

Coln House

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Barbara 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

This residential special school caters for 35 boys and girls aged 9 to 16 years old. The boarding accommodation is divided into five separate house areas providing small group living. A small cottage that was previously available for independence training is now being used to introduce new residents to the school. All pupils have emotional, behavioural, social and associated learning difficulties.

The school is maintained by the local authority and is situated on the edge of a market town. The residential provision was last inspected in December 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 headteacher and head of care provide clear leadership and direction and are progressive and forward thinking. They are dedicated and committed to their role. The implementation of a well-thought-out development programme continually improves the facilities and resources for residential pupils. Their ethos of 'wanting to do a job well' runs through the entirety of the school. Staff in all departments are committed to achieving excellence and obtaining accreditation for their work. For instance, In July 2012, the catering team achieved the bronze award from the Food for Life Partnership and now aim to achieve the silver award.
- Staffing levels are well organised and meet the needs of the residential pupils. A well-coordinated training programme equips care staff with the skills and abilities to work with vulnerable pupils. Staff reflect on their practice and continually enhance their skills as a result of the extensive support they receive. They work cooperatively, confidently and competently. Systems are in place for ensuring that staff are able to summon a quick response should problems occur. This keeps both residential pupils and staff safe.
- Staff consistently meet the aims of the service by providing a very high standard of personalised care. Daily routines are very well established and reinforced by staff. As a result, young people know the standards of behaviour expected, and, despite some incidents, things run smoothly. Parents, carers and social workers are very positive. They comment that residential pupils make excellent progress from their starting points, as a result of extremely successful joint working arrangements. Professionals associated with the setting describe these as being, 'very effective and a critical factor in the progress that that young people make.'

- The diverse needs of pupils are recognised and catered for, as a result of the comprehensive assessment of needs that is completed prior to them being admitted to the residential setting. The integrated, child-centred approach adopted by staff encompasses each and every child. Each one is understood and appreciated for their differences. Care staff contribute greatly to the role the school has to play in helping pupils to achieve their potential. Residential pupils derive immense enjoyment from the social activities provided and develop skills and interests that they can take into adult life.
- The safety and welfare of residential pupils is paramount. Safeguarding procedures are robust and shared effectively with the staff team who know their primary duty is to ensure the safety of residential pupils. Residential pupils feel safe and secure and, overall, enjoy their boarding experience.
- It has been suggested to the school that they can improve their practice further by including more detail within written risk assessments and records of physical restraint. This will better inform the monitoring process about whether the action being taken is sufficient and appropriate.

Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding.

Residential pupils live in a highly inclusive boarding community in which their individual needs are recognised and met. Staffing arrangements are very well organised and take into account both individual and group needs. The behaviour of residential pupils is effectively managed through high staffing ratios and an extensive range of stimulating and challenging extra-curricular activities that keep young people constructively occupied.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and protect residential pupils who feel safe and secure in their environment. The local authority safeguarding team values the contribution that the school makes in protecting the welfare of residential pupils by advocating strongly on their behalf. The local authority designated officer (LADO) says, 'The school's child protection practices are robust. Decisions about children being removed from child protection plans have been reversed as a direct result of intervention by the school.'

Most residential pupils have a history of poor attendance and multiple exclusions. The school is highly effective with most young people, in reversing this pattern. Staff support residential pupils to establish and maintain regular attendance and improve their educational performance. Most residential students have made impressive progress in their reading ability following the introduction of a 24 hour curriculum, where care staff support residential pupils with their reading in the evenings.

Boarders thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience and talk enthusiastically about

the meals and activities provided. Residential pupils benefit from imaginative and innovative care that focuses on raising their aspirations. Although in its infancy, the school supports young people to develop emotional resilience, tolerance and a sense of achievement through a programme of planned weekend expeditions. To the same end, the school successfully uses its links with other schools to broaden the experiences of residential pupils. For instance a teacher and a residential student recently joined an expedition organised by another school and completed a 100 kilometre trek across the Rift Valley in Tanzania to reach the hottest classroom. Following the event the pupil comments, 'This has been life changing for me. I will always remember the hard times and how my mentor helped me through those times. I am so lucky to have had this chance.'

Residential pupils have good health as a result of: the provision of healthy, well-balanced and nutritious meals, the diligent arrangements for the administration of medication and the vast opportunities for pupils to keep fit. The arrangements for attending to the medical health needs of residential pupils are excellent. The recent appointment of a part-time school nurse is driving standards forward, particularly in the oversight of the arrangements for the administration of medication.

Meals are taken in boarding houses and these arrangements are largely successful in making mealtimes a positive, social event. Children are given choices about the meals they eat and this means they express high levels of satisfaction about most of the meals served. Particular attention is paid to the special dietary needs of some residential pupils and special consideration given to the impact that the taking of regular medication has on the appetite of others. The school responds by the application of strategies as outlined within individual health and diet plans.

Residential pupils are involved in a wide range of experiences at the school. The skills of the staff team are used to help young people acquire practical skills, such as motor mechanics, hairdressing and gardening. These experiences help residential students make an informed, successful and sustained transition to further education and vocational courses on reaching school leaving age.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding.

Within the limitations imposed by the age and nature of the building, boarding provision is excellent. Communal areas and dormitories are decorated and furnished to a high standard and provide residential pupils with a comfortable and relaxing environment while making excellent provision for their recreational needs. An ongoing programme of maintenance and refurbishment ensures that facilities are continually improved and any damage is quickly repaired. As a result young people generally like and respect their environment.

There is a comprehensive and well-thought-out induction process which is tailored to

the needs of new residential pupils, including the opportunity for introductory visits. The nurturing unit is a new and successful initiative which helps residential pupils make a well-planned transition into a new school environment. The intensive and individual work undertaken with new pupils helps them develop relationships with staff and an understanding of the routines and expectations before moving into the main school. As a result, residential pupils become familiar with the routines and expectations and settle quickly. Several residential pupils said, 'This really helps people to settle in, I wish it had been there when I started the school.'

One professional associated with the school comments, 'With all of our cases I have consistently found the school to be very thorough on all aspects of transition, with every child being met and listened to by the headteacher and head of care as a starting point, followed by phased student-led transition.'

Residential pupils engage enthusiastically in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities each evening. The activities programme recognises both individual and group interests. Some residential pupils have joined local clubs, such as army cadets and Scottish dancing. As a combined force, the teaching and care staff bring many skills to the school, such as, rugby and fitness coaching. They enthusiastically and successfully share these with residential pupils as a result of which they develop new interests. Staff also successfully network with their contacts outside the school, such as with a local sports centre and the local fire station, to introduce residential students to new activities and experiences.

Residential pupils develop a sense of social conscience and responsibility to their local community by giving their time and making practical contributions to the community. As a result, relationships between the school and the local community have improved greatly over the years. Residential pupils are valued for the contribution they make which raises their self-esteem. Some of the projects residential pupils have been involved in, such as creating a picnic area alongside the river and planting up tubs in the market place, help them acquire practical skills in readiness for adulthood. The following comment was made by a town councillor: 'The school is an integral part of the community. They have always been extremely helpful when asked to participate with projects/events that the Town Council are undertaking. Activities that they have carried out have been well received by the community and include, creating and building the display figures for Santa's Grotto; helping the grounds man with work in the churchyard and playground; and helping in the flood alleviation programme.'

The quality of pastoral support is excellent. Boarders receive excellent guidance and support from the care staff who themselves supported by a committed and driven management team.

There are clear and effective systems for the sharing of information between the residential setting and the school, for instance, within the daily briefings. As a result, all staff develop a common understanding of the needs of each young person and

mutually support each other in their roles. Some teaching staff support care staff by performing evening duties and arranging evening activities. Residential pupils develop socially, educationally and emotionally as a result of the shared vision that academic and pastoral staff have for their pupils.

Pre-admission assessments and care plans are comprehensive. Through these staff develop a clear understanding of the needs of young people and of how to meet them. Staff and care staff again work consistently and effectively implement the strategies outlined. Staff are imaginative and resourceful in identifying new strategies if young people are not seen to be making progress.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes outstanding provision to safeguard the welfare of pupils.

The welfare and safety of residential pupils is at the very heart of the school. All staff receive training in safe working practices, such as child protection and behaviour management. They fully understand the needs and risky behaviours presented by residential pupils and focus on providing a safe and secure environment. A social worker says, 'My young person very much values the school as a safe and supportive environment.'

Residential pupils are protected by the school's safeguarding arrangements. Robust child protection procedures together with regular training, ensures that staff know the action to take if concerned about the safety and welfare of a child. The school acts in accordance with the local safeguarding procedures and the prompt referral of concerns secures the interventions required. There have been no allegations against staff and the LADO says, 'The school's designated child protection officer is one of the best I work with. She takes her role seriously and shares information effectively enabling action to be taken to protect some of our most vulnerable children.'

The application of robust and thorough recruitment procedures protects children from having contact with unsuitable people. A robust and well-established monitoring process is in place to ensure that all the required recruitment checks are completed before people start working with children.

Most pupils who attend this school have an entrenched history of emotional and behaviour management issues. Staff are trained in positive behaviour management techniques. The consistent application of these in practice assists most residential pupils to sustain their placement at the school and break the pattern of exclusion.

The school proactively identifies strategies which help residential pupils take control and manage their behaviour in a more positive way. The 'hub', is an innovative and effective feature of the school's practice. It is a designated safe haven to which young people frequently retreat as a means of avoiding confrontation. Residential pupils receive an immediate response from staff and this equips them with the

emotional resilience to continue their day in a more positive frame of mind.

Staff help residential pupils to develop socially acceptable behaviour through the use of well-planned programme of constructive activities and several imaginative reward systems. These systems run alongside each other, such as, a league system which is based on points earned. Residential pupils understand each system and say that they are helpful. Residential pupils can earn credits by being helpful around the school, which they can then use to purchase tuck or an item to take home. Prefects are selected weekly on the basis of the top point scorers. All pupils therefore have the opportunity to aspire and achieve, dependent on their behaviour. Physical restraint is used when it is necessary to safeguard the welfare of young people or others. Staff are trained in safe management techniques and use these consistently. Although the frequency of physical restraints appears high in the records, the majority of these are of short duration and are low level, such as an escort.

The school keeps records of sanctions and physical restraint as required and in practice there is good oversight of these at a senior level. The record of physical restraint is now kept electronically. It is not always possible to determine from this record the reason for the restraint taking place and therefore whether residential pupils are being treated fairly. The detail that is lacking, is however present in the separate incident reports that are kept. These confirm that staff use physical restraint appropriately. The school keeps records of major sanctions as required, but from these it is not easy to identify patterns and trends in relation to each boarding house.

While not without incidents, residential pupils largely comply with the expectations and behaviour is well managed. At night residential pupils settle well. Residential pupils commonly say, 'You should have seen me when I first came here. I was much worse and used to do some silly and dangerous things. Staff have really helped me change.'

Preventative action, such as raising the pupils' awareness through education, reduces the number of incidents of bullying. Pupils inform staff of 'low-level' incidents, allowing intervention at an early stage. A high and visible staff presence alongside a well-planned timetable of activities within the residential setting reduces the potential for bullying to occur. Any forms of bullying, such as racial or cyber-bullying are taken seriously and prompt action is taken to tackle it when it occurs. Residential pupils say, 'Some bullying does occur, but staff respond instantly. If it carries on you get excluded.' Residential pupils value the system through which they can anonymously draw the attention of staff and managers to incidents of bullying and see it as an effective means of addressing any incidents that occur. Some pupils have recently been trained as peer mentors. This has raised the awareness of all residential pupils to the effect of bullying and is proving to be both an effective deterrent and support mechanism for residential pupils.

Incidents of residential pupils going missing from the school site are very low.

However, in the event of this occurring, staff protect residential pupils by promptly implementing the school's policies and procedures. Residential pupils are supported to take age-appropriate risks, such as, joining community based activities and independently going to the local shop, dependent on their behaviour and the assessed level of risk.

Pupils are protected within the school environment by regular checks, maintenance and servicing of equipment. Fire safety precautions are effectively relayed to residential pupils, who know the procedures to follow in the event of a fire. While risk assessments of the premises are robust, they do not currently cover particular features in each area of the house and grounds, such as the hen house and a fire guard. While residential pupils are mostly protected by the practical precautions taken, potentially staff may not be alert to the inherent risks involved.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding.

The residential provision is valued highly for the overall contribution it makes to the school and for the role it plays in the personal development of each residential pupil. Residential pupils benefit from a nurturing environment in which they feel that people care. Well-established daily routines bring consistency and stability to residential pupils lives.

Care staff are guided in their role by a dynamic, forward-thinking and experienced management team whose primary focus is to improve the life chances and opportunities for residential pupils. The suggestions for improvement that were made following the last inspection have been met. As a result, residential pupils are better informed of how to access an independent visitor and recording systems better reflect the school's practice in a number of areas, such as care planning, recording of sanctions and obtaining children's views. Records now give a better overview of how children are treated and involved in the running of the school.

There is a strong desire and commitment to continually improve the service. The management team have an insightful awareness of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Strategies to address identified weaknesses are outlined within the school's development plan, including a major refurbishment of some parts of the premises. In the interim since the last inspection, the school has been proactive in securing further improvement, for instance the installation of a new kitchen in one of the boarding houses.

Excellent provision is made for residential pupils to express their views about the school's practices and to make suggestions for improvement. Residential pupils are extremely effective at securing change through the school council forum. In the vast majority of instances, they receive immediate and positive responses to their requests, such as those for new bedding, posters and sports equipment. This

contributes to pupils' sense of achievement. Residential pupils understand the reasons for requests not being granted as a result of explanations being given. When asked what they would do to make the school better, most replied, 'I cannot think of anything. If we want something we discuss it.'

The school is fully aware of the diverse nature and needs of residential pupils and care planning is highly individualised in recognition of these. Most residential pupils make progress in all aspects of their lives as a result of the implementation of strategies outlined within individual care plans.

The staff team is diverse in gender, age, experience and qualifications. Changes in the composition of the staff team have been well managed. New staff are extremely well supported in their role by more experienced members of staff. The school's own induction and training programmes effectively equip new staff with an understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities and gives them confidence to perform these. Arrangements for staff to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards, as required by national minimum standards, are in hand.

The school communicates effectively and regularly with parents, carers and placing authorities. It shares information and informs them of the progress that young people make. One social worker says, 'My experience of the school with regard to regular communications during the transition of new students and their day-to-day progress is very positive.' Visits to parents enhance the joint working partnership and enables the school to receive parental feedback about its performance.

Improvements in the behaviour of young people at home are largely attributed to the work that has been achieved in the school. The school website also provides an informative, pictorial overview of the school and the activities in which residential pupils participate.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that the permanent record of restraint includes details of the reason for the restraint taking place.
- maintain separate records for the recording of sanctions administered in each boarding house.
- conduct a dynamic risk assessment of any particular features in the grounds and in each room and ensure that the staff responsible for the completion of these receive training.

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.



13/11/2012

Dear pupils

Inspection of Coln House

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me and show me around the school during my recent inspection.

I have judged the school to be outstanding because of the way staff care for you. You have all made excellent progress since you started at the school. Your attendance is excellent and you are all making terrific progress with your reading.

Both the care staff and the teaching staff make sure that you are healthy, safe and have lots of fun. You do a lot of nice things and there are excellent opportunities for you to follow your own interests as well as joining in the group activities.

You are extremely helpful to your local community and this is a very special thing to be involved in. You receive a lot of praise for the work that you do, such as the log deliveries and helping with the flood relief. This helps a lot of people and I have been told how pleased others are that you do this.

The houses are lovely places to live and relax. You have a lot of very good facilities and most of the time you take really good care of these. The staff still want to make things even better for you. They listen to your views about how they can do this and really take notice of what you say.

I hope to be able to visit your school again to see what else has changed. In the meantime I hope you enjoy the rest of the school term.

There are lots of staff and they always help you. The staff also attend training to make sure they know the best way to care for you.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Davies

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