

Holbrook Centre for Autism

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	David Morgan
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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

This residential special school provides specialist education and care for students with autism aged between five and 19-years-old.

The residential provision is used by students for one night a week in term time; limited week-end and holiday care is also available. There are seven bedrooms in two separate, self-contained flats and a total of 27 students currently use the residential service throughout the week. Students have their meals, except lunch, in the units. All bedrooms are single.

Residential students can access facilities within the school and also use community resources in nearby towns; the school has its own transport.

The seven students in residence during the inspection all contributed to this inspection.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced, full inspection considered all outcome areas and concludes that the overall quality rating is outstanding. Excellent practice is shown by continual improvement to existing practices and projects being undertaken to provide additional opportunities for students. Self-assessment is improved since the last inspection when eight recommendations were made. This inspection finds no areas of significant weakness and outstanding or good practice in all areas. One recommendation is made to improve the way that individual targets are set.

Improvements since the last inspection

The last report made eight recommendations, which have all been addressed. Medication procedures in particular have been reviewed in detail with all residential staff to ensure that safe practices occur. Records are also appropriate now, especially in terms of tests of electrical appliances, accidents and physical interventions. This contributes to effective monitoring and quality assurance.

Monitoring of matters such as risk assessments and problems arising with fire fighting equipment has improved, which helps to ensure the safety of students and staff. The privacy of students using the residential accommodation has been improved by the installation of suitable privacy locks in bathing and toilet areas.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students have their individual health care needs addressed particularly well. There is excellent liaison with parents, who are primarily responsible for the health care of students, and also health professionals when necessary. Effective integration of efforts by teachers, parents and care staff means that students receive a high standard of health care support. Students are helped to take responsibility for their own health and health-related projects are initiated in which students are involved.

This method of working also applies to meals, with associated benefits for student's health and independence. Residential staff are successful in engaging each individual student in meal preparation, for example, with the result that 'brilliant' progress is reported by parents. Attractive and nutritional meals are prepared with active involvement by students, and mealtimes are sociable occasions. Meals are also eaten off-site, when students experience cuisine from other cultures. Any specific needs arising, for example, from individual student's cultural or religious backgrounds are accommodated thoroughly. Imaginative projects are undertaken that require the application of a variety of skills, for example, planning, preparing and distributing snacks to school staff. The school is successful in attracting grants for new initiatives that benefit students.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Highly effective management of behaviour is represented by the ongoing improvements to practices and the undertaking of new projects. Not only are students kept safe from bullying and being absent without authority but they are routinely involved in events such as meeting the police and creating safety posters for use in the community. There is also effective networking with a range of external professionals. These features demonstrate a high level of understanding and application of safeguarding principles and senior staff seek-out ways of improving practices. Improvements since the last inspection include better baseline assessments of student's needs so that individual progress is more readily assessed.

Sanctions are not undertaken and positive ways are used to encourage appropriate behaviour. Individualised procedures are described in each student's residential file so that care is tailored to each student's needs. This helps to ensure that physical interventions are successfully minimised; any that do occur are thoroughly reviewed. Students benefit from a wide variety of ways to describe their feelings, including easy access to personal journals on the computer and use of the school council; in addition, students are never away from their parents for more than one night. Technology is used to excellent effect to show improvements to parents and other professionals, for example at review meetings. Students express no concerns about their care and are consistently positive about their experiences in the flats. Effective leadership means there is a culture in which concerns are identified early and

resolved promptly.

Strong health and safety and recruitment procedures mean that students, staff and visitors are kept safe. Students benefit from good levels of privacy, which all staff respect. Students have single bedrooms and staff are careful to encourage and teach personal hygiene in a discreet way. High standards of fire safety are also in place and the particular needs of students, such as their poor reaction to loud noises, are taken into account in procedures. Exceptional attention to detail means that in the event of an emergency staff react in the safest way possible. All staff involved in managing safety have a thorough understanding of the issues.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's residential provision makes a substantial contribution to student's educational progress. Senior staff are clear that the primary purpose of the residential service is to support the education of students. To this end there is excellent communication between education and care staff. Activities undertaken in the flats complement events in school very well. For example staff acknowledge cultural celebrations; pay attention to individual student's targets, and fully encourage numeracy and literacy. Residential staff are fully aware of each student's academic targets, which are clearly shown in their files and reported upon at each of their annual reviews. Students are encouraged to contribute to their review-meetings and some use evidence they have compiled themselves on the computer, which is particularly praise-worthy. Results show that residential attendance contributes positively to student's development and achievements. A significant example of this is the substantial contribution residential attendance plays in helping students achieve certificated awards.

A particular highlight for students who attend the residential unit is the activities that occur both on and off site. A wide range of stimulating and community orientated events occur with sporting, theatrical or musical themes. Such activities also contribute substantially to student's learning and social development. Individual preferences are readily accommodated by the service having several vehicles and enough trained drivers to allow several activities to occur at once. Parents said, 'my child has a fantastic time and really enjoys it'; 'they do things we couldn't do at home'. One recent highlight was a pop concert and outdoor activities include climbing and sailing, when weather conditions permit. Recent improvements include greater integration into public activities, in addition to specialist services for people with disabilities. This contributes well to their familiarity with community activities as well as their achievement of education and residential targets relating to communication and behaviour.

Excellent attention to the individual needs of each student means that parents observe improvements at home too. Individualised communication systems are particularly important with this group. Staff ensure as far as possible that each student has a functional method of communication at all times. Ground-breaking

work has been undertaken to use new technology with students. This means they can use hand-held devices to communicate their needs to other people, which are more effective and discreet than other systems, especially in public. Other communication systems are used by students to demonstrate their understanding of, for example, horse-care, which contributes to awards.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Students and parents benefit from excellent communication by the school. Residential students indicate this through their positive reactions to staff and by their achievements; parents feel it is a particular strength of the school. Effective communication procedures now include direct work with parents, if they wish, to share ways of working. This allows better continuity of student's training, for example regarding how domestic matters such as bed-making are implemented. Amongst the extensive range of communication methods there is a newsletter, open days and regular phone calls.

Parents and students are routinely involved in agreeing what targets are set with nominated staff. Imagination is demonstrated by the involvement of students in work-related learning and enterprise programmes that help them learn skills such as working with others, problem solving and sharing resources. There are good methods in place to link the residential targets with the annual education targets and to keep progress under review. However, targets are somewhat imprecise. This makes monitoring and day-to-day implementation less effective for students than possible. On the other hand, new initiatives mean that students participate in decision-making more and are given more responsibilities, for example, regarding their catering project on site. These measures are a major contribution to the skills achieved by students before they are discharged.

Students enjoy excellent relationships with staff partly as a result of minimal turnover. There is a productive and up-beat atmosphere in the flats to which students respond well. Staffing arrangements are excellent and staff pursue targets with individual students in a relaxed but purposeful way. New residential students are carefully assessed and integrated from amongst day pupils. Admissions are always planned and occur at a pace that suits each individual and their family.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

One parent observed that 'boarding has made an incredible difference to my son's confidence and self-reliance away from home', and another said, 'residential care helps students lead a more independent life and teaches them skills for the future'. This high standard is applied to all age groups and through a variety of day-to-day activities; award schemes, and projects involving some degree of enterprise. These allow students, especially the older ones, to handle money, for example, in a

particularly wide variety of ways that help prepare them for adult life.

Students live in two well-presented flats that provide adequate space for their needs. The limited communal space is addressed appropriately by low numbers and students have individual bedrooms. Maintenance and decoration levels are good and the accommodation is homely in almost all regards. New beds are in place and are a sign of continual improvement.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Students and staff enjoy the stability of a school where there is particularly effective leadership and monitoring. There is a keen interest in continually developing the residential service's contribution to education, which is reflected in the improvements and projects described in this report. Sound leadership includes regular formal and informal supervision of staff. Monitoring by senior staff and by the governors is thorough and benefits from self-evaluation and improvements arising from the last inspection. Whole-school reviews and planning are also in place to ensure the best standards continue to be provided.

Students have access to a satisfactory range of pictorial versions of the Statement of Purpose. The service also now includes a number of weekends and a one-week period as well as the existing Monday-to Friday service. The statement includes a reference to the equal opportunities policy.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Students in residence benefit from excellent opportunities to have their individual needs met, for example through the placement planning process, which is recorded in clear and precise records for each of them. This means they are as well placed as possible to benefit from any opportunities that arise. Good attention is paid to cultural and religious events too. Activities and trips expose students to issues of social diversity as do lessons in school.

Students are looked after by staff that are thoroughly familiar with their needs and can therefore encourage them in the most effective ways. The staff team is largely unchanged since the last inspection, which is a substantial contribution to continuity and effective practice. Staffing levels during the day and night are high and reflect the likely needs of students during any emergency. Training has a high profile with staff being encouraged to increase their knowledge and external professionals being used to teach up-to-date skills, for example regarding diabetes and child protection recently. Excellent practice is demonstrated by the involvement of taxi drivers in certain training so that students receive the best care possible during lengthy journeys to and from school. Staff competency is outstanding with all staff having a professional qualification. In addition, staff demonstrate an enthusiastic and informed approach to the care of residential students. This translates into a warm and encouraging environment that students enjoy.

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 the placement plan specifies how the school will care for each child and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis, with regard to targets being sufficiently measurable. (NMS 17.2)