

Potterspury Lodge School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector	Andrew Hewston

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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

The school is an independent special school for boys aged 8-18 years who have Autism and/or emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and associated learning difficulties. There are currently fifteen resident pupils and thirty six day pupils. The school offers termly boarding, weekly boarding and day provision. All pupils have a statement of special needs and are referred to the school by the local authority.

The main house accommodates some of the school classrooms, one boarding area, the main office and medical room. Three further boarding areas and school facilities are provided in various buildings adjacent to the main house.

The school is set in several acres of land. The boarding accommodation consists of four self-contained units providing accommodation for groups of up to six boys as well as the Stables Further Education Centre. This accommodation is homely and comfortable. Weekly boarding is currently available from Sunday evening to Friday, as well as termly boarding, during term time only.

The school's care provision was last inspected in March 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	satisfactory
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	satisfactory
Leadership and management of the residential provision	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The residential provision has a positive impact on the lives of the residential pupils through encouragement in their educational, personal and social development.
- Residential pupils are supported by a caring and knowledgeable staff team who offer experiences that develop their self esteem and promote positive behaviours.
- Some safeguarding practice issues need to be improved, but staff are generally well aware of their duties and responsibilities to enhance the safety of residential pupils.
- Effective and detailed recordings are completed by a dedicated staff team. Residential pupils files contain a wide range of information relating to their time at the school and also show their development specifically to areas such as behaviour. Plans relating to residential pupils care are well thought through and highly personalised.
- The accommodation available to residential pupils is of a high standard. Communal areas are comfortable and homely while bedrooms are personalised with displays of certificates and achievements that develop young people's self esteem.
- A good range of activities are in place to allow residential pupils to develop skills while being in residence.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils at the school are good. Residential pupils are able to discuss positively how they have developed at the school, with one pupil stating that, 'the staff have helped me to calm down my behaviour and get me ready for life after school'.

Regular target setting and appraisals of residential pupils development allow the improvement of positive relationships and also create a more relaxed and safe environment for all at the school. The residential experience allows pupils to become aware of their own needs and how to develop strategies to combat these with the support of the staff team. The range of certificates within residential pupils' accommodation, and the way that they are able to discuss their own improvements within the school, shows that their achievements have developed their confidence and self esteem.

Good experiences through activities help to develop a range of interests for residential pupils and also practical and life skills. One residential pupil stated that, 'the activities are the best bits about the school'.

Residential pupils benefit from holistic promotion of health throughout their time at the school. Individuals are appropriately supported with relation to their physical, emotional and psychological health by a range of visiting professionals and the staff team. The vast majority of residential pupils state that they enjoy being in residence and are able to discuss positive elements of their care at school. The staff prepare young people for moving out of the school with the thoughtful use of an independence area for older pupils.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. Residential pupils are supported by a staff team that are aware of the differing needs of young people and respond to them effectively. Placement plans are child centred and provide a holistic assessment of needs. Robust and thorough placement planning highlights how residential pupils are working towards specific targets. The up-to-date and clear care files show how there is a strong culture of listening to residential pupils; evident in the recording of decisions made by the young people and discussions with them. Throughout their time at the school staff seek residential pupils views and choices, helped by their positive relationships. This interaction extends to the weekly hostel meetings and school's council, in which residential pupils actively participate. These formal meetings enable residential pupils to take responsibility for helping to develop the residential provision.

Arrangements for the induction to the school and also transitions to other hostels are fully supported by effective recording systems. These give staff a clear picture of how

best to support the residential pupils. Residential pupils enjoy a wide range of activities, both on the school site and externally, such as bowling and cinema. A well-structured activities plan gives residential pupils the choice of differing experiences to develop individual skills or work as a team with other young people. The school has its own scout and explorer groups to further enhance the activities programme. Contact arrangements for residential pupils are clear and they are able to use mobile phones or the communal phone within the main house to keep in touch with families.

Health practitioners visit the school on a weekly basis to support residential pupils. They also deliver advice to care staff to further enhance the level of care that they are able to offer. The procedures for administering medication are rigorous and ensure residential pupils receive accurate prescription medication safely. There are clear care arrangements for when a child is unwell, so that parents can be reassured their child's health is closely monitored. Health plans promote residential pupils' healthy lifestyles within the school. Residential pupils have an input into the food provided and the catering staff have an awareness of their differing needs. However, menus are not always responsive to differing cultural events to promote diversity within the school. Residential pupils stay in accommodation that is well-decorated and maintained to a high standard. The bathroom areas continue to be refurbished on a rolling programme. Residential pupils are proud of their bedrooms which are personalised with posters, photos and certificates, so developing their awareness of achievements and improving their self esteem.

Residential pupils' safety

The residential pupils' safety within the school is satisfactory. Residential pupils report that they feel safe within the school and their living environment. They describe a range of different staff or individuals that they would talk to if they were concerned about elements of their care, or if they were unhappy with anything within the school. Recruitment procedures for staff within the school are robust and enhance the safety of residential pupils. However, the recruitment of volunteers is not always fully completed in line with the regulations, although individuals helping at the school are well known to the staff.

Residential pupils are aware of the expectations of the school with relation to behaviour. Recording and target setting promotes positive behaviours and also form part of individual risk assessments and placement plans to further develop appropriate behaviours throughout the school. Residential pupils are able to clearly discuss the school reward system that is in place. This system is well thought through and allows pupils a choice of rewards or to save money to go towards larger rewards. Staff respond appropriately to poor behaviours in the majority of cases, although there are occasions where staff have not followed behaviour management plans and poor behaviours have escalated. Behaviour management records are completed in a timely fashion to support the safety of residential pupils. All staff complete training in the use of restraint techniques and this includes how to diffuse situations to further improve on young people's safety.

All staff have annual updates relating to child protection and there is a well-known system of reporting safeguarding issues within the school. However, the school has not referred safeguarding concerns appropriately to the local safeguarding children team. The school's management team have responded to this through improved risk assessments and information has now been shared with external professionals to improve safety arrangements for both pupils and staff. Thorough health and safety checks and regular maintenance of safety systems, including fire checks and drills, ensure the safety of pupils and staff throughout the school.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are satisfactory. There were three previous recommendations to improve care practice. Two of these have been fully met. There is now a monitoring system to examine all of the residential paperwork. Improved recording systems for restraints allow residential pupils to have an input into the records. However, the ability of school to respond to safeguarding issues appropriately continues to cause concern.

Instances of residential pupils going missing from the school are rare and there are effective risk assessments in place to support the safety of young people should this happen. However, a new policy for missing children is not fully compatible with local police protocols. The school clearly shows how it supports residential pupils' individual needs but there is a lack of promotion or awareness of equality and diversity throughout the residential provision. Some comments made by residential pupils relating to sexual orientation or disability are not sufficiently challenged by staff.

The school has clear information relating to the practice and purpose of the residential provision in a school prospectus. This gives readers an awareness of the school and residential experience. The residential areas are appropriately staffed by a team with a wide range of experience and qualifications. Shift patterns are demanding, but there is a low turnover of staff. This supports consistency of care and allows for settled relationships with residential pupils. The staff team cover absences within their own team with additional support from teaching staff where necessary. Staff are supported through regular supervision from the schools management team and this has been enhanced by the appointment of a care team leader to assist the head of care.

Residential pupils are able to highlight their opinions about the school in a number of ways, including dedicated meeting times. When residential pupils are unhappy about aspects of their care, there is a well-known complaint system in place. Recording shows that the school responds quickly and appropriately to concerns or complaints and residential pupils state that they are happy that their views are taken seriously. There is a robust, regular and effective monitoring system in place to examine a wide range of records within the residential provision. This is completed, both internally by

the schools senior management team and through independent visitors. A new reporting tool has meant that those completing the monitoring have a good awareness of what areas to look at and report on. All residential pupils have an up-to-date record of their time at the school and this includes all necessary information in line with the expectations of the standards.

National minimum standards

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

- Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 14.1)
- 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)
- The school's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the Head of Care follows the local RMFHC protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority. (NMS 15.7)

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure staff respond to behaviours exhibited by young people in line with their behaviour management plan
- ensure comments that do not promote equal opportunities are effectively challenged.

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.



23/01/2012

Dear residential pupils,

Inspection of Potterspury Lodge School

As you are aware the school was recently inspected. It was great to spend time in all of the residential hostels and see how you are helped by the staff team that work with you.

The home areas are well decorated and I liked the way that all of the residential areas are clean and well looked after. It is good that you are allowed to put up your own pictures and personalise your rooms.

The staff team work hard to make sure that there is a plan in place that will help you in your development at the school. It is good that you have targets to work to and improve while being there. I enjoyed seeing a few of the activities that you are involved with and I really like the fact that you have a scout group on the school site, I do not see that very often in schools.

The staff try to make sure that you are healthy, through having good systems for medication and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The school staff need to make sure that they challenge you when you are saying the wrong things about other people a bit more. They also need to make sure that they do what they need to if anyone has been hurt on the school site or they are worried that someone may get hurt.

The staff team work well together, they complete training and are helped by the senior staff when they need support.

Thank you for letting me spend time with you and for talking to me about what it is like to live at the school.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Hewston

