



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

RESIDENTIAL SPECIAL SCHOOL

Skilts School

Gorcott Hill
Redditch
Worcestershire
B98 9ET

Lead Inspector
Warren
Clarke

Announced
20 June 2005 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

Reader Information

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Residential Special Schools*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of school	Skilts School
Address	Gorcott Hill Redditch Worcestershire B98 9ET
Telephone number	01527 853851
Fax number	01527 857949
Email address	www.skilts.bham.sch.uk
Name of Governing body, Person or Authority responsible for the	Birmingham City Council Education Department
Name of Head	Mr Charles Herriotts
Name of Head of Care	Mr Anthony Pridding
Age range of residential pupils	5 - 11
Date of last welfare inspection	19 th October 2004

Brief Description of the School:

Skilts is a Residential Special Schools for primary age boys with Emotional, Social and Behaviour Difficulties with associated Learning Dificulties. It is situated just ouside Reddith, in Warwickshire; it is approximately five miles from the Birmingham boundery and is controlled by Birmingham Local Education Authority (LEA). It is opened on weekdays and term time only, and is equipped for 50 pupils during the school day and 30 on a residential basis each night. Residential pupils stay 1,2,3 or 4 nights a week, depending on their needs. Children are usually placed at the School by Birmingham LEA, but it is sometimes used by neighbouring LEAs. Children who are paced at the School have usually experienced major difficulties in other in mainstream schools or other settings; are likely to have experienced exclusion on either a temporary or permanent basis and therefore have had time out of regular school.

SUMMARY

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

This is the fourth inspection of the School under the Care Standards Act 2000. It is informed by information provided at a pre-inspection visit on 09/06/05 and data provided in the pre-inspection questionnaire, the Head Teacher's self assessment form and questionnaires which were administered to the children who are accommodated at the School and their parents. In addition the inspection visit was conducted over three days and permitted direct and indirect observations of most aspects of school life at different times of the day.

It is encouraging to report that the School continues to make substantial progress in its effectiveness in the care and education of the children on its roll. We observed clear leadership, staff cohesion and real purpose in the ways that staff members were discharging their duties. We were affected by the enthusiasm and commitment of staff at all levels, and in their various capacities, who are resolute in doing their best for the children and thus ensuring that the School is successful. One ancillary member of staff reported: "We are like a family here, we do all we can to make the children comfortable and happy".

We observed a largely peaceful environment in which there are good inter-pupil relationships and in which there is mutual respect between children and adults. Overall, we considered that the children are being well looked after in a comfortable and relatively safe environment and, in the sample cases closely examined, this was being done as prescribed in their Statement of Special Educational Needs (SENs) and/or Placement Plans.

The Recommended Actions section of the report is intended to follow the sequence set out under the 6 main headings that form the body of the report. Regrettably an error was made in the sequencing of the requirements and there is no facility to correct this. The reader is also advised to note that the scores given for the Schools performance against the standards, reflects overall performance in achievement of outcomes rather than fulfilment of every quality indicator for the particular standard.

Note, children and parent's views, as given the questionnaires, have been represented in the report, to which the Head of Care at the School has responded following receipt of the draft report. This response has been noted and is on file.

What the school does well:

It provides a warm, caring environment for all the children and particularly so for those who are resident. The residential units are homely and during leisure time the children are engaged in a wide range of activities, which are likely to contribute to their social, educational and healthy personal development.

The School sets clear boundaries for behaviour rooted in respect for the rights and feelings of others, and staff are effective in using a range of predetermined strategies, such as Circle Time and "Chillin'" (time for calm and reflection) to address conflicts and poor conduct. Positive reinforcement such as the Star Pupil award for behaviour and other endeavours, and the way staff praised and encouraged children, were considered to be applied to good effect. Pupils appeared to have been particularly affected by health promotion in the School via the Healthy Schools initiatives. Certainly, they were knowledgeable about diet and nutrition and very proud of their vegetable garden.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The School has conducted a comprehensive review of all its child protection measures and has established a coherent policy and procedure, which is compatible with that of the LEA and has been endorsed by Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). There has also been an initiative to introduce a more systematic system of identifying the children's care needs, planning strategies for addressing these and for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of inputs in this regard. As the main text of the report will show, the formulation of this initiative is sound, but further work is required to achieve effectiveness in its application.

What they could do better:

There is too great a variation in the standard of the care planning process mentioned above and in the daily records of individual care inputs to each child and their response. Staff members also need training and guidance to identify the work that is being done to fulfil the care component in the children's Statements of Special Educational Needs and how this contributes to the

overall purpose of the placement. It is also necessary for those in control of the School to ensure that staff members are punctilious both in the accuracy and timely recording of medication given.

Taking this opportunity to give expression to some of the helpful comments that a minority of parents made, which do not necessarily accord with the inspectors own findings, the School should consider the following comments presented in summary below:-

- The School should make clear in its prospectus, the age limit and ability criteria that it sets for children's admission.
- Thought needs to be given to the practice of removing children from classes for poor behaviour, as they have already missed a lot of schooling.
- The School might consider some ways in which to help parents to engage the children during the longer holidays when they become bored, their behaviour deteriorates and they lose the gains that they have made during term time.

Please contact the Head for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted.(NMS 14)
- Children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs.(NMS 15)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14, 15

The School is making a significant and successful contribution to the children's health both in the management of specific health conditions and in the measures that it is taking to promote good health. What is more, the creative means of promoting good health has caught children's imagination and has led to some positive outcomes.

EVIDENCE:

Individual children's health information was in place within the children's files that were examined. Additional confidential health information was stored by the school nurse relating to specific children's health and health care needs. The school had gained the Healthy Schools Award at the time of the last inspection and was observed to be now involved with ongoing health promotions including the residential units developing a vegetable patch, the produce from which is being included in the schools meals. Staff members were able to discuss specific successes regarding children and how health promotion had helped diminish difficulties.

Medication recordings within the units were variable with at least one example of poor recording being noted. The School Nurse stated that they had offered support to the residential staff in relation to these records. The inspectors assessed the location of medication cabinets within the lounge areas of the residential units as being unsafe, particularly when they are used for the storage of controlled drugs.

There is a school doctor to whom the children have access should they become ill while resident at the School. The Head Teacher and staff reported that whilst access to specialist services such as the Schools Psychology Service, Speech and Language Therapy, and the Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) has improved, some of these services CAMHS, especially, are

only available subject to stringent criteria. This is not always in the best interest of some children in relation to their emotional wellbeing and in addressing their conduct. Information given by senior staff suggests that there were sufficient staff members who had received training in first aid to ensure that there is always someone available to administer first aid to the children should this be necessary.

The inspectors observed meals being prepared, served and consumed within the various residential units. Children were seen to be offered sufficient choice of food and staff members were aware of differing children's likes, dislikes and special dietary needs. Children routinely make suggestions for meals as part of the business of the School's Council meetings. The Bursar explained her keenness to involve the children in the catering arrangements and seeks to introduce new dishes with a view to building up a wide variety of those that the children enjoy.

Menus were examined and were deemed to provide a full account of food provided, which is assessed as varied and wholesome. The menus, in a form that all the children are likely to understand, are posted in all the residential units so that those who are interested are aware of what is to be served beforehand. Stores of food were seen and were deemed to be of sufficient quantity, variety and quality. This included fresh, frozen, and tinned food all of which were either in good condition or, in the case of frozen food, within the relevant dates on their labels.

In formal and informal conversations with both children and staff they confirmed that the quality of food provided is good. This was further corroborated by the children in their responses to a relevant item in a questionnaire, which was administered as part of this inspection.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled.(NMS 3)
- Children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration.(NMS 4)
- The welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse.(NMS 5)
- Children are protected from bullying by others.(NMS 6)
- All significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified by the Head of the school or designated person to the appropriate authorities.(NMS 7)
- Children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return.(NMS 8)
- Children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour.(NMS 10)
- Children live in schools that provide physical safety and security.(NMS 26)
- There is careful selection and vetting of all staff, volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers.(NMS 27)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 10, 26 and 27

We consider that the School has adopted and implemented a wide range of effective measures for the protection of children from harm, including humiliating treatment and bullying, in any form. Furthermore, that those measures take account of the children's rights to privacy, confidentiality and that any concerns or complaints they might have are taken seriously and responded to accordingly.

The School's environment is, overall, deemed safe from known potential hazards and the vetting of staff is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that those employed to work with the children, or have substantial contact with them, are unlikely to place them at risk of abuse.

EVIDENCE:

Documentary evidence, discussion with staff and direct observation confirm that the School has a clear child protection procedure effective for both preventing abuse and for ensuring that suspicions or allegations of such are responded to in a timely and efficient manner. The School's procedure is in accord with those of the local Area Child Protection Committee, a copy of which is available at the School and includes the responsible Local Education Authority's protocol and those agreed for occasions when cross-border working arrangements are necessary.

Staff members were seen, in advance of the inspection, to receive training in the nature of abuse and familiarisation with the School's system for the protection of children. Since these measures are intended to keep children safe, those in control of the School will be encouraged to learn that 96% of the children who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they felt safe there.

In relation to potential hazards in the environment, it was noted from records, kept and interviews with key personnel, that risk assessments have been completed in relation to risk of fire and other aspects of health and safety. Where indicated, any control measures identified as necessary, had been or were in the process of being, put into effect.

Ensuring that the children's right to reasonable privacy is not compromised is both a general requirement and one of the ways in which they are protected. We found that the arrangements that the School makes in this regard are acceptable. Toilet doors were seen to have safety locking mechanisms and bathroom and shower rooms were also arranged to provide privacy for those who use them.

The children who assisted the inspectors in the inspection tour of the premises confirmed that they were able to wash, bathe and conduct their toilet in private. Furthermore, when resident their bedrooms are regarded as their exclusive space and it is clearly understood that other children are not allowed in uninvited. It was also observed that when staff needed to enter the children's bedrooms, they knocked and waited to be invited in. These observations are supported by the children's response to the questionnaire in which 91% of respondents indicated that they "get privacy when they want it".

At the time of inspection there were no children who required intimate care, but it was noted that the School has an acceptable intimate care policy. It was also noted from the register of staff that there is a sufficient balance in the ratio of males and females to enable children to be able to choose who should assist them with such care in the event of their needing it.

In order to safeguard children from any humiliating treatment or abuse, there is clear guidance on the protocol to be followed in the event of it being necessary to search a child's person or possessions. Similarly, children are assessed in relation to the risk of their absconding or being missing without permission. There are clear guidelines for those events, which take account of the child's age and circumstances. There are administrative arrangements for recording absconds and a known process for responding to circumstances of persistent absconding.

The senior staff members of the School are aware of the requirement to notify the Commission of any significant occurrences therein that either involves or affects a child and has a system (the LEA's own provision) for alerting parents and other relevant bodies. At inspection no such occurrence (i.e., death of, or serious harm, to a child; improper conduct of a member of staff; outbreak of infectious and notifiable diseases) were either reported or detected.

Record books of additional measures of control were kept within each unit. Those inspected had not been sufficiently updated with sanctions being recorded within daily records yet not within the sanctions log. There was also an example of a sanction being recorded within the log but no reference was made of this within the daily records. However, the range of sanctions, which was being used, was considered to be within what is permissible and appropriate for the age of the children. Note, parents in their response to the questionnaire were supportive of the School, 94% indicated that they have been advised about the School's approach to disciplining of the children and the measures which are imposed in this regard. All those who gave an opinion of the sanctions thought they were reasonable.

We examined the issue of bullying, considering the extent to which the School acts to counter bullying and the children's experience in this connection. We found that the School takes bullying seriously and that this features in the children's moral education and socialisation. Throughout the School and in the residential units, were promotional information about bullying and who the children should approach if anything was causing them to be unhappy or to be concerned.

None of the children with whom the inspectors had contact reported any bullying and, indeed, those who were asked directly said that they did not experience any bullying. However, 30% of those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they were experiencing bullying in the School by other named children. It will therefore be necessary for staff to be vigilant in this regard, perhaps conducting its own survey and accelerating the risk assessment, which the Head of Care is conducting in areas within the School where there might be a likelihood of bullying going on undetected.

The inspectors were satisfied that the School has a clear complaints procedure, including that for dealing with any complaints about the Head Teacher. Processes and timescales for dealing with complaints are also made clear and a record of the essential details of any complaints, which have been made, are kept and the outcomes also noted. Apart from the formal process, the ethos within the School is one of listening to the children and taking their concerns seriously. These observations are borne out by the children who responded to the questionnaire: 22 or 96% of whom confirmed that they know how to complain. Their parents made similar responses: 94% (16) indicating that they had received information about the School's complaints procedure; 87% had been advised about how to complain to Inspectors and of the 25% who had actually complained, commented that their concerns were dealt with quickly and satisfactorily.

Assessment of the School's staff selection procedure and observation of staff records, suggest that requisite care is taken to ensure that those employed to work, or have substantial contact, with the children are fit persons and thus limits the scope for the children to be exposed to potential abusers.

It was noted from the children's records that individual risk assessments are completed with the intention of establishing in what circumstances they might place themselves or others at risk. Where known and potential risks were shown, the control measures taken were considered to be appropriate.

On this occasion no checks were made of the risk assessments, carried out in all areas of the school and the residential units. However, it was observed that hazardous substances such as cleaning agents are securely stored in areas to which the children do not have access.

Evidence of a recent fire risk assessment for the whole school, which is understood to have been conducted under the supervision of the Local Authority's Fire Officer, was provided. It showed that some risks have been identified such as inadequate separation of some combustible materials and potential sources of ignition, need for greater clarity in the fire notices and for all staff to receive fire safety training. These and any other fire risks identified, must be addressed as a matter of priority.

The records however showed that fire alarm tests were being carried out weekly, fire drills were being conducted and the fire detection, alarm and extinguishers were being serviced at the required frequency. When asked, the children were aware of what they had to do in the event of a fire and the muster point for their unit. The Head Teacher provided a report of a fire safety inspection, which was carried out by Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. The report declares that all aspects of fire safety against which the School was inspected, were satisfactory and it noted that a risk assessment was been conducted in accordance with the Fire Prevention (Workplace Regulations) 1997.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school.(NMS 12)
- Children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities both within the school and in the local community.(NMS 13)
- Children receive individual support when they need it.(NMS 22)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12, 13, 22

The children are benefiting from the provisions of this school in which we found unity of purpose in those areas of its function, which were examined during this inspection. It has a clear rationale, which makes clear how the care element of its operation is intended to impact on the children generally and, in particular on their education.

We considered that the children were being provided with a wide range of activities, which are likely to fire their imagination, widen their interests, enhance their social development and directly or indirectly facilitate their learning. There are satisfactory systems in place for establishing each child's needs and for responding to these on an individual basis.

EVIDENCE:

We observed good links between the school and residential units, with teachers having a positive involvement when there were opportunities for them to have contact with those units during the school day. It was also noted that some teaching staff do extraneous duties thus further cementing the link between the School's education and care components.

In order to achieve the unity of purpose necessary in a residential school good communication between its education and care components are essential, we therefore examined this and concluded thus:- Adequate arrangements in place for liaison between the education and care teams ensured that children's successes and difficulties in both settings were understood and taken into account.

Mindful of one of the Ofsted's inspector's observations, when the School was inspected last year, suggesting that there was not a strong enough link

between the activities, which staff provided the children during the evenings and work pupils undertake in class, we looked carefully at this. Whilst we cannot comment on the work children undertake in lessons, we found that superficially it may appear that enough might not be done by care staff to support the children's formal education. In fact this is not the case; staff tend to take for granted what they do in this respect – believing it goes without saying and do not always give the fullest account of what is actually being done. We found evidence of school-based topics being supported by the residential staff in the evenings and facilities available for individual study, if required.

Staff explained that they attempt to strike a reasonable balance between formal school and the children's leisure time, but act as a good parent might in ensuring that the children in residence complete any homework that is set. They also explained that in certain instances they help children reading. In terms of direct observations we saw books in the residential units and a range of games, some of which would involve the children in counting and developing strategies to win.

The children were able to discuss a wide range of activities that they had been involved in on a regular basis both within the residential units and external to the school site. These included swimming, gym club, pond dipping and football. Activities were organised on a semi-structured basis with sufficient freedom being given to residential staff to organise these on an impromptu basis. Computer games and videos / DVDs, to which the children had access, were all observed as being appropriate for their age.

All the children who responded to the questionnaire confirmed that they are provided with activities at the School. Among the responses from parents was the suggestion of some form of holiday club at the School, as the facilities there enable the children to be occupied positively, which cannot be replicated at home during the longer school holidays. This causes boredom and frustration and consequent deterioration in behaviour.

The school has an independent visitor, who visits the residential units on a weekly basis and talks to the children. The visitor had been involved with the school staff's child protection training in the previous term. The independent visitor did not report any issue of concern.

Whilst we commend the School on providing this service, it was noted that the Independent Visitor is in school one set evening and since the number of nights that some children spend at the School vary; it means that some are unlikely to have an opportunity to benefit from this service. Should it be possible to arrange for the Independent Visitor to vary visits, over a period, to cover all the evenings when children are in residence, this might ensure that all of the resident children are able to access the valuable support that this service provides.

The School has an assessment and care management system, which is intended, and was seen, to focus on the children's individual needs. Children currently on roll at the School present with a range of emotional and behavioural disorders but as stated earlier, though its access to specialist services such as CAMHS has improved, the children's need of such services is not currently matched by their availability. The inspectors were disappointed to learn that a child about whom staff members have concerns was referred to CAMHS, but the referral has not been successful. Those in control of the School must ensure that where specialist services such as CAMHS are considered to be necessary to promote the health, education and care of the child, this is provided whether by direct input from the specialists to the child or through training and guiding staff.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. No child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views.(NMS 2)
- Children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect.(NMS 9)
- Children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes.(NMS 11)
- Children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school.(NMS 17)
- In accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while living away from home at school.(NMS 20)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 2, 3, 11, 17 and 20

Children in the School are well informed about what is expected of them and in turn what they can reasonably expect of the School. They are consulted both in matters that are likely to have an impact on them at school generally and in those related to their particular care and education.

EVIDENCE:

The School was able to demonstrate in several respects how it seeks to involve and elicit the opinion of the children and their parents or significant others. A School's Council has been established; new election to which has recently been conducted and the first meeting of the new Council took place during the inspection and was attended by one of the inspectors.

Representatives from each of the residential units were observed taking part in a school council meeting, with a broad range of agenda items being discussed, including both school and residential care matters. The School Council meets each half term; minutes are recorded of its business and are made available. This approach to involving the children in the running of the School was considered most effective since they were observed to raise pertinent issues and make helpful suggestions. The inspectors did assess one comment in the minutes of a children's residential house meeting, relating to a particular child,

to be inappropriate. Staff members need to be careful that any discussion at residential house meeting does not adversely focus on any particular child and that there is nothing in the minutes, which is likely to cause hurt feelings.

In addition to the School Council, there are regular house meetings involving the children in residence. These focus on specific routine matters of the way the unit is run and its impact on those accommodated therein. Again the children advised that their contributions to these meetings were taken seriously. The Head of Care reported on the progress of a children satisfaction questionnaire, which is due to be administered imminently and was reminded of the requirement to submit the outcome to the Commission

Examination of the children's records revealed evidence of work which has been done to prepare them to contribute to formal review of the education and, as appropriate, their care. This work enabled the children to set out their wishes and feelings so that even if they opt not to attend those meetings the review panel is provided with authentic evidence of their opinions. A sample of children who were asked about whether staff explained to, and discussed with, them the plans, which were being proposed for their future care and education, confirmed this to be the case. Parents in responding to the questionnaire also reported favourably on the efforts that the School makes to consult with them about the care of their children (94%) and to seek their opinion before making decisions (87%).

There is a well-established admission process, which permits parents to visit the School to view its provision and have discussions with staff before any final decision about their child's admission are made. Once the decision to admit the child is made, pre-admission visits are arranged. Guidance is also provided to care staff in how to welcome and settle children who are new to the School.

Being a primary school historical links have been established with the secondary schools to which leavers are to be transferred and that good working arrangements are in place to ease their transition. We observed at the time of inspection a group of children were involved with visiting their senior school on a daily basis as part of the introduction process. This was viewed as a positive step for supporting the children with this transition. We also noted and commend the children and the staff members who assisted in producing the existing and, soon to be introduced, new children's guide. This is intended for those who join the School and describes life for boarders from a child's perspective.

All the children are the subjects of Statements of Special Educational Needs a copy of which were found among their records. These prescribe what is required in relation to the children's education, emotional and social requirements. In some instances the children are also being 'Looked After' by the Local Authority and, in these cases, staff report they often experience difficulty getting assessments or background information from social workers.

However, the inspectors were satisfied that the combined information available was sufficient to enable the School to understand and respond to each child's needs as might arise from their health, disability, religion, culture, etc.

A new approach had recently been introduced, which is intended to match the needs identified in the child's placement plan or Care plan against measurable objectives that the residential component sets for meeting those needs. Whilst this approach was considered to be sound in formulation, its execution was at best variable. These plans of actions were not systematic and the objectives in them often vague and therefore not amenable to proper assessment. This belies some of the sterling work, which was being done and some training might be required to enable staff to develop these to an acceptable standard and with uniformity in approach.

Those in control of the School will be pleased to learn that 96% of the children who responded to our survey said that they were well cared for at the School and parents were equally satisfied indicating that they believe the staff are doing a good job. Some cited the happiness and contentment of the children and others pointed to the progress that their children had made as the basis of their opinions. Among the children's comments were these: *"It has been a good time here and I am happy"* – *"I feel that I have improved my behaviour since I came ... and I feel much happier... and safer"*.

The School makes more than adequate provision for children to have contact with their parents and, as appropriate, other family members. It has a visitors' suite equipped for children to meet with parents and other authorised visitors in private and comfort, and is also appropriate for conducting supervised visits. Children also have access to a telephone from which they can make and receive calls in private. We considered that staff members are sufficiently skilled in working with children and their families and that this accounts in large part for parents' positive view of the School. Parents (87%) indicated that they are encouraged to visit the School and that staff are welcoming.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money.(NMS 16)
- Children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living.(NMS 21)
- Children live in well designed and pleasant premises, providing sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs.(NMS 23)
- Children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use.(NMS 24)
- Children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity.(NMS 25)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 16, 23, 24 and 25

Children who board at the School are considered to be cared for in ways that permits them to act with such self-determination as appropriate to their age and understanding. They are afforded a largely safe environment consistent with their needs and in which they enjoy very good material standards and with facilities and services that contribute to the preservation of their privacy and dignity.

EVIDENCE:

The School offers flexible boarding arrangements so that children are able to board Monday nights to Thursday nights either consecutively or for numbers of nights between. Their substantive care is therefore very much anchored at home and when resident at the School this care is effectively shared. Accordingly, children bring with them supplies of clothing and other possessions sufficient for the period in which they will be resident. Whilst the School has a dress code, this only applies during formal school hours and children are permitted to wear casual clothing of their choice during leisure periods.

The School's residential care arrangements successfully achieve the intended parallel with ordinary home life. Current numbers of boarders means that each

child has his own bedroom, which provides more than adequate storage for clothing and other personal requisites. Where children bring any money into School there is provision for its safe keeping and they are supported to maintain the accounts of this.

Although the School is in a somewhat isolated location, this does not present as an adverse factor. Satisfactory transport arrangements are made for travel between their home and the school with escorts being provided, as necessary. Located in the countryside, the School's environment provides the children with an agreeable contrast with urban living: that is, the space, freedom and relative safety that they need to develop.

The School does not accommodate children with significant physical or sensory disabilities and, accordingly, is not equipped for this. Further, it is not being used for any purpose other than its principal function as set out in its Statement of Purpose. It is, therefore, deemed fit for its purpose and a proper place to accommodate children.

Adequate precautions are taken to ensure the security of the premises and therefore the safety of the children. There is a reception area to which all visitors are required to report and access beyond this point is controlled. The inspectors had only two concerns about the external safety of the premises:-

1. There are public rights of way that abut the premises in two areas and greater use is being made of these owing to commercial developments of neighbouring properties. Gaps in the School's perimeter, i.e, a gate at the side, which, even when closed, would not provide a sufficient deterrent against intruders and would provide direct access to the playground. The other is also a gate at the rear leading to the playing fields also providing no effective barrier against potential intruders. We consider that this merits a risk assessment and, as necessary, the introduction of any indicative control measures.
2. There are tall trees in the vicinity of two of the residential units which if they were to snap or fall they are likely to land on those units. The Head Teacher reported that he too was concerned about trees around the premises and had commissioned a safety check by specialist in the Local Authority approximately three years ago. After work was carried out, including removal of branches, the trees were declared them safe. This was in response to an accident at an accident in another area of where a child was killed by a falling tree.

We found that there are ample outdoor play areas for the children, which are open thus making it possible for them to be supervised. Play apparatus such as the swings had safety features, eg, bark on the surrounding ground to reduce injury in the event of falls.

In relation to their freedom of movement in the residential units, we observed no undue restrictions in this regard. We did, however, consider that it would be necessary to re-site the locks on the toilet doors at a height, which is accessible to all the children.

All areas of the children's residential accommodation were found to be in good decorative order and with furniture and fittings of good quality and which were being maintained in good condition. It is apparent that proper care is taken with housekeeping, the units presenting as warm, welcoming and homelike. As earlier explained, the current numbers of children who use the residential accommodation means that they are afforded single bedrooms and only share by choice and with approval. The children advised that bedrooms identified for them on admission are used exclusively by them when they are resident and that they are allocated the same room on each episode of residence. All the bedrooms and communal areas were acceptably adorned, as appropriate, with the children's own possessions and with other adornments that the School provides, e.g., pictures. These all reflected the age and particular interest of the group and the individuals.

Beds, and bedding in use and in store, were seen to be in good and clean condition, as were curtains and floor coverings throughout. The units are centrally heated (oil fired) and it was noted that the oil storage tank was being replaced at the time of inspection. Throughout, there is adequate light (both natural and artificial) and ventilation.

A staff sleeping in room is located near to the children's own bedrooms. It is clearly identified to the children and they are aware that it is off limits to them. The staff sleeping-in room being located close to the children's bedrooms is likely to both provide reassurance to the children and enable efficient response to any difficulties that they might encounter throughout the night. There is an auditory alarm installed in the sleeping quarters to alert staff to children who leave their bedrooms during the night. This is intended for the reassurance and protection of children and, according to evidence of the previous inspection, is clearly mentioned in the Statement of Purpose (a document akin to the School's Prospectus). In order to conform fully to this standard, it will be necessary for those in control of the School to retain documentary evidence that the use of such a monitoring system has been approved by each child's parents or placing authority or an agreed feature of the Statement of Special Educational Need/Placement Plan.

The rear of the main building is desperately in need of repainting. It startlingly mars the otherwise pleasing appearance of the premises and, if left any longer in its current state, is likely to lead to erosion of the structure and greater expense to rectify. It was also noted that a fence at the front of the Caretaker's cottage, adjacent to the reception area, is falling down and needs attention.

We noted that there is a disused building on the site, which is understood to have been a former residential unit, but has not been used as such since 1985. The external condition of this building remains sound at present, but left unused for much longer and without maintenance, is likely to become a hazard as its condition deteriorates.

There are two bathrooms in each residential unit in which there is bath, shower and toilet facilities. The facilities are discreetly separated thus providing the requisite degree of privacy for children's ablutions and toilet. These areas were seen in clean condition. Those children, who were asked, reported that they were indeed able to use these facilities in private and that they are all in proper working order. This was confirmed by the inspectors' own checks, which found that there was a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water at the bath and shower outlets; the hot water temperature to feel was at a safe degree and the toilets flushed properly. These facilities are all in close proximity to the children's bedrooms thus enabling convenient access.

In the inspection survey children were asked: "Do you like staying here and are you happy"? In their response 91% answered this question positively, i.e., that they like staying at the School and are happy there. This was taken to mean that the vast majority of children are not only satisfied with the quality of the relationships with their carers and teachers, but with the environment in which they are being cared for.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils.(NMS 1)
- Children's needs, development and progress is recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions.(NMS 18)
- There are adequate records of both the staff and child groups of the school.(NMS 19)
- Children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently.(NMS 28)
- Children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs.(NMS 29)
- Children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare.(NMS 30)
- Children receive the care and services they need from competent staff.(NMS 31)
- Children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools.(NMS 32)
- The governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school.(NMS 33)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 18, 19, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 33

The purpose of the school, its aims, objectives and the principles that underpin the functions that it perform, are all clearly set out in its Statement of Purpose. We consider that that not only does the School fulfil the requirements standard 1 in ensuring that this document is made available to those who need it, we assess that it is an accurate rationale of how the school is actually being run. It is also considered that in combination, information provided prior to, at and after children's entry to the School provides them with an understanding with the contents of the Statement of Purpose at a level suitable for their age and understanding.

We consider leadership of the school to be sound and effective, and that it has been consolidated such as to bring about significant staff development, cohesion and a positive impact on the children. Such records as the School is required to keep to demonstrate its effectiveness in influencing the children's overall development and specific progress are being maintained as are

registers of all children who enter the school and those employed in their care and education.

EVIDENCE:

The Head Teacher made available a copy of the School's Statement of Purpose dated 06/09/04. It was also observed that there is a copy of this document in the reception area, it is available in each of the residential units and is replicated in the School's prospectus. Direct observations of the School's environment and its practices; and evaluation of its policies, procedures and guidance, as commented on in earlier sections of this report, suggest that the Statement of Purpose is an accurate reflection of the reality of how the school is being run. More importantly, feedback from children and their parents in the survey for this inspection corroborates this.

Examination of a sample of children's files revealed that the basic personal details of each child were being kept as required and similarly individual records of personnel, which contain the information necessary to demonstrate safe staff selection, were also seen to be maintained. We commend the senior staff on the care which they are taking in this regard as shown in the Checklist, which had introduced the necessary rigour into this process.

Staff members are required to maintain a daily record for each child, which effectively summarises the events of their day and report on the care inputs that are intended to fulfil the objectives of their care plans. We assessed these recordings as being variable in quality, often being without sufficient detail particularly when specific difficulties occurred or achievements were made. Again, this tended not only to belie some of the effectiveness of care inputs, but if this information is to be relied upon to inform assessment and review it is at risk of not providing a full picture.

Checks of records confirmed that those related to accidents, incidents, menus (used as record of food served), duty rosters and a record of visitors are being kept, as required. They provide an additional safeguard in terms of monitoring or should it be necessary to conduct retrospective enquiries into any occurrences at the School.

In fulfilment of standard 28, the School is essentially required to ensure that staff members are available both night and day in sufficient numbers commensurate with the number of children accommodated and their needs. In this regard, a staffing policy (*Skilts School Residential Staffing Policy*) was submitted. In essence, this informs that there 12 residential care staff members who are employed on a full time basis and deployed according to the time of day, the numbers of children in the units and the activities taking place at the particular time. This level of staffing is augmented by teachers who

perform extraneous duties and classroom assistants who are available on each unit at key times such as when day pupils arrive in the mornings and at lunchtimes when day pupils join those in the residential units.

After school in the evenings, and before day pupils arrive in the mornings, the ratio of staff to children is 1:4 with one member of staff sleeping in each unit at night. This does not include the rota of senior staff members who are available or on call throughout the day and night and the teachers who do extraneous duties. This level of staffing is deemed adequate and was being maintained during the time of inspection. Examination of rotas revealed a similar situation at other times. Note, in order to maintain continuity of care and consistency in personnel who provide it, the School does not staff from agencies, but is able to manage shortfall within its own resources either by readjustment of care staff's working patterns or their doing additional shifts.

It was also observed that staff who live on the School's premises are required to enter an agreement as to their conduct, the supervision of any visitors they might have and the possible implications for their residence should they become the subject of certain allegations. All these measures were considered as sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the School provides and deploys staff such as to respond to the children's needs consistently and safely.

We examined whether staff are trained and orientated in the running of the School in ways that would enable them to respond effectively to the needs of the children according to the principles set out in the Statement of Purpose. In this connection, we were satisfied that there are arrangements for new staff to be provided with an induction programme and opportunities to benefit from in-service training that take account of the topics set in Appendix 2 of the Standards, i.e., child protection, residential care skills and needs arising from race religion and culture, etc.

As an adjunct to the induction programme and an addition to its portfolio of principal policies, procedures and guidance, the School makes available to each member of the residential care staff an A to Z summary of these written in pitchy style. This document titled: *Who, What, When, Where, Why – a guide to the routines and common practices in our residential houses*, was considered an excellent initiative and is likely to prove most helpful to both new and existing staff.

There is a clear line management structure and staff (including ancillary staff) supervision arrangements. For residential care staff, the frequency of their formal supervision is once per term. This was confirmed both by the School's staff supervision policy and staff themselves. We were satisfied that staff at all levels are guided, supported and are made accountable for the individual contributions to the proper care of the children.

With regard to the requirement for the School to ensure that the Head of Care has a professional and managerial qualification(s) at NVQ level 4 or its equivalent and for 80% care staff to achieve NVQ level 3 in the care of children and young people by 2005, we assessed progress towards this end. Currently the Head of Care is undertaking the course, which leads to the relevant qualification and intends to complete it later this year or soon thereafter. There are two members of care staff both with substantial previous experience in residential child care and already appropriately qualified and 4 others are presently undergoing assessment leading to the NVQ level 3 award. Assuming those 4 members of staff achieve their NVQ level 3 before the year's #end, this still means that only 50% of care staff will be relevantly qualified within the required timescale. This is a situation that the School plans to address.

Staff told us that they were being provided with the necessary time for staff meetings, record keeping, and care planning, including briefings at the end and beginning of shifts. Additionally, staff considered that they are consulted in policy development and review and in all matters concerning the care of the children and running of the School.

Children were not seen or reported to be ascribed roles that give them responsibility for, or authority over, other children as might lead to bullying. For their part, the large majority of parents who responded to the survey indicated that they are well informed about the School's pastoral policy, behaviour and discipline and complaints procedure, including alerting them to the role of the Commission as an avenue for complaints. Parents also reported that they believe the staff members are doing a good job and cited the progress and happiness of their children to attend as evidence of this.

In regards to the overseeing the running of the School and welfare supervision of the children the Head Teacher reported that a senior officer of the LEA visits the School each half term. Further on behalf of the Governors, the Head Teacher conduct the supervisory and welfare visits required by Standard 33. No further evidence was sought in relation to this standard on this occasion.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
Standard No	Score
14	2
15	3

STAYING SAFE	
Standard No	Score
3	3
4	3
5	3
6	3
7	3
8	3
10	3
26	3
27	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
12	3
13	3
22	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
Standard No	Score
2	3
9	3
11	3
17	2
20	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard No	Score
16	3
21	N/A
23	2
24	3
25	

MANAGEMENT	
Standard No	Score
1	3
18	3
19	3
28	3
29	3
30	3
31	2
32	3
33	3

No

Are there any outstanding recommendations from the last inspection?

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	14	Those in control of the School must ensure that accurate and up-to-date records are kept of any medication administered to children and relocate the medication cabinets to safer locations within the residential units.
2.	2	Care should be taken in both the conduct of the children's meetings and the recording of its proceedings to ensure no child is focussed on adversely and that there is no likelihood of hurt feelings.
3.	2	The School should submit to the Commission, on completion of the analysis, a copy of the outcome of the children customer satisfaction survey and any response that it intends to make in this regard.
4.	6	Those in control of the School must explore further and, as necessary take appropriate action, in relation to the issue of bullying, which a small but significant number of children reported in the response to the questionnaire, which was administered as part of this inspection.
5.	17 and 18	The children's individual care plans must all clearly identify the children's needs, set out in precise and measurable terms how those needs are to be met and detail the actions, either in the existing daily recording or other form, the effectiveness of those actions and their impact on the child's progress.
6.	22	Attempts should be made to vary the evenings on which the Independent Visitor is in School or otherwise make it possible for all the children to have access to the service the Independent Visitor provides.
7.	23	Reposition the locks on the toilet doors, which are used by children so as to ensure that they are accessible to all regardless of their height and, in the case of each child, seek and retain documentary evidence of parental or other relevant authorisation for the use of the auditory

		monitoring system in their bedrooms
8.	23	Conduct a risk assessment, and take such control measures as might be indicated, in relation to the unsecured gaps in the perimeter of the premises that abuts the public footpaths.
9.	24	Give consideration to either demolishing the redundant building on the School's premises or renovate it and put it to use compatible to the Schools functions. For example, it might make an excellent facility for a partnership project, say by health, education and social services, for a weekend/holiday shared care arrangement for children in need or at risk of having to be looked after by the Local Authority.
10.	24	Repaint, as a matter of priority, the rear of the main building and repair or replace the fence around what is understood to be the Caretaker's cottage adjacent to the reception area.
11.	26	Proceed, as planned, with introducing the measures to avoid or mitigate the risks identified in the recent assessment of fire risk within the School.
12.	30 and 31	Make such arrangements as are necessary to ensure that the School achieves the required standard of 80% of care staff completing NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People by the year's end. The LEA should also ensure that in instances where children who need specialist additional services such as child psychology and CAMHS are admitted to the School suitable pre-existing arrangements are in place for the children to receive those services and for staff to be trained or supported to reinforce the interventions of the specialists.
13.	As relevant	We recommend that the children be commended on their helpfulness during the inspection and their general friendliness which we saw while we were at the School. We would also like to suggest that staff be encouraged to maintain their enthusiasm and commitment and that the efforts they have made to improve the School's interventions into the lives of the children is consolidated and developed.
14.	As relevant	That the Head Teacher proceed, as planned, with the developments in those areas, which, in the Self Assessment was identified as needing to be improved.
15.	10	Care must be taken to record all sanctions in main sanctions register irrespective of whether they have been recorded in the children's individual logs.

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