

Potterspury Lodge School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Elaine Clare
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Date of last inspection	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

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 school is a long established school which opened in 1956. It is an independent special school for boys aged 8-18 years who have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and associated learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils have Asperger's syndrome or autistic spectrum disorders. The school offers weekly boarding and day provision. All pupils have a statement of special needs and are referred to the school by the local authority.

The ethos of the school is linked to the Rudolf Steiner philosophy of educating pupils in a holistic manner and providing opportunities for progress in all aspects of life and study.

Many of the staff live on site, including most care staff. The main house is a large Grade 2 listed building and accommodates some of the school classrooms, some boarding areas, the main office and medical room. Further boarding accommodation and school facilities are provided in various buildings adjacent to the main house.

The school is set in several acres of land providing a tranquil and spacious setting. A stream running into a small lake filled with various fish, where boys can fish for pleasure, marks the school boundary to one side. Another boundary is marked by a large vegetable garden, orchard and oakery, though these areas are out of bounds to students unless accompanied by an adult. A large field provides a football pitch, running track and large play area including climbing frames and swings. There is a skate park, tennis and basketball courts. Indoor facilities include a large sports hall, pottery and music room, a chapel and other educational facilities that can be used for extra-curricular activities.

The boarding accommodation consists of four self-contained units providing accommodation for groups of up to six boys. This accommodation is homely and comfortable. Boarding is currently available from Sunday evening to Friday, during term time only.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection and all key standards were inspected. A large number of boarders participated in the inspection and contributed their views. Outcome areas for being healthy, enjoying and achieving and positive contribution are all judged as outstanding. The remaining areas staying safe, economic well-being and organisation are judged as good.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and there is a firm commitment to continue to improve the school's facilities to support pupils' development and progress. Considerable improvements have been made to the houses since the last inspection to provide pupils with accommodation which is consistent with their needs.

There have been some referrals to the local safeguarding team and these have been dealt with in an open and transparent manner. The head teacher recognises the importance to apply the referral process with all staff.

Pupils continue to receive outstanding pastoral care and individual support from experienced and competent staff and external professionals where appropriate. Firmly established communication systems across the school community contribute effectively to pupils' welfare and the monitoring of their well-being. However pupils do not always have the opportunity to comment on the physical interventions and a recommendation has been made.

Pupils are consulted on a range of matters, including menus and the refurbishment and upgrading of accommodation. They report they are able to make suggestions which are acted upon, are taken seriously and are listened to.

Records and documentation are well maintained overall. However, not all monitoring visits carried out by the trustees comment on the areas required. A recommendation has been raised in relation to this matter.

The recommendations raised at the last inspection have been addressed.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were two recommendations made following the last inspection. Action has been taken to address both recommendations. Ofsted is now being notified when a safeguarding referral is made to the Local Authority.

The Trustees have commenced with monitoring of the school on a half term basis and have produced a report on their findings.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical and emotional health needs of pupils continue to be actively promoted and effectively supported in partnership with other professionals, including psychologists and health service staff. Pupils receive advice, guidance and support on a range of health and social issues through the school's personal, social and health education programme, visiting speakers and care staff. This work is reinforced by pupils' involvement in creating posters and displays which are prominently displayed throughout the school and residential provision.

Pupils' health care needs are identified and parental consent to medical treatment is obtained. Staff follow clear procedures for the management and administration of medication both on and off site. Sampled records are in good order and medication is securely stored. First aid training is provided to staff, regular updates are attended and qualified first aid staff are always available on duty. Health matters such as enuresis are dealt with sensitively and pupils return home when unwell. Parents are kept informed of health appointments and checks conducted in school, and are encouraged to attend wherever possible.

Emphasis is placed on the provision of a balanced, healthy diet and exercise. Pupils contribute ideas to menus through a number of ways including the school council. Special dietary needs are catered for when required and systems are in place to sensitively monitor individual eating patterns. Meal times are well organised with clear routines and expectations to promote the development of social skills. The majority of pupils refer favourably to the food provided.

Food handling and hygiene training is undertaken by catering and care staff and regular updates received.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders' privacy is respected and information is handled appropriately. Space is provided for pupils to meet privately with visitors and parents and they are able to make and receive telephone calls in private where appropriate. Lockable storage is provided for pupils personal possessions both in school and the boarding provision.

Information regarding the school's complaint procedure is provided to parents, carers and boarders; help line information is also provided to boarders. Complaints have been received by the school since the last inspection and these have been handled sensitively, no complaints have been received by Ofsted. One parent wrote 'we are very happy with the school'. Boarders identify a range of staff they feel able to go to with any worries and concerns and are confident that they will be listened to and supported.

Policies and procedures promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils and strong working partnerships are in place with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children and young people. There have been some referrals to safeguarding and these have good transparent records of actions taken by the Head teacher. However, on one occasion this has not been applied and a subsequent referral was made to the local authority during the inspection. All staff receive child protection training as part of their induction and regular updates. External training is attended by designated staff and Trustees and parents are informed of the school's duties and responsibilities in relation to child protection matters.

Bullying is not identified as a problem at the school. Pupils report positive responses by staff to issues raised and state 'boys are usually okay to one another; if there are

issues, staff listen and help to sort them out' and 'staff bring boys together to sort out problems; they shake hands afterwards'. Bullying issues are openly discussed through assemblies, curriculum based activities and during tutor time. The school's head of care supports individuals where a specific need has been identified and uses one-to-one sessions to explore issues and the development of strategies for anger management and assertiveness.

Staff are vigilant in their supervision of boarders and the monitoring of their whereabouts. Detailed procedures are in place for responding to pupils leaving the site without permission, including a working protocol with the local police. There are no incidents of boarders being reported missing.

Throughout the inspection staff relationships, levels of patience, sensitivity and calmness were seen to be of a very high standard. Pupils continue to be supported to develop appropriate behaviour through the use of behaviour plans, reflective discussions and supportive strategies. Such strategies include the school's privilege scheme, counselling and individual support programmes. Staff receive regular behaviour management training including de-escalation techniques and the use of physical intervention. Good records are maintained of the use of sanctions and physical intervention. However, pupils' comments are not normally recorded. Pupils are very clear regarding the expectations placed upon them and are able to explain the school's privilege scheme levels which they consider to be fair. They also refer to the use of behaviour plans and targets and how staff support them in finding and maintaining strategies to help them which are effective. For example, pupils explained 'you can go up and down but staff help you and explain how you can get back to your level'. Good work, positive behaviour and effort are recognised and rewarded across the school community.

Safety matters are taken seriously by the school and robust procedures are in place for the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Regular safety and servicing checks are carried out to fire, electrical, water and gas installations. Regular fire drills take place at different times and boarders are familiar with fire evacuation procedures.

Robust procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff and the monitoring of visitors and contractors. A record of visitors is maintained and proof of identity is requested. These practices reduce potential risks to the welfare of pupils.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's boarding provision actively supports and contributes to pupils' educational progress. A stimulating activity programme provides pupils with opportunities to keep active, develop social and life skills and build their self-esteem. Teaching staff undertake extraneous duties and support the evening programme by providing science, art and sporting activities. Both pupils and staff report favourably on the opportunities to engage in this way and to strengthen their working

relationship and understanding of each other.

Care staff know boarders very well and are familiar with their educational needs and progress. Firmly established communication systems contribute effectively to pupils' welfare and the monitoring of their well-being. For example, care and teaching staff are involved in regular liaison meetings, contribute to reviews and attend morning briefings.

Pupils continue to receive excellent pastoral care and individual support in line with their needs. Effective working partnerships with the local authority and a range of external professionals, including speech and language specialists, attendance officer, health services and psychologists support the work of the school with pupils and their families. Boarders identify a range of adults across the school community, to whom they would go with any worries, including the head teacher, counsellor and tutors.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to express their views and be involved in decision-making. Excellent forums include the school council, tutor meetings and house meetings. Pupils have also contributed suggestions to the refurbishment of one house and catering staff have joined pupils in class to discuss healthy eating and changes to menus.

Admissions to the school are planned and tailored to individual pupils as far as possible. Home visits are undertaken and every effort is made to gather as much information as possible about a child and their assessed needs prior to their admission and arrival. Care is taken to minimise the impact of new admissions to boarding. Boarders report that staff and other pupils are helpful. Pupils also explained they found being away from home 'difficult to start with' but conclude 'activities help to take your mind off things when you first start'.

Pupils' needs are assessed effectively and regularly reviewed and updated in conjunction with pupils, parents and the local authority. Individual support programmes are compiled and are signed by the pupil, personal tutor and principal care manager. Time is regularly set aside for personal tutors to meet with pupils to discuss their progress and any difficulties. Pupils report 'it can be difficult to talk about some things but you feel better'.

Boarders are able to retain contact with their families and can make and receive telephone calls in private. Staff regularly update parents and carers on their child's progress, medical matters and any concerns. Home visits and school based meetings are used to support the work of the school with individual pupils and focus on parenting skills, consistency and strategies of support.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is provided in the main house and at three other houses on campus. Considerable improvements have been made to the houses since the last inspection in consultation with pupils and staff. All kitchens have been redecorated and completely refurbished provide a welcoming and pleasant environment for pupils to cook in. Bathing and toilet facilities have not been upgraded but the house is clean, warm and well ventilated. Care has been taken to create accommodation of a more domestic appearance to support the house's preparation for independence programme. For example, smaller kitchen appliances and cooking utensils are provided, and domestic style furniture, fittings and accessories are in place in communal areas.

Positive links are promoted and maintained with the local community through a number of initiatives including supporting varying charities and involvement in national projects for example 'Red Nose Day'. Pupils' confidence and feelings of self-worth benefit greatly from their participation in these projects.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and there is a clear commitment to continue to improve the school's facilities to enhance pupil's progress and their development. Pupils are looked after by very experienced, well trained and competent staff who understand their needs.

A school brochure and statement of boarding principles and practice provide comprehensive information to parents and interested parties. Work is being undertaken to include updated details of staff and their qualifications at the next review of documentation. A separate illustrated guide is provided to pupils and is viewed by them as 'easy to understand' and 'helpful'.

Staff have access to a range of training opportunities both in-house and external to the school to support them in their work. These include child protection, first aid, behaviour management, autism and working with families. External support is provided to the head teacher and established arrangements are in place for regular personal and casework supervision, appraisals and staff meetings. A handbook is provided to staff and policies and procedures are readily accessed and updated.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Pupils' individual needs are recognised and supported and they are encouraged to embrace opportunities to participate in local community work to widen their understanding of society and the needs of others, including the elderly and children with disabilities.

A duty rota is followed in practice and time is scheduled for handover sessions, staff

meetings and casework tasks. Pupils know who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times, including during the night. Suitable arrangements are in place for duty cover in times of staff sickness and absence through use of the school's own pool of staff. The low turnover of staff provides pupils with consistency and stability and promotes positive relationships.

Good, effective systems are in place for the monitoring of pupils' welfare and the operation of the residential provision. Specific monitoring tasks are delegated to members of the senior management team and the head teacher prepares regular reports to the trustees. Current projects within the school are reported to have led to greater involvement of the trustees to the benefit of pupils. Regular monitoring visits are conducted by the trustees and reports prepared. However, not all reports comment on areas required.

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 school's procedures to responding to allegations is consistently applied to both care and teaching staff (NMS 5)
- ensure pupils views are recorded following a physical intervention (NMS 10.22)
- ensure that all records monitored on a half termly and termly basis are signed to evidence that monitoring has taken place (NMS 32.2).