

Bridge School, Longmoor Campus

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Jackie Callaghan
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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 school was formed following the amalgamation of two maintained primary special schools in September 2006. The site provides education for boys and girls aged between two and 11 years of age who have severe or profound learning disabilities; some children also fall within the autistic spectrum. The children who attend the residential unit have all been identified as having severe learning difficulties with a wide range of other needs, including communication difficulties. Most children have had unsuccessful placements at other special schools.

The school is purpose built and includes teaching areas, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and a residential unit. The residential provision is available between Monday and Friday for up to six children on a term-time basis. The residential provision provides full-time placements for those children who have residential on their statements. They also provide six week targeted intervention residential placements for those children who are deemed to require additional support. The school is a Birmingham City Local Authority school. It is close to local amenities and children also access the wide range of leisure and other facilities in the city.

Currently there are four children using the service. This includes, one full residential child and three children who are receiving six weeks of targeted intervention. All of these children contributed to the findings in this report either via questionnaire or observation.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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. This inspection also considered the four recommendations made at the school's last inspection and this visit found that all previous recommendations have been met.

The overall quality rating for this setting is good, however, there are many outstanding features. Children enjoy sleeping in the residential provision and benefit from clear, professional, effective management. This coupled with a staff team who are skilled, knowledgeable and enthusiastic provides all children with stimulating and purposeful care. This was confirmed up by a pupil who said 'I like sleeping at school'. Four new recommendations have been raised as a result of this visit in order to help the school develop further.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the school now ensures that all physical interventions are recorded in a separate, bound and numbered book. All documentation is now monitored and reviewed in order to ascertain if there are any obvious patterns or trends occurring. These changes further promote accountability.

Electrical installations have been checked and systems are now in place to check every three years as required by national minimum standards. Risk assessments on the premises and grounds and risk assessments about the children are carried out and reviewed regularly. This ensures that staff are fully aware of any hazards and the measures they need to take to minimise risks.

There are now written placement plans that identify the needs of each child in order to promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis. The placement plans are reviewed regularly and amended to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or to show progress in their development. The residential provision has introduced a formal induction programme for newly appointed staff. It is recognised that this programme was still being embedded at the time of the inspection. However, it is beginning to help shape staff practice and equip them with the information and skills required to settle quickly into their roles.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Health promotion is a prominent feature at the school. The physical, emotional and mental health needs of each child are actively identified on admission and comprehensively supported throughout their school life. For example, excellent partnership working with the school nurse helps the school to provide holistic care for children.

Medical consent is actively sought from parents and a signed form is retained on file ensuring children receive preventative and emergency medical treatment without delay. Staff training on administration of medication is in-depth. As a result, children reside in a healthy environment where their good health is comprehensively promoted.

All food is freshly prepared and cooked on site. Children receive a healthy and nutritious diet and excellent messages about healthy eating. Mealtimes are very pleasant and sociable occasions which unreservedly enhance the social development of all children. Children are actively involved in menu planning, ensuring that their likes and dislikes are catered for. A parent confirmed this view as they said 'I am really pleased with my sons stay. He led a healthy lifestyle whilst in the unit and was given many opportunities that he hadn't experienced before'.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are protected from harm by robust arrangements for safe personal care. Staff thoroughly respect children's need for privacy and confidentiality. There is an open approach to complaints from all sources, and staff successfully support children to use accessible processes to make their views known.

The safety and welfare of children has a very high priority in the school and children say they feel safe during their stay. Staff understand and are clear about what they should do if there is a safeguarding issue. However, a very small number of staff receive external child-protection training. This has meant that they are not fully confident with the school policy, for example, being uncertain of the identified staff member that child protection concerns should be reported to. However, all staff clearly recognise that issues should be reported and would in fact do so. All staff are confident about what constitutes a child protection concern and they understand their role in protecting children.

Staff work hard to protect children from the impact of bullying, anti-social or intimidating behaviour and children are clear about their right to feel safe from this. Staff are sensitive and attuned to individual needs. Detailed planning and close supervision ensures a supportive response. Children's behaviour is well understood by staff and they know what the triggers are for more challenging behaviour for individuals. Staff have completed training and are competent in diffusing situations to avoid the use of physical intervention. Incidents of physical intervention are very infrequent, demonstrating that staff are effective in practise.

Staff have good relationships with children and see them in an extremely positive light. The emphasis is on positive intervention with rewards that are achievable for children. This helps them to progress in their overall behaviour. While there have been no incidents of children going missing from the service there are clear procedures in place.

Children are cared for in a safe environment. Health and safety is effectively managed. There are appropriate checking and monitoring systems in place to promote safety. Security is thorough and well monitored. Children know what to do should there be a fire and understand about keeping themselves safe. There is a robust recruitment system in the school which maintains good levels of safety for children. This includes Criminal Records Bureau checks at enhanced level, proof of identity and references prior to employment. The overall management of the system is effective and children are well protected.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is a real strength in the close and constructive child-focussed links between educational and residential staff. Residential staff innovatively support children to take part in activities that contribute to individual children's educational progress. Residential staff are familiar with the educational needs and progress of children in their care.

Children are looked after by staff who seek out and celebrate the individuality of all the children and look for ways to enable and reassure them to try new opportunities. Children are seen as individuals and staff really value the opportunity to visit and talk to parents at home to share ideas and support them. Parent's comments include, 'the staff are lovely and it is a really positive experience for my child'. As a result, children experience life enhancing activities and new opportunities that enable them to take an active part in society.

Children receive outstanding support that ensures their individual needs are identified and met. Key workers in the residential service have a clear and effective role in co-ordinating children's placements. Key to this is a committed residential staff group who have outstanding skills in day-to-day communication.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The views of children are gathered and expressed through a residential pupil council in which every child participates. The agenda and other information are produced in word and symbol formats so that they are totally accessible to the children.

Children are proactively encouraged, enabled and supported to contribute to their care by using a variety of communication aids. Consequently, children's views are clearly valued and they are given choice wherever possible. There are explicit written plans which summarise how children's needs are to be met. Records document children's daily, weekly and monthly progress. Residential staff's care practice in this area is strong and children are clearly involved in drawing up their care plans. Staff do not currently get the children to record what they see as their needs. Implementing this addition to a plan may overtly outline where children see themselves and further reinforce their already excellent outcomes.

Children experience carefully planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes. Before admission detailed discussions are held with parents to gather lots of information. This successfully paves the way for a smooth transition into residence. Children come in for tea visits to begin with, as a gradual introduction to residential living begins. Parents confirm that the admission process is exceptionally supportive and identify that it is equally strong when children are due to leave the school.

Children stay a maximum of four nights of the week at school and then go home to their parents or carers. Staff are proactive in ensuring children maintain contact with parents when they sleep in school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has made a number of environmental adaptations, particularly in areas used for personal care. For instance, bathrooms have handrails and the use of hoists. The school's location, design, size and layout are in keeping with its Statement of Purpose.

The residential provision is used exclusively for residential pupils and is exceptionally clean and tidy. The residential unit is a warm and inviting space for children to sleep in and children are actively encouraged to personalise their bedrooms in order to make it feel more like home.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The residential staff, like the rest of the school staff, put into practice their real commitment to achieving the school's aims. This means that children experience a consistent approach that is personalised to meet their exclusive needs. Staff are well trained and benefit from regular staff meetings. However, staff's support processes are potentially weakened because they are not receiving regular half-termly supervision or annual appraisals. All new members of staff are required to undergo a process of familiarisation within the work place in order to enable them to function effectively and safely from the day they take up their appointment.

The management team provides very effective leadership for the staff group which means that children are receiving consistent care. The staffing policy ensures that the level of staffing is optimum in order to truly meet the school's Statement of Purpose. Consequently, children receive a flexible package of care by a skilful, committed and enthusiastic residential team.

There are effective procedures for the internal monitoring of the operation of the residential provision. There is a well-focused school development plan in place, which accurately prioritises actions and provides criteria for success. However, the external monitoring undertaken by the governing body is currently not meeting timescales as identified by the national minimum standards.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Children are receiving a good individual service in the school which is designed to meet their personal needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure that all staff including ancillary, volunteer and agency staff know and understand school child protection procedures in order to know who to report any concerns or suspicions to (NMS 5.1)
- consider ways of incorporating into the care planning process children's own views about what they see as their assessed needs (NMS 17.1)
- ensure that all staff receive supervision at the frequency stipulated by national minimum standards and that staff also receive a formal annual appraisal (NMS 30.2 & 6)
- ensure that half termly monitoring visits are undertaken by a representative from the governing body and a written report is provided on the conduct of the school following such a visit. (NMS 33.1 & 2)