

Pencalenick Residential Special School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Chris Passmore
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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

Pencalenick school is a maintained trust special school providing education for 110 children with complex communication and learning difficulties, including autism. Pupils come from across Cornwall and are age 11 to 16 years. The school has been successful in achieving Communication Interaction Specialist Status, the Healthy Schools Award and most recently gained National Support School status. The headteacher is a designated national leader of education.

The school campus is sited within a large country estate with extensive grounds, in close proximity to the City of Truro. The boarding accommodation comprises parts of two floors in the main school building which is in the original estate house. Children board for geographical or social reasons. Boarding is either weekly Monday to Thursday nights or respite boarding of one or two nights a week. Currently there are 18 weekly boarders and the average occupancy is around 25 boarders each weekday night.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced key inspection and all key national minimum standards were assessed.

Outcomes for individual children and young people are excellent and demonstrate that the school provides very individualised care and support. The school is totally committed to ensuring that it provides a high quality service. It continually monitors the services it provides and there is a strong emphasis on reflective practice, continuous improvement and development.

Pupils are encouraged and fully supported to express their needs, wishes and opinions regardless of their communication needs and staff are skilled in the use of alternative methods of communication. The whole school is a community in which pupils working together to achieve more is the key emphasis. Boarding is a key element in maintaining pupil's education and their development. It contributes to the preservation of the unique community that is Pencalenick and boarders are often the envy of day pupils because they get to stay at school and have fun activities with friends after school.

Staff are provided with training and development opportunities and the school is committed in ensuring that it has a well qualified workforce. Staff were observed to be interacting and performing care tasks with sensitivity and good humour. Boarders spoken with thoroughly enjoy staying at the school and Ofsted has received excellent

feedback from parents regarding the care and support provided at the school and the trust they place in the staff.

As a result of this inspection two recommendations have been made but neither has any impact on the outcomes for pupils which are outstanding.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were four recommendations made at the last inspection. These related to recording processes including site health and safety, medication, fire alarms and care planning. The school has acted on all of the recommendations, taken local professional advice and implemented changes to systems. There is an ongoing site health and safety awareness with a full review scheduled for later this term. Controlled drugs medication records have been separated from standard prescribed medications. Fire records clearly differentiate between false alarms and planned drills and the care planning system has been enhanced. These provide clearer records of boarder's welfare and health management as well as safety awareness. The school has reviewed the issues raised in the recommendations, taken advice and made improvements therefore the recommendations are met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements for promoting healthy lifestyles of pupils at the school. Staff work very well in partnership with families to ensure that pupils receive continuous health care. The support for those who have emotional health care needs is creative and provides excellent support for the pupils and their families. The staff are proactive in liaising with health professionals to obtain specialist services, such as input from mental health teams for the deaf, to ensure that any identified health needs are met. There are well kept records of pupil's health needs and areas requiring support. This helps staff work effectively with parents and health workers to ensure the pupils health is promoted and protected. All staff are trained in first aid and provide appropriate help if there are any accidents. There are well-equipped first aid boxes situated around the site and a small sick-bay where pupils can be treated or observed.

There are suitable medication procedures to help ensure that the pupils get their medication at the right times. Medication is administered by a suitably qualified member of staff to ensure that this important aspect of individual care is completed effectively. Activities are designed to include regular physical exercise either through sports based games or leisure activities such as local walks. Boarders and staff participate in a daily walk or run around the school block as part of their early morning routine, before going into breakfast together.

There is a good variety of healthy, well balanced meals on offer at the school. The catering team manage a range of particular dietary requirements and personal eating traits in a discrete but effective way. Boarding staff know the boarders well and give

gentle encouragement or assistance with individual eating patterns and diet. Meal times at school are social occasions and boarders eat together with staff around communal tables in the evening and at breakfast. These are social occasions in a pleasant setting where boarders talk about their day with the staff with whom they have positive relationships.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff are very aware of the need to protect pupils' privacy. There is respect for individual private space, records are stored securely and personal care issues are dealt with sensitively. Boarders have access to a payphone to make and receive calls from family or friends. This is sited on the landing outside the boarding area. Telephone numbers of Child Line and other organisations who assist children in difficulties are displayed in close proximity to the telephone. There was a parental comment regarding difficulties in contacting their children using this phone number because it is often engaged or left to ring. The headteacher is aware of these difficulties and an alternative solution is being considered.

Pupils have access to email in school and many have mobile phones. Students are given advice and support on how to use these appropriately. Accommodation within boarding accommodation houses has been improved and enhances boarders privacy. For example bathing and showering facilities are designed to a very high standard and there is an ongoing review of sleeping arrangements and the creation of increased single accommodation.

Staff and students are aware of the complaints policies and procedures and these are available to parents and the public on the school website. A complaints log is kept for the purpose of recording any complaints however it is little used.

The school has good policies and procedures in place to safeguard the students and staff practice extends to safeguarding awareness in its widest sense. The designated person for child protection and safeguarding has contact with the relevant local safeguarding team and uses the approved local safeguarding and child protection guidance.

The head of boarding is the designated person responsible for safeguarding and child protection. Both the head and head of boarding have received safeguarding training and are qualified safeguarding trainers. All staff across the school have received safeguarding training at level one recently and there are regular in-house training days when safeguarding and child protection is refreshed. Staff across the school have a very well developed awareness of the vulnerability of the students and are very vigilant to report on any concerns that might have a safeguarding significance.

Staff are aware of the need to protect students from bullying and this includes cyber bullying. There are appropriate policies and agreements are in place to guide staff and pupils with regard to these issues. The countering bullying policy is about to be

updated to include statements about cyber bullying and to link into the 'Acceptable Use Policy'. Boarders indicated bullying did occur occasionally but the school deals with these occurrences quickly. Every boarder stated that they felt safe in the school and had an adult they could turn to for help and advice.

The school has very clear policies and procedures in place with regard to absence and the authorisation of absence. However, there have been no incidents of absence without authority since the last inspection.

Staff work very closely together to ensure that students' needs are met and behaviour management is very much a team effort. Teachers, care staff and therapists are all involved in behaviour management and approaches to behaviour management are discussed at weekly meetings. Positive reinforcement is used and students can gain stars or similar tokens towards a target reward. Merit awards such as 'Boarder of the week' are aimed to encourage good will, tolerance and kindness towards others. Sanctions are little used but are always reviewed to gauge effectiveness. Where this is unproven then alternatives are sought. Staff often involve parents as well as house staff in devising individual schemes of sanctions or rewards. This ensures that there is a greater opportunity for continuity of approach between home and school and the student receives consistent messages.

A restraint policy is in place. A log book contains details of serious incidents whether or not they include any physical restraint. This log provides appropriate spaces for all the required detail to be recorded and for related following-on information. There have been no serious incidents in boarding for a long time and the number of incidents including restraint across the school is also reduced.

Staff are very well aware of the difficulties that their students face and concentrate on what students are good at rather than what they struggle with. Students are given plenty of opportunities to discuss their rights and how they feel about any issues with their tutors in school or their keyworkers in boarding. House staff are very clear that their overall objective is to build students' self-esteem and increase their resilience. Students and parents state in their questionnaire responses that the school has helped boost boarders' confidence and independence.

The school has a fire risk assessments in place and there are regular fire tests and drills. Fire alarm systems are checked on a weekly basis. Environmental risk assessments have been drawn up across the site and a full review is scheduled for later in the term. Environmental safety is very well managed. There are regular visits by professional contractors who carry out periodic servicing and maintenance of plant and equipment.

The school has a robust policy of staff recruitment, backed up in practice and evidenced by comprehensive records. These show consistency in practice and an adherence to government guidance on safer recruitment in schools. Visitors and contractors are suitably identified and escorted throughout their visit to the school. Contractors were observed to be checked or escorted by site supervisors.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is outstanding individual support for pupils, education is promoted, and there is a wide range of activities on offer at the school for the pupils.

Each boarder has a placement plan identifying their individual needs together with how these will be supported. Staff provide excellent care and are very knowledgeable about each pupil's individual needs and how best to support them. There is excellent practice with regard to encouraging the boarders to communicate and make choices as part of their care and support. To enable this there is an appropriate increase in the use of pictures, symbols and sequence strips to aid individual understanding of tasks and events. Staff aim to help promote the boarders' understanding of their lives and social expectations that will help them to achieve in the future. There are good links with other health and social care agencies providing further specialist support regarding the management of behaviour and promoting health. Staff often provide support to a boarder's family in times of crisis or particular stress. For example, providing flexible accommodation arrangements for pupils at a time of family health crisis or when there are temporary housing difficulties.

A continuous care curriculum is promoted and education is actively enabled and promoted through boarding. There are very good links between the school and care staff to ensure consistency of care and good communication.

Staff actively encourage the children and young people to get involved in a good range of activities on the school site and out in the community. The monthly newsletter gives numerous examples of community involvement and specific project interests followed by pupils. There is a good range of resources in boarding accommodation including books, toys, computers, pool table and Wii accessories. Boarding also makes best use of its location and access to riverside walks and the open spaces within the grounds. There are regular trips out and support to use local leisure facilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Outstanding assessment of need and placement planning guides ensure that staff provide high quality care to pupils. Individually tailored plans ensure that every aspect of a pupil's development is assessed and regularly reviewed. Behavioural targets are set each term and constantly monitored and reviewed. If the review reveals that a target is inappropriate then new aims are set. Targets are personalised to ensure that the pupils take small steps to success at their own pace. This method is aimed at supporting the boarders to learn and develop new skills over a planned period of time.

Pupils are encouraged to give their views and opinions about the school. This may be through the school council, whose representatives are elected by the whole school.

The school takes regular straw polls of pupil opinion and boarders have the regular opportunities at meal times to talk to boarding staff. Boarders said they thought that they are able to comment on all aspects of living at the school. Parents report that the school provides a very high standard of care and they have confidence in the staff.

The school has undertaken a support worker role for families when appropriate. This assists families at vulnerable times and supports the pupils' education. There is very good communication within the school regarding all aspects of a pupil's education and care while at the school. Prior to admission there is a full written assessment and meetings to ensure, as far as possible, that the school is able to meet the needs of the pupil. When parents visit the school they have a full tour of the campus which includes the boarding facility. Parents of potential boarding pupils are encouraged to visit more often and talk with boarding staff before making a decision about boarding. There is a continuous awareness of boarders' emotional presentation and this is monitored very closely during the early days for a new boarder.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarding accommodation is part of the large original estate house which is itself a listed building.

The boarding accommodation has been remodelled and adapted over recent years. That combined with a reduction in overall boarding numbers results in a situation where boarders are now based on two floors, occupy mixed landings and have a very homely environment in which to live.

Toilets, shower rooms and bathrooms have improved immensely. Bathing and shower rooms have improved privacy arrangements, updated facilities and bathrooms reflect a similar standard of improvement.

Each floor has at least one communal lounge and a games room. There are kitchenettes on each floor from which staff prepare frequent refreshments, treats and supper time snacks. All boarding areas, including the bathrooms and toilets are warm, appropriately furnished, clean and personalised by the users.

The physical accommodation is not to an outstanding standard but does preserve its unique character. It has been decorated and adapted in sympathy with its setting and boarders are clearly happy and at home while living there during the week.

Pupils are encouraged to think about their personal money management and the principles of budgeting. They are taken to local shops while in boarding. This gives them opportunities to enhance their social skills and the basics of money management. There are opportunities within the curriculum and during boarding activities for pupils to prepare, cook and present simple meals which they share with friends. These activities are part of their preparation for leaving the school and adult life.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Children, parents, staff and professionals have access to a statements of the school's principles and practice either in written form or from the school website. The latter is relatively new and still in development but already an improved version of the schools electronic information sharing. Given the special nature of the school's provision and the needs of pupils attending much of the detailed exchanges of information take place through face to face contacts. Most parents, through their questionnaire responses, felt the school information was good. Some parents expressed the feeling that information about their child might be more detailed.

Pupils are looked after by staff who know them as individuals well. Staff clearly understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently. The school ensures that there are adequate staff on duty at all times to meet the needs of the pupils. This includes an effective pastoral care team who have effective communications with the head of care throughout the school day. Care staff spoken with stated that staffing levels are appropriate to the needs of boarding groups and are adjusted if needed to meet any changes in identified needs.

Staff training and development opportunities are good and improved. Care staff are enthusiastic to acquire the skills and knowledge that equips them to meet the needs of the boarders. There are good opportunities for specific care related training as well as core subjects like first aid or child protection. The school provides new care staff with a comprehensive induction package and ongoing support and training through small but mutually supportive and experienced care staff group.

Boarders receive the care and services they need from competent staff. The head of care is appropriately experienced and qualified and the service is totally committed to ensuring that it has a well qualified workforce. There have been changes in care personnel since the last inspection but they work well as a team. Overall, 84% of the care staff have obtained a National Vocational Qualification at level 3 with the remainder enrolled and undertaking the current diploma equivalent qualification. This exceeds the national minimum standard of 80%. All new care staff have come from a background in similar care settings and proved to be effective members of the team. Statements made by established care staff and boarders comments reflected this. Staff added that the new members have brought new ideas and aspirations with them. This has made the team even more reflective about their practice.

Children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Comprehensive records are maintained of staff individual supervision and appraisal. Weekly care staff meetings are held with an open agenda but are child focused and content is recorded. This again is in excess of the national minimum standard requirement.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school fully promotes the

rights and needs of pupils who have individual needs, and promotes community participation and involvement. No child is considered not to be able to communicate their needs and wishes and the school has a proven track record in communication and interaction skills. Pupils are given every opportunity to be actively involved in everyday life and are given the same opportunities as others. Menus reflect that meals are offered and provided from other countries and cultures. Picture displays around the school also show the school encourages pupils to have a global awareness of social issues and culture.

The school is efficiently run and there is continuous monitoring and reflective practice established. The governing body continues to monitor standards of boarding welfare and there are other monitoring visits from a senior manager of the provider authority's children's care services team.

The school has a history of responding promptly to meet recommendations and developing its services to very vulnerable pupils. Pencalenick has a clear development plan which includes aspirations of academy status.

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...

- review the effectiveness of the pay phone as a point of contact available to family and friends of boarders (NMS 24.9)
- maintain the school website in a way that ensures key school statements and policies are available and up to date. (NMS 1.1)