

# Mulberry Bush School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Unique reference number for education** 123330  
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**Inspector** Michael Williams / Sharron Escott

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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**

Mulberry Bush School is a not for profit charity and is approved by the Department for Education as a non-maintained special school. It provides 38 weeks of residential care and education and family work, as well as a number of day placements. This provision is for up to 40 boys and girls aged 5 to 13 years, who have experienced severe emotional damage in infancy and early childhood. At the time of this inspection, the school had 29 pupils on roll of whom 26 were residential pupils. The school specifically provides therapeutic treatment for children who have serious emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The school is situated in a village in rural West Oxfordshire, five miles south of Witney. Four houses provide the residential accommodation and are located around a 'village green', the classrooms are in close proximity and the layout of the site creates the spirit of a community.

The residential provision was last inspected in February 2011.

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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 overall effectiveness of the residential provision at Mulberry Bush school is outstanding. Along with education, therapy and family work, it forms part of a highly integrated school community that significantly improves the quality of life both for residential pupils and their families.
- The residential experience enables pupils to make excellent progress in their educational, personal, social and emotional, and cultural development. They grow in independence and confidence, which helps to prepare them for life after the school. Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally good.
- Staff focus highly effectively on the individual needs and wishes of residential pupils. Staff use this focus to inform individualised and integrated treatment planning for each pupil. This planning leads to considerable personal achievements for each pupil.
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is outstanding. Procedures for child protection, safe recruitment of staff and health and safety are robust and effectively implemented so that pupils are cared for in an extremely safe environment.
- The school is extremely well led and managed. The heads of group living and education work together effectively to promote residential pupils' welfare. They routinely reflect on and evaluate their practice to continually improve it. Within each of the residential households, the needs of the pupils are exceptionally well met by the extremely well-trained and experienced staff looking after them.
- All the national minimum standards are fully met. The school has sustained its

outstanding practice since the last inspection.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding, taking into account their starting points when they joined the school. One parent commented 'overall it's the best school my son has been to.'

Residential pupils are part of a highly integrated school community that includes group living, education, therapy and family work. There are exceptionally good quality relationships between staff in each of these teams and pupils. The spirit of a community at the school helps residential pupils develop a strong affiliation to their house group. Given the pupils' severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, which include attachment disorders, relationships between them can quickly change from being exceptionally good to being poor. The school's work consistently addresses these difficulties to establish positive relationships.

Residential pupils make outstanding progress socially and emotionally through their residential experience. For example, they significantly increase their ability to have healthy and mutually trusting relationships and significantly decrease their aggression, anti-social behaviour and levels of hitting and hurting. This is the impact of the school's work in continually assessing and reviewing pupils' social and emotional progress, as part of overseeing their care, education and treatment.

Prior to arriving at the school, many of the residential pupils have experienced multiple placement breakdowns and school exclusions. Once at the school, however, placement breakdown and exclusion are extremely rare. Pupils are helped to develop a clear sense of responsibility and to take on responsibilities, such as membership of the school council. Pupils are elected to the council by their peers, which meets weekly to discuss any topics pupils wish to. By raising pupils' views with managers and being regularly consulted about planned developments, the council has made a substantial difference to the school. In house groups, pupils' views are continually taken into account, both collectively and individually.

Residential pupils develop well-rounded interests and are empowered to achieve their full potential. This is as a result of the wide-range of extra-curricular activities and clubs that the school offers throughout the residential week. Clubs such as the production of a school newsletter and activities both in school and in the wider community such as sports groups and camping trips.

Residential pupils' physical, emotional and psychological health are highly effectively promoted. The school's nurse oversees pupils' health and medical needs and each pupil's treatment team includes their key worker, teacher, family worker and a therapist. Treatment teams are responsible for the oversight of the therapeutic care, education and treatment of pupils throughout their stay at the school.

Through their residential experience, pupils grow substantially in independence and confidence which helps to prepare them for life after the school. In addition, each pupil's treatment team includes a therapies and networks team worker who works with their family and external professionals to support their reintegration at the end of the placement. As a result, most pupils experience a smooth transition when they leave the school. For example, the majority of them achieve the school's aim of them returning to their home communities.

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

The quality of the residential provision and care for the residential pupils is outstanding. One parent commented 'we are very pleased with the support our child and us are receiving.'

The school's highly integrated multidisciplinary teams provide an exceptionally well coordinated provision for residential pupils. This supports their academic and personal progress. For example, there are comprehensive procedures for induction and support for pupils, both prior to and upon arrival at the school, which ensure they are familiar with staff, other children and the school's expectations and daily routine. These procedures include pre-admission visits to both the child's home and the school.

The school offers a wide range of excellent quality extra-curricular activities in house groups, the school community and the wider community. These activities are appropriate and enjoyable and contribute to residential pupils' personal development. Children enjoying taking part in activities, such as football club, and talk enthusiastically about other activities they had particularly enjoyed, such as street dancing.

As a therapeutic community, the school gives residential pupils excellent opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities to improve their self-awareness, aid personal growth and value achievement. For example, pupils elected to the school council link with managers to make changes where identified and agreed. The whole school community gets together weekly and celebrates pupils' achievements with the issuing of certificates. In house groups, pupils come together with staff each week for a community meeting when pupils' progress in relation to specific and agreed targets is reviewed and celebrated.

Placement planning and review at the school is comprehensive, highly focused on promoting residential pupils' progress in all areas and rigorously implemented in practice. Each pupil has an integrated treatment plan with placement objectives informed by a wide range of assessments that take place during their stay at the school. This plan includes the pupil's contribution, so that they are consistently and centrally involved in the planning and review of their care and an assessment of their progress academically, socially and emotionally. This plan is also regularly reviewed

to re-assess pupils' progress and to make any changes needed in the way the school teaches and looks after them. As a result, the school understands and meets pupils' needs extremely well and is extremely responsive to their changing needs.

The school has excellent facilities to promote and maintain residential pupils' good health. The school's qualified nurse, various therapists and house staff work closely together with each other as well as with a local general practice surgery and child and adolescent mental health service. The range and quality of the activities and food available to pupils also contributes to promoting their good health. The school caters extremely well for pupils who have special diets and who have issues about food consumption, to ensure that all pupils have healthy diets.

Residential accommodation and facilities are of a high standard and are safe and very well maintained. The accommodation in the houses is homely and residential pupils have appropriately individualised their bedrooms. Although the majority of pupils disagreed with the statement 'my belongings are safe', the inspectors found that each house provides reasonable protection for pupils' valuable possessions. In response to pupils' concerns, however, the school council and school managers are together looking into the provision of further protection. The school is aware that this is part of the wider issue of pupils learning to value and respect both their own and others' possessions.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The quality of the school's arrangements for ensuring that their residential pupils are safe and protected from harm is outstanding.

The majority of residential pupils agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel safe in my boarding house'. Pupils feel safe at the school and are highly protected at the school, which is especially important for them given that previously they may have felt so profoundly unsafe in their lives. One of the residential staff agreed with the statement 'children are safe in this school' but qualified this by adding 'the children often put themselves and others in unsafe situations. Staff work hard and put themselves at risk to deal with it effectively and thoughtfully.'

Thorough vetting procedures for recruiting staff ensure that only suitable people have contact with residential pupils. The school follows Department for Education guidance on safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education.

There is excellent practice in child protection. All staff are fully trained in child protection and four staff have particularly detailed safeguarding knowledge and expertise as a result of being part of the Local Safeguarding Children Board training pool. The head of group living and the partnerships and referrals manager are the school's lead child protection officers. They are informed of any potential child protection incidents at the school and are in regular contact with the local child protection team and the local authority designated officer for safeguarding. The

latter commented that 'our experience of the school is of an establishment that is open to outside agencies and always willing to work with agencies to address concerns.'

Positive and proactive behaviour management strategies are consistently applied to promote residential pupils' positive behaviour and relationships. The school's policy on working with challenging behaviour, positive handling and the use of sanctions is focused on de-escalating incidents and is consistently and successfully implemented in practice. All incidents at the school, such as aggressive, anti-social, racist and bullying incidents, are comprehensively recorded and monitored each week to bring about sustained improvement in pupils' behaviour. For each pupil, the frequency of such incidents is mainly decreasing as they successfully learn to develop socially and emotionally. If they have had an incident free week, pupils are awarded a certificate at the weekly community get together to celebrate this achievement.

Residential pupils live in a physically safe environment. The school complies with Department for Education health and safety advice and fire safety regulations. Regular health and safety meetings are preceded by a walk-round all areas of the school so any issues can be raised at the meeting. Fire drills are regularly carried out in residential time and a fire risk assessment is regularly reviewed.

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

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding.

The school is exceptionally well led and managed. The group living, education and therapies and networks teams work effectively together. This whole school approach means that all the different parts of the school run smoothly together and residential pupils are extremely well cared for and fully supported in all respects.

The school has a well informed and insightful evaluation of its performance and uses the findings to continually drive forward improvement in pursuit of the best possible outcomes for its residential pupils. For example, the school's annual welcome booklet profiles their successes over the year and how much progress pupils have made. The school's annual self-evaluation report also shows pupils' progress and achievement, both academically and socially and emotionally. This report clearly presents outcomes for ethnic minority and non ethnic minority pupils. Monitoring also takes place when the heads of group living and education meet weekly to review incidents and bring them to the attention of individual pupil's treatment teams if necessary. Improvement is also driven forward by the school's use of regular trustee visits and reports.

Managers ensure that there are always enough well-trained, experienced and suitable staff deployed to supervise the residential pupils. The school runs externally validated foundation degree training for all their staff who work alongside the pupils in group living and education. This is well above the level of the national minimum standard. All staff are extremely well supported to meet the needs of the pupils in



their care, through the school's practice in continual professional development. Staff receive regular supervision, both individually and in groups.

The school has the recommended policies and records in place to help the support of residential pupils. These are regularly reviewed by management. Pupils' records provide comprehensive information on their history and progress at the school and are kept securely. As a result, pupils can access their records at any time and gain an accurate understanding of their time at the school.

The school is fully aware of the diverse nature and needs of its residential pupils and ensures that they all have the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential while at the school. One of the ways that the school develops this awareness is by completing a cultural toolkit for each pupil during the assessment period at the start of their placement, which informs their integrated treatment plan. The school has well used anti-racism and equality and diversity groups and a positive value each term that helps support the promotion of equal opportunities. The January 2012 issue of the newsletter that pupils produce includes a reminder about the term's positive value: looking after things around us.

Through the school's therapies and networks team there is excellent communication with parents, carers and placing authorities as part of equipping each child with the personal, emotional and learning skills and abilities they need to be able to cope in a family and in a local school and community.

Communication with residential pupils is also excellent. There is continual consultation between staff and pupils to aid both their group living and individual treatment. As a result, the majority of pupils agreed that there are adults in their house that they feel able to talk to if anything is worrying them. Pupils elect their peers to the school council which the school consults about planned developments so they can contribute to these. Should pupils wish to speak with someone from outside the school, the school employs the services of an independent advocacy service. Each house has a direct phone line to this service, who visit the school monthly.

## **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.**



24/01/2012

Dear pupils

### **Inspection of Mulberry Bush School**

In January we visited your school for three days to find out what it is like to live at the Mulberry Bush School. We met many of you and would like to thank those of you who spent time with us, showing us around and talking with us.

Overall we found that the school does an excellent job in looking after you. This is because we found that they provide you with an excellent quality of care, which means that over time you get some great benefits or great results from being at the school. For example, most of you are able to return to your home community when you leave the school.

We also found that the school is extremely well run, by the staff and the managers, and excellent at making sure that you are kept safe.

Finally, we also found that how the school treats and cares for each one of you as an individual, taking your own wishes and feelings into account as far as possible, is excellent.

We enjoyed visiting your school and wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Williams and Sharron Escott

Yours sincerely,

Michael Williams / Sharron Escott