

Bowden House School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Janet Hunnam / David Putnam

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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

This is a residential special school maintained by a local authority. It provides education, care and accommodation for up to 38 boys, with an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, between the ages of 10 and 16.

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	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	satisfactory
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the school's residential provision is good. The high quality of care, support and guidance impacts significantly on the lives of residential students enabling them to make progress socially, educationally and in their behaviour.
- Positive, nurturing relationships with experienced, committed and well trained staff help students develop trust in the adults who care for them. Students report they have a number of people they are able to communicate their needs, views and wishes.
- The school manages students' individual health requirements extremely well, including the provision of fresh, nutritious food to enhance students' health. Effective systems are in place to address the emotional well-being of students with on-site specialists available to implement a holistic approach.
- Students engage in a stimulating and wide range of outdoor and indoor activities which allows them to develop individual interests, leadership and team working skills that promote their self-esteem, self-confidence and social skills.
- The newly built, purpose designed accommodation provides superb facilities to meet individual students' needs and to develop their independence.
- Close, effective liaison between care and education staff promotes a shared understanding of students' needs and a consistent approach.
- Strong links exist between staff and students' families including weekly telephone calls and postcards. Parents and carers appreciate this effective communication ensuring students' needs are met. Parents speak highly of the school and the

positive impact on their children in a short period of time. One parent commented 'the school has ticked every box' in terms of their expectations of meeting their child's needs.

- The protection of students has a high priority. Students feel safe and secure within the residential provision. However, systems designed in the new buildings to enhance the safeguarding of students has the effect of restricting their ability to move in and out of buildings freely. Risk assessments are comprehensive and rigorous though do not limit the students from fully engaging in activities. Progress on enhancing the safety of students since the last inspection is evident.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision are highly effective. Skilled and proficient managers support and guide an experienced and stable staff team to provide high quality care enabling students to make progress and enhance their future life prospects.
- The school has successfully addressed the recommendations made at the last inspection. The school meets a majority of the national minimum standards. Two are not met.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential students are good. A parent commented that, 'the school is brilliant, I cannot fault it' and that her child, 'is a lot better at home since being at the school'. Another parent commented that, 'there has been a change since he started at the school. He is happy, contented and loves going to school. The school is amazing and I have seen a difference in a short period of time.' Students benefit significantly from their residential experience and highly individualised care. Positive, nurturing relationships with staff help students develop trust in the adults who care for them. Students report they can approach any of the care staff if they are anxious, worried or upset and are comfortable talking to staff. Students respond well to consistent positive reinforcement from staff, firm boundaries and the highly nurturing environment. The culture of the school promotes respect, honesty and responsibility within which students encourage and support each other. A proactive approach to bullying involving students in a bullying council encourages all students to show consideration for others and develop an understanding and acceptance of each other. This contributes to students' increased confidence, self-awareness and emotional resilience.

Parents have excellent relationships with staff. They report that communication could not be better. They receive weekly telephone calls and a postcard each week keeping them informed of the progress students are achieving and ensuring each student's individual needs are met.

Students contribute to the development of residential provision through discussion with staff and via the school council. Initiatives through the student council have resulted in more menu choices, snacks at break time, fruit in common rooms, input

into activities and the refurbishing of the youth club. Staff take suggestions seriously, refer student ideas to senior members of staff for consideration and provide feedback to students. These practices provide students with a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Students enjoy a wide range of stimulating experiences and opportunities. These help them to develop teamwork, leadership skills, fitness and social skills and ensure they have fun. Through the privilege system, students earn additional activities and agreed rewards based on their improvements in social and academic areas of the curriculum. Staff encourage students to develop independence skills at an appropriate level. Intense staff support prepares older students for a successful transition to adult life or the next stage of their education. They experience budgeting, managing a bank account, planning, shopping and cooking meals, independent travel and driving lessons to equip them with the skills and knowledge to move on successfully.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Committed and motivated residential staff provide consistent and high quality care. Highly effective and cohesive links between pastoral and academic staff provide students with individual support tailored to their needs and help to address any issues promptly. Consequently, students thrive and progress academically and socially.

Purposeful, enjoyable activities are a key feature of the residential provision. Students participate in a range of outward-bound experiences led by experienced and trained residential staff. Through these activities and residential trips, students develop leadership and team working skills that promote their self-esteem and self-confidence. Regular activities away from school enable students to widen their social experiences and integrate into the local community. Individual student's interests are encouraged alongside group activities and students attend a local gymnastics club and air cadets. The school has superb on-site facilities, including a spacious sports hall, enabling appropriately skilled and qualified staff to engage students to use their leisure time positively and develop new skills and interests. Staff consult with students regarding their choice of activities and plan age appropriate pursuits. Younger students are encouraged to play and have fun both indoors and outdoors. Students say they enjoy the activities that are many and varied and which support their development, assist them in learning to play with others and use the outdoors constructively.

All students register with a local doctor who visits the school on a weekly basis. Staff ensure students attend regular health appointments and work closely with parents and carers to ensure the school is meeting all their health needs. There is a robust system for administering medication ensuring students receive their prescribed medication safely. There are clear arrangements when a student is unwell to monitor their health closely. Students' emotional health and well-being has a high priority.

Trained and experienced staff provide individual counselling and therapy where appropriate. The focus on meeting the health needs of individual students allows them to feel valued and cared for.

Catering arrangements in the school are excellent. Students have healthy and nutritious meals that offer choice and variety. Effective communication ensures staff accommodate individual student's dietary requirements. Students' requests for changes in the catering provision through the student council, influence menu planning and the availability of snacks during the school day and in the evenings. Meals are well balanced and cater for personal preferences, cultural needs and identified medical requirements. Catering staff have an excellent rapport with students. Meals are social occasions set up to encourage the development of social skills and appropriate social interaction.

Residential accommodation is superb. It is newly built, separate from the school building and specifically designed to meet the needs of residential students. Individual bedrooms with en-suite facilities and some bedrooms enabling students to share, provide private space. Students are encouraged to personalise their rooms. Spacious common areas are furnished to a high standard and enable students to relax and pursue indoor activities in a safe and calm environment.

Residential pupils' safety

The school's provision to safeguard residential pupils is satisfactory. This judgement is significantly influenced by the failure to meet a national minimum standard. Some students raised concerns that an electronic key fob system on external doors restricts their freedom. All external and some internal doors in the school and residential buildings operate by this system. If the fire alarm is activated doors open automatically. Otherwise, students cannot leave the building unless a member of staff agrees to let them out. While recognising this system is designed to promote safety, it results in the liberty of students being restricted at all times they are in the buildings.

In other areas, the school delivers effective provision to safeguard students' welfare. The protection of children has a high priority. Sound policies and procedures coupled with up-to-date training fully support staff. This helps them to have the confidence to deal with problems as they arise. Suitably experienced members of the senior leadership team share the designated child protection lead role. This ensures there are always senior staff available to deal with important safeguarding issues. Managers proactively liaise with other safeguarding bodies to share information effectively to protect and support students.

Students say that they feel safe. They do not report bullying as an issue. Difference is accepted and respected. Students effectively contribute to the sense of safety through an anti-bullying council, which staff and governors support.

Robust records evidence excellent recruitment practices. This safeguards students from unsuitable people working within the school and residential provision.

Students feel secure and comfortable living in age related groups. Staff support them to engage in activities appropriate to their stage of development without the influence of others. Individual targets promote positive behaviour which students clearly understand. The prospect of additional privileges encourages students to respond enthusiastically to meeting their targets. Staff use restraint only in accepted circumstances. Detailed records of restraints include the opportunity for students to discuss with staff what happened. This helps students to learn from experiences and consider different actions in the future and is a positive response to a recommendation made at the last inspection.

Staff address all aspects of risk comprehensively and health and safety is taken seriously. Risk assessments are rigorous with on-site and off-site activities carefully considered before they take place. However, such risk assessments do not limit students from engaging fully in activities and pursuits and highlight a positive risk-aware approach rather than risk-averse.

The positive responses to other recommendations made at the last inspection further enhance the safety of students. The school's policy on students who go missing now makes links to the relevant protocols for each local authority that has children placed at the school. Fire drills now take place in the school and residential buildings each term. This ensures that students practice how to respond in an emergency to keep them safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the residential provision are good. The move to the new building represents the culmination of a longstanding vision to improve and develop the provision for students. An experienced and enthusiastic leadership team have a range of skills that complement each other. As a result, the transition to the new buildings has been managed extremely well resulting in minimal disruption to students. Throughout this period of change, managers have continued to support staff effectively to secure their engagement and contribution.

All staff receive regular supervision of a high standard. This promotes the continuing professional development of staff, who are also encouraged to contribute to their own personal development plans. Managers review individual plans annually and link these directly to the overall development plans for the school.

All students are residential, meaning that boarding is central to the experience of all students. Excellent communication exists between residential and teaching staff, ensuring effective and consistent sharing of information. However, there is suitable division between the two elements of the school experience, meaning that students are able to keep issues or difficulties separate.

Managers and staff get to know students extremely well as individuals, enabling them to identify and meet the needs of students. Knowledge of each student's family background including their culture, faith or religion is augmented by excellent relationships with parents and placing authorities. Relationships with some members of the local community have proved more difficult in recent months. Difficulties relate to changes resulting from the new building. Leaders and managers continue to respond to matters raised and strive for improvements in these relationships.

All recommendations made at the last inspection have been thoroughly addressed achieving positive outcomes for students. In addition to the improvements in their safety, detailed records now contribute to an understanding of each student's experience. These include details of medical appointments or interventions.

A national minimum standard is not met. The school's statement of principles and practice refers to care staff as 'residential social workers' and indicates that an education social worker is employed. However, no staff are appropriately qualified or registered with a professional body which entitles them to use the title of 'social worker'. This has limited impact upon students, but does have the effect of restricting the judgement to good.

National minimum standards

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

- No school restricts the liberty of any child as a matter of routine or provides any form of secure accommodation. (NMS 12.7)
- Any social workers and other specialist professionals (e.g. medical, legal, educational, psychologists, therapists) are professionally qualified and, where applicable, registered by the appropriate professional body. They are appropriately trained to work with children and their families, and have a good understanding of residential child care and the policies and purpose of the school. (NMS 19.5)

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.



24/09/2012

Dear students

Inspection of Bowden House School

As you may remember, Ofsted recently inspected the residential provision at your school. The inspectors visited the groups, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. Some of you talked with the inspectors as a group, while others were spoken with when they were on an activity or at meal times.

Staff provide you with high quality care and support. We can see you have members of staff that you can talk to and you get on well with staff. Staff know you very well, treat you as individuals and want to help you to do the best you can.

Your new school is superb and your living accommodation with your en-suite facilities and spacious common rooms enable you to relax with your friends and have private space. The sports hall is fantastic.

We are very pleased to see that you have such a wide range of exciting outdoor activities and that you have activities you can do inside. It seems to us that you all enjoy the activities and have fun.

Staff make sure they look after you and keep you healthy. We know the food is healthy and we thoroughly enjoyed our time eating with you. Your mealtimes are very pleasant sociable occasions.

It is good to see that staff help you to become more independent and the older students are doing very well in learning how to look after themselves.

Staff are excellent in keeping in touch with your families and letting them know how you are getting on.

Staff try at all times to keep you safe and this is the reason why the outside doors can only be opened by staff when you want to go out. However, we have asked them to try to give you opportunities to move around more freely.

We also asked your head teacher to change the title of some staff in their documents about the school as only qualified social workers can be called social workers.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Hunnam / David Putnam