

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Clare Davies
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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 provides care and accommodation for up to 53 students with autistic spectrum disorder between the ages of 11 to 19 years. It operates as an independent co-educational residential special school which also provides accommodation for a number of children receiving up to 44 weeks boarding and is therefore registered as a Children's Home.

Students are accommodated in six on site residential houses and one off site in a neighbouring village. The school is set around a restored country house, within many acres of parkland.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This inspection assessed this service against all the key national minimum standards for children's homes. The school received 2 days' notice. An integrated inspection of the education and welfare took place at the same time. The inspection of the organisation's independent school is reported on individually. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

This service requires a very large staff team to meet the needs of the students in residential care, night care and in the school setting. The staff team is a strength of the school as they report how much they enjoy their work. They feel supported in doing so by a comprehensive training programme, team and line management support, and clear policies and procedures. Students benefit from an individual approach to their needs from the skills of residential staff, teaching staff, nursing staff and therapists.

The management of student privacy and the formal response to complaints is an area that needs to improve. Record keeping across the school is varied and like the monitoring of care practices it requires some cohesion to become more effective in the development of the service.

Improvements since the last inspection

One action and a recommendation were made at the last inspection in the outcome area of organisation, these have not been met and therefore carried forward from this inspection. The head of school is in the process of applying to Ofsted to be the Registered Manager. There is a strong training department however, due to high numbers of staff, only 60% have completed the National Vocational Qualification

(NVQ) award at level 3 with a further 45 staff expected to complete by the end of this year.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school and residential provision actively encourages and promotes a healthy life style. Food is provided by catering staff who have a good understanding of what makes a balanced nutritious meal offering a good variety including food from different countries and cultures. Special medical and cultural diets and individual preferences are catered for. The care staff encourage the students to try different food. This is supported by the canteen style dining room in the main school where students can choose their lunch and evening meal, breakfast is taken in each house. Some older students are supported by staff to shop for, prepare and cook their own meals in their residential setting and for the students who live off site, all their meals are prepared and cooked with student involvement. Students are supported in growing vegetables, salad and herbs in the garden. Daily records are made of each student's menu choice and this is shared with parents informing them of their children's diet while living away from home. Staff do not routinely evaluate these records, they are available for analysis when a medical or behavioural issue has been identified.

Students are encouraged to take part in regular daily exercise and the school has very good facilities to support this such as, a running track, playgrounds, a swimming pool, a gymnasium and a large hall for wet weather use. To promote personal hygiene and life skills students follow schedules of symbols or photographs to help them undertake these tasks independently.

The school takes positive steps to ensure the well-being of the students by obtaining parental consent to authorise emergency treatment and to administer medication. The students' health needs are recorded in their placement plans and they provide details of how these are to be met. Arrangements are in place to ensure that students have access to a doctor and attend routine checks with a dentist and a optician. Staff are trained in the administration of medication and supported by school nurses. The recently appointed school nurses are undertaking their own assessment of the current procedures and have identified areas that need to be more robust. Records of the stock of medication and where it is located on the school site are insufficient and some additional recording errors were noted.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Students are supported well by staff however the amount of information displayed on walls within the residential setting compromises the privacy of some students. Records relating to personal hygiene and how to support individual students with some aspects of personal care are not stored discreetly and are on view for all to

read. Similarly in the school dining room, individual support plans are on display for all to read when they could be more privately available between the student and their support worker. Audio monitors are appropriately used in ensuring the safety of some students during the night who have epilepsy however, such monitors are on during the waking day and could compromise students' privacy.

All students have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. Some have little or no verbal communication and use alternative communication systems including the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and basic signing. For some students communication is limited to physical actions and facial expressions. Consequently they are unable to easily communicate when they have an issue or a concern. Staff are adept at interpreting the different means of communication. This allows them to take appropriate action when a student is feeling uncomfortable or unhappy. Parents are given information of how to raise concerns and complaints with the school and the residential provision. Records of such complaints are varied and do not provide a consistent record of the action taken in response to a complaint or the outcome. It is unclear as to who takes overall responsibility for responding to any complaint and consequently the records are lacking information.

The school has shown a huge commitment to the safeguarding of students by ensuring that over 30 staff have trained with a national charity as designated senior people in safeguarding children. This includes staff from across different disciplines covering senior managers, residential staff, education staff and the therapy team. The school liaises appropriately with the local authority and has a comprehensive policy available to staff. Training is initially addressed in the induction period and then refreshed regularly ensuring all staff know how to respond if they should be concerned about the welfare of any student.

Bullying and being absent without authority are not issues for these students. They receive appropriate support and are provided with high levels of supervision. There is a safe and secure environment which ensures that the students are unable to leave without the staff's knowledge and involvement. Behavioural risk assessments identify those who require higher levels of supervision when on trips away from the school. Staff are fully conversant with the procedures to follow if a student should go missing. There is good collaboration across the teams in supporting students with their behaviour through their contribution to personal support plans. Particular behaviours are identified and how they can be managed by avoiding triggers and employing strategies. All staff follow such plans and this ensures a consistent response is given to students. Daily charts are completed recording particular behaviours that are exhibited. The psychologists collate this information weekly and produce charts over time to identify patterns and trends which show that a student may need additional support.

Staff are provided with training on the use of positive handling techniques, including the use of de-escalation and distraction techniques and the use of restraint. Individual plans provide guidance on agreed strategies and on the physical interventions that can be used. The number of staff trained as tutors in behaviour management has increased and staff report how beneficial this is in supporting them

to review their practice, considering what works well with individual students and what requires modification. Bound record books ensure that all the key information is recorded and such records are monitored by the senior management team. Although there is very good attention paid to individual records relating to each student to monitor their progress and development there is insufficient monitoring of the physical interventions across the school as a whole. Records are made in relevant residential settings or the classroom and there is no central overview.

The safety of students, staff and visitors is given importance. There are no obvious hazards around the site and systems are in place to check fire detection systems and other aspects of health and safety. While students have comprehensive individual risk assessments, other risk assessments for the environment require review. Staff confirm that regular fire drills and evacuations occur in order that everyone knows how to respond on hearing the fire alarm, including a recent practice during the night. A mixture of records are held in each house and centrally on site with a lack of overview, this has the potential for fire drills and equipment checks to be overlooked. Fire safety training is delivered during staff induction. Robust recruitment procedures are adopted and managed by key staff ensuring checks have been completed before permitting new staff to start work. Staff accompany visitors while on site, they are required to sign in at reception and get issued with a visitors' badge.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The individual needs of the students are planned for in a detailed manner. Care plans are developed using information from the multi-disciplinary team. This team can provide speech and language therapy, behavioural therapy, music therapy, occupational therapy and psychology. Close liaison between care staff, education staff, medical staff and the therapy team underpinned with information from parents ensures that all aspects of each young person's complex needs are met to a good standard. Staff have a good appreciation of how each student expresses their individual wishes or feelings and respond to them accordingly. The use of symbols, pictures and augmented communication is encouraged and developed; students are supported and guided to learn and use the most appropriate format for them.

The residential provision supports the educational progress of the students. There are close links and twice daily handovers between care and education teams. A number of the care team are allocated to provide support during the school day. These arrangements help to ensure a consistency and continuity of care and management of behaviour. Transition from the residential provision to the school is supported by the care staff. There is a waking day curriculum and the residential provision is an integrated part of this. Projects cross over from classroom to residential care to promote continual learning. For example, the theme of transport provided the topic for art and craft after school one evening where students made pictures of forms of transport that had been the focus of their school day. Individual targets are shared between the school and care settings to ensure that students

benefit from a cohesive and consistent approach and are able to develop their life and social skills in both settings.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Individual placement plans are very good documents specifying how the needs of each student will be met through the day and night. Ongoing assessment contributes to the regular update of placement plans and formal review meetings involve relevant professionals and parents. When there is concern about a student regular meetings may be held to identify what additional resources can be used or how best to meet the student's needs.

Contact arrangements are known by the staff team and weekly calendars list regular telephone calls between students and their parents, and staff and parents. Some students use a webcam to communicate with their families, others gain enjoyment from simply hearing their parents' voices over the telephone. A designated member of staff acts as a liaison between families and the school. In addition to being a point of contact this member of staff co-ordinates social events, parent forums, the involvement of the students' siblings, arranging home visits and is a member of the transitions committee. Students start their placement once a full assessment of their needs has been completed. Moving in is carefully considered and the process is planned at a pace commensurate with each student's ability to cope with the transition. A comprehensive set of documents is provided to parents as a guide to the school and residential provision. Prior to leaving the school a transitions committee work together with parents and placing authorities to provide appropriate help with moving on to adult support services.

Every effort is made to establish the views of individual students using relevant methods of communication and observations. Staff have a good understanding of how the students express themselves and are both patient and persistent when communicating with them. Students are encouraged to make daily choices with regards to food, clothing and activities. Staff ensured that some students were able to contribute their views to the inspection by translating surveys to symbols. Students expressed their contentment with the food and their school placement in general. Student involvement in their annual review meetings is being considered as to how this can be further improved with use of photographs and computer programmes to evidence student achievement with skills in independence.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Independent living skills are promoted throughout the classroom and the residential houses. This varies from managing personal hygiene without prompting to cooking a simple meal or attending a work placement. Students are supported to integrate in the local community, using leisure facilities, restaurants and shops.

The accommodation is a mixture of purpose built houses and adapted areas of the old building. There is one house off site in a neighbouring village to accommodate students working towards their life skills and independence. Overall the quality of the accommodation is good though some locks on bedroom doors, bathrooms and toilets are not functioning. Some bedroom doors have an observation window for staff to monitor at night, however the choice to operate the blind in these windows is not always available to students due to some needing repair. Across the houses there are single and double bedrooms, the school development plan is considering how to increase the number of single rooms. As students wish, their rooms are decorated with personal belongings, posters and photographs. Communal areas provide soft seating and a selection of toys, activities and sensory stimulation. Outdoor areas are secure with opportunities to use playgrounds and school facilities. Each house has a kitchen area for making snacks and some older students are supported individually or in pairs to cook a simple meal for themselves.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All of the students are valued and respected as individuals. They are all given the same opportunities regardless of ability, age or gender. The students are encouraged and helped to make personal choices and there is no assumption that any are incapable of doing this. Individual medical and dietary needs are met in practice. A range of festivals are celebrated marking cultural and religious days and there is an annual multi-cultural day with events throughout the waking day curriculum. The ethnicity of the staff team is culturally diverse and of mixed gender. Students are encouraged and supported to be part of the local community.

The Statement of Purpose provides good detailed information about how the home is organised and what it aims to provide for the children and young people. A student guide is made available using a personalised approach and written using symbols or a more suitable form of communication. Collectively these documents, and the website, provide a good range of information to enable parents and other interested parties to determine the purpose, ethos, values and objectives of the school.

Students are looked after by experienced, competent and trained care staff who have a good understanding of the needs of children and young people with autism. Staffing arrangements are good and are sufficient to meet the individual and group needs. High staffing ratios support the students and the service has recruited well to reduce the number of agency staff employed. Communication systems are effective and there are routine handovers between shifts, including the waking night teams and the education department.

The staff undertake a range of training that provides them with the skills, competencies and knowledge to provide a good standard of residential care and meet the needs of the students. Training starts with a two- week induction

programme which is followed up with a number of mandatory training sessions that include safeguarding, behaviour management, first aid, medication, understanding autism and fire awareness. Records indicate that 60% of the care team have completed NVQ at level 3 in the care of young people. At least six staff have achieved NVQ level 4 in management.

Staff speak highly of the training they receive, the slight deficit is in relation to managing the physical challenge of young adults and the senior management team are looking into a different accredited method to address this shortfall. A significant high number of accidents has occurred identifying injuries to staff, it is anticipated that an alternative method of physical intervention will reduce this number. The care staff are committed to ensuring that the students receive good quality care. They are supported by sound policies and procedures, supervision and team meetings. The management structure of the residential provision has had significant gaps over the last 12 months and the absence of a Registered Manager in post for some years. Staff report that they feel supported within their house structure but feel less connected with the senior management team. The head of school is in the process of applying to Ofsted to be the Registered Manager and will be supported by two deputy heads of care. It is anticipated that this structure will provide some consistency for the leadership and management of the residential provision.

There are some good monitoring systems in place, many are delegated across various departments within the school. The current system of monitoring lacks a sense of cohesion and therefore is not always effective and has the potential to fail to identify any shortfalls. Additional monitoring is undertaken by the trustees and comprehensive reports are produced identifying any action required where standards are not met.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
13	ensure that suitable arrangements are made for the recording, handling, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of any medicines received into the children's home (Regulation 21(1))	01/10/2010
9	ensure that the home is conducted in a manner which respects the privacy and dignity of children accommodated there (Regulation 11 (2)(a))	31/10/2010
16	ensure that a written record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of the investigation	31/10/2010

	(Regulation 24 (5))	
34	ensure that an individual is appointed to manage the children's home (Regulation 7(1))	31/10/2010
33	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 34)	31/10/2010

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- monitor the records of physical intervention to monitor compliance with the home's policy, procedure and guidance and to identify any patterns in incidents leading to disciplinary or restraint action becoming necessary (NMS 22.11)
- ensure that risk assessments are carried out, recorded in writing and regularly reviewed. In particular, those relating to the premises and grounds (NMS 26.2)
- ensure that positive steps are taken to keep children, staff and visitors safe from risk from fire and other hazards. In particular, centralise the records in order to promote consistency (NMS 26.1)
- ensure that the home provides adequate good quality domestic style facilities for those living on the premises consistent with the purpose and function of the home and is maintained in good order throughout. In particular, ensure locks on bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets are in working order and that students can operate the blind in their bedroom door for privacy when they choose (NMS 24.1)
- ensure that staff receive training and development opportunities that equip them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children and the purpose of the home. In particular, training in an approved method of physical intervention with older students for whom the current programme is insufficient (NMS 31.1)
- continue to work towards a minimum of 80% of all care staff having completed their NVQ at level 3 in care or equivalent. (NMS 29.5)