

Doucecroft 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

Doucecroft School is an independent residential special school privately owned by Autism Anglia and caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorders. There are 47 pupils aged between seven and 16 years of which 26 pupils reside at the school four nights a week. The school is situated on the outskirts of Colchester. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses located on the school site. There are two further education departments, one on the main site and one at Kelvedon which also provides residential accommodation.

The residential provision was last inspected in February 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	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The residential provision has a positive impact on residential pupil's lives, enhancing their personal and social development.
- The quality of care is good; high levels of supervision ensure care is tailored well to individual pupil's needs.
- Safeguarding and security are good; residential pupil's safety is given high priority.
- The residential facilities are comfortable and well organised; these promote good outcomes for pupils.
- Monitoring of the residential provision is not fully effective and this minimises the opportunity for improvements.
- There are some national minimum standards that are not met but these do not diminish the overall quality of care and have minimal impact on residential pupils.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. Residential pupils are comfortable and at home in the residential houses. Surveys show that a high percentage of pupils agree that they enjoy boarding. The atmosphere is calm and orderly. Residential pupils share communal areas well, showing acceptance of one another's differences. High levels of supervision ensure that residential pupils are supported at all times by staff who understand their individual and complex needs.

Residential pupils develop confidence and independence while residing at the school. They feel secure in the provision and know what to expect. Good support from staff has helped them understand their individual routines using a range of visual timetables and symbols. All residential pupils develop practical skills as they participate in the running of the houses. Residential pupils take part in daily chores, prepare meals and shop for food. Menus are compiled with pupils, using their ideas and preferences. Older residential pupils at the Kelvedon site are able to learn how to cater for themselves in a teaching kitchen and prepare meals for others by assisting the cook in the house kitchen. They become increasingly independent, using public transport to access local resources with support from staff. These activities prepare pupils for transition to more independent lives.

Residential pupils behave well and are polite and welcoming. They talk to visitors about the provision and show familiar acceptance of one another. Residential pupils enjoy a varied range of activities both on the main school site and in the local community, where they take advantage of resources including clubs, parks, and shops. Older pupils enjoy a broad range of trips to support the school curriculum and widen their life experiences. These include outings to the theatre, art exhibitions and performing arts. The main school site has a swimming pool, gym and sensory room, all of which are used regularly by residential pupils. This gives them a varied range of physical activities to choose from, promoting healthy lifestyles.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of care received by residential pupils is good. Residential pupils are provided with good pastoral support that gives them guidance and support at all times. Academic and residential staff meet weekly to discuss the week ahead and ensure arrangements are in place to meet the individual needs of each pupil. A home-school book aids communication between the school, residential support workers, and parents. Care plans and health files show how each pupil is to be cared for and their health needs met. Individual management plans compiled by the school and residential staff give clear details and strategies on how to support specific behaviours. This ensures that residential pupils are provided with good overall care inline with their unique characteristics and individual health needs.

Residential pupils receive a good induction to boarding. A general prospectus and individual welcome packs ensure that pupils know what to expect and who will be caring for them. These include photographs of the staff and accommodation, providing good visual aids for pupils. Pupils are able to visit accommodation with families and arrangements to start are tailored to pupil's individual needs.

The school's catering arrangements work well. Residential pupils enjoy healthy food that is freshly prepared on the premises. Surveys from pupils show that most agree the food is good. Older pupils report that they thoroughly enjoy their hot evening meals. Other pupils are provided with hot lunches and lighter evening meals. These always include salad and vegetables. Snacks after school include fresh and dried fruit

with milk or fruit juice. This ensures that pupils have a balanced, nutritious and healthy diet. Residential pupils are involved in planning evening menus and these are displayed in formats that all pupils can understand.

Residential accommodation is of a varying standard. The main school site is purpose built and provides modern, homely accommodation with ample space for residential pupils. The further education site is an older building and is clean, warm and homely. Pupils have their own rooms and there are adequate bathroom facilities for the numbers of pupils. However, all the bathrooms are extremely dated and the lay out makes supervision of pupils who require help with personal care difficult to manage.

Residential pupils' safety

The safety and welfare of residential pupils is good. There are effective procedures for recruiting new staff. Thorough checks on suitability ensure that pupils are cared for by safe, suitable adults. There are robust child protection procedures implemented well by designated staff. This means that pupil concerns are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Staff use an established system to report concerns and monitor pupils' welfare and safety. All staff are given child protection training and understand how to implement the procedures that safeguard pupils' welfare. Residential pupils' surveys show that pupils feel safe in their residential houses and there are adults they can talk to if anything is worrying them. Feedback from social workers is that communication is good, staff liaise with them well and attend meetings where required.

The school site is enclosed and appropriately secure. Gates are electronically monitored and perimeters of the grounds are robust and well maintained. Houses are locked and visitors are monitored and chaperoned. These robust measures take account of pupil's characteristics and ensure pupils' security. Consequently, there have been no incidences of pupils going missing from the school site. Management of traffic on site is good; there are designated walk ways and crossings which staff show pupils how to use. Older pupils practise road safety while out in the community. This teaches pupils about the dangers of traffic and how to keep themselves safe.

Health and safety checks are generally up to date and fire prevention equipment is checked regularly. There have been some fire drills; however, these are not practised with enough regularity in residential time. This means that some pupils have not taken part in a fire drill and this could compromise their safety in the event of an emergency.

There are positive behaviour management strategies which keep the use of physical restraint to a minimum. Staff work cohesively to devise management plans for each pupil's behaviour. These are detailed and instructive, giving staff clear guidance on how to de-escalate situations and help pupils develop positive relationships. Staff do at times use restraint and these are reported on and reflected on well. Overall, pupils

are given behavioural support that is consistent and keeps them and other pupils safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. The Statement of Purpose sets out clear aims for pupils. These translate well into good residential care that is managed efficiently by the care deputy. Senior staff lead and direct staff during shifts in the residential houses. Good systems ensure that staff know exactly which pupils they are working with and which activities have been chosen for the evening. This ensures that high levels of supervision are maintained and staff are deployed effectively to meet pupils' individual needs.

The residential staff are positive and work well together as a team. New and existing staff undertake a range of training courses planned throughout the academic year. Some staff have obtained a Level 3 qualification. However, many staff do not have this which means they do not have a recognised level of professional competence in working with children. Support for staff is inconsistent. Some residential support workers have regular supervision, while others have little or none. This means that opportunities to reflect and improve practice are lost and this could impact on the quality of care provided to pupils.

The residential provision is an integral part of the school and residential staff are strongly committed to it. Staff fully recognise the diverse needs of pupils and plan well for them. This enables each boarder to develop and achieve in relation to their individual starting points. Good planning and use of risk assessment means that all pupils can access activities. This promotes good equality of opportunity amongst residential pupils.

The school has made some assessment of the quality of the residential provision and is aware of areas for improvement. There are new self-evaluation procedures that are being trialled to monitor the quality of residential care. The staff are committed to making future improvements, although the school has not fully acted on the two recommendations made at the last inspection. These related to staff supervision and monitoring, which require further improvement. External monitoring is not fully effective. While some visits are made, these are not carried out with enough regularity and there are no reports following visits. This has minimised the opportunity to drive improvements since the last inspection.

National minimum standards

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

- All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these Standards hold these qualifications or begin

working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment. (NMS 19.2)

- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)
- Accommodation for children complies with any requirements set out in regulations relating to school premises (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'), is appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, cleaned and maintained, and reasonable adjustments are made to provide adequate accessible accommodation for any children with restricted mobility. Toilet and washing facilities provide appropriate privacy for children. The accommodation contains suitable specialist facilities to support children whose disabilities require them. (NMS 5.1)
- In addition, fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'residential time'. (NMS 7.2)
- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the Headteacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)
- 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?

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.



14/11/2011

Inspection of Doucecroft School

I recently visited your school to carry out an inspection. I spent time in each house and spoke to some of you and the staff who look after you. Several of you also filled in our survey, as did your parents, and this was helpful.

The residential support workers work hard to help you develop your abilities and independence. There are a good range of activities on the school site for you to enjoy. I was very impressed by your good manners and by the way you help run the houses.

The houses are clean and well designed on the main site. The Kelvedon house requires some work on the bathrooms, and we have asked that this is the next priority for the school. We have asked the school to attend to some areas including monitoring the school more regularly.

Overall, the residential staff look after you well, and the food is varied and healthy. The staff take care of you health needs and ensure you have everything you need.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdra Keating