

Fred Nicholson School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

Unique reference number for social care	SC038284
Unique reference number for education	121256
Inspection dates	29/09/2011
Inspector	Dorrit Andrews

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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

Fred Nicholson School is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council, catering for pupils with complex needs aged from seven to 16 years. Situated in a residential area on the edge of a market town, the school takes pupils from a wide catchment area.

There are currently 106 pupils on roll, 21 of whom presently board. Pupils may board for up to four nights from Monday to Friday. However, the majority stay for two nights per week. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls in single bedrooms and dormitory areas in groups of four or less. Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. In addition, residential pupils have access to a range of school facilities during boarding time. The previous inspection of the residential provision took place in January 2011.

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

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. The provision has a highly effective impact on pupils' personal and social development and their education progress.
- Residential pupils are consistently provided with high quality individualised care to meet their needs.
- A stimulating activity programme with clear aims and objectives provides residential pupils with opportunities to keep physically active, develop social and life skills and build their self-esteem and confidence.
- Comprehensive systems support staff in keeping pupils safe and promoting their welfare. Residential pupils feel safe and demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety matters affecting them.
- The residential community is highly inclusive; boys and girls integrate well and form positive relationships between themselves and with staff. Pupils are supportive of one another and greatly enjoy their residential experience.
- Excellent work continues to be undertaken to promote tolerance and respect across the school community and beyond to enable pupils to understand and appreciate the differences of others.
- Pupils are empowered to develop individual skills which help them to progress, access the wider community and support them in their next step after school.
- Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to express their views and be involved in decision making.
- Individual health needs are promoted and supported extremely well in

partnership with other professionals. Nutritious meals cater for individual dietary needs and contribute to pupils' well-being.

- Effective staffing arrangements contribute to continuity and consistency of care for residential pupils.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision are highly effective. There is a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of the residential experience for pupils.
- Parents and carers are actively encouraged to work in partnership with the school to the benefit of their children.
- Residential pupils are extremely happy with the care provided. Parents, carers, staff and external professionals give high praise to the work of the school.
- All national minimum standards are met.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils benefit enormously from their residential experience and the excellent individual support they receive. For example, opportunities to take on responsibility, prepare after-school snacks and shop in town empower pupils to develop their skills and self-esteem. In addition, involvement with community projects, using public transport and visiting local amenities have enabled pupils to take controlled risks and negotiate their place in the wider community.

All pupils speak very highly of their residential experience. Specific reference is made to the friends they make, the activities on offer and the caring staff. Pupils who are soon to leave are sad at the prospect and say they will miss the strong relationships they have with staff and peers. Pupils report staff 'help lots', 'they explain things', 'listen' and help pupils to 'do things' for themselves. Effective working partnerships with visiting professionals also contribute to the well-being of pupils and support the school's work with families. Pupils' emotional health is supported by an informed staff team who are confident in discussing a range of topics with young people. This practice contributes to pupils' well-being and their transition to independence and adult life. Individual interests are nurtured wherever possible both locally and in the pupil's own community to enhance social skills and a sense of belonging.

Pupils' views are actively sought and effectively contribute to the development of the residential provision and school. For example, menus, décor, activities and play equipment are recent areas of discussion. Everyone is considered to have a contribution they can make to the school community. Roles of responsibility are tailored to individual pupils to support their development and build on their skills.

Comments from parents and carers regarding the residential provision are very positive. These include, 'the boarding is fantastic, it has made such a difference to

my child's skills of trying to be independent', and, 'I cannot thank the school enough. They have done a brilliant job'.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision and care is outstanding. Excellent provision is made to develop pupils' life and social skills, thereby supporting their educational progress. Admissions are planned and tailored to individual pupils. Clear placement plans detail assessed needs and are regularly reviewed to ensure pupils receive the support they need. Highly effective communication systems across the school community contribute significantly to pupils' welfare. These include staff working across the school community, whole-school training and residential staff attendance at daily briefings.

Pupils' health and well-being are promoted and supported extremely well in partnership with other professionals. These include a visiting counsellor and specialist health staff. Effective policies and robust recording systems support the safe management of medication which is securely stored and administered by designated staff. Pupils are empowered to self-manage their health care with support where appropriate. Personal care needs and their management are sensitively discussed in consultation with parents and pupils. First aid training is provided to staff across the school community to ensure qualified first aiders are always available on duty. Pupils report that they are cared for when they are unwell. The importance of a healthy lifestyle is emphasised through the curriculum and reinforced by the school's impressive 'Protect Me' programme. Pupils also benefit from a stimulating and wide-ranging programme of activities to keep active, enhance their social skills and build their confidence.

Pupils continue to be provided with healthy and nutritious meals offering choice and variety. Mealtimes are organised, social occasions and encourage the development of independence and social skills. Staff sit with pupils, engage with them and sensitively monitor food intake. Pupils benefit from catering staff who know them well, are very supportive and well trained. Pupil forums contribute ideas to menus, and effective systems are in place to communicate pupils' dietary needs and share menus with families. Residential pupils report they are very happy with the food provided. Parent 'access days' provide opportunities for parents and carers to sample school menus and discuss any queries with catering staff.

Residential accommodation is pleasantly decorated, furnished and clean and provides a welcoming environment. Premises are secure, checked regularly and well maintained. Pupils' personal possessions are protected and efficient provision is made for the laundering of pupils' clothing and bedding. Displays of recent events and residential pupils' artwork contribute to the creation of a pleasant environment. Pupils benefit from communal space in each of the dormitory areas and a large centralised communal sitting room and kitchen. Pupils also have access to a range of school facilities to support aspects of the evening activities programme.

Pupils are able to retain contact with their families and can make and receive telephone calls in private. Arrangements are flexible to fit in with family circumstances and support is provided where necessary.

Residential pupils' safety

The arrangements for ensuring residential pupils' welfare and safety are outstanding. Pupils' safety and well-being are placed at the heart of the school and staff are very aware of their responsibilities towards the pupils in their care. Effective policies, procedures and risk assessments promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils, both at school and in the community. These include robust recruitment procedures and the monitoring of visitors and contractors. Keeping safe matters are regularly discussed with pupils through a range of forums and activities and include cyber and personal safety.

The designated child protection officer has strong links with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children, ensuring practice at the school remains current. Effective monitoring of identified safeguarding concerns continues in liaison with other agencies; comprehensive records are maintained and securely stored. All staff receive child protection training and regular updates appropriate to their role. Bullying is not tolerated and is not identified as a problem at the school. Pupils are confident that staff will listen and deal with any issues well. Clear guidance is provided to senior pupils holding positions of responsibility on how to refer any concerns to staff. Pupils identify a range of adults across the school community they would go to for support. Pupils are unanimous they feel safe, and parents and carers confirm that the school keeps their child safe.

Pupils are effectively supported to develop appropriate behaviour through the use of behaviour plans, reflective discussions and supportive strategies. Staff receive regular behaviour management training including de-escalation techniques. Pupils are very clear regarding the expectations placed upon them and contribute to discussions regarding these as individuals and in groups. Few sanctions are used within the residential provision and the use of physical intervention is rare. Staff set aside time to talk with pupils and reflect on incidents involving the imposition of sanctions and the use of physical intervention. Clear records are maintained and include pupils' comments.

Regular safety and servicing checks are carried out to support the maintenance of a safe environment. Staff and pupils are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and pupils demonstrate a good understanding of safety matters affecting them. Premises are secure. Residential accommodation and associated facilities are reserved for the use of those pupils designated to use it.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. There are clear aims for boarding and these are communicated well to pupils, parents and interested parties. The purpose and benefits of the residential provision are positively promoted across the school community. There is a strong commitment to its continuing improvement. Established and effective monitoring systems and consistent self-evaluation also support the school's development. Internal monitoring reports and those of the local authority and designated governor are used effectively to drive improvement.

Highly effective management of staffing ensures staff skills and competencies are utilised to the benefit of pupils, for example, in one-to-one work with children and work with families. Staffing arrangements are effective in practice and ensure continuity and consistency of care. For example, efficient arrangements are in place for covering duties at times of staff absence through the school's own pool of staff. Pupils know who is responsible for them at specific times and are confident in what they should do if they need staff support during the night. Well-established routines and efficient organisation support the smooth running of the residential provision and contribute to pupils' progress. Pupils are particularly proud of their ability to organise their equipment for the school day and evening activities.

Staff are competent, highly committed and fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. All staff have access to good support, guidance and training to assist them in their work. Established systems are in place for the regular review of staff performance.

There is excellent communication with parents, carers and other professionals. Staff regularly update parents and carers on their child's progress, medical matters and any concerns. Home visits, school-based meetings and events support work with pupils and increase the involvement of parents in the school community. In particular, 'access days' provide opportunities for parents and carers to work alongside their child, be involved in activities and participate in workshops connected to safeguarding and parenting matters. Information regarding the school's complaint procedures and external agencies of support is provided to pupils, parents and carers. Pupils are encouraged to raise any worries at an early stage and all report they are confident in approaching staff. They feel they are listened to and treated fairly. Comprehensive records are maintained.

The residential community is highly inclusive; boys and girls integrate well and form positive relationships between themselves and with staff. Residential pupils are consistently provided with high quality individualised care to meet their needs. Pupils are supportive of one another and greatly enjoy their residential experience. Excellent work continues to be undertaken to promote tolerance and respect across the school community and beyond, to enable pupils to understand and appreciate the differences of others. The school's links with a similar school in China and recent

visit there by a small group of pupils and staff are contributing further to this area of work.

The recommendation from the previous inspection has been successfully addressed.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure a copy of the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol is included in the staff handbook.

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.



29/09/2011

Dear Boarders

Inspection of Fred Nicholson School

I enjoyed my recent visit to your school and the picnic tea and walk at Santon Downham. You made me feel very welcome. I am grateful for the time you spent talking to me and showing me around the residential units.

You told me you really enjoy boarding, making new friends, spending time with staff and doing activities. You are able to keep your things safe, decorate your own bed space and telephone your family if you want to.

Staff encourage you to eat a healthy diet and keep active. You like the food provided and are able to make suggestions to menus and help prepare snacks and supper. You are all encouraged to help with unit jobs, to make your bed and have good personal hygiene. Doing these things help you to become more independent and confident in looking after yourselves.

Staff regularly spend time with you and talk to you about how you are feeling and progressing. You think the rules are fair and you are kind to one another. The residential units are welcoming, kept clean and safely run. You know about fire drills and safety in the units and when out on trips. Staff also talk to you about keeping safe.

Staff keep good records of the work they do with you and share these with you regularly. You told me staff are kind, listen to you and help you with learning new skills.

This is an outstanding school and you are very happy with the care and support you receive.

I really enjoyed meeting you all and visiting your school. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Dorrit Andrews

Yours sincerely,

Dorrit Andrews