

Starhurst 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

Starhurst School is a maintained special school that incorporates day and residential provision for boys between 11 and 16 years of age with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school provides for up to 50 boys and has residential provision for 24. Boarding is primarily on a weekly basis but there is flexibility within this to make other arrangements to suit the needs of individual pupils. The residential accommodation consists of three separate lodges, two of which are identical in their physical provision while the other is used for senior pupils to experience independent living and to acquire independent living skills. The residential provision was last inspected in September 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	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Young people receive a good standard of care, support and guidance which addresses their educational, social and behavioural learning needs, and say they enjoy staying at the school.
- Relationships between staff and young people are meaningful, with young people stating they have a number of people to whom they feel able to communicate their needs, wishes and views.
- Suitable systems are in place to address behaviour management, with young people saying they have made progress in reducing their negative actions. However, responses from staff in challenging inappropriate language and attitudes are inconsistent.
- Excellent systems are in place to address the emotional well-being of young people, with on-site expert advice and programmes of intervention enabling a holistic approach to be implemented.
- The physical and medical health care needs of young people are generally met, although opportunities to address unhealthy lifestyles are not always taken.
- Activity planning is a strength of the school, with a varied programme in place each evening allowing young people to engage in many outdoor and indoor pursuits. Young people clearly enjoy activities and are enabled to pursue their own individual interests.
- The standard of accommodation is extremely high with young people benefiting from living in a very well-maintained environment with access to excellent facilities.

- Young people and staff alike are kept as safe as possible without unduly limiting their opportunities to participate fully in physical activities. Robust safeguarding protocols are implemented in practice, with all matters of health and safety being rigorously addressed across the school.
- The management approach is effective and young person centred. An experienced and stable care staff team are well supported and guided to provide care that places the individual needs of young people first. Parents/carers comment most positively on the support received from the school and the progress made by their child.
- The school leadership team display a commitment to developing practice and learning from experience.
- Since the last inspection progress has been made in a number of areas including improving the robustness of the monitoring of care provision. The school meets a majority of the national minimum standards; two were not met.
- The individual needs of young people are well considered. The approach toward equality and diversity underpins practice, allowing young people good opportunities to learn about and appreciate difference.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for young people are good. Young people share sound relationships with staff and are comfortable in their company, confirming they had a number of staff whom they can go to for help or advice. Young people are clearly able to express their views easily and say they feel, 'listened to'. For example, when young people raised concerns that they were being treated differently to day pupils, in relation to a school sanction being carried over into the residential routine, the school responded by amending the process to ensure greater equality. An on-going process is in place to gain the views or opinions of young people which are subsequently used to inform activity planning and development.

Young people are assisted to make progress in their personal development and say they enjoy the boarding experience. Comments included, 'the activities are great', 'staff understand me', and 'I have learned loads since coming here' and were indicative of the how young people feel about staying at the school. Young people were also able to reflect positively on the impact of being at the school over time, noting that, 'I used to be very difficult when I first came, but I have been helped to sort out my behaviour.' Parents and carers expressed positive views on the changes brought about by their child being at the school.

The use of sanctions is appropriate and commensurate with the nature of any misdemeanours. Young people say the rules are, 'fair enough' and stated they understood them and the reasons why they may be given. The level of sanctions put in place is kept to a minimum, with very few occurring since the last inspection.

In general boarders have their health care needs met, most notably their emotional well-being and encouragement to engage in healthy physical activities. However, other areas, such as assisting them to reduce or give up smoking, are not always addressed in a planned and consistent manner.

Young people are assisted with planning to move on from the school and to learn independent skills before they do. Close liaison across the school ensures such transitions as moving on to college are done jointly involving input from the education and residential teams alongside the young person and their parents and carers. One area of the boarding facilities has been set up to cater for older young people. Some young people struggle to settle into the less structured environment and increased levels of personal responsibility; however, the school has persevered, leading to a number of young being able to make progress in their self-care skills. Young people noted the process had enabled them to, 'grow up a bit more' with their self-esteem clearly improved as a result. The school has also implemented a process with contact being made with young people who have left the school to assess how well young people who have moved on are doing.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential provision and care is good, although the promotion of healthy lifestyles is not always addressed comprehensively.

Young people receive very good pastoral support with clear communication between all staff assisting them to engage fully in the educational, social and vocational aspects of school life. Issues affecting each young person during the school day are passed over to the residential team without delay, while a member of care staff is always on duty during teaching times to offer support whenever required.

A well-established system of linkworking ensures young people are allocated a designated member of care staff who plays a key role in implementing their care plan and liaises regularly with their parents and carers and placing authorities. Staff of both genders are available, while information relating to independent advice and support is displayed openly.

Personal education plans are completed on each young person, which provide an individualised approach to meeting their holistic needs and take account of their cultural backgrounds and learning abilities. Similarly specific care plans highlight areas of need and include aims and objectives for each young person with agreed targets to achieve. Some targets focus on reducing swearing and aggressive outbursts, though these plans are not always followed by some staff.

Young people are provided with good information before arriving at the school with admissions into boarding being as planned as is practicable. A new DVD has been

produced which offers a visual overview of boarding including the large variety of activities young people undertake. Opportunities such as sports days are used to introduce young people and their parents/carers to the school.

Activities are a strength of the school with a varied amount of pursuits available throughout the week making up a key component of the day. Trips away from school take place regularly such as to local places of interest where games such as 'man hunt' are clearly popular with young people. Young people are helped to pursue their own interests alongside group outings and events such as attending cadets or local youth clubs. Evenings centre around activity planning, with the staff team engaging young people with enthusiasm and their own participation. Young people are enabled to consider difference and culture with diversity evenings held ranging from meals, games and information nights. Recent themed events have included learning about countries such as Jamaica and Argentina, while a 'cockney night' focused on an aspect of British culture. A 'bug night' also took place with young people able to handle and learn about exotic creatures via a visiting expert.

The physical and medical needs of young people are generally well considered and addressed. One National Minimum Standard, relating to ensuring young people have opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles, was not met. All young people are registered with a local doctor's surgery with close working protocols ensuring appropriate advice and intervention are readily available. Health care plans highlight specific areas of need including current medical issues and any medication being taken. Risk assessments are completed to allow young people who are able and responsible to administer their own medicines. Shortfalls were identified in health care planning in relation to assisting young people to address unhealthy pursuits. For example, programmes were not put in place to help young smokers to reduce or stop their smoking habits or indeed to receive smoking cessation advice or intervention. The storage and administration of medication is maintained suitably with only trained staff administering medicines.

Young people benefit from excellent on-site resources to address their emotional well-being. This includes speech and language support and dedicated time from staff from the local child and adolescent mental health service who are available at the school two days per week. The healthy profile of such support and ease of referral allows for close working with young people and their families and reduces the risk of stigma and fear. Young people can also access more therapeutic-based support through acupuncture which provides an opportunity for them to find appropriate ways in which to deal with feelings of stress or anger.

Young people receive a high standard of catering provision which provides variety, choice and nutrition. Menus confirmed that meals are balanced, with fresh vegetables and salad options. The nutritional values of each meal are analysed to ensure their fat and salt contents are suitable. Young people have input into meal choices and can request specific foods which are considered appropriately and implemented wherever reasonable. The last environmental health department

inspection awarded the catering department its highest mark for cleanliness and hygiene.

The quality of boarding facilities is excellent with all areas being found in a very good condition. The décor of the environment is homely and young people have been able to personalise their own rooms. Little damage was evident, with young people seeming to appreciate the high quality of their surroundings. Young people benefit from excellent on-site facilities including a sports hall and gym, a sports field, outdoor play areas and comfortable lounges equipped with modern entertainment items.

Young people are assisted to maintain regular contact with parents, family and friends. All young people go home every Friday with a vast majority having their own mobile phones. Lodge phones are available should young people wish to call home, while older boarders are allowed free time to visit friends locally.

Residential pupils' safety

The approach taken in regard safeguarding young people is good. Shortfalls were identified in the manner in which behaviour management strategies are implemented.

The school ensures young people are kept as safe as can be expected with robust policies and procedures being implemented effectively in practice and closely monitored. Clear lines of responsibility ensure key people are identified as taking the lead on safeguarding matters across school, with all staff receiving high quality training in child protection, including the domestic and maintenance staff teams. When issues arise they are addressed swiftly and include closely liaising with Local Safeguarding Children Boards when required. A comprehensive recruitment process ensures no members of staff work with young people until all required checks have been completed; all persons living on site are subject to similar procedures.

The school takes a progressive stance in regard bullying and has established a number of innovative ways in which young people can express their concerns. This includes the establishing of a confidential anti-bullying text and email helpline and highly publicised anti-bullying information and events; the anti-bullying lines are monitored daily by the head of care and senior staff. Staff are mindful of young people who may be vulnerable to being bullied and those who may bully others; no young person raised concerns that bullying was a significant issue in the school. A similarly rigorous approach is taken toward young people leaving the school without permission. Clear protocols have been established to respond to such events, including working with the local police. Incidents of this nature are not common, with young people being supported to make considerable progress in reducing their tendencies to 'run off' at times of stress, frustration or anger.

Young people are normally provided with good advice, guidance and support to

address their negative behaviours; however, the approach toward behaviour management can at times be inconsistent. As a result one National Minimum Standard is not met in this area. Individual plans include targets such as reducing swearing or aggressive behaviours with progress being reviewed routinely. The behaviour of young people was seen to be varied with responses from staff to negative behaviours being mixed. On occasion, staff were seen to respond to negative and abusive comments in a strong, firm and appropriate manner, while in similar circumstances different staff did not challenge the young people at all.

Staff are trained in dealing with situations that may require the use of restraint and seek to engage young people in dialogue wherever possible to avoid the need to intervene physically. As a result, the levels of restraint within the residential environment are very low with just one being recorded since the last inspection.

Health and safety are taken seriously, with all aspects of risk being addressed most comprehensively. All required tests, drills and servicing of equipment occur without delay, including the routine testing of fire safety equipment and the undertaking of fire evacuations involving young people. Assessments are completed on all areas of the school with trips away from the site being rigorously considered before they occur. Such risk assessments do not limit young people from engaging fully in pursuits and activities and indeed highlight a positive risk-aware approach rather than risk averse.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good. The management of boarding is clear and effective, with boarding seen as a high priority in the school as a whole.

The aims of boarding are clearly identified and acted upon in practice. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and cover all aspects of care, support and intervention, being updated and reviewed annually by the school and its governing body. All records are stored securely.

Leadership of boarding is strong, with unforeseen and challenging circumstances, such as sudden and long-term staff absence, being responded to in a progressive and pragmatic fashion. The head of care is vastly experienced, displaying a wealth of knowledge and insight into the needs of young people and the support and guidance staff require to care for them.

The monitoring of care provision is robust, with all records and care practices being regularly reviewed by the head of care. Key areas of care are assessed for patterns or shortfalls, with the findings used to inform and improve staff practice. Required monitoring visits are undertaken by an independent person and provide a comprehensive review of the quality of boarding which include the views of young people themselves. Such reports link well with the head of care's reviews and the

overall improvement agenda. The school's development plans include quality assuring the residential service, the progress made by young people using the provision and future boarding requirements and challenges.

Good numbers of staff are deployed day and night to meet the needs of young people. An experienced and stable staff team work hard to support the purpose of boarding. During periods of unforeseen staff shortages, existing staff have shown considerable commitment in providing young people with a continuity of staffing, thus nurturing a sense of community.

Complaints are dealt with swiftly and appropriately, while the views of young people are sought in matters which affect them. Few formal complaints have been made since the last inspection, with those that have being addressed fully with all parties being satisfied with their outcome. Ideas and opinions from young people are routinely sought via a number of avenues and are subsequently considered seriously. Young people can complete requests forms at any stage, with recent ideas bringing about changes in rules concerning bedtimes, in moving bedrooms and the addition of a Jamaican theme night to the programme of diversity events. The school council is currently not in operation, although given the aforementioned developments, this does not impact negatively on young people having an active and productive voice.

The school ensures that excellent communication is maintained with parents/carers. The school works hard to establish and maintain positive and effective contact with parents, carers and placing authorities. Joint working allows strategies to be implemented both within boarding and at home, which in turn assists young people and their families to make progress. Parents speak most highly of the support they receive from the school noting that, 'we cannot express how much we have appreciated the help they have given us and our son'.

National minimum standards

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

- Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include: records of developmental checks; health monitoring required by staff; intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues. (NMS 3.11)
- The school has and consistently implements a written policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint is to be used; and arrangements for searching children

and their possessions. (NMS 12.1)

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.



21/05/2012

Dear Boarding Pupils

Inspection of Starhurst School

As you may remember Ofsted recently inspected the boarding houses at your school. The inspector visited the houses, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. Some of you talked with the inspector as a group, while others were spoken to when they were out on an activity.

Your school provides a caring and supportive place for you to live. It is good that you all have different members of staff who you can talk with and that you can have a laugh together. The inspector was very impressed with the activities that you are offered, especially ones where you can try new and exciting experiences like 'man hunt' and 'bug night'.

The inspector saw some good behaviour most of the time, although once or twice a few of you used pretty bad language and showed some attitude which could have been hurtful or even offensive to others.

Your health is looked after pretty well at the school, especially when you need help with your feelings or thoughts. Staff help you to learn how to eat healthily and take exercise, although you should be helped more to reduce or give up smoking.

The staff work with you to help you to become independent and move on to college courses. Although some of you found living more independently a bit difficult it is really good to see that others were able to learn a lot more about looking after themselves.

You live in boarding houses that are really great with brilliant facilities like a sports hall and gym also being available for you to use. It was really nice to see how you have personalised your own bedrooms by putting up posters and pictures.

At the end of the inspection the inspector asked the school to review the practices around working with you when you use really bad language and behaviour and to improve the way you are helped to give up smoking.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Whatley