

Inspection report for children's home

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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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The centre is registered as a secure children's home, operated by a local authority and is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure care and accommodation. Education is provided on site in a separate purpose built building. There are four living units available, although only three are in use at this time.

Facilities available for young people's use include; an artificial surface sports pitch, a sports hall, gym, garden areas and a courtyard containing a tennis court.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This inspection has the purpose of informing the Secretary of State on the continuing suitability for this provision to operate as a secure unit to restrict children's liberty.

The centre has continued to develop positively since the last inspection. A streamlined senior management team are committed to driving the centre forward and are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses. A development plan is in place which details the proposed actions to meet identified targets.

A reduction in the number of young people accommodated has enabled some restructuring of staffing to occur and this has resulted in a stable and consistent staff group being available to work with young people. At the time of inspection the centre was calm, with good relationships in place between staff and young people who knew the expectations of behaviour and the boundaries set. Staff know the young people well and are creative in managing negative behaviour utilising the principles of restorative justice.

The centre provides good individualised care and young people feel safe and are safe. There is an outstanding process for monitoring all incidents at the centre using the recently installed CCTV system. This ensures that any area for staff development in practice can be identified and addressed without delay.

There is an excellent activity and enrichment programme in operation and mobility is used imaginatively as part of the comprehensive resettlement programme.

Areas for development include the addition of some information to the young people's guide and medical records. While formal education provided at the centre has continued to develop in a positive manner, further work is required to ensure the pace of improvement is sustained.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the education policy for teaching and learning is implemented fully by sharing best practice. (NMS 8.4)
- improve the quality of additional learning support by providing specialist training for Learning Support Assistants in the provision of literacy and numeracy support. Take action to ensure that there is a timetable of regular literacy and numeracy support sessions for young people who need extra help. (NMS 8.4)
- review and revise the arrangements for governance so that the current pace of improvement in the quality of the provision is maintained. Ensure that the school improvement plan is implemented fully with the continued support of the local authority (NMS 8.5)
- ensure that young people's written record of medication and treatment contains full details of any known allergies to prescribed medication or methods of treatment. (NMS 6.15)
- ensure the young person's guide to the centre includes details of how a young person can contact their independent reviewing officer and the children's rights director. (NMS 13.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Young people at the centre receive care in an individualised manner. Generic assessments are not used and all action plans in place are written in a way which includes an understanding of each young person's diverse background needs. All staff are aware of identified needs and the associated work required. Key workers ensure that the reasons that brought the young people into secure care are addressed and that they are aware of how this links into their targets. All young people spoken with confirmed the work they were doing with key workers. Young people who are remanded are helped to understand court processes and assisted to prepare themselves. All of this work helps young people to develop self confidence and increase their communication and coping skills.

There are very good multi agency arrangements in place to support young people to enjoy good health, and all assessed needs are met. A full range of emotional, physical and physiological support is available either from the nurse support available on site or by the use of external agencies. Staff support young people to eat healthily and encourage exercise. The provision available enables young people to enjoy good health and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

A healthy balanced diet is provided for all young people. A menu is available from which they are able to make choices of meals. Options are available to meet any individual dietary needs. Young people are able to eat healthily and make informed choices. The majority of meals are taken in a central dining room, this allows young people to experience socially positive mealtimes.

An outstanding enrichment and activity provision assists young people to have a positive view of themselves and what they can achieve. Many of the sessions undertaken include contact with external groups such as a hospice, disabled sport teams and the police who visit to coach football skills. This enables young people to learn about others and have an understanding and contribute to a wider community.

Young people are able to contribute towards the running of the centre in a number of ways and are consistently consulted. There is a young persons' council where representatives from the living units can put forward any points raised. Feedback is given to the representatives by the manager or a member of the senior management team to all requests or issues. Daily meetings are also held on each of the individual living units. Additionally a 'can I have a word please?' form can be filled in and submitted to a manager to make suggestions for improvements. Effective and established processes are in place to enable full consultation for young people.

There are very good arrangements in place for young people to keep in contact and maintain positive links with families and friends. Telephones are available on each living unit and letters can be sent home by young people. Encouragement is also given to family members to visit. Key workers also keep in regular contact with parents, updating them on progress regularly and encouraging them to attend reviews and meetings. Young people benefit from the arrangements in place.

The work undertaken to prepare young people for life outside the centre is excellent, There is good support available relating to preparation for future placement and this

area is a strength of the centre. All young people have a defined individual resettlement plan and there is a dedicated worker who oversees all of the work carried out. Life skills training is carried out in the centre and a range of packages ensure that young people are able to learn about cooking and domestic chores. Some work is also carried out in relation to budgeting and living independently, however on occasions this is done on an ad hoc basis and does not form part of recorded sessions undertaken. Mobility is used imaginatively and young people are able to visit a number of community projects such as horse sanctuaries, places of worship and homeless charities. Visits are also undertaken to colleges and schools to prepare a young person for leaving. The opportunities available ensure that young people develop skills that will aid them in the future and enhances their knowledge and understanding of adult life.

Education outcomes for young people are satisfactory. Over the last six months the number of qualifications achieved by young people has increased significantly and is now satisfactory. Until recently the school offered only qualifications which were attainable within extremely short timescales, mainly at entry level, that do not provide sufficient challenge for all young people. Managers are now taking action to provide more substantial and meaningful qualifications that will help young people to progress to further education and employment. For example, young people capable of achieving qualifications at foundation and intermediate level are now following appropriate courses.

Young people who are capable, and whose length of stay in the centre is long enough, are able to commence GCSE courses in a range of subjects. Managers also support well those young people who were studying courses prior to their arrival in custody to continue with their studies. Six young people completed 22 GCSE examinations this year and this is significant in allowing them to prepare for the next stage in their education. Young people value greatly the opportunity the school provides to complete GCSE courses.

Overall young people make satisfactory progress at school. In some lessons, such as in physical education, art and design and in English, they produce work that reflects that seen in mainstream schools. In cookery young people produce good practical work but their written work is simplistic. However, in too many lessons the lack of challenge in the work set results in lower standards.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **good**.

Young people enjoy positive and meaningful relationships with staff. They are cared for by staff who are aware of their individual needs and take into account their wishes and feelings. Two young people said that 'staff respect me and take care of me'. Young people are encouraged by staff to engage in respectful interactions with the adults caring for them, their peers and visitors to the centre. The focus on understanding rights and responsibilities provides a solid basis for young people to accept responsibility for their actions and to respond to the boundaries set by staff.

Young people's needs are comprehensively and effectively assessed. Each young person has a detailed and individualised care and sentence plan in place. Clear targets are set and agreed at initial planning meetings and subsequent reviews. All agreed targets and direct work carried out is realistic and dependent upon the length of time the young person is at the centre. Key workers have an active role in direct work with young people. They work through offending behaviour or active citizenship programmes which have been identified for individual young people. They also discuss issues of behaviour, family contact and preparation for reviews or court hearings. Young people enjoy the time spent individually with staff and feel they respond to them if they are feeling low or struggling with a concern or worry.

Staff understand and are supportive of young people when things are not working out as they would wish and attempt to help them see the reasons for decisions that are outside of their control. When appropriate staff will support young people in challenging decisions, usually linked to planning for their future. Support is also provided by the independent advocates who regularly visit the centre.

There is a good focus on group work as a means of helping young people understand a range of issues, such as sexual health, substance misuse, implications of fatherhood and sexual orientation. There are groups for young people prior to resettlement, enrichment activities that raise awareness about disability and community based projects that provide young people with opportunities to give back to the community. One young person who has been involved with some community based activities said, 'I have changed since I came here'.

There are good processes in place for the monitoring of all aspects of care and placement planning and evaluating aspects of interventions both group and individual. The centre is continually reviewing and revising what works with young people and thinking creatively as to how programmes can be improved. Recent developments have included the drawing together of external professionals who provide services in the community for young people on a range of relevant topics. This group of external professionals are now contracted to work at the centre with young people and provide support to staff. The next phase of their involvement involves providing an outreach mentoring service to those young people for whom it is deemed appropriate and who are located in the local area upon discharge. This is an excellent initiative.

The views and wishes of young people are routinely sought and are integral to the individual planning processes. Young people's views are also sought on the day to day operation of the centre. The boy's council has recently been reviewed and

restructured to ensure young people feel they can influence the running of the centre and make suggestions for improvement. They are now routinely informed of the outcome of discussions managers have about their suggestions. Several young people gave examples of how they felt they have been able to influence things at the centre; these include: suggestions for changes to the respect scheme, menu planning, and the quality of furniture in the living units.

Complaints are managed effectively. Young people demonstrate a good understanding of the complaints system and how to access it. They have free access to complaints forms which can bypass centre staff and be sent directly to an independent source, if felt necessary. However, most young people say that issues and concerns are sorted out directly with staff on their unit. Systems are in place to monitor complaints which culminate in quarterly meetings held with the local authorities' head of children's complaints which monitor, review and assess all complaints made. This layer of external monitoring has been introduced within the last year. Young people also have access to an independent advocate who visits their own unit weekly. They often support young people with complaints and a representative from the advocacy service is invited to attend the quarterly monitoring meetings.

There is a robust and comprehensive system in place to identify and address young people's health needs. Nursing staff carry out a full assessment of health needs within 24 hours of admission. Referrals are made, as appropriate, to the local general practitioner, the dentist, optician, substance misuse staff and mental health services. All young people have individual health care plans in place. Nursing staff work closely with centre staff and external medical professionals to ensure young people's health needs are identified and addressed. This includes any shortfalls in their immunisations.

Nursing staff make care staff aware of any significant health issues young people might have. Information is shared with the consent of young people. The system in most circumstances works well and information shared is available to care staff. However, there was a health issue with one young person for whom a serious allergy was identified, but this was not consistently reflected throughout relevant documents including risk assessments. The recording systems in this instance were not sufficiently robust to ensure all relevant information was available to all that require to know.

There has been a recent disruption to the mental health services available to the centre. These were formerly provided by a Primary Care Trust but were not meeting the expectations of the centre. Managers at the centre had no choice but to attempt to find an alternative provision. A temporary transitional arrangement is in place until a more substantial service agreement can commence with a new provider. The aim is to ensure appropriate mental health services are consistently available for young people and support is provided to staff.

Good attention is given to promoting a healthy lifestyle and health eating. Food provided is of a good quality and there is reasonable variety with healthy options.

Staff encourage young people to think about the food they are eating and promote exercise to help them keep fit and deal with stress. Young people are able to influence menu planning and confirm that usually they have reasonable choice. This was not the case for one young person during the inspection, who by his own admission was a 'fussy eater'. However, the catering manager spoke with the young person to ascertain his preferences and confirmed that if he felt the choice was limited he should raise this immediately and this will be addressed.

Young people's medicines are securely stored. All staff who administer medicines have now received training by the centre's nurse. In response to a previous recommendation a policy is available for young people to manage their own medicines, subject to risk assessment. Although the policy is in place practice has not yet changed to encourage young people to manage their own medicines.

The centre actively supports and promotes young people's cultural and religious needs. Interpreters are available for young people for whom English is not their first language. During the inspection an interpreter spent a considerable amount of time supporting a young person. One of the advocates described work with a young man who was returning to his country of origin. She said: 'his key worker was brilliant with him. Staff worked in a calm and patient way with him and every attempt was made to meet his individual needs'.

An Imam visits the centre every Friday and spends time with young people of Muslim faith and others' who are interesting in talking with him. He is an excellent resource for the centre, particularly as he is comfortable and aware of issues in custodial settings. The centre is currently working out how to manage the period of fasting during Ramadan which will commence shortly. At least seven young people of Muslim faith have indicated that they wish to fast during this period and excellent arrangements and strategies are being put in place to ensure they are effectively supported during this time. The young people are also involved in plans for the celebration of Eid at the end of Ramadan, which will involve the whole centre. A separate celebration for young people with their families is also being planned.

Although there are sessions to raise awareness of diversity with young people during lessons in school and during enrichment activities, these issues are not an everyday topic in general discussions with young people. For example there was little evidence of staff taking an opportunity to remind young people of the religious festivals taking place around the world or general news items related to diversity.

The centre is maintained to a good standard and there have been recent positive improvements to the furnishings and decoration. An architect working on behalf of the Department for Education visited the centre and has identified that replacement of the bedroom doors in the living units would greatly improve both security and the environment.

Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall the quality varies significantly across subjects. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations for what young people will achieve and how they will behave. The teacher plans a good range of

learning activities with deadlines for completion that ensure that the lesson moves at a good pace. Young people are motivated to learn as the tasks they have to complete are set in a logical order that increases in complexity. The teacher checks regularly that they understand what they are doing and this gives young people the confidence to continue. These teachers promote a very productive ethos in which young people learn to work to high standards and are very keen to achieve as much as they can. Young people enjoy these lessons and they make good and often very good progress. However, more could be done to record this good progress to set targets for future lessons.

For example, young people made very good progress and produced high quality work in an English lesson on the topic of persuasive writing. The teacher began the lesson with a brief explanation of the concepts involved and supported the young people to take part in a discussion on how to complete a letter with persuasive content. The young people made some very good suggestions and then planned their approach thoroughly before writing a draft letter, which they were then motivated to complete in their own time. Young people's commitment, enthusiasm and behaviour in this lesson were excellent.

However, in some lessons the work set by the teacher provides too little challenge for the young people. Teachers do not set the learning activities into a context and as a consequence the young people fail to see the relevance of the work. Some teachers use printed worksheets or read from textbooks which results in a lack of variety for the young people. These lessons lack pace and as the young people do not have enough to do their behaviour deteriorates, sometimes to an unacceptable level. In some lessons teachers do not have enough information on young people's prior attainment or ability and as a result the work they set is too easy or too hard. In a minority of lessons young people are allowed to play music which is loud and is distracting for the other members of the group.

Learning support assistants are effective in supporting young people to remain focused on their work. However, on occasions they are overly-directive and provide too much assistance, preventing the young people from solving problems for themselves.

Managers work well, within the constraints of the small number of young people in the unit, to provide a satisfactory curriculum. A core of subjects that provides continuity from the national curriculum is provided, but more work is needed to ensure that the accreditation courses lead to is appropriate for all subjects. The timetable has been revised and is now planned well, with appropriately shorter lessons and a good variety of subjects delivered during the school day. The use of external agencies to enhance the curriculum in areas such as dance and drama is limited.

Although the range of vocational provision offered is limited managers have started to implement plans to introduce more opportunities for 'work-based learning' available in the centre. A small number of young people are gaining valuable knowledge and skills in painting and decorating and catering. Two young people

were making very good progress in re-decorating one of the bedrooms in the unit to a good standard. As a result of the teachers good use of coaching and questioning techniques the young people were able to speak very knowledgeably and articulately about the skills they were developing. At the time of the inspection this very good work was not leading to accreditation but well-advanced plans to resolve this are in place.

Young people receive satisfactory support and guidance during their time at school. On their first day in the unit they commence a week long induction to education which begins with an initial assessment of their levels of literacy and numeracy. This induction helps them to settle quickly into school. Given that many have not previously attended school regularly this is significant in beginning to change their attitudes to learning. The information gathered during induction about young people's prior attainment is used to ensure that they are placed in a group that matches their level of ability. However, initial assessment is not carried out with enough rigour to ensure that teachers are able to plan learning resources that meet the widely varying needs of the young people. For example, some young people are given materials that they are unable to read and in other lessons the work is too easy.

Young people identified to be in need of additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy are not provided with sufficient support to help them to catch up. Learning support assistants have not had sufficient training to be able to provide the one-to-one support needed and the lack of senior specialist expertise, in for example teaching reading, means that they do not receive the guidance and support needed to carry out this aspect of their role effectively.

Young people receive good support from education and care staff to welcome them into school in the morning and to encourage them to participate fully in all lessons. Behaviour at school is generally good. Their attendance is very good as managers quickly follow up those who refuse to come to school in the morning and this usually results in the young person attending education for some of the day. The number of young people returning to their rooms during the day due to poor behaviour has fallen significantly and is now low. Care staff and teachers work together well to ensure that young people arrive punctually and that they move around school calmly between lessons. Relationships between staff and young people are generally mutually respectful. Most staff challenge young people who use inappropriate language effectively. Young people's attitudes to learning improve significantly during their time in the unit. Care staff and teachers use a weekly tutorial session to provide young people with information on the points they have been awarded during the week and to discuss their progress. More could be done to ensure that young people are involved consistently in recording their scores and setting and reviewing their targets.

Young people benefit from well-planned opportunities to participate in mobility visits that prepare them for transition to the community. Good arrangements for celebrating young people's achievements at weekly assemblies and through professional displays of their work throughout the centre are effective in raising their

self-confidence. The recent introduction of an open evening for parents and carers was very successful in increasing the ambitions of the young people and their families.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Outstanding systems are in place to safeguard and protect young people. Both the verbal and written feedback received from them throughout the inspection provided strong evidence that young people feel safe. Keeping young people safe from themselves and others is a primary aim of the centre, who continually strive to improve and revise its working practices to achieve this. For example, young people were surveyed recently about areas and locations of the centre they may feel uncomfortable or more vulnerable in. Swift action was undertaken to address any concerns raised in the survey. This is one of a number of initiatives implemented recently that is designed to improve safety and safeguard young people more effectively.

Excellent levels of communication and co-operation exist between themselves and the centre. The local authorities designated officer (LADO) visits regularly to provide advice and review any incident that may have a safeguarding overtone. Quarterly meetings with the LADO to monitor, review and assesses all safeguarding incidents have recently been introduced. This provides young people with added protection. The benefit of these practices improves external oversight, whilst providing independent monitoring. This has brought a far greater transparency to the whole safeguarding and behaviour management process within the centre.

There were no concerns or complaints raised by young people, either verbally or in writing regarding any aspect linked to behaviour management or their safety. They confirm that bullying is not tolerated and that staff are quick to intervene should an incident occur. One young person reflected the views of many by stating that there is 'not a lot of bullying, if there is it's dealt with'. Staff are alert to a young person's potential to bully or be bullied and work proactively to minimise the risk. For example, observations made on the units and during recreational periods showed staff deployment as being effective in minimising risk.

Restorative practices linked to the respect scheme are now well imbedded into working practice. Whilst not replacing sanctions, which are known in the centre as, resolve and restore, there has been a steady decline in the number being given, as restorative practice has developed.

Young people understand how the respect system works, which allows them to gain points and move to different levels where they receive greater benefits and rewards. They are comfortable with and generally accepting of the systems in place. A number were happy to show inspectors their certificates of current achievement, which are displayed on their bedroom doors. One of the main benefits for young people on the highest level, diamond, is that the need to gain points ceases and young people are given the opportunity to take on more responsibility for themselves and their own actions. This is viewed as excellent practice.

A new system to record significant events was introduced in December 2010. This has improved both the depth and standard of recording linked to physical intervention. Allied to this are improved and more transparent systems to monitor any significant event that takes place. This is underpinned by the introduction of regular external monitoring and scrutiny of incidents, aided by the 24 hour, manned

CCTV system that is in operation. Quarterly monitoring meetings with the LADO include a review of physical intervention events.

An overall improvement has taken place regarding the monitoring of safeguarding and general behaviour management. It commences at each morning briefing where all single separation, restraint and sanction logs from each unit are brought to the meeting to be reviewed and signed off by senior staff. A number of layers of monitoring are in place culminating with the external oversight being provided regularly by representatives from external agencies charged with specific safeguarding duties.

Senior management are prepared to take steps and make decisions to safeguard both young people and staff. Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly and quickly and now include input and oversight from external sources such as safeguarding services and the Police.

The systems in place recruit staff meet with regulatory requirement and good practice. Suitable clearances are being obtained before new staff take up their posts. Longer serving staff are re-checked every three years.

Staff and young people are protected with a range of risk assessments covering the whole campus. They are reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Service contracts for fire, gas and electrical equipment are in place. Young people participate in regular fire drills and understand the evacuation procedures. Security arrangements in operation are robust and offer protection for all at the centre.

Young people living at the centre have benefitted by the recent initiatives to improve practice and from the excellent working relationships developed with external agencies that now provide a pivotal role in the external monitoring of the centres working practices. One young person summed up the general feeling of others in the centre by stating, 'it's clean, all boys get along, staff help me, I feel safe'. Another says, 'people respect me and take care of me'. These comments typify the positive comments received by inspectors from young people throughout the inspection.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **good**.

The centre is effectively managed. The senior management team has been streamlined and lines of accountability altered and clarified in some departments. There is a clear vision for the centre and managers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses which are addressed in a written plan for the centres development and improvement. Recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed and practice at the centre has continued to develop, having positive impact on the outcomes for young people. A statement of purpose is available which sets out fully the aims and objectives of the centre and managers are able to demonstrate how they strive to achieve these. Information on the centre is given to parents, professionals and young people. The young people's guide does not yet contain the additional information as required by the new national minimum standard, although this information is available from staff if required.

Two recommendations made at the last inspection have both been addressed. All staff have received training in medication awareness and administration, and a self medication policy has been introduced which enables those young people who are risk assessed as able to do so to hold their own medication.

There are good monitoring systems in operation which ensure an acceptable quality of care is provided. Regulation 33 visits are carried out by an officer from the local authority and a written report is produced of their findings. Internally there is consistent auditing of records and a monitoring process which ensures every recorded incident at the centre is reviewed by senior managers. Behaviour management records are reviewed on a daily basis by a member of the senior management team. Any areas of staff practice development which are identified are addressed quickly and fully and trends are identified. Exit interviews are undertaken with the assistance of an independent advocate and development reports in line with regulation 34 requirements are completed. Any actions required to improve outcomes for young people are able to be identified by the processes in place.

There are sufficient staff available to meet with the requirements of the centre. All staff receive appropriate training and opportunities are available to attend a variety of courses. Amendments to the way training is delivered are currently planned to provide additional availability. Staff are supported formally to carry out their duties with regular supervision sessions which are fully recorded.

Resources available are well managed. Since the last inspection there has been a reduction in the number of beds contracted by the Youth Justice Board to twenty five alongside the availability of two welfare beds. This was part of a national sector wide reduction in beds. The centre has closed one of the four living units on site and whilst this has resulted in some staff reduction, it has enabled a reorganisation of staff deployment and has had no negative impact on the care young people receive.

All significant events which occur within the centre are notified to the relevant external agencies and any further actions are required are carried out appropriately. Protocols are in place for the centres work with other agencies such as the police service. Records are held as required in a secure manner, they are well structured, detailed and regularly audited.

Positive community links are in place with local groups and individuals. Where practical young people are able to engage in voluntary work within the community and make a positive contribution. Managers oversee a staff group who are committed to ensuring the development of all young people can be met. Knowledge of other groups is enhanced by fundraising activities with the young people and enrichment sessions are undertaken which allow understanding of disability and religion issues to be experienced.

Leadership and management of formal education is satisfactory. Following an extremely turbulent period, during which there was considerable change to the school's senior staff, the substantive headteacher has recently returned to the centre.. He is supported well by his deputies. In the period since the last inspection a vision for education has been established and this is beginning to impact on the experience provided for the young people. The daily routine of the school is well-organised and teachers and care staff work together well to provide a welcoming and purposeful learning environment. The temporary deputy headteacher has developed key policies, such as for teaching and learning, and effective arrangements for quality assurance that are focussed appropriately on improving learning and the standards of young people's work. Senior managers now have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning and are ambitious for the future. The self-assessment report for education is broadly accurate.

The local authority has provided the school with good support over the last year that has been effective in providing the essential specialist educational and human resource advice needed. This has been significant in enhancing the leadership of the school and in helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Performance management arrangements are much more effective. Staff absence has reduced dramatically and the education team are working together well.

The establishment of an interim executive board (IEB) is a very good local authority development. Board members have the experience and expertise needed to monitor the performance of the school robustly and to provide challenge to the headteacher. The board receive comprehensive reports on the progress the school is making against its improvement plan from the headteacher and an experienced school improvement partner (SIP). The IEB has provided significant leadership that has been influential in promoting improvement, particularly in quality assurance. These developments need to be sustained and embedded fully to ensure that planned changes, for example to the terms and conditions of education staff, are implemented and the improvements seen during the inspection are maintained.

Teachers are appropriately qualified, however a large proportion have worked in the centre for many years and have not had sufficient professional development to keep up-to-date with mainstream practice. The school provides a good learning environment that is well-maintained. Classrooms and circulation areas are spacious and light. Learning resources are good in some areas such as art and design but more needs to be done to ensure that teachers are able to use information and learning technology to enhance their lessons.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.