

# Fred Nicholson School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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<b>Head/ Principal</b>	
<b>Nominated person</b>	Alison Kahn
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	02/12/2009

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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 school is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council catering for pupils with complex needs aged from seven to 16 years. Situated in a residential area on the edge of a market town, the school takes pupils from a wide catchment area.

There are currently 106 pupils on roll, 21 of whom presently board. Pupils may board for up-to-four nights from Monday to Friday. However, the majority stay for two nights per week. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls in single bedrooms and dormitory areas in groups of four or less. Boarders have access to a range of school facilities to support the boarding 'Life Skills' programme. These include the library, gymnasium, school grounds and club room. Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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 proportion of boarders participated in the inspection and all contributed their views. Outcome areas for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and organisation are all judged as outstanding. The remaining area, economic well-being, is judged as good.

Leadership and management of boarding is very strong and there is an active focus on the continual improvement of the boarding experience for pupils. Staff remain highly committed to their role and continue to provide outstanding pastoral care and individual support to pupils.

Safety and security 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.

Staff maintain regular contact with parents and carers through a range of initiatives, including home visits prior to admission and open access days. Pupils' views are actively sought and their ideas and suggestions are listened to. Comments from parents, carers and pupils give high praise to the work of the school and include 'you couldn't ask for more really', 'we have wonderful teachers who help us and listen to us' and 'activities are brilliant'.

Records and documentation are effectively monitored and regularly reviewed.

Written information is provided to parents on the school's use of electronic monitoring systems but this is not included in the Statement of Purpose as required. A recommendation has been raised in relation to this matter.

The recommendation raised at the last inspection has been addressed.

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

At the last inspection, the school was asked to ensure that the monitoring visits conducted by the local authority and designated governor reported on all the required areas. This matter has been suitably addressed. The action taken in response supports the monitoring and safeguarding of pupils' welfare.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The physical and emotional health needs of pupils continue to be promoted and supported extremely well in partnership with other professionals. These include a visiting counsellor, specialist health staff and a clinical psychologist. Pupils receive excellent advice, guidance and support on a range of health and social issues through the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme and care staff. This work is reinforced by the school's excellent 'Protect Me' programme. This covers a range of topics with pupils in relation to keeping safe and includes discussion groups and activities.

Health care plans, including details of known medical history, are in place and parental consent to medical treatment is obtained. Personal care needs are identified in consultation with parents and are approached sensitively. Staff support pupils to develop independent self-care skills wherever possible and consult pupils in relation to the staff who will be involved in providing their personal care. Pupils remain with their own General Practitioner and the school has emergency access to medical and dental treatment if required. First aid training is provided to all groups of staff, regular updates are accessed and qualified first aid staff are always available on duty. Staff follow clear procedures for the management and administration of medication and receive appropriate training in relation to specific health matters including epilepsy, asthma, diabetes and medication. Appropriate records are maintained to a high standard and medication is securely stored. Strong links are maintained with parents, carers and health professionals regarding medication matters, including health plan reviews.

Pupils are provided with healthy and nutritious meals which offer choice and variety. Mealtimes are organised, social occasions where pupils and staff sit together to encourage interaction and the development of social skills. Arrangements at the evening meal and breakfast are slightly different to those for lunch and encourage pupils to develop their independence skills, such as making a cup of tea and serving themselves. Catering staff know individual pupils well, are very supportive, encourage individuals to try new foods and monitor eating patterns. Pupils continue

to contribute to menus through consultation forums. Boarders are provided with opportunities to shop and cook as part of the evening life skills programme and can help with preparing after school snacks and drinks. Drinking water is available throughout the day and evening, and milk and toast are provided for all day pupils on arrival at school as many travel long distances. Parent 'access days' provide opportunities for parents and carers to sample school menus and discuss any queries with catering staff. Effective systems are in place to communicate pupils' dietary needs and to share menus with families. Parents refer positively to the food provided stating it is 'excellent'. All of the pupils who participated in the boarders' survey stated they liked the food and received enough to eat.

The dining room has been refurbished since the last inspection and this has involved pupils in choosing new tables and chairs.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Staff have access to a comprehensive set of policies, procedures and guidance to support them in keeping pupils safe and promoting their welfare both at school and in the community. All staff and members of the governing body receive safeguarding training including refresher training, relevant to their role. Keeping safe matters are regularly discussed with pupils through a range of forums and include personal and general safety issues. Effective monitoring of identified safeguarding concerns continue in liaison other agencies; comprehensive records are maintained and securely stored.

Pupils' privacy and dignity is well respected. They are able to keep their personal possessions safe, make and receive telephone calls in private where appropriate and are provided with showers and bathrooms that provide a good standard of privacy. Personal care needs are responded to sensitively and discussed with the child and parents to secure agreed support.

Pupils know how to raise concerns about matters they are unhappy with and are encouraged to discuss concerns at an early stage. They identify a range of adults whom they feel comfortable in approaching with any worries or concerns and, from previous experience, know they will be listened to. Information regarding the school's complaint procedures and external agencies of support is provided to parents, carers and pupils. Complaints are appropriately recorded and responded to. No complaints have been received by Ofsted in relation to the school.

Bullying is not identified as a problem at the school. Any incidences of unpleasant remarks or unkindness between pupils are taken seriously and addressed. Work is undertaken across the school community to discuss issues openly and to support pupils in their understanding of bullying, feelings and friendship. Individual risk assessments consider potential issues in relation to bullying and individual work is undertaken where specific needs are identified. This may include sessions with the school's counsellor to examine anger management, conflict and relationship issues.

Staff are vigilant in their supervision of boarders and the monitoring of their whereabouts. There are no incidents of boarders being reported missing.

Pupils are encouraged and supported to develop socially acceptable behaviour. Care staff establish clear routines and expectations, encourage positive behaviour and work hard in establishing positive relationships with pupils. All staff continue to receive regular training in managing behaviour including de-escalation techniques. Behaviour plans outline triggers and identify strategies for dealing with behaviour effectively and consistently. Few sanctions are used by care staff and the use of physical intervention is extremely rare. Good records are maintained of incidents and pupils' comments are recorded following discussion with staff. Pupils consider expectations to be 'fair' and view them as being in place to 'keep us safe'.

Safety matters are taken seriously by the school. An effective system of risk assessments, policies and procedures supports the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Regular safety and servicing checks are carried out and risk assessments are routinely reviewed. Fire drills take place at different times and pupils are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Pupils continue to demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety matters affecting them including the importance of safe behaviour in practical lessons and activities.

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 boarders with opportunities to keep active, develop social and life skills and build their self-esteem and confidence. The programme has very clear aims and objectives in providing purposeful experiences for pupils to enable them to develop personal skills in a meaningful and fun way. For example, care staff support boarders in getting themselves ready for school, listen to them read and encourage their participation in social games. A small group of teaching staff undertake evening duties and support the evening programme. Boarders enjoy the range of activities on offer, particularly the workshop, trips out and playing social games with staff. Provision is also made to support the individual interests of pupils in the local community. For example, some pupils attend local dance groups and access music lessons. These practices provide opportunities for children to expand their friendships groups and build new networks of support for the future. All activities are risk assessed and regularly reviewed.

Boarders continue to receive excellent pastoral care and individual support in line with their needs. Individuals speak extremely positively of the support they receive both in school and from care staff. Comments include 'its great', 'I want to stay

more' and 'they have helped me so much'. 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 attend daily briefings in school and contribute to reviews.

Effective working partnerships with the local authority and a range of external professionals, including social work teams, health services and psychologists, support the work of the school with pupils and their families.

## **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. A comprehensive range of formal and informal opportunities are available. These include discussions at mealtimes, school council meetings, governor visits, use of surveys by the school and one-to one sessions. Recent changes made as a result of listening to pupils include the refurbishment of the boot room and large cushions being sourced for recreational areas. Feedback from boarders' surveys are also used to shape the programme of activities for the following term.

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 at the school. Care is taken to minimise the impact of new admissions to boarding and boarders report that staff and other pupils are helpful. For example, boarders particularly appreciate being able to have a night light or being able to have their music on low to help them settle. A record of photographs and achievements is collated for each boarder and support is provided for moving on.

Pupils have their needs assessed effectively and written placement plans outline how these needs will be met. The plans are comprehensive, regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with pupils, parents and the local authority. For example, the personal care needs of pupils are sensitively discussed and individual pupils are encouraged to nominate staff, with whom they feel comfortable, to support them. A key-worker system is in operation to monitor individual placement plans and coordinate information. A highly effective activity programme is in place to support the development of boarders' life skills, confidence and self-esteem. Activities are linked to each of the Every Child Matters outcome areas and accessed by all boarders. Provision is also made to target identified needs of individual pupils such as personal hygiene, keeping safe and anger management.

Boarders are able to retain contact with their families and carers, and can make and receive calls in private. Some boarders have a regular arrangement whereby a parent telephones each evening when they are boarding. Staff maintain effective communication with parents and carers with regard to pupils' progress as well as any

concerns; this can include home visits. The school employs a parent support worker who in addition to providing specific support to individual families, assists parents and carers in liaising with other staff at the school and offers information advice. Parents are highly positive in their comments about the school and state 'the school treats each child with great care and understanding' and 'provides emotional support to us and the child'. Regular parent 'access days' are held throughout the school year in addition to a range of other events staged to involve parents, carers and the community in the life of the school. Access days provide opportunities for parents to work alongside their child, participate in activities and engage in workshops connected to the school's 'Protect Me' programme.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is pleasantly decorated, furnished, clean and well maintained. Staff continue to provide a welcoming environment for boarders. For example, they encourage and support the personalisation of sleeping areas and have recently framed and displayed a selection of boarders' artwork throughout the residential provision in celebration of their work.

Separate accommodation is provided for boys and girls in single bedrooms and curtained dormitory areas in groups of four or less. Great care is taken to maintain the allocation of sleeping areas to the same pupils each time they board to promote continuity. Good provision is made for the storage of boarders' personal possessions, including a lockable drawer. Boarders state that there is adequate privacy in bathrooms, toilets and sleeping areas and report that they can keep their belongings safe. Residential routines are clearly displayed in both written and pictorial form on communal notice boards and for individuals where necessary.

Sufficient showers, baths and toilets are available to boarders; separate facilities are provided for staff.

Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. A large communal sitting area and kitchen is also available and is used for group meetings, snacks after school, supper and playing quiet games. Boarders also have access to a range of school facilities to support aspects of the evening activities programme. These include the library, school workshop, cooking facilities and gymnasium.

Written information is provided to parents on the school's use of electronic monitoring systems. Pupils are also made fully aware. However, this information is not detailed in the school's Statement of Purpose as required therefore, interested parties are not fully informed on all operational procedures.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and there is a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of boarding. Clear line-management structures, a good team ethos and effective systems of communication contribute effectively to boarders' welfare. Staff remain highly committed to their role and they have very good knowledge of the pupils in their care.

Comprehensive documentation regarding the school and the boarding provision is provided to parents, carers, pupils and interested parties and is regularly updated. The new parents' guide referred to in the previous inspection report is now complete and in circulation.

Effective management of staffing contributes to continuity and consistency of care for boarders. For example, arrangements are in place for covering duties at times of staff sickness and absence through the school's own pool of staff. A duty rota and staffing policy is followed in practice and boarders know who is responsible for them at specific times. A member of care staff sleeps in each of the boarding areas at night and a photograph is placed on the sleeping-in room door to remind pupils who is on duty. Boarders know the location of staff sleep-in rooms and are confident in what they should do if they need the assistance of staff during the night.

Good training opportunities continue to be made available to staff, including safeguarding, first aid, medical needs and wider pastoral matters. Written guidance is available to staff through the school's policies and procedures and a handbook. External support is provided to the headteacher, and a system of staff supervision and appraisal is in place. Weekly team meetings, daily handovers and attendance at school briefings by care staff all provide constructive forums to exchange information and raise concerns.

Effective systems are in place for the regular monitoring of pupils' welfare and the operation of the boarding provision. Checks of records are conducted by the head of care as required and the headteacher prepares regular reports to the governing body. Copies of internal monitoring reports and those of the local authority and designated governor are held on file and made available for inspection.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Pupils are empowered to develop individual skills which help them to progress, access the wider community and support them in their next step after school. Excellent work is undertaken to promote tolerance and respect within the school community and beyond and to enable pupils to understand and appreciate the differences of others.

## 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 information in relation to the school's use of auditory, electronic or visual monitoring systems is included the Statement of Purpose (NMS 23.7).