

Cedar House 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

The school is a co-educational residential special school for young people exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school caters for young people of either gender aged seven to 16 years on a day or residential basis. Residential provision operates for 38 weeks per year. Currently there are a total of 48 pupils of whom 24 are resident. Since the previous inspection, which took place on the 12 January 2011, the school has re-located to its current site, with the move taking place during the Christmas break, ready for the spring term.

The residential accommodation comprises of four separate residential units, each with its own facilities. Three of the residential units house only male boarders of similar age, with the other currently housing female boarders, but with the potential to mix genders.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

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 is outstanding.
- The school provides an excellent boarding experience for residential pupils who thrive on the care and support they receive.
- Residential pupils benefit from having outstanding relationships with staff who provide clear boundaries along with a safe and stimulating environment.
- Residential pupils' individual needs are recognised. Comprehensive, high quality planning documentation, coupled with strategies and individual risk assessments are in place to address those needs.
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is outstanding.
- The accommodation and facilities available are of an extremely high standard and provide an environment designed to meet the needs of residential pupils.
- The management and organisation of the schools residential provision is outstanding.
- A highly motivated, skilled and well qualified staff team are supportive of the ethos, aims and working practices developed in the residential provision, which are outstanding.
- Managers and staff have a strong commitment to constantly review, evaluate and improve all areas of the residential provision with the aim of improving outcomes for residential pupils.
- All the national minimum standards are met. To improve further, the contact details for Ofsted shown in the pupil and parent guides, along with those

displayed in the living units should be updated to reflect recent changes.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Residential pupils are achieving outstanding outcomes in all areas of their development. They receive excellent levels of support that allows them to prosper socially, emotionally, physically and educationally. Strong, meaningful relationships are developed, with individual differences accepted and valued by all living and working in the school. This allows pupils to develop trusting relationships with appropriate role models. One parent says; 'I am pleased with the commitment of the staff and the progress my son has made. The fact the staff keep in touch regularly is good.' Feedback from other parents is equally positive.

Care staff are knowledgeable and understand the diverse needs of the residential pupils in their care. This knowledge is used constructively to consult with pupils and help plan activities and leisure pursuits that are both meaningful and meet individual needs. Photographs give an insight into the range of activities taking place. Opportunities are provided for pupils to become engaged in community activities where they can help and assist with certain tasks. These range from helping in a local café to assisting those less fortunate through fund raising and giving of their own time. Pupils benefit from developing a greater appreciation of other people's circumstances, giving them a feeling of self worth, achievement and satisfaction.

Residential pupils are regularly consulted about a range of issues that affect daily life. This is reflected in the way staff and pupils have worked together to quickly create a sense of community and identity throughout the residential provision, after only taking up residence in January 2012. Pupils' views have been taken account of throughout the planning and implementation of the move. The four living units are quickly establishing their own ethos and sense of identity, reflecting the tastes and interests of pupils residing in them. Excellent levels of communication between staff and pupils, along with more imaginative ways to engage and consult, ensure the levels and depth of consultation taking place is outstanding. This gives pupils a sense of worth, purpose and direction, confirming that their views and thoughts are important and used constructively to plan for change.

Residential pupils settle into an environment where boundaries and expectations of behaviour are well established. Pupils say they are comfortable with this, which provides them with a feeling of security. As a result, behavioural issues usually decrease significantly as pupils settle and adapt to their surroundings. Behaviour of residential pupils throughout the inspection was excellent, with pupils responsive to each other's needs and treating each other with sensitivity, respect and understanding. This tolerance for peers leads to a strong sense of community that abounds throughout the residential provision.

Residential pupils are very well prepared for life beyond the school. For example, all

pupils in their final year have a leaver's package. This is a personal file with a range of information, coupled with a series of practical tasks that promote and develop skills. This is part of the preparation in place for pupils to embrace independence and lead a more independent lifestyle. Underpinning this is recognition that promoting independence commences when pupils arrive at the school and this is reflected in planning documentation and individual risk assessments.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding in all aspects. The move to a new location means that residential pupils benefit greatly from more space and improved facilities. The whole site was completely refurbished to a high specification before the move took place. As a result, pupils have more space for recreation along with new facilities such as the sports hall. Common rooms have been created, heavily influenced by pupils' ideas and suggestions, giving residential pupils extra facilities to meet, relax and enjoy each other's company.

The four residential units contain single occupancy, en suite bedrooms for pupils, which are being personalised to suit the taste and interests of the occupant. The general quality of the furnishings, fittings, equipment and décor in the living units is outstanding. Whilst the settling-in process remains ongoing, the reaction from residential pupils to their new surroundings is extremely positive.

Residential pupils enjoy a healthy lifestyle and good health, with their health needs being promoted positively. Detailed health plans ensure individual needs are assessed and met. Residential pupils are registered with community-based health services to access day-to-day health support. The school employs its own nurse and also has its own clinical services on site for more specialised input where necessary. Excellent links with other services that provide additional specialist input are in place.

Residential pupils are encouraged to improve their lifestyles through diet and exercise. They are provided with information and given every encouragement and practical support to modify certain aspects of their lifestyle, such as tobacco, drugs and alcohol. As a result, pupils enjoy improvements in their general health and fitness levels.

Staff promote healthy lifestyles in a variety of ways. Residential pupils actively engage in a wide range of group activities, individual interests and leisure pursuits. For example, individuals have opportunities to attend community-based projects and activities that serve their specific needs and interests. They benefit from healthy meals which are sociable occasions. Clear information is available that allows them to make more informed choices regarding the food they eat. They are encouraged to try unfamiliar foods, appreciate different cultures and try international cuisine. Festivals and religious events are celebrated.

Residential pupils benefit and thrive in a supportive and nurturing environment.

Excellent, detailed care plans and individual risk assessments clearly identify individual needs, which include identity, religious, cultural and racial needs. Plans are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they meet current needs as pupils progress and develop. Pupils discuss and review their plans with staff and can demonstrate good insight into how they are cared for. They benefit from the excellent relationships developed with staff, who work openly, transparently and communicate positively with them. As a result, pupils enjoy living in a stimulating environment where they are cared for in a supportive atmosphere. This helps them to engage with adults in a positive way and look to their own futures with optimism.

The ethos and working practices developed in the residential provision are based on developing and maintaining positive relationships with pupils, an area in which staff are extremely skilled. These relationships usually survive testing times and challenging periods, which encourages pupils to settle and develop trust. A range of planned strategies addressing individual needs are used to support pupils in their placement. In practice, this means pupils settle into the school and reinvest into a more ordered lifestyle, allowing them to develop socially, emotionally and educationally. This in turn leads them into developing a more positive view of themselves and others, with significant improvement to their emotional resilience and knowledge gained.

Residential pupils' safety

The school has outstanding arrangements in place designed to keep residential pupils safe at all times. This is reflected in the range of policies and risk assessments in place, which are reviewed regularly. They underpin working practices developed by the school where safety is given a high priority. For example, there is a robust implementation of policies and procedures that relate to the recruitment of staff. As a result, only suitably checked people work with or have contact with pupils.

The welfare of residential pupils is safeguarded, with staff having the experience, knowledge, training and familiarity with safeguarding procedures to keep pupils safe. Should an issue arise, prompt referral to external agencies ensures young people are appropriately protected. Good staffing levels, coupled with sensible deployment of staff around the campus, are effective in minimising incidents of bullying. Pupils say that bullying is not a problem and confirm that it is not tolerated, with staff quick to intervene if needed. Pupils say they feel safe living at the school and this view is replicated by parents.

Residential pupils are supported to work positively through difficulties and say that any sanctions or punishments imposed are usually fair. However, they recognise that good behaviour is rewarded and have a full understanding of how the system works. Staff are extremely skilled at diffusing difficult situations and incidents, resulting in less confrontation and ultimately, less physical interventions. Excellent monitoring and evaluation of incidents ensures pupils' individual strategies are kept under review and adapted. As a result incidents reduce.

Staff know how to respond should any residential pupil go missing or fail to return from leave. They are aware of the local multi-agency protocols and practices in place, which are designed to protect pupils who are missing. This multi-agency response goes a long way to minimising the occasions where pupils become vulnerable or put themselves at risk.

Residential pupils are protected with a range of risk assessments that identify hazards both in and away from the school campus. Pupils participate in regular fire drills and can safely exit the living units when needed. Checks to maintain a safe environment are regularly undertaken. Pupils' individual risk assessments, coupled with coping strategies, promote a safer environment for all. Individual strategies are updated as required, based on each pupil's perceived risk and progress.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership, organisation and management of the residential provision is outstanding. There is a continuing drive to improve outcomes for residential pupils; for example, this has been the inspiration behind the move to a new location to improve the facilities, opportunities and ultimately, outcomes for pupils. The excellent ethos, organisation, management and working practices noted at previous inspections have successfully transferred to the new site. This has provided managers and care staff with opportunities to review some long-standing practices, which have been revised to reflect the new campus and its layout. For example, the residential provision is closed during school hours, ensuring that all pupils in the school enjoy the same facilities and all leave school collectively, to return to their home base.

Residential pupils benefit from having a practical, child-focused management team, who have a clear vision of how the provision should develop and are comfortable consulting with and acting on the views of pupils. They are supported by a staff team who are fully committed to the ethos, aims and working practices developed in the residential provision. They demonstrate a team-centred approach and understand their role and responsibilities. They work cohesively with the support of managers to address pupils' needs. The aims of the residential provision are clearly stated for both parents and pupils.

Residential staff receive excellent support, along with regular supervision and performance management. This helps to improve their knowledge and working practices. All staff have gained appropriate professional qualifications and receive additional, regular training to revise their knowledge and practice. This ensures they possess the competences and skills to effectively meet pupils' diverse needs.

The management team demonstrates an understanding of the strengths of the residential provision and areas in need of improvement. Both the internal and external monitoring of the provision takes place systematically, with monitoring

reports being completed regularly. They contain elements of quality assurance and ensure practice is accountable. Reports appropriately review performance and identify areas for improvements. Residential pupils contribute to elements of the monitoring process and can discuss their views.

Residential pupils live in an energetic, lively and supportive environment where staff work with families and other professionals to address young people's individual needs. Staff work with consistency and look for ways to resolve issues with pupils in a non-punitive way. They work through difficult and challenging periods patiently and positively, allowing pupils to stabilise their behaviour and look to the future with a greater sense of responsibility.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- The contact details for Ofsted shown in the pupils and parents guides, along with those displayed in the living units, should be updated to reflect recent changes.

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.



23/02/2012

Dear Residential Pupils

Inspection of Cedar House School

Thank you for spending time and sharing your thoughts with me and the other inspector, Mr Trainor when we visited your school recently. Everyone met and spoke with an inspector. Your views were helpful and have been taken into account when the judgements about how well the residential provision of the school is progressing, were made. You all made a full and positive contribution to the inspection.

Most of you gave positive examples about how well you are either settling into the school and how well you are now progressing in various aspects of your lives. You recognise you are well supported by staff and say you get on well together.

You have all worked very hard to get the residential units looking so good and lived-in after such a short period of time. However, the inspection is not just about the way staff look after you or the quality of the accommodation you live in. It's about the pupils living in the school as well. As a visitor, the lively, energetic and friendly atmosphere created by yourselves and the staff makes visiting a pleasure. That is great credit to you all.

Based at where you were when you first arrived at the school, you seem to be making significant progress with your lives. You understand the boundaries put into place by staff and the reasons why. Usually you keep to these. When you don't, you recognise that the rules are generally fair. None of you had any serious concerns about the staff or school in general and everyone was able to confirm that the school is a safe place to live and that you feel safe living there.

As a result of the inspection, the school has been asked to update the contact details for Ofsted which are displayed around the school and appear in the written guides provided for you.

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting the school and its residential provision. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Robinson