

Ratcliffe School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

Unique reference number for social care SC003895
Unique reference number for education 113656
Inspection dates 11/12/2012 to 13/12/2012
Inspector Norma Welsby / Paula Lahey

School address Ratcliffe Special School, John Nash Drive, DAWLISH,
Devon, EX7 9RZ
Telephone number 01626 862939
Email
Headteacher Mrs Cherie White

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk



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 is a local authority provision for young people aged between eight to 16 years. Pupils are of mixed gender, with emotional and behavioural difficulties, many of whom have been identified as being on the autistic spectrum. The school provides a flexible residential service for up to 45 young people, between Monday and Thursday. In addition, the school provides extended day support usually up to 6pm, for the majority of the 78 pupils who attend the school.

The school and its five residential houses are on the same campus. All residential pupils have a single bedroom. All residential areas have kitchenettes, dining and sitting areas. The school has grounds of approximately 10 acres, a vegetable garden, poly tunnel greenhouse and keeps hens. Residential pupils have the use of a wide range of facilities including outdoor hard and soft play areas and many of the school's indoor facilities, such as the computer suite, during planned after school activities.

The school and the residential provision were last inspected in November 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

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.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is good. Residential staff are very motivated to help residential pupils achieve good outcomes. Relationships between residential staff and residential pupils are excellent.
- Residential pupils' report that they benefit from their residential experience: they thoroughly enjoy a wide range of activities during the evening and feel that their confidence, social skills and behaviour have significantly improved.
- There is a strong sense of community and staff across the whole school work together to assess and meet individual needs to improve outcomes. Residential pupils benefit from a caring and nurturing environment and good attention is given to promoting equality and diversity.
- Feedback from residential pupils and their families confirms that they feel the school provides a very positive experience for pupils and that they feel valued, consulted and safe.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Staff are well trained and named senior staff take lead responsibility for child protection. Staff have an excellent recognition of the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of residential pupils and take prompt and thorough action where necessary.
- Residential pupils are clear about how they are expected to behave. A system of rewards and sanctions is firmly established and behaviour, including personal skills and strategies to manage difficult and emotional situations are given good attention.
- The residential service is well organised and managed. Staff retention is very

good and the residential staff team is experienced, suitably trained and supported. The team is highly motivated to provide residential pupils with good quality residential support and opportunities to make good progress.

- Since the last inspection the school has continued to progress well. There is a good sense of the service wanting to improve further, including for example the physical environment of the residential provision and in preparing pupils for transition to college or other placements.
- The majority of national minimum standards are met. Shortfalls relate to the frequency of independent visits and what is included in the monitoring reports.
- Action has been taken in response to the shortfall in one national minimum standard identified at the last inspection. As a result further developments have taken place to enable all residential pupils to make everyday choices and maximise their opportunities to develop independence. Some progress has been made in respect of an area identified to improve further. As a result, views of pupils are recorded occasionally following physical restraint. Following this inspection two national minimum standards were found to be unmet and relate to monitoring by independent visitors. Three areas for improvement have also been identified in order to develop the quality of provision further. These relate to consistently evidencing consultation and recording views of residential pupils, reviewing some aspects of behaviour management and ensuring safe practices for residential pupils who self-medicate.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. They benefit from a highly motivated staff team who aim to enable all individual's to reach their personal potential. Residential pupils make good progress considering their starting points. Improvements are especially felt in school attendance and progress, personal confidence, behaviour and in developing skills through a wide variety of planned activities. Residential pupils benefit from the structure and stability the service provides. They have opportunities to mix with peers, develop new interests and talents and to improve their self-esteem. Residential pupils have a strong sense of pride and identity with their house. Many pupils referred to their sense of 'belonging' and that for them this was their first really positive educational experience. They speak incredibly well of the residential staff and recognise their contribution in helping them do so well.

Residential pupils benefit from the excellent relationships they have with residential staff. They feel that there are a variety of staff they can talk to and feel confident that they are listened to. They are satisfied with their houses, feeling they are comfortable and homely; a place where they can relax after school and enjoy their evening. Several young people happily showed inspectors their bedrooms. They were especially happy that they have sole use of their bedrooms even when they only stay a couple of nights each week and were pleased to be able to personalise them with their own choice of décor and personal items.

All staff encourage pupils to respect the rights of others within the school and individual houses. They learn to treat their peers with care and tolerance. There is a keen sense of promoting pupil's social development and in preparing them to function successfully and be accepted in the wider community. On the whole the promotion of good behaviour is positively managed. For example residential pupil's really like the reward system in place. It is evident that this helps them manage their behaviour and anger more appropriately and improves their emotional resilience. However the system of sanctions in place, particularly 'Red 1's' while providing clear boundaries and consequences to unacceptable behaviours, sometimes feels excessive and is not always the most appropriate sanction to use. Moreover the sanction, most often imposed within the school discipline framework, impacts unnecessarily on what in other respects, is a very positive residential experience.

Overall, residential pupil's comments about the school are positive. They feel safe and well cared for. They feel the houses are comfortable and homely environments in which they can relax and have fun. They feel they have really good relationships with residential staff and always have someone they can speak to. Without exception all comments received about the number and variety of activities were very positive. Many comments about food were also very complimentary, while a minority felt that evening food in some houses could be better. Some residential pupils also felt that sanctions were not consistently applied and were not particularly effective. Residential pupils are involved in the student council and are also asked to complete questionnaires. They feel that they are able to make a contribution to their residential community and effect changes and improvements, for example to furnishings, décor, activities and equipment such as the purchase of new play equipment currently being finalised.

Parents speak positively of the outcomes achieved since their children have attended the school. One commented: "It is a fantastic school and I couldn't speak more highly of it. Attending this school has transformed my son and there is such a massive difference in how well he is doing now compared with his previous school experiences.'

Residential pupils have a range of opportunities that helps prepare them for a successful transition to independence and adult life or for their next stage in education. Since the last inspection a life skills assessment programme has been implemented and is working effectively across age groups within each of the residential houses.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. Residential pupils benefit from being supported by a staff team who are experienced, well trained and highly motivated to provide a quality service. Staff across the school and residential provision work effectively together and alongside other professionals and parents to provide a

holistic approach to care. The quality of pastoral support is good, including very thorough placement planning, day-to-day support and external consultation with other professionals.

Care planning is thorough and effective. Individual targets are set and monitored. The role of the family support worker within the team provides good links with external agencies such as children and mental health services and promotes effective partnership working with professionals and parents alike. Both pupil's and parents are consulted and involved throughout the person-centred approach. Parents confirm that they feel involved and supported and appreciate the benefits of this approach.

There is an impressive range of after school activities on offer every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening. There are a choice of activities both before and after the evening meal and include drama, computer club, swimming, cooking, trips to the beach, football, Tae Kwon Do and fishing. Pupils find these activities stimulating and exciting and they offer genuine opportunities for them to develop their self-esteem, new talents and confidence. Staff are highly motivated to provide these activities and are effective in distinguishing them from the more structured school activities.

A thorough approach is taken to promoting the health and well-being of residential pupils. For example staff have clear guidance on how to safely deliver intimate care and all staff are either trained in emergency first aid or have achieved the full four day first aid qualification. Generally medication is safely managed and administered. However there was no written evidence of a competency or risk assessment having taken place, nor are suitable safe storage facilities provided for residential pupils who self-administer their medication. Staff encourage pupils to make good lifestyle choices by encouraging healthy eating and regular exercise. Information, support and access to specialist services is also facilitated in such areas as smoking cessation and emerging sexuality. While the overall quality of food provided is good, the evening meal in houses where food is provided from the school's central catering facilities is not as wholesome as lunch and this was reflected in some comments received from residential pupils.

Residential pupils enjoy good quality accommodation that creates a domestic and homely environment. Communal areas are open plan and pupils make good use of the space, enjoying shared activities such as watching television or playing board games. All residential pupils have their own bedroom which they have been able to personalise and equip to meet their needs and interests and where they can enjoy privacy and quiet away from others when they choose.

Residential pupils' safety

Residential pupils feel safe and protected. They confirmed that they feel well cared for and confident to approach a range of adults with whom they could share any concerns they may have.

The school has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote safety and well-being, for example in child protection, countering bullying and missing from school. Staff are knowledgeable about such policies and procedures and are very mindful of their responsibilities. Staff are well trained and named senior staff take lead responsibility for child protection. There are good links with local safeguarding agencies including the local authority designated officer and police. Local police report that incidents connected with the school are very low and that the school uses them in a very positive, preventative way which has helped to establish an open and positive rapport with pupils.

Staff are aware of the potential for bullying incidents to occur and remain vigilant. Residential pupils are fully aware that bullying behaviour is not tolerated and report that while bullying is not an issue any concerns are responded to quickly and effectively. Residential staff and pupils are mindful of the range of potential bullying incidents and feel that where necessary appropriate safeguards are put in place, for example in respect of cyber-bullying.

The school has a comprehensive behaviour management policy. A key aim of the school is to 'enable pupils to improve their behaviour to a socially accepted level'. Pupils know how they are expected to behave as staff are very clear about their expectations and have clear boundaries in place. Staff are skilled in their de-escalation techniques and promote positive behaviour through rewards and recognition of achievements. There is a sense however that some sanctions used within the school environment do not feel wholly relevant and impact on the residential experience, as residential staff are expected to continue to implement them in the evening. Physical interventions are used only as a last resort and in accordance with the legislative framework. There is evidence of a steady reduction of physical interventions over recent years.

There are robust procedures in place for safe recruitment and vetting of staff. All staff are subjected to a Criminal Records Bureau checks which are renewed every three years or earlier if there is a change in position. The identity of visitors to the school are checked on arrival and are supervised to prevent them gaining unsupervised access to pupils.

The safety of the environment is promoted by a comprehensive approach to risk assessment and an on-going maintenance and service programme. For example, fire and utility checks are routinely carried out. Residential staff and pupils are familiar with the fire evacuation procedure, having regular opportunities to practice fire drills.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the residential provision is good. The residential provision is a highly valued and integral part of the school. Almost all pupils benefit from either overnight residential stays or extended days. Parents feel involved and

supported by the school. They believe that the residential provision supports and compliments the school and significantly contributes to improving outcomes.

The school has clear aims for its residential service which are translated into practice. Staff across the whole school work in partnership in the best interest of pupils.

There are good staffing arrangements in place. Staff are designated to work in a specific house and there is a good staffing structure in place. Staff retention is excellent and morale is good. Staff feel well supported through regular training, staff meetings and individual supervision.

The residential provision has a good track record and demonstrates a commitment to continue to improve in the best interests of its pupils. For example further work is taking place in respect of preparing young people for adulthood and a successful transition when they move on. There is monitoring by independent visitors, namely governors of the school. While these do contribute to the internal quality monitoring systems in place, the visits do not occur regularly enough nor do reports explicitly cover the areas identified in the national minimum standards.

All required policies, documents and records are in place and are generally of a good standard. They are also stored securely. However records do not consistently evidence consultation, views and debriefing of residential pupils in relation to specific events such as in writing their support plan and following physical interventions, sanctions and complaints made by them.

National minimum standards

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

- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the Headteacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)
- Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include: checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of physical interventions, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children; assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish). (NMS 20.2)

What should the school do to improve further?

- Consistently evidence consultation, views and debriefing of residential pupils in relation to specific events such as in writing their support plan and following physical interventions, sanctions and complaints.
- Review the implementation of behaviour management to ensure it does not become too excessive or institutional, ensuring that it does not unnecessarily impact negatively on the positive residential experience.
- Provide evidence of competency and risk assessment and suitable safe storage for residential pupils who self-administer their medication.

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.



11/12/2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ratcliffe School

Thank you for helping us with the recent inspection of the residential provision at your school.

During the inspection we read through surveys you completed, spoke with many of you, joined in with activities, examined records, consulted staff and saw your accommodation. We also spoke with some families and professionals involved with the school. From all the information we gathered we have decided that you are provided with a good quality service. You are making good progress and staff are very proud of your achievements. We feel the staff have a very good understanding of your needs and they have high expectations for you to do well.

You have very good relationships with residential staff and show care and respect towards others in your house. You are making progress in learning how to manage your behaviour better both at school and at home and are learning new skills.

We thought that the range of activities you have in the evening are excellent. We enjoyed taking part in some of these with you and we know that you really like to have so many opportunities available to you.

The houses have had lots of improvement over recent years and are comfortable and homely. We like how so many of you have personalised your bedrooms.

We have asked the school to do some things which we think will make further improvements and hopefully benefit you. We have asked them to review some sanctions, such as Red 1s and how these are applied in the evening back at the houses. We have also asked them to ensure that they record your views in your support plans and also following any sanctions, restraints and complaints. Something else we have asked them to do is put records in place if you self medicate and provide you with a suitable facility to keep your medicine safe. Finally we have asked them to increase the number of visits governors make to your houses, as they are expected to visit every half term.

Thank you again for your help and best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Norma Welsby / Paula Lahey