

North Hill House

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

North Hill House is an independent residential special school for 52 boys, and more recently for girls, aged 7-19 years, 28 of whom reside at the school during the week and some weekends. The residential accommodation is provided in five areas, four of which are located within the school and the fifth is in the nearby town for pupils in post 16 education. The school is situated on the edge of the market town of Frome and provides for pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Asperger syndrome) and associated learning difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in April 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 North Hill House is outstanding. The residential experience enables pupils to make significant progress in all aspects of their development. Pupils grow in confidence and independence which helps prepare them for life after school.
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is outstanding. The school is proactive in working with other agencies for the safety and benefit of pupils. Risk management provides safety without stifling the opportunity for new challenges.
- This school is continually striving to improve and engage with pupils to inform development of the service. This school embraces new initiatives for the benefit of pupil's learning and well-being.
- The collaborative working across the school contributes to stimulating the enthusiasm of the staff teams. All staff have high aspirations for pupils, encouraging them to achieve excellent outcomes.
- The residential provision is extremely well organised and managed. Parents are very satisfied with this provision and the progress their children are making.
- All the national minimum standards are met.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with comments such as; ' The pastoral care is outstanding. Excellent

communication and I feel listened to. There should be more schools like this. I am highly impressed with this school.'

Successful progress is made by residential pupils, particularly with regards to behaviour. They recognise how staff support them to manage feelings of anger and frustration and help them develop strategies to reduce such behaviours while improving their social skills. Staff are proud to report examples where individual pupils have grown in maturity and self confidence, thereby reducing the number of incidents of challenging behaviour.

Residential pupils benefit from exceptionally good quality relationships with experienced and committed staff members. The positive relationships they have with adults assists them in forming and maintaining friendships with their peers and others.

Pupils are actively encouraged to know of, and exercise, their rights along with accepting responsibilities. Pupils benefit from the levels of personalised support, supervision and structure that the residential provision provides. A project teaching pupils about their diagnoses, who they are and what this means for each of them is an excellent initiative, appropriately entitled 'I am unique'. This supports residential pupils in developing their confidence and self-worth. The staff team promote a 'can do' attitude and supports pupils to challenge barriers which would otherwise prevent them from fully participating in school, the community and wider society.

Residential pupils report that they generally like this school with some rating it, 'eight out of ten' and others 'eleven out of ten', which demonstrates their high levels of satisfaction. When pupils first join the school they benefit from receiving high levels of individual support from staff. This helps them become secure and comfortable in their placement before being offered new and stimulating experiences. Individual lessons in swimming and music have enabled residential pupils to become confident enough to join these activities in a group. Where the site lacks playing fields and a sports hall, residential pupils gain social skills through using leisure facilities in the community and some pupils are members of local youth groups.

Residential pupils have a strong voice and this school values what children and young people have to say. Records of meetings and posters of decisions are displayed around the home and remind pupils of their contribution and the difference it has made. They have been successful, for instance, in obtaining more games for the games consoles and a better range of snacks. More formally there is a school council and some pupils have represented the school in a European project. This enables pupils to think of others and the wider world.

A multi-disciplinary team of therapists address any emotional and psychological health issues through individual and group work. Having such a team of professionals on site ensures that residential pupils do not have to travel to appointments and it

means they receive a joined up approach from one school staff team in meeting their needs.

All residential pupils learn life skills, for example using public transport and budgeting. There is a fantastic opportunity for pupils attending post 16 education to live in the local community in a house managed by the school. This experience prepares and equips pupils for their young adult life with the support of staff nearby to guide them.

This school is rightly proud of all its pupils and their achievements, many of whom keep in touch after they have left. Former pupils have gone on to study music, zoological conservation and engineering at university and some have secured employment.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils benefit from an effective induction to this school through which they can progress at a pace that is comfortable for them and their families. Previous schools and family members are fully involved in the transition to this school, providing pupils with consistency and reassurance. New pupils are familiarised with the school rules, routines and facilities through the excellent induction programme and information in the parent and student handbooks.

Residential staff support pupils during lunch time and assist with the transitions from the classroom during break times. Similarly some classroom staff support pupils in the residential areas in the mornings before school. Residential pupils benefit from the consistency of care that this arrangement provides. An integrated approach between the different professional specialism is highly effective in supporting all the care needs of residential pupils as outlined within their care plans.

The residential provision offers an excellent variety of individual, group and community-based extra-curricular activities for young people. Residential pupils develop leadership skills and take on areas of responsibility by for instance, collecting supper items from the main kitchen or organising a game or activity as a sports leader. Members of the school council are good role models. They lead by example and engage with other pupils to seek and represent their views

All staff are dedicated and committed to their work and place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their practice. They are a real strength of the service. Therapists work alongside care and education staff and devise programmes of therapy to support pupils. This collaborative working is reported as 'valuable' by the residential staff who appreciate having a therapy team on site.

Residential pupils receive health care and medication from trained staff. In addition to staff being trained in first aid, some pupils have received basic training in life

saving techniques. This valuable skill enables them to take effective action to help themselves or others should there be an accident or injury. The promotion of a healthy lifestyle is achieved through physical activity and a nutritious diet. Pupils have access to information and community resources in relation to sexual health and the dangers of drug use, smoking and alcohol. Pupils with this information are supported to make safe, healthy choices.

The residential accommodation is integral to the school building though appropriately separated from the teaching area. Single rooms with en-suite bathrooms are maintained in good condition providing a comfortable environment. Residential pupils report that they like their bedrooms, they have safe storage for their belongings and they enjoy being able to personalise their space.

Residential pupils' safety

The quality of the school's arrangements to safeguard residential pupils is outstanding. The utmost importance is given to the safety and well-being of pupils, staff and visitors. All staff accept this responsibility regardless of their role within the school. Training on the safeguarding of pupils has been adapted and fully addresses the complex behaviours presented by the pupils attending this school. Such attention to detail ensures that staff receive appropriate training to meet the individual needs of the pupils in their care.

The welfare of young people is promoted through a robust and transparent response to safeguarding concerns. Staff liaise effectively with the local safeguarding team and, where appropriate, attend multi-agency meetings to discuss concerns. There is a commitment and adherence to follow best practice principles and this promotes optimum outcomes for residential pupils.

This school has developed a collaborative relationship with the local police and the community support officers who visit the school to deliver messages about anti-social behaviour and its legal consequences. As a result of this proactive joint working initiative, police officers have a better understanding of Asperger syndrome, its associated learning difficulties and how best to deal with the behaviour presented.

Thorough vetting procedures safeguard pupils from having contact with unsuitable people. The school follows Department for Education (DfE) guidance on safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education.

Pupils have a great awareness of the impact that their behaviour has on others. The different disciplines in the school consistently apply proactive behaviour management strategies and involve pupils in compiling their behaviour plans. There is an effective use of a traffic light system, this provides visual prompts to pupils and effectively supports them in moderating their behaviour.

Staff are trained in behaviour management with a focus on de-escalating incidents.

Two staff are qualified to deliver this training, this provides staff with direct access to the trainers and to discuss individual matters. All incidents are thoroughly recorded and enable staff and the senior management team to monitor the effectiveness of the interventions used. Success and achievement are consistently recognised, pupils are pleased to earn stars and merits to receive rewards.

Pupils are encouraged to report any bullying and where they do not feel safe. This open culture enables pupils to raise issues with staff at an early stage so they can be dealt with. Pupils report that 'staff do something about it' when they raise any concerns. The handbook, discussions and posters reinforce the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and provide some structure for pupils in their social development.

Residential pupils live in a physically safe environment. Maintenance or safety issues are reported promptly. Areas of the school and activities are all subject to risk assessment. These identify and reduce levels of risk without denying pupils the opportunity to take measured risks as part of their growth and development.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The school is managed and organised in a manner that delivers and maintains an outstanding level of care. The head of care provides excellent leadership and has the expertise, skills and knowledge to effectively manage a residential provision. The cohesion of the senior leadership team, lead by the principal, is a strength of the school. Quality assurance systems provide an informed and insightful evaluation of the school's performance, identify strengths and areas for development and take into account feedback from pupils. The senior management team generate enthusiasm amongst the staff with their determination to continually raise standards in the delivery of care and education to the pupils. The school has contributed to the new framework for inspection of residential special schools and keeps abreast of local, national and international initiatives to inform best practice.

There is a clear focus on improving outcomes for all pupils. The curriculum and care is personalised and delivered on a one-to-one basis where necessary. This supportive approach demonstrates the commitment made to pupils and their learning and prevents their exclusion from education. The school has the recommended policies and records in place to support residential pupils. These are regularly reviewed by management and the wider organisation.

Residential staff are experienced, skilled and qualified to deliver 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 for all staff. Excellent support is provided to catering and support staff through group supervision from the counsellor. This enables them to understand the complexities of Asperger syndrome and how best they can interact with the pupils.

The school values individuals and celebrates difference. It enables pupils to explore and obtain an understanding of equality and diversity issues through the use of music, food, sport and festivals. Discussions and display boards raise awareness of issues such as the global world, disability, racism, sexism and homophobia. Pupils develop a social awareness by taking part in charity events to raise money.

The school adopts an inclusive approach and values the voice and views of pupils. Examples of this can be seen through the school council, residential meetings, surveys and participation in government initiatives and international projects. Pupils have recently identified what resources they would like in a new area for break times. This level of consultation gives pupils some responsibility and values their views and opinions. Residential pupils have the opportunity to talk to an independent listener, this allows them to air any problems outside of the school if they choose. The complaints procedure is accessible and pupils know how to use it. These procedures are reviewed within the organisation to monitor the views of pupils and to identify any changes required to care practices as a result.

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.



01/06/2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of North Hill House

I recently came to visit North Hill House to see what it is like to stay in the residential area. Thank you all for making me so welcome, showing me around and telling me what you think about being at this school. The residential provision was judged as outstanding, this means it gets top marks.

I found that the residential staff and managers do an excellent job in looking after you and they work closely with teachers, therapists and support staff to make sure North Hill House is a safe place to be where you can have some fun. It was great to hear that you and your parents also think that the residential area is really great and some of you told me you rate it from 8 out of 10 up to 11 out of 10.

The staff are supporting you to meet your targets and learn some independence skills. The school provides you with tips on how to manage when you are feeling angry or upset. It was great to hear from some of the older boys who told me they use these strategies to help themselves to calm down without staff support. Talking with the staff individually and at meetings are all good ways to let them know how you are feeling.

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 in the last term before the summer holidays. 'Go for Gold' just like the Olympic athletes.

Yours sincerely

Clare Davies

Yours sincerely,

Clare Davies