

Vale of Evesham School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

Unique reference number	SC043049
Inspection date	17/05/2010
Inspector	Julian Mason
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	20/10/2009

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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

Vale of Evesham School provides education for young people with autistic spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. The majority of young people receive day education but there is provision for boarding, which can accommodate 15 young people up to the age of 19 years as weekly boarders. The boarding accommodation is placed on the first floor and consists of three suites, one of which is very separate from the other two. Each of the suites are staffed with their own team of care staff under a care officer, all of whom are responsible to the head of care. The school is maintained by a local education authority, Worcestershire County Council Department of Education and the school is directly responsible to a governing body.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was a full announced inspection that concentrated on key national minimum standards for residential special schools. The school was accommodating 16 young people at the time of the inspection. Many were present during the visit and a number of young people participated in some of the inspection process. The inspection focused on areas relating to being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic well-being and how staffing and management arrangements supported the operation of the residential units.

Vale of Evesham Residential Special School is outstanding. The inspection found that the school provides an excellent standard of care and support that helps young people with their education, personal, social and emotional development. Staff have a clear focus on enabling and developing each young person's approach to communicating with others that does not discriminate or exclude them from any part of school life. The school's head of care along with other managers provide strong and effective leadership which results in staff being clearly focused and guided in meeting the needs of young people. Relationships between staff and young people are attentive, caring and very supportive. Young people benefit from living in a school that is consistently managed and organised to achieve the best possible outcomes for each young person.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has taken action to address the one recommendation made at the last inspection. The recommendation referred to the need to keep a written record of all medication administered to young people. This recommendation has now been

actioned and all medication given to young people is recorded at the point of administration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school's arrangements for meeting young people's health and well-being needs are outstanding. Young people clearly benefit from having a team of carers who are well informed and focused on monitoring and promoting their good health and fitness. For example, staff have well-established partnerships with a range of health care colleagues to ensure that each young person can access the right services and professionals when they need to. In addition, the school nurse provides an effective link to external services that achieves a responsive and coordinated approach to health care. Health promotion is also effective and meaningful as it is delivered in a planned way through the school's personal, social and health education curriculum.

Young people's health needs are reviewed regularly. For example, staff are very good at collating and gathering information about the possible impact prescribed medication has on young people's well-being. Staff are well informed about the possible side effects of prescription drugs. They are very observant and aware as many young people cannot directly articulate how they feel. This area of practice is crucial in ensuring young people's comfort and well-being is maintained. As a result of this excellent practice, medication has been changed by prescribing doctors to lessen the side effects and impact felt by young people. These circumstances reflect the fact that young people have competent, well-trained staff looking after them.

Young people have very good diets that are planned to provide them with a good balance of nutritional food that meets their needs. Staff know young people's favourite foods and also provide for special diets that relate to specific health needs such as diabetes. Young people are able to identify a whole range of food that they know is good for them. The development of a new vegetable garden has widened young people's awareness and knowledge of where their food comes from. Young people benefit from well-organised mealtimes that are planned to provide opportunities to socialise and chat. Staff practice is attentive and enabling, ensuring all young people are able to participate in the occasion, always aiming to promote independence and autonomy. This is an excellent example of the school's wider approach to social inclusion and involvement for everyone.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school's arrangements for keeping young people safe are outstanding. Young people are very safe because staff who work with them are knowledgeable and clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff work in partnership with each other as well as other agencies to consistently share information that is necessary to promote each young person's welfare and safety. Successful lines of communication exist

because managers provide effective leadership that reflects the school's values and priorities in terms of safeguarding. Regular staff training and comprehensive policies underpin and guide this whole school approach to child protection. Young people and parents are positive about the school with one parent stating, 'They make sure the pupils are safe and happy.'

Young people's privacy and dignity is promoted very well by staff who practice and follow the school's agreed policies and individual plans of care. Despite some communication difficulties, staff strive to ensure that each young person's wishes about their personal care is respected. Plans are developed based on young people's circumstances, needs and abilities, and this helps to form an approach that is individualised and considerate.

Staff are very responsive to any concerns a young person may express in whichever way this is communicated. Young people's known methods of communication are widely promoted and contribute to informing staff about how best to support them. Staff pay attention to young people's behaviour and regularly encourage them to express themselves. Although this communication may not always be clear, this does not deter staff from exploring matters that may be of concern to young people. Staff do not automatically assume young people are content and this approach makes an important contribution to wider safeguarding arrangements.

Young people are provided with excellent support to help them manage their behaviour. Detailed and individual behaviour management plans that are updated regularly to help guide staff in their day-to-day work with young people. Furthermore, this work is underpinned by regular staff training that reflects the school's comprehensive behaviour management policy. Young people benefit from staff practice that is calm, professional and well informed. Young people do not experience any bullying behaviour. Boundaries are made clear in a way that helps young people to learn and develop friendly relationships with their peers and staff. Physical interventions and formal sanctions are not part of the current behaviour management practices within the residential units. Staff use their training to good effect by focusing on the positives and regularly talking to young people about their behaviour and safety. Young people benefit from having a group of carers who are excellent role models and who are committed to each individual's personal growth and development.

Further positive steps are taken to ensure young people are safe. For instance, they are provided with an environment that has very good levels of physical safety and security. Frequent health and safety checks are completed, fire drills and evacuations are practised and fire equipment is serviced at appropriate intervals. The school also carries out a range of comprehensive assessments to assess and manage any known and likely risks to young people. Young people are also protected because of effective recruitment, selection and vetting processes for new staff. Existing staff have their Criminal Records Bureau checks renewed every three years which is over and above national minimum standards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are successfully supported and cared for by a professional and well-informed team of staff. This is because they can draw on a detailed and comprehensive range of information about young people's needs. Parents are very positive about the school, stating: 'The school does an excellent job', 'My son loves boarding which says it all' and 'They have a great social life as well as time to relax.'

Effective and supportive relationships are developed between parents and carers that are meaningful and significant. This helps the staff team to develop and improve their knowledge about each young person's needs. The residential routines fully support young people in developing both their life skills and educational attainment. Close working partnerships between teaching and care staff offers great consistency and continuity for young people throughout each day. Young people are treated as individuals and each case record reflects information about their needs that is unique and representative of their backgrounds, identity, culture and religion. In addition, staff at the school have a clear focus on enabling and developing each young person's approach to communicating with others that does not discriminate or exclude them from any part of school life.

The range of activities on offer to young people is excellent. Staff make full use of the school's facilities allowing for choice and preferences to be incorporated into evening routines. Currently, trampolining is a favoured activity and this is facilitated on a regular basis. Young people are also fully supported to access community facilities and venues such as outdoor centres, youth clubs, restaurants and shops. Young people's diaries are used effectively to reflect the activities young people are involved in. One parent stating, 'The photographs which are added into the daily diaries are a particular favourite for us as parents, as we can see from them just how much our son gets from each activity.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are fully supported to maintain contact with people who are important to them while residing at the school. Parents and carers can phone for progress reports and staff regularly contact them to keep them informed of any changes or issues of concern. Family contact and information sharing contribute to young people being settled and at ease with their care and support arrangements. One parent stating, 'We feel the boarding unit is run extremely well as there is great communication between staff, pupils and parents.'

There are excellent arrangements for consulting young people and their families. Young people are actively encouraged and supported to have their say about day-to-day routines and arrangements as well as wider life at the school. Close attention is paid to ensuring that the residential records fully represent the views and wishes of

each young person and their families. Placement plans are detailed and include risk assessments that enable young people to successfully maintain levels of independence in a safe manner because staff are well informed about how to support them in achieving this.

Each young person is well supported through their admission and leaving processes because staff devise plans and arrangements that meet with individual circumstances. Staff are very aware of the potential impact on young people when they move so are sensitive and understanding when this happens. Young people benefit from a tailored approach that best meets their needs.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are provided with modern, homely and comfortable accommodation. There are facilities and recreational areas that are more than adequate for the numbers of young people living at the school. Young people have excellent access to the school's facilities to help them play and enjoy their leisure time. The accommodation provides a stable and safe environment that successfully enables young people to realise their personal enjoyment and social development. The residential provision is well-maintained with good-quality décor and furnishings. The school and living accommodation is very clean and tidy. Young people's bedrooms are highly personalised, decorated and furnished with their own personal items and possessions.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Young people benefit from living in a residential school that is effectively managed and well run. Staff and managers have an excellent insight into how well young people's needs are being met and the outcomes being achieved. There is a comprehensive range of information available about the school, its values and services. The residential team is led by a conscientious and effective head of care who is part of the senior management team that has overall responsibility for the service. Staff portray professional, caring attitudes throughout the school because they are provided with excellent support and clear guidance from competent managers. A good range of occupational and vocational training also underpins these circumstances with most staff having a minimum National Vocational Qualification at Level 3.

Staff speak with confidence and pride about their various roles and responsibilities. Staff have a clear understanding of what each other does and how they fit into the services being provided. This benefits young people greatly as their individual needs are effectively promoted across the professional disciplines of care, education and health. Young people state that the staff are good at: 'helping me and others', 'looking after me' and that they are, 'helpful and kind and fun.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff's knowledge about individual young people, their needs and circumstances is excellent. The school gathers a comprehensive range of information to ensure plans of care are individualised and unique to each young person. Staff provide an environment where young people's differences are acknowledged, understood and where they are treated fairly and with equal concern. The school's operation is underpinned by clearly written policies that promote social inclusion and equality.

Managers have a cycle of quality assurance activity that produces a range of information about the school's operation and outcomes for young people. This includes on-site visits by governors as well as internal audits carried out by managers. Informal feedback from governors' visits are provided verbally but it is not clear if the areas reported on are matched to recommended areas within national minimum standards.

The management team have a clear agenda on maintaining and improving residential services that are necessary to meet each young person's needs. For example, the school's current development plan includes a number of areas to improve and develop residential services for young people. The areas for development are not only focused on young people but their families as well. This is highlighted by the introduction of a life skills picture book which provides parents and carers with a pictorial record of each young person's progress and development. This is an excellent addition to the school's communication systems that are already very effective.

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 governing body or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage the school to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. (NMS 33)