

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Julian Parker
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

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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

This setting is a residential special school registered as a children's home. The service offers a comprehensive, integrated, specialised education and care package for up to 20 children aged between eight and 18 years diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder that usually includes associated complex needs. The service is provided for both full-time and respite care of students who are not permanently looked after.

The school has a wide range of on-site facilities, and children and young people are provided with access to educational, psychiatric and paediatric consultants for professional care, advice and support.

Overall effectiveness

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

This school provides children and young people with a very supportive, well provisioned, comfortable environment in which to live. The quality of care, outcomes for young people, safeguarding and leadership outcomes are considered outstanding. Young people confirm, through behaviour and demeanour, that they feel safe and well cared for. Consistent high quality care provides a secure base for the encouragement of excellent educational attendance and attainment.

The placement provides a very reassuring place of safety for young people with severe autism and challenging behaviour to understand their individual issues and extensive personal support needs. This school provides many exceptional facilities and opportunities that would not be readily available in a normal community and the multidisciplinary support required to promote positive individual behaviour. The management and staff of the school provide outstanding support for young people, consistently encouraging them to fully engage with the broad range of opportunities being made available. Liaison with parents and placing authorities is very good with feedback effectively helping to influence the high quality of the provision.

The understanding and integration of equality and diversity within day-to-day practice and the home's recording, is outstanding. The particular cultural needs of the diverse group of children are integrated and celebrated with exceptional promotion of the rights of children with disabilities.

The one shortfall is that the records of staff supervision are not consistently signed by the member of staff.

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 completion of staff supervision is consistently signed off including any reason for it not taking place. (NMS 19.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making steady progress and in this way present a positive image of themselves when considered against their starting point. With the ongoing consistent support of staff they are assisted as far as is possible to understand the reason for their placement and improve their social skills and recognition. Young people are practically assisted by being stimulated and encouraged to extend both their emotional and physical boundaries, for example, by the regular use of the on-site multisensory equipment as a means to improve communication, by having their interests recognised and promoted to make themed collections, or simply by responding to stimuli that help reduce the frequency of 'unexplained' repetitive behaviour. Young people keep their understanding of their background by retaining regular and positive contact with their families by phone, video link or by hosted visits to the school to maintain the importance and bond of family ties.

Young people are enabled to take controlled risks with the support and guidance of their key carers and staff team. The risks posed by daily living are known, assessed and minimised, for example, by having well-supervised access to public and community resources and leisure pursuits. Choice for young people is actively promoted, for example, by staff being aware of individual mealtime likes and dislikes, preferences for particular activities and knowing what personal routines affect the emotional state of mind of individuals. Staff routinely advocate on behalf of students to improve their access to normalising activities that improve their experience of the wider community, such as short visits to the seaside or zoo.

Full-time attendance in education is promoted extremely well by strong partnership arrangements between care staff and school. Young people are enabled in class by access to a bespoke curriculum supported by their teachers and learning assistants.

Ongoing development of the residential living areas and catering facilities, coupled with curriculum-based learning, significantly enhances how the school helps students improve their basic living skills. Preparations for the eventual transfer of young people to future supportive placements are developed from a multidisciplinary perspective facilitating a gentle and considerate transition from the school.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people living at the school are empowered and enabled to thrive because of the stability and nurturing provided within the safe, supportive environment. Young people confirm through their actions and behaviour that they enjoy living here and are comfortable with the quality of care with which they are provided.

By working in teams assigned to each unit staff effectively provide young people with the familiarity and continuity of care needed to nurture sound and stable relationships. Safe, supportive relationships underpin each young person's desire and ability to achieve realistic developmental goals.

The significance of language for young people with an autistic spectrum disorder is prominently recognised, as in addition to high levels of care staffing, the school employs specialist speech therapists and psychologists. This added dimension significantly enhances students' ability to make their views known through multimedia tools and recognised preferences. The school procedures reinforce the view that the rights and opinions of young people must be actively considered as well as those of the child's parents, social worker and advocates. Although young people may display severe impediments with language and understanding, no young person is presumed not to be able to communicate. This is evident in all aspects of practice.

Limited personal communication abilities do not deter young people from being actively encouraged to make their views known about all aspects of their life at the school or retain regular contact with their families. Staff receive training in helping them communicate with young people in differing ways and to share this knowledge by developing an effective recording style. Despite the limitations of communication, importance is afforded to maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality, thereby promoting the rights of young people.

Because of their significant understanding of how young people present and communicate, key workers and care staff are encouraged to advocate on behalf of young people when they feel that the views of young people may be overshadowed.

An effective and promoted complaints procedure is in place, with child-centred translations provided in differing communication formats. These describe how young people, or any person advocating on their behalf, may raise concerns or complaints about the service. All concerns are taken seriously, formally addressed and receive a written response from the Registered Manager. Written compliments from stakeholders and parents received by the school indicate high levels of satisfaction with the service provided.

A multiagency, comprehensive assessment of young people's needs prior to placement ensures that they are appropriately placed. The care, educational and medical needs of young people are recorded in comprehensive placement plans that identify how specific needs will be addressed and outcomes achieved. The sharing of

information ensures that young people remain at the centre of practice and that they do not experience drift. The programme of care for young people is set out in placement plans. These are working documents that are regularly updated as part of the statutory review process, to ensure young people receive full benefit from the service being provided. The plan is recorded from a first-person perspective that narrates how the young person prefers care and recreational needs to be provided by their carers. Visual and image-based recording actively encourages the young person's ongoing access, contribution and input into this process. Ongoing needs continue to be regularly monitored monthly by the school's multidisciplinary team to confirm the effectiveness of the placement.

Young people are able to safely develop in a setting that has been specifically chosen and adapted to specifically meet the needs of young people with a profound autistic spectrum disorder. The school is set in extensive grounds, rurally located in an area convenient for accessing the range of community, recreational and leisure facilities including retail outlets, transport networks and health-related services. The school can, however, remain self-contained within its own resources to meet the needs of a diverse group of young people while actively preparing them for greater and safer levels of integration and socialisation. The countryside location of the school complements the promotion of a calm and healthy living space in which young people may be safely looked after. Extensive grounds, gardens and woodland walks provide safe exercise and practical outdoor learning areas for students.

The living areas, including the individual bedrooms used by children and young people, benefit from being constructed following specialist clinical advice to deliver an environment involving minimal physical or emotional risk to children from any source. Essential support services are provided which practically enhance the care and education being provided for young people. Different living units within the school provide homely living areas and safe communal facilities for young people to socialise or just enjoy their own company.

The school is committed to ensuring that young people, notwithstanding their disability, can access and achieve to their potential in their education placement. Young people are helped to achieve, and receive consistent praise for all their everyday and educational achievements including full-time attendance. The school has developed its educational structure to improve the learning needs of younger and older students. Students are practically assisted by being stimulated and encouraged to extend both their emotional and physical boundaries by being bespoke to individual student's ability while practicing communication and learning skills.

The school is extremely active in promoting students' equality and diversity needs and widening the horizons of young people with disabilities. Young people are integrated into everyday public life with assistance and transport to go shopping, attend community recreational facilities and access other places of interest.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live in a very supportive and thoughtfully appointed environment where they are effectively protected from harm. This engenders a sense of safety, security and well-being. Young people, through their behaviour and demeanour, confirm that they feel safe. The vigilance and personalised care provided by staff protect young people from their own behaviours and that of their peers. One young person said: 'The staff could let me climb fences and abscond, but they feel this is dangerous and unsafe.'

The safety of young people is afforded the highest priority. Staff are extremely well trained to understand the autistic spectrum and how this informs how to safeguard children. They know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse as presented by children with disabilities, and what actions they need to take to ensure that this vulnerable group is fully safeguarded. Subject to their understanding and ability, young people receive excellent advice, in many formats, about personal safety. These include the potential risks posed by peers or adults. Staff encourage young people to communicate their worries or concerns in any way. Staff engage very effectively with therapists, nurses, social workers and other agencies to ensure that young people are fully protected by sharing safeguarding. A whistle-blowing policy is accessible should staff have concerns about any aspect of professional practice.

The vulnerability of young people is well recognised by this specialist placement. The risks, including physical harm, exploitation and discrimination, that young people may be exposed to in the community, were they not effectively supervised, are well recorded and proficiently managed. Explicit, regularly reviewed risk assessments and behaviour support plans effectively explain how young people may be protected from potential harm. By having a very comprehensive knowledge of the young people being looked after, key workers and care support workers are able to realistically balance the need for protection alongside enabling young people to experience low-level risks that are considered a normal part of adolescent growth and development, for example, adjustments in supervision levels when going for a walk. In this way young people are able to enjoy similar social experiences to their peers by actively engaging with community activities such as going on city visits.

The high level of staff supervision and discreet site security ensures that the potential for unauthorised absence by young people is significantly reduced and managed confidently. Robust procedures are in place in the unlikely event a young person should attempt to go absent from the home or off-site excursion.

Young people's behaviour is sensitively addressed by the school's multidisciplinary approach to behaviour management. This broadly includes aspects of dealing with bullying, promoting positive relationships between young people and carers, plus the effectual management of conduct associated with a learning disability. A positive reward system is in place which reinforces sociable behaviour through consistent

praise. Less desirable behaviour is never sanctioned. The school utilises an accredited methodology for managing challenging behaviour, using the minimal and safest use of physical restraint with young people to prevent self-harm or hurt to others. All care and education staff are fully trained, equipping them to understand and recognise the diverse range of challenging behaviours likely to be encountered. The school evaluates all behavioural incidents to inform the safety of future practice and effectively compiles a plan for each young person which is shared with all practitioners. Improvements continue to be introduced to improve understanding, enhance consistency of practice and to better ensure comprehensive compliance with minimum standards. Young people are further protected by the school openly communicating these issues with parents and placing authorities. One parent said of the staff: 'They care about my son to such a high standard. They ring me with an update daily and speak with great warmth about my son.'

Young people live in a physically safe environment. Personal safety is enhanced by the school's extensive range of health and safety procedures, risk assessments and preventive checks which prescribe how care will be provided. Regular health and safety checks, including fire drills, are conducted to ensure the premises remain safe and young people are aware of what will happen in an emergency. The recruitment and selection of staff working at the school follows comprehensive company procedures and suitability checks that ensure only adults confirmed as safe are permitted to care for vulnerable young people. The school administrators and Registered Manager are vigilant in ensuring that all appointed staff possess the relevant qualities, competences, qualifications and skills to meet children's special needs. In addition, vigorous systems are in place that ensure visitors to the school are suitably checked and supervised while on the premises.

Leadership and management

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

The school is efficiently managed and fully promotes the safety and best interests of its resident young people. The aims of the Statement of Purpose are comprehensively met, with young people, their families and social workers being clearly informed about the services and support provided through accessing this and other documents provided prior to any admission. The young persons' guide is personalised to the format preferred by each young person. It is readable and delivers useful information and pictures of what the school provides, in an accessible, friendly tone.

The manager and staff team effectively demonstrate their strong commitment to delivering exceptional childcare practice, tailored to the individual and personal needs of each young people they look after. Young people are enabled and empowered to make excellent progress across the many aspects of their lives, including school attendance and educational achievement, emotional development and maturity, and keeping themselves safe.

The Registered Manager uses reflective practice effectively while consistently

enlisting and acting upon feedback provided by the views of young people, their parents, staff, and social workers. In-house, detailed monitoring of the quality of care is used to inform and improve the service. This approach helps ensure positive outcomes for young people. The school's ethos is one of sustained improvement based on its previous performance inextricably linked with the progress being made by young people. Independent Regulation 33 monitoring provides an effective external perspective of the operation of the school from which the Registered Manager can refine day-to-day practice.

When asked what was good about the school one parent wrote: 'Everything. They meet my child's needs to the highest standard and are always at the end of the phone if I need them and are happy and helpful. I couldn't ask for my child to be in a better placement.'

Young people are looked after by a very competent staff team who display a wide range of skills, experience and enthusiasm. All established staff have a relevant qualification in working with young people, with all other staff working towards their qualification. The skills and diversity within the team appropriately match the needs of young people living in the home. The manager and staff team are committed to providing young people with the stability, consistency and security needed to keep them safe, coupled with direct access to education to meet their academic potential.

The school staffing complement is sufficient to confidently meet the needs of young people in the best possible way, including the provision of waking night staff, specialist therapeutic input and medical services. Staffing numbers provide for the levels of support needed to promote activities, visits and attending appointments. Staff access a comprehensive training programme that addresses the behavioural specialism of this placement, alongside the more considerable and complex care needs of young people. Training provides staff with the statutory input, skills, qualification and knowledge to do their jobs effectively. Careful recruitment complements this by carefully selecting people who are sufficiently tenacious to maintain their commitment.

Staff are very well supported by their manager and his senior team. They have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and the high expectations placed on them for providing childcare practice of an extremely high calibre. All staff confirm that when they need support and guidance, the manager is responsive. Staff regularly receive one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals of their practice, which informs their learning and development. The confirmation by signature of regular supervision is, however, not consistent. Unit team meetings take place regularly, encouraging discussion about the general operation of the school, how the service may be improved and each individual young person's progress.

Case files and written records are securely stored and provide a comprehensive yet practical picture of individual young people's needs, development and progress. Young people's personal records contain up-to-date information about them, including the relevant documents from placing authorities. The manager is proactive in following up shortfalls from placing authorities. The clarity of case files benefit

from the well-recorded multidisciplinary approach to the provision of childcare.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.