

Sunnydown School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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 is a residential and day school for boys aged 11 to 16 years, who have an emotional or learning difficulty. The school is fully maintained by the Local Education Authority and currently has 70 learners, of whom 34 are weekly boarders. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs and a number have social communication disorders, such as Asperger's Syndrome. The boarding accommodation is separated into two areas; the juniors reside in the main school building and seniors occupy the first floor of a teaching block. The school is situated in a residential area, with shops, community facilities and public transport services close by. The grounds include a basket ball court, all-weather sports pitch, raised garden beds and a play area.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Boarders frequently join this school presenting as vulnerable and timid young boys. Throughout their stay, a dedicated and motivated whole school team works in close partnership with parents, the boarders and associated professional agencies to produce confident, capable young men who are hungry to move on into the next stage of their lives. The care team works extremely hard to view each boarder positively as a unique individual, and builds upon their self esteem from day one. An excellent balance is struck in terms of providing a nurturing and safe environment which also encourages self exploration, and learning through appropriate risk taking. Boarders learn through making mistakes and receiving the support they need. Parental comments include, 'without this school, my son wouldn't be the person he is today', and, 'this school has been the making of my son'. Success stories include leavers realising their ambitions by securing further education placements, joining the general work force and setting up their own businesses. Leavers often return to the school to deliver talks and lectures to current pupils. Such factors are inspirational.

No recommendations have been made following this inspection visit.

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made at the previous inspection visit on 18/01/2010. The school has continued however, to instigate its own improvements in terms of increased boarder consultation, additional safeguarding mechanisms and widespread improvements with regards to the physical premises.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders thrive in an environment which promotes and protects their physical, emotional and medical well being. Explicitly clear policy and procedural guidance is stringently implemented in practice by the care team. Parents and carers understand that they retain the overall responsibility for their sons' medical, dental and optical care. Such appointments and ongoing treatments are usually conducted when the boarders are at home; however the school remains acutely aware of such interventions and vigorously supports these.

Care staff receive the training they need to ensure the boarders are well supported; their first aid and medication training is up to date. The medical room is secure and appropriately equipped. Boarders commend the staff for making them feel better when they are unwell. They say, 'you are always looked after', and, 'the staff really care about us'.

Medical records are appropriately completed and monitoring systems are robust. Safe, competent practice ensures the boarders' medicines are safely stored and administered. Staff take this role very seriously and are quick to advise parents and carers of any health concerns.

Medical conditions and needs are carefully researched through excellent liaison with parents. Staff across the school are sensitively advised of allergies and special health needs in order that boarders are protected. They are kept safe and confidentiality is assured. The medical room is staffed throughout the school day and boarders know exactly where to report, and to whom, in the event of feeling unwell.

In surveys, boarders commend the school's meal provision. Comments include, 'the food is great', 'I love the food here' and 'there are so many choices'. Menus are varied and the school goes to great lengths to measure the nutritional content of meals. There is excellent liaison with the boarders to ensure they have a real say in the choices offered. The catering team, led by an experienced chef, are passionate about providing food of the highest quality. The team effectively uses its budget to purchase good quality produce from local grocers and butchers. Boarders say they can always have additional helpings; they are never hungry. Meal times are sociable and relaxed occasions in a quiet, well equipped dining room. Boarding and day pupils sit together and they all assist with serving and tidying away.

Cookery is a very strong and popular pastime throughout the school. Boarders routinely practice their skills within the boarding provision and the main school kitchen. They have frequent opportunities to cook for themselves and each other. Within the last year, a new purpose built catering facility means that every pupil now receives such lessons on a weekly basis; and after the school day Other schools have been invited to visit to take part in friendly cookery competitions. Parents are also invited to come for themed lunches. These celebrate different cultural foods and are also used to raise money for various charities. Thus, pupils are encouraged to

develop a social and moral conscience whilst practising their practical life skills.

Boarders demonstrate a superb understanding of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. This is delivered through formal teaching, the boarding life skills programme and excellent staff role modelling. Structured activities during and after the school day include numerous physical activities, such as football, basketball and fully utilising the additional sports equipment held at the school. Boarders speak very knowledgably about the importance of making informed lifestyle choices. They fully understand the risks associated with smoking, alcohol use and drugs and make comments including, 'I will never smoke' and 'I've got friends outside school who make silly choices, not me'. Incidents of boarders engaging in such activities at school are very rare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are assured that confidential information about them is only shared with those who need to know. Staff members follow very clear policy guidance in practice and boarders appreciate this.

The school enjoys very positive and pro-active relationships with boarders, parents and carers, and the local community. All stakeholders are actively encouraged to raise their concerns and anxieties at the earliest possible opportunity. Boarders say, 'you just tell the staff if anything is bothering you' and, 'we are asked every day if something is worrying us'. Notice boards throughout the school advise boarders of the school's complaints' process, and boarders demonstrate a clear understanding about this. The details of the independent visitor, the local authority and Ofsted are widely advertised. A separate formal complaints register is held. This is robustly monitored; however no such formal complaints have been made since 2009. Parents say, 'I just speak to any staff member' and 'they respond immediately'.

Boarders are effectively protected from possible sources of harm and abuse. Child protection arrangements are explicitly clear. Staff at every level receive ongoing training and guidance commensurate with their own roles and responsibilities. Procedures are regularly reviewed and the school is taking pro-active measures to ensure the designated child protection officer hands over this role to the head of boarding well in advance of his planned retirement. The local authority receives referrals and consultations from the school in an appropriate and timely manner. The school is open and transparent with such external agencies, in the very best interests of protecting the boarders.

Boarders are unanimous in their view that instances of bullying are extremely rare. One comment relates to an historic incident which was, 'immediately sorted out'. The school remains conscious that instances could occur and to this end, staff training and procedural guidance is routinely updated. The quality of relationships between the boarders across all age ranges is exemplary. Younger boarders look to their older peers for appropriate advice and guidance. Boarders across all ages choose to spend

their free time together; they enjoy each others' company. Every boarder is uniquely valued and this creates an atmosphere within which the topic of bullying is an alien concept.

The school enjoys excellent attendance figures. Boarders frequently say that they would like to board more often than they actually do, 'because it's such good fun' and 'it's really safe here'. Others say, 'I like to go home but I also like being here'. A clear missing person's procedure is understood by the staff team; however there has been no cause to use it.

The general behaviour and conduct of the boarders is commended; they are a credit to themselves and the school. Staff are excellent role models; they treat each other and the boarders with unconditional positive regard and respect. This creates a culture whereby positive conduct and personal achievements are celebrated and encouraged at every possible opportunity. Boarders feel good about themselves and consequently they behave well. Appropriate written behaviour management guidance is supported through the provision of external training, which includes the use of physical restraint, should this be needed. No such intervention has been necessary for over five years; and the implementation of approved sanctions such as early bed times and the loss of privileges, are equally rare.

Boarders enjoy living in a safe and secure physical environment. The accommodation is private and secure from public access. Generic premises risk assessments are robust and the governing body scrutinises all aspects of health and safety. Routine health and safety checks, including electrical appliance testing are diligently completed by the premises manager and bursar. Patterns and trends relating to accidents are monitored and major works are only completed by reputable contractors who have been subject to appropriate checks. Boarders are fully conversant with fire safety guidance. Evacuations are routinely practised and fire fighting equipment and systems are regularly maintained and serviced.

The recruitment practice of the school is solid and robust. Boarders are assured of protection. Staff retention is excellent; hence new starters are rare. However, the few recent appointments which have been made have been subject to rigorous vetting processes. The school renews Criminal Records Bureau checks on all of its staff on a three yearly basis. This practice goes beyond the local authority guidance but the school believes it to be in the best interests of protecting the boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive precisely the help and support they need to complete their homework and additional school assignments. Dedicated time is set aside each evening in a quiet and conducive environment, and the care team and teachers are available to provide individual support to the boarders. Care plans clearly feature individual education targets; hence key workers are fully aware of the specific needs of the boarders they are responsible for. Staff across both disciplines effectively

communicate using formal and informal mechanisms. Pertinent information is seamlessly shared, resulting in excellent outcomes for the boarders. In line with good parenting, the care team ensures that boarders end their day suitably relaxed, naturally tired and in positive spirits, ready to start the following school day.

Boarders thoroughly enjoy the wide range of activities which are made available during the school day and evening. Boarders say they are routinely consulted with regards to new ideas about activities and this keeps them fresh and interesting. An excellent balance is struck between on and off-site activities; hence local and wider community resources are very well utilised. A good number of boarders report very positively about the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Older boarders are encouraged to think for themselves and to develop and maintain their own personal interests. During the early evening boarders enjoy freedom of movement throughout the school and fully utilise all of its facilities, including sports equipment, the playground, common rooms and kitchens. Discrete staff supervision ensures appropriate protection and safety.

Excellent support mechanisms ensure that boarders can go to a number of trusted adults for the help they need. Key worker relationships are very positive; and boarders say they can approach any member of staff with a problem or difficulty. Teachers are routinely available outside of the school day and the independent advocate is well known by the boarders. Care plans distinctly feature the very personal and individual needs of each boarder.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are actively encouraged to take advantage of the various consultation systems in place. Two way communication is very strong. Boarders really value their school council, which is represented across all year groups. Responses to sensible requests are swift; boarders have a real influence upon decisions. They say, 'you can make suggestions in lots of ways, you can write them down or just tell a member of staff'. Boarders believe they are effectively listened to and their confidence in communicating with adults excels as a direct result.

Boarders join the school in a planned and structured manner. Thorough assessment processes ensure placements are offered only if the school is able to meet the needs of the individual. Prospective boarders receive clear information and are warmly welcomed by more established peers. If necessary, a phased introduction into the boarding provision is agreed in order to minimise anxiety.

Boarders approaching school leaving age attend a transition review which explores the help, guidance and support they might need. Although nervous about their next steps, older boarders present as ready and excited and many return to the school years later to give talks and advice to current pupils. The whole school actively celebrates the achievements of its leavers, and their successes inspire the younger ones.

Boarders enthusiastically contribute to their personal care plans and review these with their key workers often. Such plans include personal likes and dislikes, aspirations, targets and the things they need help with. Progress is clearly tracked on a frequent basis, as well as through the formal annual review process. Boarders are assured of receiving the support they need to make continued, steady progress.

Boarders can easily contact their parents and carers while staying at school. The majority of boarders have their own mobile phones and good access to email contact. In addition, the school has two mobile phones available for the boarders, which they can use to make calls in private. Parents commend the care team for the regular contact that they maintain as key workers. They say, 'I'm always kept updated', 'I know exactly what is going on for my son' and 'my son is usually too busy enjoying himself, so I rely on the staff to keep me updated, which they do'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders run to the boarding provision at the end of the school day, ready and excited to commence their activities. They change into casual clothing and are encouraged to tidy away their school clothes appropriately. They are expected to bring personal items they need while at school. Responsibility is encouraged. The care team keeps and distributes necessary supplies and older boarders have good independent access to the local shops.

Boarders begin the school's unique Skills for Life programme in Year 7. Throughout their time at school, they benefit from a wide range of activities aimed at developing independence skills in a range of domestic activities, budgeting and practical life skills, such as car maintenance and completing application forms. This aspect is innovative, fresh and exciting. Boarders are given real and appropriate opportunities to learn new skills, make mistakes and begin to think for themselves. The school is passionate about its enabling culture.

Boarders fully appreciate the excellent standard of accommodation provided by the school. Junior and senior boarders are separately housed. Both houses are immaculately cleaned and very well maintained. Bedrooms are spacious, brightly decorated to personal taste, and secure from any form of public intrusion. Bathrooms ensure excellent privacy and boarders know exactly which staff are on duty at night. Junior boarders like to bring in their own personal items, such as bedding and treasured possessions. Seniors are very proud of having personally decorated their rooms, and this includes making their own curtains and soft furnishings. They leave school very well equipped with a strong work ethic and the ability to live within their economic means.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Parents, boarders and all other stakeholders know exactly what to expect from the school because its written literature is accurate and regularly updated. Parents say the staff never tire of explaining things, no matter how often they are asked. One parent commented, 'the school helps me as much as my son!'

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Boarders come from a range of social and economic backgrounds and some have additional learning needs. The staff team actively celebrate difference and encourage boarders to be respectful and accepting. Different faiths and religions are explored through lessons, the celebration of religious festivals, assemblies, naturally occurring discussions and food.

The energetic and motivated leadership style of the headteacher and head of care impacts positively upon staff morale. Comments from the care team include, 'this is an amazing place because of our headteacher and head of care', 'I couldn't think of working anywhere else' and 'it's all about the boys'. The long standing staff team provide stability for the school. Safe, consistent working practice is assured. Boarders are well known and they receive the care and guidance they need.

The care team receives regular, meaningful supervision. There is whole school training for safeguarding, first aid and fire safety. Boarders further benefit because the care team also receive appropriate additional training courses relevant to the boarders' needs. All of the care team have completed the National Vocational Qualification award at either level 3 or 4. An additional exhaustive training list includes communication, counselling and understanding behaviour. The competence of this collective team is strengthened each year.

The school has very strong and active governance. The governing body comprises experienced members who bring a variety of skills and expertise; some are also current parents, and they are frequent visitors. The ongoing welfare of the boarders is also explicitly monitored on a regular basis by the local authority Standard 33 visitor. The chair of the board of governors is highly valued by the school and demonstrates a keen desire to improve the outcomes for the boarders.