongoing refurbishment programme. All of the houses have had the kitchen/dining areas completely refurbished which is of excellent quality. There are further plans to refit all bathrooms and shower areas in all houses, with one house being completed already. Flooring in some of the house has been replaced where needed. Children have access to a range of outdoor play equipment located in the house's enclosed gardens on the central shared lawn and play areas. Children were observed enjoying their environment and have access to a wide range of age appropriate toys and activities in each home.

There is a comprehensive programme of renewal and refurbishment to ensure that the high standard of accommodation is maintained and improved.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Prior to admission children, parents, carers and stakeholders are provided with a range of booklets that provide substantial information on the theory, purpose and philosophy of the school. The booklets are informative, well-constructed, accessible,

and clear and accurately set out what care and services the school provides. Further information is available on the school's website and via website links detailed within the text of the booklets.

The residential provision is organised, managed staffed and resourced in a manner which delivers and maintains an outstanding standard of care. The school's effective monitoring systems enable it to regularly reflect and review its practice, and to consider ways of improving the residential experience and outcomes for the children. The head of group living and her deputies are experienced and qualified and provide effective leadership and management. The staff team is competent, qualified and trained to understand and meet the needs of the children they look after.

There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the complex needs of the children. Staffing levels are organised to support both individual and group needs. The allocation of staff to individual houses ensures that there is consistency and continuity of care. However, there is enough flexibility in staffing arrangements for staff too cover absenteeism or provide additional support in the houses or the school if the need arises. There is limited use of agency staff. Staff teams are culturally diverse, gender balanced and reflects the backgrounds of the children. The large majority of the children feel that the staff get to know them well and care about what they are doing.

The school's commitment to its staff professional development is exemplary. The school has its own training department which organises and coordinates a comprehensive training programme that covers the social emotional, behavioural and therapeutic needs of the children. Training is provided on mandatory (renewable) and service specific subjects. Records indicate that most, and in some areas all, of the staff have completed their renewable training which includes positive handling, first aid, child protection and fire marshal training. Staff rotas are organised to provide regular study days and access to additional inset training organised during the term. The school's accredited 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 and to specifically meet the needs of staff working in a therapeutic environment. There is a clear expectation that all therapeutic social workers will undertake the foundation degree. Records indicate that the vast majority of staff have either completed NVQ level 4 in Leadership and Management, graduated from the degree course or are in the process of working towards this.

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.

There are exceptionally well developed systems for the effective monitoring of the welfare of the children. Key records are monitored by the head of group living. Routine observations are made of care practices within each of the houses. Regular unannounced visits are undertaken by members of the trustees. Detailed reports are of these monitoring activities are shared with the relevant members of staff. There is

clear evidence that issues identified through monitoring are responded to promptly. This ensures that excellent standards are maintained and that information gathered from these exercises is used to improve facilities, resources and practices within the school.

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. Each child is clearly treated as an individual and the school takes positive steps does not discriminate or 'label' them. Children are encouraged to make personal choices and there is no assumption that any are incapable of doing this. Staff are proactive in raising the children's and awareness of different cultures and beliefs. They celebrate and participate in different cultural festivals. Children are supported in maintaining their own cultural and ethnic identities. Documents demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities and avoidance of inappropriate discrimination in all forms. The care teams have good balance in terms of gender, age and ethnicity which reinforces positive role models for children.