

Helen Allison School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Lucy Martin
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Date of last inspection	14/12/2009

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society, moving to its present site in Meopham in 1991. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders aged 5-19 years of age.

The school is situated on the edge of the village in a semi-rural area close to a park with an adventure playground, shops, mainstream schools, a library and railway station. The residential provision is situated several miles away from the school building on the Overcliffe at Gravesend.

The residential provision comprises two houses and two flats. All of the houses are Victorian and are within close proximity of each other.

The aim of the school is to 'provide education specifically geared to meet the needs of children and young people with an autistic spectrum disorder in a safe, stimulating and structured environment to enable each individual to reach his/her fullest potential and to prepare him/her for adulthood as full and equal members of society'.

At the time of this inspection the school has 69 students, 15 of whom are resident during the week. The school also operates a short break service for young people who do not attend the school.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced inspection during which all the standards identified by Ofsted as key areas were inspected. Helen Allison School provides outstanding standards of care in all the areas assessed, except achieving economic wellbeing, which is judged as good.

There is excellent leadership and management at the school and effective monitoring of practice. All those at the school, including the education, care and therapy teams, work exceptionally well together to ensure that the school has the welfare and happiness of students at its centre. The students' health needs are well met and they are kept safe from harm. There are excellent systems in place to manage and improve behaviour and to assess risk. Students enjoy the wide range of activities on offer and there are warm, professional relationships between the staff and students. The written plans outlining students support needs and how they will be met are of high quality and there are positive relationships with parents.

The school uses auditory monitoring devices in the residential houses and a

recommendation has been made to review this practice.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection three recommendations were made. The school was asked to ensure that the waking night staff employed hold a current first aid qualification. This training has been undertaken. The other two recommendations concerned the refurbishment and maintenance of the residential houses. Since the last inspection, the front of the houses have been repainted and the bathrooms in two of the houses have been redecorated and refitted to a good standard.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical, emotional and mental health needs of students are identified and met to a high standard. The school places a strong emphasis on providing a healthy environment and on promoting the health needs of each student. This includes encouraging students to eat a healthy diet, providing ample opportunities for physical activities and comprehensive guidance and support with health issues.

Parents are responsible for routine and specialist medical appointments and students are sent home if unwell. However, staff do take students to a local walk-in clinic if treatment is urgently required and appropriate records are maintained. A dentist visits the school on an annual basis.

There are excellent procedures and practice in place regarding the administration of medication. All staff receive training in administering medication and there is regular monitoring of the records. All medication is securely stored and additional safeguards are in place regarding the storage and administration of controlled drugs. Changes to medication are detailed and the medical record forms are of high quality. Parental consent to medication is sought which includes the names of all non prescribed medication used. Some students have medical conditions such as epilepsy, and there are clear procedures in place to ensure that emergency medication is carried by staff on trips outside of school or in the evenings.

Students' emotional and mental health needs are well met. Students receive support from the therapy teams at the school which includes psychologists, speech and language therapists and an occupational therapist. Referrals to appropriate specialist agencies, such as the child and adolescent mental health services, are made if necessary.

Students are provided with an excellent choice of healthy and varied foods. Lunch is eaten in the school dining room where there is a choice of a hot meal or a salad, baked potato or a sandwich daily, as well as a various puddings. Student are able to choose what they would like on a daily basis and special diets such as gluten free, are accommodated. Kitchen and residential staff receive regular training in food

safety and the school is part of the Healthy Schools programme.

The evening meal and breakfast is eaten in the residential houses. Students are actively involved in choosing the menu and one student helps prepare the meal for everyone in the house each day, supported by the staff on duty. Students generally like the food provided which is of good quantity. All meals are sociable and relaxed occasions, where staff and students eat together.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The students' welfare is given top priority and there are robust safeguarding practices which ensure that students are well protected at the school. All staff receive regular training in child protection and it is included in the induction of new staff. There are three staff at the school who have received additional training in safeguarding and they meet to discuss any incidents which give cause for concern. Clear records are maintained which include the actions taken and the liaison with other agencies involved in child protection.

The school takes any incident involving bullying seriously. Support is provided to those students involved and there has been effective work undertaken using 'social stories' to help make it clear to students that certain behaviour is unacceptable. All incidents of bullying are well recorded and there is effective working together with parents to help resolve these issues.

Boarders' privacy is well respected and they are able to make telephone calls in private. The school's complaints procedure is available to parents and the information is in picture form for students. There is a proactive response to concerns or complaints with an appropriate emphasis on informal resolution whenever possible. Comprehensive records are maintained of all complaints received, the action taken and the outcome.

A particular strength of this school is the effective way it supports and manages the behaviour of students.

Students are given clear expectations regarding behaviour and there is a consistent approach provided by the staff team. Relationships between the staff team and the students are excellent and there is constant praise for positive behaviour. The school has an educational psychologist and two assistant psychologists who work full time at the school. They provide excellent support regarding behaviour management supported by the other therapists on site. The assistant psychologists work most evenings in the residential houses and there are weekly interdepartmental review meetings to discuss students.

All staff receive training in managing behaviour which includes the use of physical intervention as a last resort. All incidents are well recorded and a log is maintained of those requiring a physical intervention. There are excellent monitoring arrangements in place for incidents requiring a physical intervention and a computer system is used

which can analyse trends and patterns. Written behaviour support plans are in place for some students and there is an excellent monthly behaviour bulleting written by the psychology team which includes the photograph of each student and provides details and updates of the support required. Sanctions are rarely used but any imposed are recorded and monitored.

The school takes health and safety issues seriously. The school and the residential houses are secure and safe due to the meticulous health and safety checks that are carried out. Regular fire drills take place as well as checks of the system. Gas safety checks and checks of the portable electrical appliances also take place on an annual basis. There are high quality risk assessments carried out regarding activities and for individual students. Some auditory monitoring systems (baby monitors) are used in the residential houses. These have been in place for some time, primarily for students with epilepsy, and are not currently included in risk assessments. A risk assessment would ensure that they continue to be required, are best practice and whether their use compromises the privacy of individual students.

Students are safeguarded by sound recruitment practices which ensure all staff are thoroughly vetted and checked prior to starting work at the school. A number of key staff have undertaken training in safer recruitment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The education, residential and therapy teams work together very effectively to encourage the students' development and achievement in all areas of their lives. For example, the residential staff also work in the classrooms and members of the psychology team regularly work in the residential houses as well at the main school site. The communication across teams is strong with weekly interdepartmental review meetings held for the staff to discuss students' progress. The residential staff are knowledgeable regarding the students' individual education plans and contribute fully to the annual review meeting.

The 24 hour curriculum has a significant input from the residential setting covering a range of social and independent living skills. All residential students take part in household tasks such as preparing meals, clearing away and loading the dishwasher. Photographs are used well to document these areas.

Students have opportunities to take part in an extensive range of activities. They are able to choose what they would like to do and regular trips include those to parks, bowling, ice skating and to a local youth club take place. Individual activities are also encouraged such as to the local scouts group. At the residential houses, there are computers available as well as outdoor space and a range of board games. There is an excellent system of risk assessment in place for activities to ensure that they are safely managed. Students say that they enjoy all the activities on offer and one parent commented 'I would highlight the real effort that the residential team make to keep my son active. He has been involved in lots of great activities.' A school

production of 'Oliver' took place during the inspection and all those students who wanted to be involved, took part.

Students receive outstanding levels of support from a number of staff at the school. There is access to a wide range of therapists onsite including full time psychologists, speech and language therapists and a part time occupational therapist. They all work well together to provide high levels of support to individual students. Extensive work is undertaken with students around communication and a number use communication aids. All residential students have a keyworker whose role it is to liaise between the school, their families and other professionals.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Much time is spent by staff ensuring that students are able to communicate their wishes and feelings. Various communication aids are used with students who have difficulty communicating verbally and staff working in the different areas of the school, are knowledgeable regarding their use. There is good use of 'communication passports' and work with modern technology such as applications for mobile telephones or computers. There is a flexible approach to ensure that each students' communication needs are well met.

Students are encouraged to make decisions about their lives. There is a school council and regular house meetings, circle times and social communication groups. All students are encouraged to give their views and to make day to day decisions around meals and activities. Other changes include to the décor and to improve privacy in the boy's toilets at the main school site.

The school has excellent processes for handling admissions and the transition to adult life. Home visits are made as well as visits to the school and residential houses and comprehensive information regarding prospective students is obtained before admission. A baseline assessment is completed within six months and provides detailed information regarding support needs. There is thorough transition planning and preparation to provide the best outcomes for students leaving the school.

The written plans outlining students support needs and how they will be met are of high quality. They include placement plans, residential pupil profiles and a residential care plan. Individual targets are written for the residential students which are regularly monitored. Pen pictures are written which give a brief overview of students with their photograph. Students' files are well maintained and up to date.

The staff maintain regular contact with parents and work to build positive relationships. There is a communication book which travels from home, to school and to the residential houses, to keep everyone informed of developments. Keyworkers speak regularly to parents by telephone. Parents are regular visitors to the school for events such as parents lunches and for school productions. An annual questionnaire is sent out to parents asking for their views and there is a real sense of positive

working relationships. Students are able to contact their families by telephone and/or e-mail.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarding accommodation at the school is of a good standard and is well suited to the needs of the students. It is located within walking distance of a shopping centre with all local amenities in easy reach. Most of the students have single bedrooms and there are a small number of rooms which two students share. Each house or flat has a lounge, dining room and a kitchen. The houses are homely, spacious and are in a good state of decoration and repair. Since the last inspection the exterior of the houses have been repainted and the bathrooms in two of the houses refurbished.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a comprehensive information including the statement of purpose and prospectus which provides clear information about the school's care principles and practice for residential students. New students are given a welcome booklet to the guide to the school which includes pictures as well as words. Parents are also provided with an informative booklet about the school.

There are excellent staffing levels in the houses at all times during the day when students are present and at night. It is usual that there is one member of staff to two students and some students have one to one staffing provided. There is a consistent and stable residential team who know the students well. Staff are enthusiastic about their work and are supportive of each other. Members of the senior leadership team regularly visit the houses and there are clear on call arrangements in place. Weekly team meetings take place in the houses and staff receive regular formal supervision from management. Staff say they feel well supported in their role.

New residential staff receive a comprehensive induction and have opportunities to shadow more experienced members of staff. Excellent training opportunities are provided with annual refresher courses as well as one off training sessions and national vocational qualifications. All the residential staff are trained to NVQ 3 level except the very newly appointed and some have NVQ 4. Students are looked after by very experienced, well trained and competent staff who understand their needs well.

There is strong and effective leadership and management of the school and of boarding. There is excellent monitoring of records and identification of patterns or issues requiring action. External monitoring is undertaken by the National Autistic Society who visit on a monthly basis. A comprehensive external audit is also completed on an annual basis.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Each student receives highly individualised care which is tailored to meet their needs. The school prompts students to think of others by taking part in fund raising activities for charity. A recent example of this was staff and students dressing up as clowns to raise money for Red Nose Day.

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...

- review the use of the auditory monitoring devices (baby monitors) in the residential houses. (NMS 26.3)