

# West Of England School For Children With Little Or No Sight

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Heather Chaplin / Guy Mammatt

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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.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

The West of England School and College is situated in Exeter, Devon. It is a non-maintained residential special school for children and young people of both genders, who have identified visual impairments. The majority of children and young people have additional complex physical or learning needs.

There are currently 100 children and young people on the roll in both the school and the college. The age range of children and young people is five to 22 years. Provision for young adults aged 18-22 years is inspected by the Care Quality Commission. There are 34 residential learners between the ages of 5 and 17 years. Children and young people come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The school provides a range of health services on site, including a 24 hour nursing and specialised therapy services. The residential accommodation and educational facilities are all on one 16 acre site. Residential accommodation is in several separate buildings, some of which are subdivided into smaller units. Some units have facilities and adaptations to meet the needs of young people with physical disabilities.

The residential provision was last inspected in September 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
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 school provides a highly specialised education and residential accommodation for young people who may have a wide variety of complex physical, learning and emotional needs. It achieves consistently outstanding outcomes for children and young people in every aspect of its boarding provision.
- There has been a reorganisation of the leadership and management since the last inspection. This has had a major impact on boarding, which has now been placed at the heart of the school's functions, with improved communication and coordination between care and education staffs. The new structure provides a coherent, robust framework which ensures that individual young people's care and education needs are fully met.
- There are many examples of excellence which are worth disseminating beyond this school. For example, there are excellent therapeutic services which work across care and education, to ensure that children receive programmes tailored to individual needs.
- Preparation of young people for independent living is exceptionally strong. Young people are encouraged and supported to take assessed and managed risks to help them to prepare for the outside world. Staff provide training and support to external employers, to help them to meet the needs of learners on work experience.
- Outcomes for learners are exceptionally good. Many young people achieve personal targets in daily living skills or behaviour, which might have seemed impossible before they came to the school. Many examples were seen where children have grown in confidence, made good friendships and are benefitting

fully from educational opportunities.

- Young people enjoy excellent relationships with staff and with each other, based on strong values. This provides an exceptionally supportive environment where young people can reach their full potential.
- The school demonstrates an outstanding commitment to equality and diversity through highly individualised care of young people from a variety of backgrounds. Young people enjoy considerable personal choice in their access to activities.
- There is a determined commitment to invest in continuing improvements to the boarding accommodation, which provides a good range of facilities to meet learners' needs. Boarding accommodation is clean, comfortable and well-maintained.
- Safeguarding has a very high priority in this school. There are excellent systems in place to promote the physical and emotional safety of learners, through a strong anti-bullying stance, effective child protection procedures and excellent risk management. The school works exceptionally well with the local authority to ensure that staff are well-trained to respond to any child protection concern.
- Parents and young people who responded to surveys, expressed very positive views about every aspect of the school. Staff and managers interviewed are also very positive and enthusiastic about their work.
- All the national minimum standards are fully met or exceeded.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential learners are outstanding. They have exceptionally positive outcomes because of their residential and learning experiences in this school. They enjoy excellent relationships with staff, who understand their needs extremely well. They feel very safe and relaxed in the school. There is a strong family atmosphere, which provides a supportive framework and helps residential pupils feel secure. Although some learners show complex, challenging behaviour at times, many have achieved significant improvements since joining the school. Some have made outstanding progress in their behaviour and confidence. They are very supportive and understanding of each other's needs. They learn to value diversity and accept their peers, irrespective of their differences.

Residential learners are well-supported in making a major contribution to the life of the school. Some have a strong sense of personal responsibility and spoke about their wish to help other learners, for example through a mentoring role. Some aim to return to the school as teachers, to share their skills with future generations. They enjoy their residential experience and most strongly agree that it is a great place to stay. They enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities suited to their needs, for example: climbing; cycling and participating in the annual Ten Tors event on Dartmoor. Residential learners are exceptionally well supported to take carefully

assessed risks and learn through experience. As a result, they grow in confidence, independence and develop an ability to deal with challenges. Many are actively involved in the wider community, through charitable work experience. Some have achieved exceptionally good progress, for example, from working behind the scenes in a shop, to serving the public. Some former learners have returned to the school as members of staff.

Learners are thoroughly and effectively consulted about the running of the school. Public organisations consult the school about provision of services for visually impaired people, which affords opportunities for young people to contribute their views. They feel part of the school and well able to influence how it is run. Learners lead very healthy lifestyles, through a well-balanced diet and lots of physical activity. All have individually-tailored programmes to ensure that they maintain optimal fitness. They feel very well cared for when unwell and benefit from an impressive range of therapeutic resources which are available to them on site. They also have swift and effective access to health care services in the community, should the need arise.

Residential learners have achieved excellent outcomes in terms of developing life skills and confidence. For example, some who suffered difficult experiences in their previous schools, including bullying, have settled extremely well, are learning, and have reliable, genuine friends. Some achieve what might appear to be relatively modest targets, such as walking themselves to school or tying shoe laces, but this can be deeply significant for them and for their families. They are highly likely to reach their potential as a result of the high levels of specialist support at this school. Former residents have gone on to achieve fulfilling and independent lives in the wider community.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. Boarding and education staff work effectively together to ensure a seamless approach to meeting residential learners' needs. They have access to excellent pastoral care, including a qualified clinical psychologist, to support them with individual emotional issues. The school's therapeutic resources are carefully coordinated through excellent communication, to provide a focused, 'joined-up' approach to individual needs. Prospective residents, accompanied by their parents, are carefully introduced to the residential life of the school through a detailed and comprehensive assessment process. New learners in residence receive excellent support to ensure that they settle well.

A wide range of exciting, stimulating and therapeutic activities is available, with residential learners fully involved in the choices. They have frequent house meetings, and are formally represented on the school council, which meets regularly to ensure that their views are conveyed to the senior management team. They could give examples of how they had been able to help bring about positive changes. They are encouraged to develop leadership and team building skills; for example,

they helped to set up and run a coffee shop in one of the houses. This provides an excellent informal meeting place. As well as being fun, this project helps residential learners to develop a variety of life skills. The school ensures that a full range of achievements are fully celebrated, both in terms of displayed work and regular award ceremonies. There is excellent communication with parents and the wider community about learners' achievements. Some learners are able to achieve relatively small targets, but these are celebrated with equal enthusiasm.

Care planning builds upon a detailed, specialised assessment process. Care plans are exceptionally thorough, very child-centred, with achievable targets. This ensures that residential learners have a realistic chance of making tangible progress. Care plans are dynamic and reflect their changing needs as they grow and progress in school. Planning also reflects medical complications which can arise when residential learners have complex and profound disabilities. The school has excellent facilities for caring for those who become unwell; for example, there is access to 24 hour nursing care if required. Medication systems are extremely well managed, safe and effective. Complex medical needs are managed very sensitively. The school has a wide range of specialised equipment to help young people maximise their freedom and independence.

Residential learners enjoy very good quality and well balanced meals, tailored to their individual medical or cultural requirements. Those who require specialised feeding techniques receive their meals in a dignified manner, before the main meal sitting. Boarding accommodation is situated in a range of buildings which vary in quality, but all provide at least a good standard of accommodation. The school is undergoing a programme of refurbishment. All residential houses are warm, comfortable and safe. The on-site maintenance team responds quickly to ensure that any repairs necessary are done so that there is a pleasant and well-functioning environment.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

Residential learners' safety is outstanding. The school has excellent, well-implemented and regularly reviewed policies and procedures to ensure that children and young people are safe at all times. The local area designated officer conducts annual reviews of safeguarding policies and practice to ensure that the school is up to date and in line with current child protection procedures. Staff recruitment is thorough, robust and exceeds the minimum required standard; for example, three written references are taken up routinely before a prospective staff member can be appointed. Staff members' partners or spouses who live on site have also been subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks and written agreements about their role with boarders. This helps to ensure that only suitable people have contact with children. All staff have received training in child protection, which is regularly updated. Five members of staff have been trained to level 3 standards, to ensure that there are robust systems in place for staff to consult if they have any concerns about a learner. Staff are well aware of action that needs to be taken in the event of a disclosure of alleged abuse.

The school implements a clear policy on physical intervention, emphasising the importance of de-escalation to avoid the use of restraint whenever possible. Physical intervention records are clearly recorded. On rare occasions when it may be necessary to restrict liberty of a residential learner with profound disabilities to ensure their personal safety, appropriate decision making processes are in place to safeguard their best interests. Residential learners report feeling safe from bullying. There is an excellent, clear and effective anti-bullying policy, which is disseminated to all learners through everyday care practices and through education. Incidents of bullying are very rare and learners' awareness is raised through excellent notice board displays around the boarding houses. They are taught about the importance of relationships, sexual health and avoiding the risks of drug and alcohol misuse. This links with the prevention of bullying by raising self-esteem and reducing opportunities for it to take place.

The school assesses and manages risks very well, so that learners are well protected and may participate as fully as possible in activities that interest them. The school is not risk averse and encourages young people to take risks to support their growth and development. Residential accommodation is very secure and safe, with residential learners well aware of the need to ensure that uninvited people do not enter the boarding houses. All equipment in the houses is serviced to the required standard to ensure safe functioning. The school has made major improvements to its fire procedures, with further plans for the future. Residential learners are very well drilled in fire safety to help ensure that they could leave the buildings safely in an emergency.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

Leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. Management changes over the past year have helped to unify the residential and educational aspects of the school. The residential side of the school is highly valued as a crucial element in the 24 hour curriculum. This unification process is ongoing, but there is clear, coordinated planning and effective communication between different groups of staff.

The school has a clear strategy for recruitment and retention of quality staff who can meet the needs of residential pupils. There are further plans to help ensure consistency and quality of staff and cohesive leadership has helped to raise morale. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of those with highly complex disabilities and some residential learners receive one-to-one care. When agency staff are used, they are regular visitors to the school and well known to all. This helps to ensure stability and that staff have the detailed knowledge of individual needs to be able to respond appropriately to any situation.

The school evaluates its own performance to an exceptionally high degree. For example, there is an 'inspection readiness' team which ensures that the school is



prepared for scrutiny by outside bodies at any time. There are clear and sustainable targets for further progress and the school has met all recommendations from the previous inspection. Independent visitors monitor the school regularly and produce constructive reports, aimed at raising standards still further. All required policies are in place. Recording of individual residential learners' needs is achieved to a very high standard. The school benefits from an exceptionally strong administration team which ensures that all records and systems operate effectively and securely. Complaints are managed very effectively, with clear recording and sophisticated management monitoring systems. Complaints inform improvements in practice to help ensure that there is effective learning.

There is an exceptionally good awareness of residential learners' individual needs. The school adapts and grows in response to changes and has, for example, purchased two properties to help meet the needs of young people aged 17 and older who are working towards independence. There is exceptionally good communication with parents and carers, who are regarded as partners in the assessment and therapeutic process.

## **National minimum standards**

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

## **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.**



25/01/2012

Dear learners

### **Inspection of West Of England School For Children With Little Or No Sight**

We really enjoyed visiting your school in January 2012 to inspect the residential and welfare facilities. It was great to meet with so many of you and hear your views about life in the school. We felt very inspired by your determination and talents in arts, crafts and many other areas.

We were really impressed by the wide range of activities that you enjoy, from Riding for the Disabled to cycling and swimming, as well as quiet activities that you can do in your houses. We thought that it was pretty cool to have your own coffee bar where you can meet up with each other and relax in the evenings. Running your own radio station is a brilliant idea! We had not come across this in any other school so far.

Your school has been rated outstanding in all respects, because residential learners are looked after so very well. Many of you have achieved fantastic results in different areas of your lives, in school work and just as importantly, through developing confidence and learning important skills for daily living. You enjoy good food, excellent health care and the school values your opinions. The school also has excellent, caring and supportive staff who are keen to continue to improve on all fronts.

Thank you so much to everyone who helped us by talking with us. You have helped to give your school such a high rating on their inspection, by being so positive and showing us how well you have achieved in every aspect of your lives. We wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Chaplin / Guy Mammatt