

Wishmore Cross School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Clare Davies

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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

Wishmore Cross is a Local Education Authority funded school for boys within the age range of 11 to 16 years. The school provides both boarding and day facilities for pupils with a range of complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Play therapy, art therapy and anger management are some of the therapeutic services available to support pupils with their behaviour and personal development.

The school has purpose built residential accommodation offering flexi-boarding for two, three or four nights each week. Within the building there are three separate residential units where boarders have single or double bedrooms. The boarders have access to the school grounds and facilities for evening activities. The school is situated in a village near to Woking in Surrey.

The last inspection of the school was carried out on 31 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	outstanding
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 Wishmore Cross School is outstanding. Along with education and therapeutic input, the boarding experience improves the personal and social development of pupils which in turn supports their families. For example, strategies used by staff to manage behaviour are implemented at home to positive effect.
- The residential experience enables pupils to make excellent progress in all aspects of their development. They grow in confidence and independence which helps to prepare them for life after school.
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is outstanding. The procedures are robust and effectively implemented so that pupils are cared for in a safe environment by people assessed as suitable. There is an open culture to work with other agencies and external monitoring is valued. The risk assessment framework effectively balances safety with age-appropriate challenges for pupils.
- Staff focus on the individual needs and wishes of residential pupils, tailoring personal targets to be meaningful and achievable. Success is built upon for encouraging pupils to aim high with the support of staff who have high aspirations for each pupil.
- The school's residential provision is extremely well organised and managed. There is a strong commitment to improvement through evaluation and review. Parents are very satisfied with this provision and the progress their children are making.
- This is an ambitious school, keen to embrace new initiatives and take proactive

action for the benefit of pupils' well-being and learning.

- All the national minimum standards are met. To improve further the school is asked to provide pupils with the contact details for the Children's Rights Officer.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with comments such as, 'Boarding is an excellent provision for these boys. It allows them some form of security and is very much a basis for developing their confidence and special abilities.'

Residential pupils benefit from exceptionally good quality relationships with experienced and committed staff members. These positive relationships with adults assist residential pupils in the forming and maintenance of friendships with their peers. There is a sense of community and belonging to the boarding provision and residential pupils display pride in their boarding environment and achievements. Through discussion on the school receiving three hours notice of inspection, one residential pupil commented that it doesn't matter when an inspector comes because they will find the school as it always is - a good school.

Staff are proud to report on the progress made by residential pupils, particularly with regards to behaviour. Residential pupils recognise themselves how they have been supported to manage feelings of anger and frustration and how they continue to utilise strategies to reduce such behaviours whilst improving their social skills. One parent stated, 'Since my son has learnt to control his anger and silliness, his academic learning has come on in leaps and bounds.'

Residential pupils are supported in developing confidence and self-worth. Areas of responsibility enable them to develop independence and contribute to their own personal and social development. For example, some residential pupils collect and deliver recyclable materials to the local collection site in the community, and others stock and run a shop where awarded points can be exchanged for a range of items. The incentive scheme of daily points encompasses many aspects of behaviour such as, daily living skills, respect and kindness to other pupils, attitude to adults and achieving personal targets. This system is very effective and residential pupils respond well, understanding what is expected of them.

Residential pupils develop well-rounded interests and are empowered to achieve their full potential through a wide range of activities. The residential provision is suitably resourced and pupils make full use of the school facilities. Some residential pupils are engaged with youth groups in the community. These opportunities further support pupils in developing their social skills with adults and young people outside of the school community.

A multi-disciplinary team of therapists are available to address any emotional and

psychological health issues. Having such a team of professionals on site ensures that residential pupils are not having to travel to appointments elsewhere and it means they receive a joined up approach from one school staff team in meeting their needs.

Each residential pupil follows a living skills programme, supported by a link worker to ultimately reach each target independently. All residential pupils have a first aid qualification and older pupils attend a local college for vocational skills in addition to work experience placements. This supports residential pupils in preparing for their future and identifying suitable skills they may have. The school reports that 66% of leavers last year are in employment or training.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils benefit from pastoral support of a very high standard. One pupil stated, 'The school has always been there for me. Great support through hard times.' Further support is expressed by a parent who commented, 'My son was helped with a number of issues he had, especially with his linkworker (boarding side); he felt secure and comfortable to air most issues he had.' This is an ambitious school, keen to engage with new initiatives and be at the forefront of best practice. All residential staff have recently become 'dignity champions' and two staff are dignity ambassadors who will help deliver the programme to other schools across the county. This role will promote the dignity of pupils and raise awareness of respect for others.

Good quality documents provide a comprehensive induction to the residential provision. The new residential pupils reported that they like the DVD made by older pupils, showing what life is like as a boarder. New residential pupils benefit from a visit before an overnight stay; this enables them to get used to the environment before spending a night away from home. A valuable event, prior to using the residential provision, is a home visit where the family can talk about their child's needs and the head of care then incorporates this information into a residential care plan.

During the school day, residential staff work in the school supporting pupils who may be struggling to stay on task and stay in lessons. An inclusion support team is made up of residential and classroom staff. This consistency of care is beneficial to residential pupils and reinforces across the site, working together to the same procedures and with the same aim of supporting pupils. Similarly classroom staff visit the residential provision at the end of each school day to report on the achievements and any difficulties that have arisen. Residential staff are able to continue with some topical themes of learning into the evening activities in addition to supporting pupils with homework.

The residential provision offers an excellent variety of extra-curricular activities for individuals, as a group and in the community. Residential staff pursue qualifications that will further enrich the activity programme. For example, two staff have

completed an indoor climbing course, enabling residential pupils to be able to take part safely.

A strength of this residential provision is the commitment and dedication of all staff who place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their practice. Staff are imaginative in finding ways to support pupils, ensuring it is meaningful and with purpose. The rules of the residential unit are displayed creatively, engaging pupils attention for discussion instead of a list of 'do's and don'ts'. Individual targets are more effective as a visual prompt for some pupils; this creative approach has engaged pupils in striving to achieve.

Care plans and weekly records are monitored by a senior member of staff. This not only ensures that residential pupils are being supported with an up-to-date care plan and targets, but also ensures that parents have weekly communication from the link worker. This excellent level of monitoring is two fold and provides feedback to link workers and their line managers on the quality of care practices and recording skills.

Residential pupils receive health care and medication from trained staff. The involvement of the multi-disciplinary team ensures a holistic view can be taken of the emotional and physical well-being of pupils. Residential pupils enjoy the school food, and meals are nutritionally assessed to ensure a balanced diet is provided. Healthy eating is promoted and pupils are encouraged to make suitable choices when making or purchasing snacks and drinks.

The residential accommodation is secure, very well maintained and decorated and furnished to a high standard. Pupils like their bedrooms and they are able to personalise their space with photographs and posters. Residential pupils can readily contact family and friends with school telephones or their personal mobile telephones.

Residential pupils' safety

The quality of the school's arrangements to safeguard residential pupils is outstanding. All the residential pupils agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel safe in my boarding house.'

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 and good inter-agency working. All staff are fully trained in child protection and the head of care is trained in detailed safeguarding issues in order to be an effective trainer across the school. Staff adhere to a code of conduct that explicitly details safe working practices. This promotes the safety and well-being of pupils and staff. Residential pupils are given information on how to keep themselves safe, building on information delivered in school through the

personal, social and health education programme. For example, safe use of computers and mobile telephones, appropriate interaction with others and the dangers of alcohol and drugs.

Proactive behaviour management strategies are consistently applied to promote residential pupils' positive behaviour and relationships. The school's policy on working with challenging behaviour, physical intervention and the use of sanctions is focused on de-escalating incidents and is consistently and successfully implemented in practice. The deputy head is trained to deliver the management of challenging behaviour to all staff and on occasions is asked to disseminate this area of practice to other schools. 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. Records support staff comments that the frequency of such incidents is mainly decreasing as pupils successfully learn to develop socially and emotionally. Success and achievement is consistently recognised and in addition to earning points, pupils can be rewarded with the accolade of boarder of the week. The headteacher also gives a weekly award across the school.

Staff vigilance and their in-depth knowledge of the pupils minimises opportunities for bullying to occur. Pupils know that bullying is not acceptable and they are supported to understand how some behaviours can make others feel, regardless of intent. The role of the dignity champions will further enhance this area of work.

Residential pupils live in a physically safe environment. The school complies with Department for Education health and safety advice and fire safety regulations. Written risk assessments are in place for the school premises, boarding accommodation and all activities. These thorough risk assessments support residential pupils to enjoy both on and off site activities, allowing them to take measured risks as part of their growth and development; such as indoor rock climbing and hill walking.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The head of care provides outstanding leadership and management of the residential provision, effectively supported by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. All parents of residential pupils agree strongly with the statement, 'boarding is well organised and managed effectively.'

There is a clear focus on improving outcomes for each pupil on an individual level with inclusion at its centre. The school has created an off-site education centre where the curriculum can be personalised and delivered on a one-to-one basis. This supportive approach is a commitment to pupils and their learning to avoid exclusion from education.

Residential pupils benefit from the collaborative working of the residential staff,

school staff, the multi-disciplinary team and parents. This ensures that pupils receive consistent messages and all the adults in their lives can apply similar strategies. Parents feel supported by school staff and feel fully appraised of their child's progress or any difficulties as they receive at least weekly telephone contact from key workers. One parent stated, 'The staff at the school are fantastic and very patient; their guidance for me is so important through difficult times with my son.'

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 pupils. The school reports improved attendance figures, reduced incidents of bullying and improved levels of attainment. To support pupils in improving their reading skills, parents are invited along with governors and support staff, such as those in catering, administration and maintenance, to spend some time with pupils reading. This is another excellent example of the whole school pulling together to meet the needs of the pupils. Improvement is also driven forward by the school's use of regular visits and reports from the governing body and an external manager from the local authority.

Residential staff are experienced, skilled and qualified to deliver the care and supervision to the pupils. Staff receive regular supervision and annual performance reviews. This ensures that they are monitored in their work and supported to identify any areas for development. Professional development is strongly encouraged. Residential staff have extended their skills through additional training.

The school has the recommended policies and records in place to help support 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. Upon leaving the residential provision, pupils are presented with photographs, memories and achievements from their stay as a boarder.

The residential provision values individuals and celebrates difference. This enables pupils to explore through music, food, sport and festivals an understanding of equality and diversity. Discussions and display boards raise awareness of issues such as disability, racism, sexism and homophobia. To take action in thinking of others, pupils take part in charity events to raise money.

Parents say that communication is a real strength of the residential provision and that they can easily contact the staff who care for their child. Consultation with residential pupils occurs daily and more formally through meetings. Pupils report that their views and wishes are valued as they have seen changes to the menus, the activities and areas within the boarding accommodation as a result of their suggestions. Residential pupils have strong relationships with the staff. This enables them to speak freely and air any problems or concerns. Should pupils wish to speak

with someone from outside the school, there are arrangements in place so they can contact an independent advocacy service.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- provide boarders with the contact details for the Children's Rights Officer.

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.



02/03/2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wishmore Cross School

I recently came to visit Wishmore Cross School to see what it is like to stay in Cedar House. Thank you all for making me so welcome, showing me around and telling me what you think about boarding at school. The boarding provision was judged as outstanding.

I found that the residential staff and manager do an excellent job in looking after you, supporting you when there are difficulties and most importantly ensuring that you have some fun. It was great to hear that you and your parents also think that the residential unit is really great and most of you told me you give it 10 out of 10.

The staff are supporting you to meet your targets and learn some independence skills. The points system seems to work really well in helping you stay on track and make some good choices with your behaviour. The points shop is a great idea and I think it is good that you are involved in selecting suitable items to exchange for your points.

The staff help you to think of others and offer kindness and friendship. You were all polite and kind to me as a visitor and I enjoyed meeting you all. I wish you all every success at school and at home. Follow your school motto, Wish 4 More!

Yours sincerely,

Clare Davies

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