

Mulberry Bush School

Mulberry Bush School Ltd, Abingdon Road, Standlake, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX29 7RW

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| Inspection dates | 20/02/2013 to 22/02/2013 | |
| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding | 1 |
| Outcomes for residential pupils | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of residential provision and care | Outstanding | 1 |
| Residential pupils' safety | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management of the residential provision | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision at Mulberry Bush School is outstanding. The school provides an exceptional boarding experience that along with education, therapy and family work it forms part of a highly integrated school community. This successfully promotes the personal growth and development of residential pupils.
- Along with education and therapeutic input, the boarding experience greatly improves the personal and social development of residential pupils which in turn supports their families. Strategies used by school to promote positive behaviour are implemented at home to positive effect.
- Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally good. Residential pupils grow in independence and confidence, which helps prepare them for life after school.
- Staff focus well on the individual needs and wishes of residential pupils. They use this focus to inform individualised and integrated treatment planning for pupils. As a result, residential pupils achieve personal, educational, social and cultural development.
- There is strong leadership and management which is well supported by a highly qualified, experienced and stable staff team. The management team routinely reflect on and evaluate their practice to continually improve it. Families and professionals highly value the way staff care and support pupils in all aspects of their welfare and development.
- The excellent accommodation is safe, secure and maintained in excellent decorative order. Residential pupils enjoy their freedom of movement within spacious surroundings, complemented by the privacy of their own personalised bedrooms.
- The school has sustained its outstanding practice since the last inspection.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Muhammed Harunur Rashid

Lead social care inspector

Thomas Webber

Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Mulberry Bush School is a not for profit charity and is approved by the Department for Education as a non-maintained special school. It provides 38 weeks of residential care and education and family work, as well as a number of day placements. This provision is for up to 40 boys and girls aged 5 to 13 years, who have experienced severe emotional damage in infancy and early childhood. At the time of this inspection, the school had 21 pupils on roll and all of them were residential pupils. The school specifically provides therapeutic treatment for children who have serious emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The school is situated in a village in rural West Oxfordshire, five miles south of Witney. Four houses provide the residential accommodation and are located around a 'village green', the classrooms are in close proximity and the layout of the site creates the spirit of a community.

The residential provision was last inspected in January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school has made good progress and now meets all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. The primary aged residential pupils are extremely vulnerable by their severe emotional and behavioural issues and multiple breakdowns of their past placements. Residential pupils make significant progress socially and emotionally through the specialist residential care, treatment and education. The school's work consistently addresses these difficulties to establish positive relationships. As a result placement breakdowns are rare.

Residential pupils are central to the work of the whole staff team. Residential pupils enjoy warm, positive and purposeful relationships with the staff team and with each other. One parent spoke about the progress they have seen their child has made since he took up a residential provision at the school. 'This has been a truly healing period of the time for us as a family, for 'name of child' it's has been a time of acceptance, guidance and friendships—things he had not experienced at previous schools before'.

Residential pupils enjoy very healthy lifestyles. They are encouraged to eat healthily and take part in various leisure and sport activities. Well-established therapies and networks address any emotional and psychological health issues through individual and group work. Having such a team of professionals on site ensures that residential pupils get timely and regular access to these services.

Residential pupils enjoy a comprehensive, high quality range of activities both on and off site. Residential pupils visit various places of interest. Activities and outings are thoroughly researched and risk assessed. Residential pupils greatly benefit from a newly introduced life and social skills programme called 'You've got skills'. This initiative engages pupils in achieving awards that are link to their social and emotional development.

The school operates a positive culture of consultation. Residential pupils are encouraged to contribute to decision making regarding developments to the school and residential provision. Pupils are regularly consulted through regular link working sessions, house meetings and their placement reviews. Pupils have access to independent advocates. Pupils are also consulted through monthly monitoring visits by a trustee.

Residential pupils grow substantially in independence and confidence which helps to prepare them for life after school. The Therapy and Networks Team which include family support workers, work closely with pupils' families and external professionals to support their reintegration at the end of the placement. This ensures a smooth transition when they leave the school.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. The introductory process is excellent including a tailor made package that really settles pupils into the residential provision. The highly effective communication between parents, residential and academic staff provides pupils with consistent approaches that reflects their individual needs. One parent said that the staff are a team of wonderful individuals who visits them at home. Residential pupils benefit greatly from the meticulous residential care given by an experienced staff team who know them extremely well. This in-depth knowledge is reflected in the care planning and review process and is being incorporated into the care plans.

All residential pupils have individual integrated treatment plans within their placement objectives. The plans include pupils contributions, so they are consistently and centrally involved in the

planning and review of their care and assessment of their progress academically, socially and emotionally. The plans are regularly reviewed to re-assess individual pupil's progress and to make any changes needed. This process helps the school to understand and meet pupils' needs very well, while being extremely responsive to their changing needs.

The highly integrated multidisciplinary teams provide an exceptionally well-coordinated provision for residential pupils; this supports their academic and personal progress. In the safe and secure environment residential pupils successfully develop their confidence and self-esteem with highly effective personalised support.

The school works very effectively in partnership with parents, the school nurse, various therapists and external agencies to promote the physical, psychological and emotional health of residential pupils. The range and quality of activities and a good choice of nourishing meals also contributes to promoting residential pupils' health and well-being.

The school offers a range of excellent extra-curriculum and leisure opportunities as part of the 24 hours curriculum in house groups, the school community and the wider community. These activities provide excellent opportunities for their personal development. Residential pupils take part in various indoor activities and sports in the school grounds. Residential pupils also take part in various sports activities into the local community. For example, one residential pupil plays football for a local football team and another pupil plays rugby and they wish to pursue a professional career in their chosen sports.

The residential pupils live in four of the residential houses situated in the school grounds. The boarding accommodation and facilities are of a high standard. This provides a safe and secure environment to residential pupils. The accommodation is very well maintained. The accommodation is spacious and homely; residential pupils have also individualised their bedrooms appropriately. Residential pupils can relax and feel warm and comfortable in their own environment. They also have suitable provisions for keeping their belongings safe.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The arrangements for residential pupils' safety are outstanding. The uppermost importance is given to the safety and well-being of pupils, staff and visitors. Residential pupils spoken to say that they feel very safe living in their residential provision. Comprehensive child protection policies and procedures and robust risk assessments are devised for each residential pupil. These arrangements protect them from harm and ensure they are safe and secure when at the residential unit and during their visits to the community. All staff including ancillary staff receive safeguarding training. The school works closely with the local authority designated safeguarding officer and seeks advice and guidance on safeguarding issues. The 'head of group living' is one of the two designated safeguarding officers. They have expertise in safeguarding issues and provide safeguarding training for the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Robust records are maintained in respect of all sanctions and restraints. Some concerns or complaints have been expressed about the use of restraints. These are suitably recorded or investigated through the safeguarding or complaint processes. All restraint, sanctions, incidents of bullying and racial incidents, including anti-social and aggressive incidents are consistently investigated by the head of group living. Where concerns are identified in relation to the increase of these it is discussed with the treatment team to come up with ways of managing and reducing these levels of behaviour. Positive and proactive behaviour management strategies are well established and consistently applied by staff to promoting positive behaviour. Re-enforcement opportunities to reflect on their actions, frustrations and negative behaviour are well established. Evidence is available to show that pupil have made progress in managing their behaviour more appropriately and their progress is fully celebrated through award ceremonies.

Staff take appropriate actions if and when a residential pupil goes missing from care and ensure that they return home safely and make them aware of the danger of missing from care. This effectively minimises the missing from care incidents.

Records of fire, health and safety are well maintained. The school is in the process of a full upgrading of their fire alarm system by installing individual repeater fire panels in each of the four residential houses. The fire officer has confirmed to the school that their present system is satisfactory until a further upgrading takes place.

The school maintains excellent practices around staff recruitment. These ensure that children are protected against unsuitable adults working with them. New staff do not commence employment until all relevant checks have been carried out. The school follows Department for Education guidance on safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

Currently all pupils enrolled at the school live in the residential provision and the school ensures in its practice that this provision is at the heart of the school. The work of Therapy and Networks Team is carefully integrated into the school's provision, providing individual therapy for pupils. The work undertaken with families and school staff at every level helps to achieve a full understanding of each child; therefore a genuinely integrated approach to managing and nurturing each pupil helps their personal and social development.

The cohesion of the senior management team lead by the director and CEO is a strength of the school. Quality assurance systems provide an informed and insight evaluation of the school's performance, identifying strengths and areas of development, taking into account the feedback from an external agency and pupils.

The board of trustees effectively monitors the work of the school and ensures that there is a well-targeted strategic plan which serves the holistic needs of the residential pupils.

The school is committed to valuing and promoting diversity in all areas of recruitment, employment, training and promotion. The school works towards an inclusive environment where all pupils and staff can develop their full potential, irrespective of their race, gender, religion and disabilities.

Communication with parents, carers and placing authorities via the school's therapists and network teams there is excellent. The quality of this communication supports each pupil with the personal, emotional and learning skills and abilities they need to be able to cope in a family, school and the community.

Staff are well experienced and highly qualified. The school has on-going high quality training, supervision, reflect spaces and support to ensure that staff are well trained and experienced to deliver individual care to each residential pupil. In order to provide high standards of care all residential staff are required to complete a two-years Foundation Degree Award which is validated by a University. In addition to this all staff receive other forms of relevant training. This includes: child protection, first aid, managing challenging behaviour and attachments. This successful approach to training and support results in high staff retention. Consequently, residential pupils who have previously experienced constant turmoil, change and consequently fragmented relationships benefit from the continuity of care.

There are relevant policies and records in place to help the support of residential pupils. These are regularly reviewed by the management team. Residential pupils' records provide comprehensive

information on their history and progress at the school. Records are kept securely and pupils can access their records.

There were no recommendations made at the last inspection. All national minimum standards are fully met; no recommendations are made as a result of this inspection.

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|-------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 3 | Adequate | A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 123330 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC013039 |
| DfE registration number | 931/7005 |

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.

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| Type of school | |
| Number of boarders on roll | |
| Gender of boarders | Mixed |
| Age range of boarders | 5 to 13 |
| Headteacher | Mr Andy Lole |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 24/01/2012 |
| Telephone number | 01865 300202 |
| Email address | cday@mulberrybush.org.uk |

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