

Wolverdene Special School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector	Barbara Davies

School address	Wolverdene School, 22 Love Lane, ANDOVER, Hampshire, SP10 2AF
Telephone number	01264 362350
Email	
Headteacher	Mr Paul Van Walwyk

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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

Wolverdene is a local authority school within Hampshire catering for primary age children experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school provides mainly day placements, but 10 weekly residential placements are available for boys within The Lodge, which is a separate unit located within the school grounds. The Lodge accommodation consists of six single and two double rooms with shared facilities.

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	good
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Pupils enjoy enhanced life opportunities as a result of the exceptional standard of care provided. Parents and carers report that children 'make remarkable progress in their education' often after poor attainment and lengthy periods of exclusion from other schools.
- The school's robust quality assurance systems support the above view. Most students close the gap on their peers and achieve the expected levels or higher, prior to their move to secondary school.
- Parents recognise and applaud the strides their children make and attribute this to the extensive support provided by the care and the teaching staff.
- Pupils benefit from an evening programme of on and off-site activities which is stimulating, varied and interesting and through which they develop intellectually, socially and physically.
- High regard is given to the interests and preferences of individual pupils. An extensive range of facilities, resources and communal accommodation together with high staffing levels enables these to be facilitated.
- A number of different activities often run at the same time. Pupils say 'the things we do are great. We love staying here because of all the things we do. It is such fun'. An emphasis on group activities helps pupils to acquire and accomplish skills and values, such as co-operation and respect for each other, that will benefit them in adult life.
- A consistently high standard of care is provided within which equality and diversity is given top priority. Relationships between staff and young people are

extremely positive and based on mutual respect. Through their relationships, staff help young people to recognise and show a high level of appreciation for each other's individuality.

- If conflict occurs, staff help pupils to resolve their differences in a reassuring and constructive manner. Behaviour is extremely well-managed within the residential setting and sanctions and physical restraint are consistently low.
- Imaginative use of staffing resources ensures that staffing resources are targeted when pupils are present.
- Pupils are protected within the residential by excellent safe work practices which are acquired as a result of a well-established training programme. A safe environment is provided as a result of the rigorous annual health and safety audits completed by the local authority and the speed with which the resulting recommendations are addressed by the school.
- Pupils, unreservedly enjoy their residential experience and the school is able to demonstrate that the development of pupils who have involvement with the residential unit make greater progress.
- Medication procedures, although currently assessed as being safe, do not conform to best practice guidance.
- The school has met the national minimum standards and has taken appropriate action to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Outcomes for residential pupils

The residential setting is a highly inclusive community in which boarders enjoy exceptionally good quality relationships with each other and with staff. Staff help boarders to develop a tolerance of each other and to recognise each others' strengths. Staff encourage pupils to celebrate each other's achievements and to make progress in their own personal development by offering tangible incentives and rewards, such as identifying 'a star of the week'. Through this pupils learn to recognise and appreciate each others' strengths and individuality.

Care staff are very well-informed of the health needs of pupils and individual needs are extremely well catered for. Pupils say that residential staff 'are really very good at looking after us'. Residential and teaching staff inform pupils of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. In practice the residential setting provides young people with nutritionally well-balanced meals and opportunities for regular physical exercise, such as swimming.

An increasing multi-disciplinary team of school staff, including family workers and a play therapist, provide extensive support to pupils and their families. Staff successfully implement strategies to help young people develop social skills, such as politeness and courtesy. The table manners of pupils are impeccable and they are

very polite. Boarders participate fully in the routine of the residential setting acquiring skills that will equip them for adulthood.

Staff provide high levels of support to pupils to help them make the transition to their next education or residential placement. Transitions are reported by parents and carers, to be 'successful, less traumatic and almost seamless'. This is largely as a result of the well-planned and well-co-ordinated introductory visits that are arranged and accompanied by residential staff.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. Boarders receive excellent guidance and support from the care staff. There are clear and effective systems for sharing information between the residential setting and the school, for instance the recently introduced morning and afternoon briefings. Pupils have numerous adults who, they can turn to for advice and support. A governor of the school is available for pupils to contact should they have concerns they do not want to share with staff. The governor visits the school regularly so pupils can make informal approaches if they want to.

There is a comprehensive and well-thought out induction process which is tailored to the needs of new residents and includes the opportunity for introductory visits. The head of care supports new pupils in their initial term after which key workers are appointed. As a result pupils are very well supported. They settle in quickly and before long become acquainted with the rules and routines of the residential setting.

The school provides good arrangements for promoting and caring for boarders' health and well-being. Parents and carers maintain responsibility for most aspects of their children's healthcare with responsibilities being clearly identified and agreed prior to admission. Extensive medical consents are obtained to ensure staff are clear about the action they can take in an emergency and should first aid be required. The current policies, procedure and practice in relation to the administration of medication do not adhere to best practice guidelines, particularly in respect of the administration and recording of controlled medication and transfer of medication between home and school. However the familiarity that staff have with all children's medication needs together with the very small amounts of medication being managed, minimises any risk. The school curriculum provides age-appropriate advice and guidance on topics, such as smoking, drugs, alcohol abuse and sexual health. This enables boarders to make informed lifestyle choices and identify sources of support.

Pupils are provided with a nutritious, balanced and varied diet. There is a good choice of food provided at all meals. The school caters appropriately for pupils' religious and cultural needs, vegetarians and special diets. Food is in plentiful supply and of good quality. Pupils have ready access to drinks, fruit and other snacks. There are opportunities for boarders to put their views forward about the food and

changes are sometimes made as a result.

Pupils take part in an extensive range of activities after school. All activities are comprehensively risk assessed to ensure that safety issues are fully considered. The communal areas also offer good variety, and include facilities such as a games room, television room and computer room. Photographs displayed in communal areas confirm the varied and exciting recreational opportunities provided.

The residential accommodation and facilities are all of a high standard. There is a rolling programme of refurbishment and all areas are clean, well decorated and maintained. The security of the residential area is excellent with keypads fitted to the entrance. Young people say they feel 'safe and secure. All boarders are able to securely lock away their belongings if they wish to and report that their belongings are safe.

Pupils can easily contact family and friends by using the landline telephones in the boarding houses. Residential pupils can also contact family using email, although most choose not to do so. Staff contact parents on a regular basis both by telephone and e-mail and parents are appreciative of this.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes outstanding provision to safeguard the welfare of pupils. Their safety is at the very heart of the school. Staff demonstrate a clear commitment to protecting their pupils and a firm lead is taken by the head teacher, who is a qualified social worker as well as a qualified teacher. Well-established links have been made with the local safeguarding team. The school is proactive and refers all concerns, including those that may be considered 'low-level', for consideration by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). New staff receive a comprehensive induction in child protection and all staff receive regular refresher training so their knowledge remains up to date. Staff are knowledgeable about procedures and take these issues seriously.

Pupils are protected by the application of robust and thorough recruitment procedures. A number of school staff attend training in safer recruitment. There is a clear understanding of all the necessary checks which need completing. Procedures are consistently applied in practice before any member of staff starts work at the school. This protects children from having contact with unsuitable people.

Pupils understand the behaviour expected of them and generally behave well. Mutual trust and respect is unmistakably evident within the relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils say that staff are fair and records show there are few incidents necessitating the use of sanctions or physical restraint. Although not always analysed in writing, incidents are subject to scrutiny and strategies identified to reduce the occurrence. Care staff successfully share information with parents, carers and teaching staff. As a result they are largely successful in achieving a consistent

approach in managing the behaviour of pupils. Parents are very appreciative of the support as well as reporting a decline in the number of incidents and this is also reflected in the school setting.

Preventative action, such as raising the awareness of pupils through education, reduces the number of incidents of bullying. Pupils inform staff of 'low-level' incidents allowing intervention at an early stage. A very high and visible staff presence alongside an intense timetable of activities within the residential setting reduces the potential for bullying to occur. Any forms of bullying, such as racial or cyber-bullying are taken seriously and prompt action is taken to tackle it when it occurs. Pupils report occasional incidents of bullying but that staff are 'really quick to jump on these and stop them from happening again'.

Extensive measures are in place to ensure that the school and the boarding houses provide a safe environment. Pupils are protected within the school environment by the robust annual audits of the school's health and safety arrangements by the local authority. Prompt action is taken by the school in response to any recommendations. Gas and electrical safety checks are regularly and routinely carried out. Effective fire safety measures are in place. Regular drills take place.

Young people say they 'feel very safe in the school' and this is echoed by the views of some parents and carers.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the residential provision is progressive and forward thinking. Due to the concerted and combined efforts of the head of care and recently appointed head teacher the profile of the residential setting within the school has increased greatly since the previous inspection. Teaching staff consider the skills and competencies of the residential care team to be an extremely valuable asset. They particularly value the advice, guidance and support they offer in relation to behaviour management techniques. Although already an integral part of the school, there are plans to further expand and improve the pastoral care role within the educational setting so that a greater number of children can benefit.

Parents, carers, pupils and staff are clear about the aims of the setting as a result of the written information forwarded to them. Staff are extremely committed and enthusiastic about their role. A well co-ordinated training programme equips them with the skills and abilities to work with vulnerable pupils. Policies and procedures are available for staff to refer to and staff work consistently to these. However in some instances, such as the medication procedure, it is not based on best practice guidance and information is not always easy to locate.

Care staff benefit from the extensive opportunities available for formal and informal support and supervision. As a result they work co-operatively, confidently and competently. They consistently meet the aims of the service by providing a

consistently high standard of care and by offering imaginative and intense levels of support to pupils. Daily routines are very well-established and reinforced by staff. As a result young people know the standards of behaviour expected and things run smoothly. Parents and carers are very positive about the service they receive and in most cases say, for example 'this exceeds my expectations'.

Overall, relationships between care staff and parents and carers are extremely positive and constructive. Care staff make frequent contact with parents to keep them informed of the progress of their children. However a few parents and carers would like to be kept better informed over some issues, such as any sanctions that occur in the residential setting.

The diverse needs of pupils is recognised and catered for, as a result of the comprehensive assessment of needs that is completed prior to them being admitted to the residential setting. Care staff enjoy considerable success in encouraging and supporting pupils to achieve to their potential. Residential pupils derive immense enjoyment from the social activities provided and make excellent progress educationally. Improvements noted in behaviour in the residential setting is mirrored within the education and home settings, although sometimes takes longer to achieve.

There has been excellent progress since the previous inspection. All recommendations have been addressed and new initiatives implemented, such as the education and pastoral care handovers at the beginning and end of each school day. The head of care and headteacher have an accurate and insightful awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the service and have an improvement plan in place.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure the school has and implements appropriate policies for boarders who are unwell (this refers particularly to ensuring the school's medication procedures relate to best practice guidelines in relation to the transfer of medication between home and school; the receipt, storage, labelling, administration and recording of controlled medication)
- ensure that all policies, procedures and guidance specified within Annexe 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools are easily accessible to staff
- agree levels of contact between parents and care staff and include the arrangements within care plans

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.



30/09/2011

Dear boarders

Inspection of Wolverdene Special School

As you know, Ofsted recently inspected the residential provision in your school. I visited the house where you stay, met with the staff and spent the evening with you. After the inspection I spoke to some of your parents and carers and they gave me some very helpful comments. Thank you for making me feel so welcome and for taking the time to tell me about your experiences at the school.

I think that the residential provision is outstanding. It is good that the staff talk to you about the rules before you move in. This makes it easier for you to settle down. You get on well together most of the time. If there are disagreements, staff are always around to help you sort things out. You all like the staff and get along with them most of the time. I was very pleased to hear that the staff don't give out many punishments and there are rarely any restraints within the residential setting.

It was really great to hear that you are all making excellent progress in your education. Your parents, carers and staff are very proud of your achievements. You all receive excellent support from the care staff. They support you with problems at home as well as school. The care staff also help you prepare for your move to your next school or residential placement. This makes the move easier for you to make.

I think that the accommodation is really nice, cheerful and homely. It is really good that it has recently been redecorated and that you have some more new furniture coming.

It was also very good to hear about the wide range of activities you do after school. You enjoy taking part in these and have a lot of fun.

While care staff are really good at looking after your health needs, I have asked them to look at the way they give out medication.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Davies
Inspector

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Davies