

Doucecroft 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

Doucecroft School is an independent residential special school privately owned by Autism Anglia and caters for students with autism spectrum disorders. There are 26 students of both genders aged between 8 and 19 years of age, 20 of whom reside at the school four nights a week. The school is situated on the outskirts of Colchester.

The residential accommodation is provided in four houses located on the school site. Currently, only three of the boarding houses are occupied. There are two further education departments, one on the main site and one at Kelvedon, which also provide residential accommodation.

The residential provision was last inspected in November 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	satisfactory
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	satisfactory
Leadership and management of the residential provision	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is satisfactory.
- Residential students benefit from good quality care, which is highly individualised, promoting good progress across all aspects of their development.
- The residential experience enables students to participate in a wide range of activities that enhance opportunities for social interaction and support the development of interests and independence skills.
- The school's arrangements for child protection are secure, and there are robust systems in place for staff recruitment. The lack of fire evacuations, which was previously highlighted as a recommendation, has not been addressed. This has the potential to compromise safety in the event of an actual fire as students are not familiar with evacuation during residential time.
- Students benefit from continuity of staffing and high levels of supervision, ensuring their individual needs are met.
- The school recognises the diverse characteristics and uniqueness of each residential student. Staff promote equality of opportunity and encourage students to make choices and express their preferences as part of daily living.
- There is satisfactory leadership and management of the residential provision. Although steps have been taken by the school to address the recommendations raised at the last inspection, a number of the standards remain unmet. Consequently, a high number of staff do not hold relevant qualifications and there is no appraisal system in place. Additionally, further shortfalls have been highlighted during this inspection.

- While there are some shortfalls against the national minimum standards, these are, for the most part, administrative. The shortfalls identified have not diminished the good quality of care or had a negative impact on the outcomes for students.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential students are good. Students develop positive relationships with staff and are supported to build relationships with peers who have diverse and complex needs. They develop respect for the rights of others in the boarding community as a result of positive role modelling and expectations set by male and female staff. Students are encouraged to work together, share, compromise and negotiate, promoting turn taking and cultivating understanding of the needs of others.

Students have positive views about the opportunities available to develop their skills, interests and social networks. They access a wide range of activities, including arts and crafts, youth club, shooting, football coaching, swimming, trampolining and music. A student said: 'I do lots of activities in the local area and have made friends with people of all ages. I do not get the chance to do these activities at home.'

Students increase their self-esteem, confidence and independence skills as a result of highly individualised care plans and carefully monitored targets. They are encouraged to become as self-managing as possible and are supported by staff to contribute to the boarding community. Students are involved in planning menus, shopping and preparing meals. They contribute to household tasks such as setting the dinner table, clearing away after meals and keeping their bedrooms tidy. Students develop their communication skills, using a variety of mediums, including verbal, picture exchange, signs and symbols. Consequently, they are able to express their choices and preferences, enabling their individual needs to be met.

Students benefit from good health promotion as a result of the links the school has with external and visiting health professionals. Additionally, students benefit from the regular support of qualified occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

Effective transitions into and out of the residential provision are underpinned by robust preparation, comprehensive multi-agency working and ensuring that the views of students and their parents or carers are at the centre of the highly individualised transition plans. As a result, students feel well prepared and anxiety levels are lowered. Students who are preparing to move on say that staff ask them about their dreams, goals and aspirations and that they are able to contribute to their plans. They say they feel confident about moving on because they know what is going to happen.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the boarding provision is good. Students are introduced to the residential provision following a comprehensive admission process, which ensures individual needs are identified. Senior staff visit parents, carers and education settings. This means that care plans are based on up-to-date information, taking into account religious and cultural needs, disabilities, health diagnoses, communication preferences and developmental stages. Students visit the school prior to their admission so they can meet the staff and other students. Individualised induction booklets for each student help them to understand routines, expectations and explain who will be looking after them. There are good links between pastoral and academic staff, with some residential staff working in the school during the day. This means that students benefit from consistency of staffing and familiarity of staff between school and residence.

Care plans are highly individualised and comprehensive. All residential staff contribute to evaluating students' social targets. Consistency plans are implemented and staff say that students make good progress as a result of the uniform responses and specific approaches in place. There is currently no key worker system in place to monitor the school's compliance on a day-to-day basis with students' placement plans, which means national minimum standard 21 is not met. Consequently, responsibility for all residential students falls to the deputy of care. This means that, in her absence, there is no established form of delegation, which has the potential to compromise outcomes for students.

The school positively promotes the health and well-being of the students. Each student has a health plan that is reviewed annually. Students say they feel well cared for when they are ill. They are supported to manage their health, for example, completing exercises recommended by their health specialist as part of their daily routine. Staff support parents to attend health appointments. Healthy choices are encouraged at meal times and physical activity is promoted. Work takes place within the curriculum and is supported in residential time. For example, older students have learned about the 'healthy plate', and they understand the food groups required to make a nutritious meal. This helps students to eat healthily and to develop skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Students benefit from the wide range of leisure activities. There are good facilities on the school site, including a swimming pool, gym, trampoline, computer suites and sensory rooms. Staff recognise the importance of social interaction outside of the school environment and promote community activities, to support students to widen their social network. Older students have positions of responsibility within the community, which they say they enjoy. Examples are football coaching and helping at the local youth club.

The residential accommodation provides ample space for communal living, comfortable furnishings and a warm and homely environment. The large kitchen and

dining areas facilitate meal times for the residential group, promoting social interaction and development. Students are able to personalise their bedrooms and the communal spaces, to reflect their tastes and interests. The bedrooms are lockable and students say their belongings are kept safe.

Students are supported to keep in contact with their families and those who are significant to them. There are private pay phone facilities available in each boarding house and students can also use the office telephones. Staff communicate weekly with parents and carers, through a home-school book, to promote students' well-being and raise awareness of any issues, progress and achievements.

Residential pupils' safety

The arrangements for ensuring the safety of students is satisfactory. The school has robust procedures in place for the safe recruitment and monitoring of staff working in the school. Checks are carried out prior to staff taking up appointment and staff receive a thorough induction to ensure they are aware of safe working practices. Contractors visiting the school are accompanied while they are on the school site. This helps to promote the safety of students.

The school has policies in place that promote students' safety. Staff receive effective training in child protection, anti-bullying, behaviour management and health and safety. Child protection procedures are robust, with named designated officers taking responsibility for reporting child protection concerns. Consequently, concerns are managed effectively and appropriate action is taken in line with organisational and local procedures and protocols.

Fencing, electric gates and camera monitoring secure the school site. Individual boarding houses are secure ensuring students have freedom of movement without compromising their safety. The security measures in place, coupled with good levels of staff supervision, robust risk assessments and behaviour management plans, mean there have been no incidents of students going missing. Regulatory fire requirements are met; however, there have been no fire evacuations in residential time for two of the boarding houses, which means national minimum standard seven is not met. This was raised as a recommendation at the previous inspection and has not been satisfactorily addressed. This has the potential to compromise safety, as some students have not been familiarised with the evacuation procedure during residential time.

Students say they feel safe and report that they are confident they can talk to staff if they have an issue. An independent visitor is also available if students wish to talk to her. Numbers such as ChildLine are publicised and students are aware of the complaints procedure, ensuring they are able to raise any concerns. Bullying is not reported as an issue in this school and students do not raise it as a concern. High levels of supervision, staff knowledge of the students and well-considered daily living routines and plans reduce the opportunity for bullying. Staff consistently support

students' understanding of the needs of others within the residential environment, which promotes tolerance within the boarding houses.

There are good behaviour management plans in place and staff work hard to ensure there is consistency in the way students are managed. Staff say that the plans are effective in helping to affirm boundaries and expectations on an individual basis. Restraint is used to prevent extreme damage to property or injury to self or others. Incidents are documented and staff have the opportunity to debrief following physical restraint. Staff receive regular training and are clear on when restraint should be used. Incidents of restraint are monitored, and data is interpreted to identify patterns and trends, contributing to the modification of plans and strategies. As a result, the management of behaviour and success of strategies and approaches are continuously evaluated and reviewed.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are satisfactory. There is a clear statement of boarding principles, which are translated into everyday practice. Placing authorities say they are satisfied with the service provided and say that students are happy, and making good progress in all areas of their development.

Clear and well-established routines underpin effective residential provision. There are effective systems in place to ensure good quality handovers between pastoral and academic staff, promoting consistency for students across the 24-hour curriculum. Routines are well managed and highly individual, to cater for each student's needs. The number of staff deployed reflects the needs of individual students and their plan of care. Regular training takes place on non-pupil days, to ensure staff knowledge is updated in areas such as child protection and physical restraint.

Despite the school's attempts to meet the recommendations raised at the last inspection, staff do not receive appraisals and there is an inconsistent approach to supervision. Additionally, only eight residential staff out of 30 have an National Vocational Qualification at level 3. While this does not impact directly on the outcomes for students, it means that staff do not have the appropriate level of qualifications. Furthermore, there is no learning and development programme in place which means the effectiveness of training and development is not being evaluated, minimising opportunities to identify shortfalls and areas for improvement. This means that national minimum standard 19 is not met.

Monitoring visits have been implemented, as a result of a recommendation at the last inspection. However, a number of national minimum standards raised at the last inspection have not been met and additional shortfalls have been identified. In the main, the shortfalls are administrative. The quality of care continues to have a positive impact on students; however, the leadership and management have not fostered improvement since the last inspection.

The majority of documents and policies are in place and are regularly reviewed. However, there is no supervision and appraisal policy in place. The missing child policy does not reference the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care local protocols, which does not meet national minimum standard 15.

There have been no formal complaints. Residential students' views are collated as part of the review process; however the school does not demonstrate how their views are taken into account at any other time or how they influence the quality of care.

The promotion of diversity and meeting individual needs is a fundamental part of the residential provision. Each student is treated as an individual and staff work hard to support students' understanding of their peers and the adults around them. All care plans are highly individualised; transitions both into and out of the residential provision are tailored to meet each student's needs. Care plans, behaviour management plans and risk assessments take full account of individual characteristics such as disabilities, culture, religion, communication preferences and abilities, gender, and age and stage of development. Routines are developed on an individual basis and social targets are needs led. Consequently, students benefit from quality of care that is as unique as they are.

Placing authorities say they receive good levels of communication from the school. The school contributes to multi-agency meetings, planning and student reviews. Parents are kept informed of their child's progress. Records for each student are thorough and comprehensive. Case files are securely stored in a locked office. Information regarding child protection issues are stored separately and are only accessible to the designated child protection staff and the headteacher, ensuring confidentiality is promoted.

National minimum standards

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

- In addition, fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'residential time'. (NMS 7.2)
- The school's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the Head of Care follows the local RMFHC protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority. (NMS 15.7)
- All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged

from the commencement of these Standards hold these qualifications or begin working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment. (NMS 19.2)

- The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated if necessary. (NMS 19.4)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)
- Each child has at least one key worker (or similar person) within the school who provides individual guidance and support to the child. They regularly make time available to the child to enable the child to seek guidance, advice and support on any matter. They monitor the school's compliance on a day to day basis with the child's placement plan. (NMS 21.2)
- The child's wishes are sought and taken into account in the selection of their key worker/s and if they request a change of key worker. (NMS 21.3)

What should the school do to improve further?

- Collate and take account of boarders' views to improve the quality of their boarding experience and care.
- Establish a policy to define the arrangements for staff supervision and appraisal.

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.



05/12/2012

Dear students

Inspection of Doucecroft School

I visited your school to do an inspection and was able to spend time with you in each of the boarding houses. I was lucky enough to have breakfast and tea with you. I was able to talk to you about what it is like for you to live at school during the week.

You told me that you like being at school. You said that you are able to do lots of activities and can also spend time doing activities outside of school. You said that you get on well with the staff and you feel safe. I could see that staff look after you well and treat you with respect. It was good to see how much progress you have made since you have been at the school. Staff have helped you to learn to be more independent and supported you to make new friends.

I spent time with the staff and looking at the school's paperwork. I have asked the school to make some improvements to supporting the staff and to make sure that you have fire evacuations in residential time. I have also asked them to give staff responsibility for making sure that your information and records are kept up to date.

Overall, I think that the school looks after you well and that staff are caring. You have lots of opportunities to learn new things and to develop your skills and interests safely.

Yours sincerely,

Louisa Bayley