

Vale of Evesham School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Martha Nethaway
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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

Vale of Evesham School provides education for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. The majority of children and young people receive day education but there is provision for boarding, which can accommodate 15 young people up to the age of 19 years as weekly boarders. The boarding accommodation is placed on the first floor and consists of three suites, one of which is very separate from the other two. Each of the suites are staffed with their own team of care staff under a care officer, all of whom are responsible to the head of care. The school is maintained by a local education authority, Worcestershire County Council Department of Education and the school is directly responsible to a governing body.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was a full announced inspection that concentrated on the key national minimum standards. The overall judgement in this report is based on the standards inspected within the relevant Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall quality rating for this setting remains at outstanding. The school provides an inclusive, holistic provision where children and young people can thrive through encouragement in a supportive and caring environment. Children and young people are happy, safe and secure. The development of children and young people's personal qualities and social skills and the fostering of socially acceptable behaviour are integral aspects of the high quality care, support and guidance provided at the school. The boarding provision provides high quality accommodation and facilities. Children and young people are cared for by staff who demonstrate real commitment and progressive practice through a diverse array of skills, experience and capabilities. The staff team achieve high levels of success and are effective at implementing care plans through supporting and meeting children and young people's personalised needs very effectively. The 'total communication' programme is well embedded in practice through the use of objects of reference, symbols, speech, gesture, signs and voice output communication aids within the whole school. Everyone is confident with using the different communication tools.

As a result of this inspection visit, no recommendations are being made.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school was recommended to ensure a written report is completed after any representative of the governing body visited the boarding provision. This has now been implemented in practice.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy good physical, emotional, and mental health. They lead healthy lifestyles, through learning and participating in the programme of personal social health and citizenship education. Children and young people regularly participate in 'circle time' where topics such as: health for life, all about me, picture my feelings, health matters and look after yourself are openly discussed. This helps children to learn and grow. To support parents and carers the school recently provided a workshop called 'Lets talk, Growing Up and Puberty Issues' which was extremely helpful for parents and carers to deal with this next stage in their child's life.

Since the last inspection, staff have been provided with training around acquired brain injury in children and young people, and the hidden impairment related to memory, concentration, communication skills and behaviour. This has helped staff to understand the long-term consequences and adopt best practice in relation to care, support and guidance.

Children and young people live in a healthy environment where staff identify and promote the health and intimate care needs of each child. The school actively promotes the health care of each child and meets any health needs. All children and young people have personalised health care plans which are effectively implemented in practice. As a result, children and young people are always getting the attention and care from professional health care services such as, a consultant paediatrician, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, audiologists, dentists and psychologists. In addition, children and young people receive support from a speech and language therapy team. Finally, there is a large number of staff that are qualified first aiders which means that any emergency can be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Children and young people's medication is being managed robustly with sound administration practices for recording, dispensing and returns.

During the school day, children and young people eat their lunch in the newly refurbished central dining hall with a new cafeteria service which reaches an outstanding standard. For example, the menus are published on the school website to aid and support transparency. For breakfast and tea time, children and young people eat in the residential dining area which provides an enjoyable atmosphere for mealtimes. Children and young people enjoy healthy, nutritious meals that take account of their health, racial and cultural requirements. The school has a successful 'whole school' approach to promoting healthy eating. This includes the development of a healthy lifestyle through combining a balanced food intake and increased physical activity. This is achieved through producing a varied menu, which introduces children and young people to an assortment of tastes and textures. This encourages children and young people to choose balanced meals.

There is also input from the school nurse to advise on healthy eating. Similarly, when a child has specific dietary needs, the school nurse works in partnership with the catering manager to provide alternative dishes. Outstanding practice is promoted through the effective use of communication aids used to support children and young people in making a choice about their meals. For example, communication boards, charts and communication books are used. The success of these aids has really helped children and young people to communicate. The personalisation, training and ongoing support to assist communication is outstanding. Similarly, outstanding practice is evidenced with the promotion of children and young people growing their own vegetables and soft fruits both in the school site and out in the community.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people's well-being and safety are outstandingly supported by staff that show diligent practice. Staff also follow extensive policies and procedures that focus on promoting the welfare of the child.

Children and young people's right to privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled. Staff show a high regard for children and young people's right to be free from over intrusion and to be treated with respect. Staff are courteous at all times and involve children and young people in decisions. Children and young people's preferences are clearly recorded in their care plans with respect to personalised care which is sensitive to their needs. As far as possible, staff encourage children and young people to be independent.

The school has an effective complaints process that ensures that any complaints are addressed without delay and the complainant is kept informed of progress. One member staff commented 'All pupils know who they can talk with if they are unhappy or wish to make a complaint'. Since the last inspection, no complaints have been received by the school or by Ofsted.

The welfare of children and young people is strongly promoted through effective policies, procedures, training and safe practice. Children and young people feel safe. Their social and emotional learning are intrinsically supported in all areas of school life. The school has strong links with parents and carers and other agencies to ensure that all children and young people are cared for, especially those most at risk. Children and young people are protected from bullying by others. The school provides high staffing ratios to ensure that all children and young people are safe from bullying and other risks. This is underpinned by excellent prevention strategies and risk assessments reflected in the care plans and behaviour management plans.

Children and young people's whereabouts is always known to staff because of the close level of supervision. The school is very transparent in the use of key codes security for exit doors and there is a robust visitor's procedure in place for the school. No children or young person has gone missing during their residency at the school.

Children and young people are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour. Staff are highly skilled with managing children and young people's behaviours positively. The school is using an electronic behaviour tracking system that records and analyses behaviour. It provides an effective, consistent, whole school system for managing behaviour. The reason for tracking behaviour is clearly understood by staff because it provides clear evidence on which staff make decisions and develop strategies to improve behaviour. This means that staff know what works and can effectively monitor their impact in order to support children and young people effectively. As a result, good practice is shared and targeted support can be provided where needed.

Children live in a school that provides physical safety and security. Staff have a proactive and partnership approach to fulfil their role and responsibility under health and safety legislation. Examples of how the school achieves this includes the following: health and safety is included in all staff meetings, all staff are trained, there is tracking of accidents and incidents through the electronic behaviour tracking system, fire safety checks are robustly adhered to, all domestic installations are serviced and checked, and work place inspections are carried out by the governors and the local authority.

There is careful selection and vetting of all staff, volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school. This prevents children and young people being exposed to potential abusers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's residential provision outstandingly supports children and young people's educational progress at the school. Children and young people receive highly personalised individual support when they need it. Children and young people are attending and enjoy school and achieve according to their ability. Children and young people's participation is actively encouraged with outstanding results. For example, outstanding practice is evident with how children and young people are supported to use objects of reference, symbols, speech and voice output communication aids. This helps to replicate a natural way of communicating which is well integrated as a successful 'whole school' approach. All staff are aware of children and young people's individual targets and the progress they make. For example, each term, curriculum and care targets are set that help support children and young people's learning. The strong links with the day school are supported by teaching staff and residential staff in an exchange of information before and after school in the handovers. Another example is the use of school and home diaries so that parents and carers are informed on a regular basis about progress and developments.

Children and young people get the most out of life and really enjoy recreation. Children and young people across the four nights in residence are encouraged to

participate in wide-ranging and fun activities. For example participating in, youth club, swimming, cooking, gardening, trampolining, snoezelen, bowling and bell boating which is a water boat activity. These activities are a successful combination of community-based activities and school-based activities. One young person commented 'I love going to do bell boating because it is really good fun in the water'. Many of the activities help the children and young people to integrate in society, developing their self-esteem, building confidence and give them new life experiences. One parent summed up their view 'Staff in the residential provision are wonderful and always ensure that there are plenty of exciting activities for children to access and the atmosphere is very friendly and a homely one'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Parents and carers have an open invitation to visit their child while in residence. Some parents avail of this opportunity and are warmly welcomed. The vital partnership between the parents and carers and the school is outstandingly supported. There is regular communication by phone, email, face-to-face meetings and through the effective use of the school home diaries. Children and young people who wish to phone home can do so because there is a convenient cordless telephone. One member of staff commented 'We regularly encourage a parent or carer to 'pop in' for a quick word now and again at the beginning of school'.

Relationships between staff and children and young people are positive and supportive, and promote self-esteem. All children and young people have individual care plans and a key worker attends all annual reviews. Children and young people have their needs assessed and written care plans outline how these needs will be met while at school. Children and young people as far as possible are consulted about individual targets and joint targets set with the teacher and key worker. For example, targets are set around communication and life skills. All targets are evaluated at the end of each term. One parent commented 'We have excellent lines of communication which ensures quality of care and I feel our opinions are valued'.

The transition of children and young people being admitted or leaving the residential school is carefully planned and collaborative. Priority for the placement of children and young people in the residential provision is established after consultation with families, children and young people, social workers and the local authority. All children and young people's admissions are pre planned and show thoughtful and insightful support, help and guidance. For example, the timings of when children and young people visit the school are arranged after the school morning begins so that a successful transition can be supported. There is a gradual build up to attending school full time. There is a similar approach within the residential provision.

Children and young people are involved in decision making at all levels and as appropriate to their needs. For example, they participate in the school council and can make choices about their daily living. Children and young people reviewed the existing packed lunch choices in class and brought their results to the school council

meetings which are linked to the healthy schools initiative. Another example, children and young people did the planning and designing ideas for the garden and are successfully growing their own vegetables, flowers and soft fruits. Children and young people worked very hard clearing the area of all the grass and completed the planting.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people live in outstandingly designed and pleasant premises, providing sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs and contribute to their development. The aesthetic appearance of the facility promotes a warm homely environment which is clean and well maintained. The provision is separated into three domains, 'Cotswold', 'Dilwyn' and 'Seymour Suites' each providing accommodation for five children and young people. All children and young people are provided with their own bedroom. Children and young people are encouraged to bring their own personal belongings to maintain their own identity and links between school and home. Since the last inspection, new settees, new curtains and flat screen televisions have been purchased for all three suites. All this continues to create high standards being achieved in the residential environment.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Leadership and management at the school are outstanding because at every level continuous improvements are being made. One senior manager commented 'We are a high performing setting which, as a result of our monitoring systems, evaluates where it currently is and what it needs to do against the care standards to maintain high standards'. The residential provision is an integral part of the school with enormous benefits for children, young people, families and carers. One parent summed this up 'The standard of care is very high'.

Children and young people benefit from excellent communication between residential staff and educational staff. Staff ensure that highly effective links exist over matters such as safeguarding, health, home and school contact support that meet the individual needs of children and young people. One member of staff commented 'The relationship between the day school and the residential provision is one of entity where all colleagues work to the same structures, systems, philosophy and ethos, thus providing a singular and compatible approach throughout the extended day'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Policy, procedure and good practice helps children and young people to know that their individual needs are valued. This is on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender, age and religion. The service is able to meet children and young people's diverse needs in everyday life in the school. One member of staff commented 'We provide appropriate and equal provision for all our residential children and young people as set out on

our equal opportunities policy. All children and young people have a voice within the setting. The children and young people are supported through a variety of communication aids. Activities are open for all pupils regardless of ability, disability, gender, or age'.

Children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding. Children and young people are looked after by staff that understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently. The impact of the 24 hour curriculum on individual children and young people in terms of academic progress and their development of personal and social skills are outstanding. One senior manager explained, 'This is evidenced through improved pupil behaviour in the day setting, parents and families value the provision and children and young people enjoy the residential setting. We know this because of the analysis data from the electronic behaviour tracking system and feedback from questionnaires from parents, carers and children and young people'.

Children and young people are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children and young people's welfare. Children and young people receive the care and services they need from competent staff. The majority of staff are qualified, experienced and skilled to carry out their roles effectively. Each staff member brings different skills and knowledge. For example, some staff have obtained the advanced training in signalong communication. Staff camaraderie is highly evolved within the staff team because of the strong support provided by head of care and senior management. The staff team achieves significant results with helping and developing children and young people in relation to their personal, social and independent self-help skills.

Children and young people and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run school. There is monitoring involving the wider leadership team each term. One senior manager commented 'We have developed a quality assurance system which ensures regular and robust monitoring across the setting. As a consequence of this we are able to evaluate our own practice against the care standards and drive our own improvements'. As a direct result of this monitoring, improvements have been made with the implementation of the 'total communication' programme and the level of detail in the home and school diaries which now includes pictures of activities and events.

The governing body and the local authority monitor the welfare of the children and young people in the school. A governor visits the residential provision and now provides a written report about their observations, experience and discussion with children, young people and staff. Reports are informative and insightful about the high standards achieved by children, young people and staff.