

North Hill House

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Date of last inspection | 20/01/2010 |

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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

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| 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

North Hill House School is part of the Priory Group, which operates a number of schools nationally for pupils with learning difficulties. The school is a purpose-built residential and day school for boys between the ages of seven to 18 who have Asperger's syndrome and associated learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection the school had 16 day pupils and 34 boarders. Post 16 pupils are educated at local further education colleges.

The school is set in its own grounds of about four acres. It offers a combination of seclusion and space, yet it is easily accessible to the centre of the bustling market town of Frome.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced key inspection took place over three days, covering all of the residential special school's key standards. This forms part of the annual inspection programme to examine the standard of care provided to young people.

The care practices established by the school ensure that outstanding outcomes are achieved for young people. Excellent standards of care is provided to young people. The experience of living at the school continues to make a positive and significant impact on the lives of young people socially, emotionally and educationally. This was endorsed by the questionnaires received prior to and comments made during the inspection by young people, their parents, observations made and records seen.

Improvements since the last inspection

Three recommendations were identified at the last inspection relating to: maintaining separate records for sanctions and restraints; staff vetting checks and carrying out half-termly monitoring visits. The Principal has taken prompt action to address these deficiencies to ensure the protection of young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people live in an environment where their health and emotional care needs are met. The staff team, in conjunction with the specialist support team, works hard to promote the health, welfare and well-being of young people. They provide young people with the necessary individual support to assist in developing their self-esteem

and dealing with any specific emotional and behaviour issues. The specialist support team comprises of an educational psychologist, trained counsellor, a speech and language therapist and occupational therapists. Young people's health care needs are primarily the responsibility of their parents. However, young people are fully supported to access the local general practitioner, dentist and opticians as a temporary residence for any emergency appointments. Medical consent forms and individual health care plans are also well established for young people. In addition to lessons in personal social and health education (PSHE), the counsellor provides support and advice to young people regarding a range of health care issues, such as personal relationships, sexual health, drugs and smoking.

Young people's welfare is safeguarded by the home's policies and procedures for administering medicines and providing treatment. Robust systems and practices are established for the safe storage, receipt, administration and the disposal of unwanted medicines. Staff receive training in the safe administration of medication and tend to administer all medication to young people. However, young people who are deemed competent are supported to keep and administer their own medication following a risk assessment.

Staff actively support and encourage young people to eat a healthy and varied diet. A satisfactory and varied six-weekly rotating menu is established which provides choices or alternatives at all mealtimes. Young people's likes and dislikes, together with any dietary needs, are well catered for. The menus and themed days held provide young people with the opportunity to explore different cultures. A selection of fresh fruit is readily available to them on a daily basis. There are opportunities for young people to undertake some cooking as well as making their own drinks and snacks, particularly in the evenings. Although young people's comments varied, most spoke positively about the quality and quantity of meals offered.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff actively promote the rights of young people by ensuring that their privacy and dignity are respected. Young people's information is kept secure and staff understand the need to keep their information confidential as well as being clear about the limits of maintaining confidentiality.

Clear policies and procedures are established for dealing with complaints which are effectively implemented. A number of complaints have been received, since the last inspection, from both young people and their parents. All concerns are taken seriously and are responded to and addressed without delay with good outcomes achieved for young people. The process of making a complaint is clearly understood by young people who are supported to raise any issues of concern openly. Young people are confident in discussing any issues with a range of staff within the school.

Young people live in an environment where their welfare is promoted and they are protected from abuse. Staff have a very good understanding of the needs of the

young people and how to safeguard them. The school rigorously follows the Local Safeguarding Children Board policies and procedures in relation to all potential or safeguarding referrals. All staff receive regular child protection training. The Principal, who is supported by the Head of Care, are the designated safeguarding officers for the school. Since the last inspection the school has liaised with the Local Safeguarding Children Board about a number of referrals or concerns. Robust records are maintained in relation to these which include all action taken and the outcomes achieved.

The school maintains a zero tolerance in respect to bullying and measures are taken to protect young people from bullying. An anti-bullying policy is established which is conveyed to young people. It is recognised by all concerned that bullying does occur from time to time but staff take prompt and effective action to address any incidents. Written records are maintained of all incidents of bullying. However, the school is currently reviewing its recording system to ensure that it records the action taken and whether the victim is satisfied with this.

There is a clear system for the reporting and recording of any event where young people go absent without authority. Individual risk assessments for young people and clear protocols are established with the local police. Since the last inspection there have only been a couple of incidents where young people have gone missing. However, staff respond appropriately to any absence to ensure that young people are returned safely at the earliest opportunity. Detailed records are maintained of all incidents. However, the current format used is under review to ensure that a more comprehensive record is established.

Young people are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement, reinforcement of clear boundaries and recognition of positive behaviour. Sanctions and physical intervention are also used when necessary with staff being trained in the use of physical intervention. Appropriate records are maintained for these methods of control. However, the current format used is under review to ensure that a more comprehensive record is established. The school maintains a range of detailed documents which provide staff with effective guidance on how to manage the behaviours of young people. The school has a 'chill out' room as well as two self study rooms which are used to provide young people with space and time to calm down. However, robust monitoring records are not maintained with regard to the use of these rooms. The design of the chill out room and one of the self study rooms do not provide adequate provision for staff to effectively monitor their use by young people.

The school has established clear health and safety policies and procedures to ensure that staff and young people are appropriately safeguarded. Positive steps are taken to keep young people and staff safe from the risk of fire and other hazards in accordance with health and safety and fire legislation and guidance. A tour of the premises identified no significant health and safety issues. Young people and staff regularly practise fire evacuation procedures and the various fire and health and safety records are kept up to date. Detailed risk assessments are carried out in respect to all activities undertaken by young people, to the building and with regard

to young people themselves.

Robust recruitment practices are now established for the protection of young people. New staff do not commence employment in the school until all the relevant checks are carried out.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The residential provision actively promotes and supports young people to obtain their educational potential.

Good communication systems and working arrangements are established between the teaching and residential staff. This enables care staff to contribute and participate in the educational progress of the young people and ensures that a cohesive and holistic approach is undertaken. Care and educational support workers make a significant contribution to young people's education and welfare. Individual education plans are well established. These list the statement objectives and targets of the young people and are reviewed annually. Work undertaken during the school day is encouraged and built on by the care staff, who assist young people with their homework when provided. Young people are provided with suitable facilities for this purpose.

The school provides young people with excellent opportunities to engage and participate in a range of activities both within the school and wider community. Trips out are also arranged for the young people. The school actively supports young people to maintain their specific hobbies and interests as well as to try new experiences. A good balance is maintained between free time and organised activities. Young people are actively involved in a range of fund raising activities for both the school and the wider community, including charities.

Young people receive exceptional individualised support to meet their needs. These are clearly identified in their health/placement plans and other associated documentation. These detail the strengths, progress, support and guidance that young people require. Young people can also access the range of therapists available within the school as well as an independent visitor.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school operates a culture of consultation where young people are encouraged and supported to make decisions and contribute to and influence the way the residential units are run. They are given every opportunity to express their views and opinions through a range of forums. These include weekly unit meetings and individual sessions with their pastoral support, as well as the opportunity to raise and discuss any issues on a day-to-day basis. A school council is also established. This forum provides young people with the opportunity to comment and propose changes

to aspects of the running of the school.

Young people live in a warm, welcoming, nurturing and supportive environment where positive and relaxed relationships exist between staff and young people. Staff celebrate the progress, successes and achievements made by young people and are very committed to their care. A friendly, caring and relaxed atmosphere has been created where young people can freely express their views about any issues which are listened to and acted on by staff. Staff undertake their duties in a caring, sensitive and professional manner and young people are relaxed and at ease in their company. Young people commented very positively about the care and support provided to them by the staff which is reiterated by their parents. The school works well with the young people's parents and other agencies to ensure that they are all kept informed of any incidents and progress made.

Young people's needs are fully assessed. Detailed individual health/placement plans and other associated documents provide staff with excellent guidance on how to effectively care for young people on a daily basis. These documents are subject to review to ensure that they remain relevant to their current needs. These also highlight young people's strengths, progress, targets and support needs. After the initial three monthly review, young people's placements are reviewed annually. Young people are fully supported and encouraged to attend and contribute to their statutory reviews. All other relevant parties are also invited to attend.

Staff are fully committed to supporting young people to maintain contact with their family members. Staff also retain excellent lines of communication and support between themselves and young people's parents. This ensures that all parties are kept informed about young people's well-being and progress. Young people have access to payphones which are sited in each of the residential units as well as personal mobile phones. Parents commented that the school is effectively managed and spoke extremely highly about the care provided to their sons. They are also very appreciative of the high level of support and guidance provided to them. They felt strongly that their sons are treated fairly and with respect and the boarding experience makes a positive contribution to their sons' personal development.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are fully supported to acquire a range of independent skills through the life skills programme which is well established by the school. Preparation for leaving care starts as soon as young people begin attending the school in line with its stated ethos and structure. However, prominence is given to this when young people reach certain units within the school. This also includes the post 16 accommodation where they are expected to assume greater responsibilities. Opportunities are provided for the development of knowledge and skills needed by young people for their future living arrangements.

Young people live in one of four residential units within the main school with the post

16 house off site. These are maintained to a high standard, being clean, tidy and comfortable. They are also well furnished and decorated. Attention has been given to creating warm, homely, caring and supported environments for young people. The units provide good communal space to meet the individual and collective needs of young people.

Young people are provided with their own bedrooms, although two bedrooms within the school are designated as twin rooms. However, these tend to be used as single bedrooms. Young people are encouraged to personalise their bedrooms to their own tastes. Young people are also provided with a lockable drawer within their bedrooms but not all of them have chosen to avail themselves of this option. Locks are not fitted to young people's bedroom doors and some young people expressed concern about not being able to keep their possessions safe. This concern was brought to the attention of the school to review whether further action is required to ensure the safety of young people's possessions.

Excellent bathing and toilet facilities are provided to young people. All bedrooms, except those accommodated in the post 16 accommodation, benefit from having en-suite facilities. Additional bath and toilet facilities are also available to young people within the main school. Suitable locks are fitted to these doors to promote the privacy and dignity of young people. In addition suitable laundry facilities are provided to meet the needs of the school.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Diversity and equality are promoted very effectively in all aspects of the service. This is very evident in the work they do to counteract the discrimination and sometimes the exclusion that the pupils with autistic spectrum disorder may have previously experienced. The school also actively promotes the inclusion of young people in the local community and wider society.

A clear Statement of Purpose together with a range of other relevant documents which includes a New Kids handbook and information for parents/guardians are established. These documents accurately describe the level of service young people can expect to receive and how they will be cared for and gives them clear information about the school.

The school is committed to providing excellent numbers of staff on duty throughout the day to meet the individual and collective needs of young people. Higher staffing levels are provided within Willow, Elm and Beech units with lower staffing levels within Maple and the post 16 house. This ensures that the specific ethos and structure within those units are well met and also takes into account the safeguarding and behavioural management issues of young people. The school ensures that there are a minimum of five waking night staff on duty to cover the whole of the residential provision. The school continues to provide young people with

continuity and consistency of care from a stable, experienced and very committed staff team. Management cover is always readily available throughout the day and night.

Young people are looked after by a staff team who are trained and competent to meet their specific needs. At the time of the inspection, 90% of the care staff team hold the National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in the care of children and young people or the equivalent. New staff are provided with a thorough induction programme. Staff continue to be supported and encouraged to update their knowledge and expertise by undertaking a wide range of courses which consist of both mandatory and more specialist training. The residential staff commented very positively about training opportunities available to them, some of which includes joint training days with education staff.

Young people are looked after by a staff team who are themselves properly managed and supported in safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Effective systems are established to ensure good communication is maintained between different staff disciplines within the school to ensure young people receive consistency of care. Regular staff meetings and daily handover meetings are also held within the residential units to ensure that staff keep up to date with regard to all issues pertaining to their individual units and the young people. Staff feel well supported and receive both formal and informal staff supervision as well as annual appraisals. These systems ensure that the ongoing performance and development of staff are regularly monitored. However, due to sickness annual appraisals and formal staff supervision are not currently undertaken at the recommended intervals.

The Principal, who is supported by a strong management team, demonstrates effective leadership and a clear vision for the school. Clear lines of accountability are established throughout the staffing structure of the school which also enables them to effectively monitor the care provided to young people. This also ensures that young people receive stability and consistency of care. Staff are highly committed to providing the best level of care and personal support to young people and are consistently looking at ways of improving their practice.

The organisation ensures that the care and welfare of young people is now continually monitored. Independent unannounced monthly visits are carried out. Reports are produced outlining these visits and any actions needed to improve the outcomes for young people.

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 arrangements established to the chill and self study rooms to ensure that all parts of these rooms can be seen by staff and that robust recording

systems are established for their use (NMS 10.6)

- review the use of not providing suitable locks to young people's bedrooms (NMS 24.11)
- ensure that all staff receive one-to-one formal supervision every half term and annual appraisals. (NMS 30.2 and 6)