

Notton House School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Notton House School is a maintained residential special school for 60 boys aged 9-16 years. Currently 25 pupils reside at the school during term time. The residential accommodation is provided in seven houses. The school is situated in a rural area of Wiltshire, and caters for young people with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. All young people referred to the school have a statement of special educational needs. An increasing number of students have additional learning difficulties, including attention deficit disorder, autistic spectrum disorders and communication and learning difficulties. The school is owned and operated by Bristol City Council.

The residential provision was last inspected in January 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	satisfactory
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Positive feedback has been received from pupils, families, placing authorities and staff. It is evident that pupils benefit from staying in the residence and have chosen to stay extra nights and weekends in order to join in with activities.
- Pupils report having excellent relationships with members of the care staff and clearly identify with a number of people with whom they can share their thoughts and feelings.
- Pupils' needs are identified, met, and regularly monitored through the care planning process and this results in them achieving good progress behaviourally, socially and emotionally.
- Safeguarding arrangements in relation to behaviour management, bullying, missing pupils, and recruitment are well met. The school demonstrates a commitment to ensuring pupils feel safe and are safe. However, concerns raised about physical intervention have been investigated internally before consulting with the Local Area Designated Officer.
- Staff are very aware of pupils' individual needs and have good strategies in place to manage any potential risks and hazards. However, these control measures are not comprehensively recorded in pupil files. This is a shortfall in documentation rather than direct practice.
- Managers report that independent visits of the residential provision occur in line with national minimum standards however; reports of visits for the whole year were not available in the school during the inspection. Reports seen confirm that mandatory checks are carried out, however, the visits are not sufficiently

challenging of the provision.

- Pastoral care is strong. Young people are provided with excellent support emotionally and psychologically. Emotional literacy, counselling and key working are good and young people develop resilience, control of their behaviour and emotions and grow in self-esteem.
- Health and safety measures are well managed in practice; this includes fire evacuation and health and safety checks. Fire and premises risk assessments have been completed and are reviewed regularly however, they do not clearly record all the potential risks and the control measures as carried out in practice.
- Healthcare arrangements are well met and pupils are provided with regular access to all required services. Nutritious food and promotion of physical activities support pupils health.
- Pupils are provided with a wide range of purposeful and enjoyable activities and report this as the best thing about the school. Activities develop young peoples' confidence, self esteem, and physical health.
- Equality and diversity is good and pupils' individual needs and requirements are known and met.
- All recommendations raised at the previous inspection have been fully addressed and have been embedded into the provision. This has included improved recording of complaints, more robust recruitment systems and more comprehensive care plans.
- All but two national minimum standards have been fully met. Senior managers are committed to ensuring that the shortfalls identified will be addressed.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are good and they enjoy positive and constructive relationships, particularly with the care team and managers.

Staff work with pupils from their individual starting points, build upon their existing strengths, and support them to develop new ones. The experience of boarding provides pupils with stability, clear boundaries, and effective support. This enables pupils to develop effective behaviour management strategies, independence skills, and grow in self-esteem. Regardless of their starting point all pupils have made good progress during their time as boarders. Placing authorities speak positively about the progress pupils have made in relation to independence skills and personal development.

Pupils are encouraged and enabled, with excellent pastoral support, to develop constructive relationships with their peers as well as the adults supporting them. Through the emotional literacy, restorative approaches, key working, reward system and therapeutic support, pupils are successfully developing tolerance and

understanding of each other. Pupils are supported to develop an understanding of their own needs and behaviours and how these may affect others both positively and negatively. Consequently relationships have improved, pupils are becoming more able to compromise and manage their emotions more appropriately and are developing emotional resilience. Pupils respond well to the rewards system and it is evident that this has helped them to manage their behaviour more appropriately and promoted their self-esteem.

Pupils report being happy with the boarding experience. A significant number choose to stay at weekends and on evenings they can visit home in order to participate in activities. Pupils active involvement in a wide range of activities provided helps them to develop new skills and interests, and opportunities to succeed.

Pupils are positive about the emotional and pastoral support that they receive; they report feeling listened to, cared for and helped to develop good behaviour. Older pupils feel the independent living skills programme has helped them to develop life skills and prepare for adult life. Pupils recognise their achievements and comments include: 'I don't get into trouble with the police anymore because I am so busy at school,' 'I have learnt life skills and can look after myself better' and 'I behave better now and don't need to be restrained anymore.'

Pupils are actively involved in the student council. This group has a strong voice and has successfully contributed to a number of changes and developments within the school and residential provision. These include: the development of a pupil games room, increased community activities, and the moving of benches across the campus.

The community based initiatives, such as the volunteer dog walking and the shoe box appeal coupled with the asdan programme enriches pupils understanding of the wider community and helps to prepare them for adult life.

The established system of daily celebrating achievement and progress helps pupils to develop a strong sense of self-worth.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. Positive feedback has been received from pupils, their families and placing authorities.

Residential pupils receive excellent pastoral care from a committed team of experienced care, therapy and support staff. The ethos is that of a nurturing environment in which pupils' needs are viewed holistically and they are well supported in the continuity of care provided. This helps them to build up trust, form meaningful relationships, and take responsibility for their actions.

Pupils benefit from regular key working sessions and have an allocated key worker responsible for monitoring their care and progress. Pupils feel confident to approach

any member of staff for support and can also access the services of an independent listener.

Pupils have a well planned induction which includes care staff visiting them at home to draw up an initial placement plan and the opportunity to visit the school with family and friends. Pupils receive a welcome booklet and meet initially with a key worker to learn about residential and school systems including complaints, fire safety, rules, and key working. Pupils feel this helped them to become aware of the boarding expectations and also enabled them to develop confidence and trust in the staff team. All pupils board at the school and staff sensitively and effectively support pupils who may initially find this difficult. The systems of providing smaller, nurturing environments has successfully supported pupils who now report that they really enjoy boarding.

Care staff are on duty during the academic day and provide pupils with additional support and encouragement. Pupils feel this has helped them to behave more appropriately during lessons. Care and education staff work together to set and review pupils' plans and targets. Daily handovers are held and contribute to all parties keeping up to date on pupils' progress and current presentation. This positively benefits pupils as it means there is a consistent approach to meeting their needs.

Pupils, their families and significant others participate in drawing up and reviewing placement plans. Pupils' views are initially sought at induction and then reviewed during key working sessions. Pupils are encouraged to participate in their annual and statutory reviews and express their views and opinions.

There are well-grounded systems in place that ensure pupils' achievements are celebrated. These cover academic, behavioural, and social achievements. There is a strong ethos on rewarding good behaviour and pupils respond well to the reward system.

Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the wide range of activities available such as swimming, the games room activities, film nights, a range of sports and trips out. They are actively encouraged to engage in the range and scope of extra curricular activities. This helps them to develop as individuals and gives them a sense of fulfilment. Good use is made of the many resources and facilities the school has to offer including a gym, games room, tennis court and football pitch.

Pupils are provided with good information, guidance, and support relating to all of the major risks to health and personal well-being and staff actively encourage them to lead healthy lifestyles. The school has recently accessed the services of a mental health worker who spends one day a week at the school. In addition, pupils are provided with personal, social and health education, drug and alcohol awareness sessions and guidance from the occupational therapist and emotional literacy coordinator. All these services work with individual pupils, liaises closely with care

staff, and provides training and support for the whole school staff group. Pupils' health is closely monitored and they are enabled to access support from the school's Consultant and local health services. Care staff receive training in first aid and the safe handling of medication and there are effective systems in place.

Pupils engage regularly in sports and other active pursuits, which promotes their physical health and well-being.

Catering arrangements at the school are excellent and ensure residential pupils receive healthy and nutritious meals. Special dietary needs are catered for, there is plenty of choice, sufficient quantity, and meals are of a very high quality.

Pupils benefit from the comfortable and well-maintained boarding accommodation. Wall displays indicating the activities pupils are involved in are evident throughout the school and residences. Pupils currently have their own bedrooms which they are encouraged to personalise to meet individual tastes and needs.

All pupils have ready access to a telephone and are able to contact their home and loved ones.

Residential pupils' safety

The evaluation of the pupils' survey and discussions with them confirm that they feel safe at school.

There are comprehensive child protection procedures in place and staff are provided with regular training and guidance in order to support pupils' needs. Recruitment and vetting systems are robust and include verification of references, checking gaps in employment and staff trained in safer recruitment on interview panels.

There is a good awareness of pupils' individual circumstances and staff work closely with placing authorities and those with statutory responsibility for young people. Any worries or concerns raised by pupils are listened to and taken seriously. Senior managers encourage pupils to reflect on how they feel following restraint and have investigated incidents when pupils have questioned how physical intervention has been carried out. Whilst it is apparent that internal investigations and subsequent actions were carried out to safeguard pupils the school had not initially consulted with the Local Area Designated Officer and this is not in line with current child protection procedures. During inspection senior managers took immediate action to address this matter.

Staff encourage pupils to respect themselves and each other. Emotional literacy is promoted and pupils are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of how their behaviour may affect themselves and others. The senior management team and emotional literacy coordinator are focused on supporting staff to understand the reasons why pupils may behave in challenging ways. The development of an environment where pupils can make mistakes without their behaviours being criminalised or managed punitively is having a positive effect on

pupils self esteem and emotional resilience.

All pupils and staff are expected to contribute their views to termly surveys on bullying and feeling safe. Restorative meetings are facilitated by suitably trained and experienced staff and help pupils to manage any incidents when they are made to feel unhappy by another person or to discuss ways of behaving more appropriately. Pupils themselves have recognised that this has helped them to understand the impact of their behaviour.

Restraint is used to support pupils who demonstrate physically unsafe behaviours. Staff receive regular training in an approved physical intervention method and consistently record all episodes of placing hands on a pupil. There is good analysis of restraint records and it is evident that the use of particular techniques has reduced this year. Managers are committed to continuing to reduce the use of ground holds and more restrictive interventions. Records demonstrate that restraint is used as a last resort and within appropriate boundaries to keep pupils safe.

Clear policies are in place to support staff to manage any incidents when pupils may go missing from the school. In practice this has not presented as an issue for current pupils.

Pupils' safety is promoted by an established health and safety policy. The head of care and site manager carry out monthly audits of the whole provision against a local authority premises and fire risk assessment. Whilst this document is comprehensive, it is generic and does not record all the specific issues related to pupils and the actual campus. There have been no recorded incidents that would suggest that pupils' safety has been compromised by this shortfall.

Comprehensive risk assessments, planning and notifications are in line with current legislation and are carried out in relation to all activities and residential trips. Each pupil has an individual risk assessment carried out initially at admission and updated regularly. It is evident that staff working with young people know these assessments well and in practice have developed good strategies to support pupils. However, these control measure are not fully recorded in pupils care plans and means that new staff may not be fully aware of how to consistently manage a particular issue.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. Pupils continue to benefit from a well-managed service that is having a positive impact on the quality of their care and personal development. The setting has an up-to-date Statement of Principles and Practice, pupils boarding booklet and parent information booklet that identifies what support and help can be expected from the school. The school is also currently upgrading its website to provide parents and placing authorities with additional information.

The six recommendations made after the last Ofsted inspection have all been met.

Staff are aware of the key principles and philosophy of the service and share this clear vision. All staff demonstrate courtesy and respect to pupils, parents and visitors to the school, and this contributes to the school's positive ethos.

Pupils enjoy the stability of efficiently run residential houses with a stable staff team. Staff are sufficient in numbers, and hold or are working towards gaining appropriate childcare qualifications. Pupils benefit from a well-trained staff team and training for staff is suitably planned to meet the needs of the individual pupils staying. Staff receive regular supervision and feel well-supported by the senior management team. Despite the current challenges the school has faced moral among senior managers and the care team remain good and this positively benefits pupils.

The residential provision maintains a complaints log and appropriately records actions taken to resolve any issues raised. This now includes the outcome of the complaint and the complainant's signature. Pupils feel empowered to raise concerns both as formal complaints to the headteacher and during surveys.

Senior managers monitor all activities across the school and residence, in particular those relating to pupil incidents, restraint, sanctions and complaints. Information is analysed and the headteacher produces a comprehensive report each term for the governing body. Reports are open and clearly document the progress made towards meeting the targets on the school action plan. Senior managers have a good understanding of areas in which the residential provision can develop further and there are plans in place to address these over the coming year. Developments include; enhancing the independent living skills programme for younger pupils and additional staff training in behavioural theories.

Senior managers and staff report that there are regular monitoring visits by the governing body and these unannounced visits include opportunities for pupils and staff to speak with the visitor. Reports following three visits this year were not available in the school for review. Reports seen do not demonstrate that independent visitors have sufficiently challenged the quality of service provided and identified any areas for improvement. The senior management team and nominated governor were in the process of addressing this. However this has not yet been embedded and remains an area for further improvement.

All policies and procedures are currently being reviewed and amended by the headteacher and governors, ensuring they remain up to date with changes in legislation and practices.

Individual pupil records are well organised, appropriately stored and regularly updated. Files contain the required information and provide an accurate record of the pupils' history and progress in the residence.

National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 11)
- Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the Headteacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, organisation, or partnership. Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body), within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. (NMS 20.3)

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that pupil risk assessments contain written information about control measures that are known and implemented by staff
- update the premises and fire risk assessments to ensure they include all potential risks and control measures as specific to the school and needs of the pupils
- ensure that governors independent visits are sufficiently challenging of the provision in order to improve the quality of care provided.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



13/10/2011

Dear pupils

Inspection of Notton House School

As you will know Ofsted recently inspected the residence at your school. We spoke to many of you, observed and joined in with activities you were doing, met with members of staff and looked at records. Most of you sent in questionnaires. We also received questionnaires from some parents and members of staff. We found that you were all very helpful and welcoming.

We were pleased to see how much you all enjoyed staying in the residence. You have good relationships with members of staff and we can see that you get along particularly well with the care staff. There are lots of people for you to talk to if you have worries or concerns and it is good that you feel able to raise complaints with the senior staff.

We were very impressed by the school council and it is evident that you have a strong voice in the school and that your suggestions for improvements are listened to and acted upon.

The staff work hard to make sure that you have an enjoyable time when you stay and they provide you with lots of opportunities and activities. We were pleased to see the photographs of you enjoying the summer activities week such as surfing, fun fairs and camping.

Staff support you to behave well and it is evident that you benefit from the reward system. We were pleased that many of you told us how the school has helped you to behave in a more mature manner.

We have asked the staff to ensure that the records they keep about you and the premises are fully completed to reflect the knowledge and service that is provided. We have also asked the governors to make sure that they challenge the staff and the care provided when they complete termly visits.

The staff are planning to develop the independent living programme so that the younger pupils can learn new skills.

Overall, we were impressed with your residence and think that you all do very well there. We enjoyed meeting you all and wish you all the best for the future.

yours sincerely,

Paula Lahey and Guy Mammatt.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Lahey