

Fred Nicholson School

Fred Nicholson School, Westfield Road, DEREHAM, Norfolk, NR19 1JB

Inspection dates	21/05/2013 to 23/05/2013	
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

- Residential Pupils make excellent progress in their personal and social development during their time at the school. They develop a range of new skills, improved self-esteem and self-confidence and make huge strides in their emotional maturity and emotional literacy. This is developed through excellent role modelling by staff; active participation in a wide range of stimulating and stretching activities and feeling safe and secure in their placements. An understanding and awareness of their medications and their knowledge of healthy lifestyles are stand out points.
- Health and safety and the welfare of pupils is given extremely high priority across the provision. A range of robust policies and health and safety checks very effectively helps protect pupils from the possibility of injury or harm on the school site. Pupils' health and welfare are extremely well supported by staff and a range of health professionals. This ensures young people's physical, emotional and psychological needs are well met at all times.
- All young people are extremely clear that they enjoy staying at the school and are happy and safe while here. Activities and individual plans fully support the provision of a 24 hour curriculum. Staff are focused, enthusiastic and committed to providing the highest quality of care and a positive, meaningful and highly beneficial residential experience to young people. The residential areas are very well maintained and bedroom spaces are highly individualised allowing young people to express their personalities and passions.
- There is an extremely strong, joined up approach to the leadership and management of the residential provision. It is clearly given a very high priority within the school and the vision and ethos of the service is clearly translated into practice. Staff supervision is regular though more robust recording would be beneficial. Training remains a high priority and is regularly refreshed ensuring staff have the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge to provide a consistent service in a safe manner.

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

The head teacher was informed of these inspection early on the first morning and agreed to begin completion of the indicative timetable. Inspection activity involved talking with boarders, a tour of the accommodation and joining them for mealtimes and activities. Staff handover meetings, interactions with pupils and boarder's case files were also observed. Looking at policies, discussions with key staff and talking to two parents also provided evidence used to complete this report. Progress made since the last inspection was noted and a tour of the premises with boarders was also undertaken.

Inspection team

Stephen Halliley

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Fred Nicholson School is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council, catering for pupils with complex needs aged from 7 to 16 years. Situated in a residential area on the edge of a market town, the school takes pupils from a wide catchment area.

There are currently 120 pupils on roll, 13 of these in the specialist ASD day education unit. Twenty one pupils presently board in the school for up to four nights from Monday to Friday. However, the majority stay for two nights per week. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls. This is split into dormitories of four or less and a flat which allows for individual bedrooms for the older female boarders. Each residential area has its own communal space where boarders may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. In addition, residential pupils have access to a range of school facilities during boarding time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- consider developing a recording system for informal supervision where discussions may impact on practice, welfare or safeguarding issues.
- ensure all updates to placement plans and risk assessments are signed and dated by staff and, where appropriate, young people.
- expand the reports provided from the new residential governor's visits to include checks on attendance, complaints, physical interventions and risk assessments.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes achieved by boarders are outstanding. Boarders make huge progress in many aspects of their lives as a result of the time spent boarding at this school. This includes social interaction and awareness, academic support and the development of new skills and abilities.

Boarders have developed extremely strong relationships with staff who clearly put the needs of the boarders and their welfare at the centre of their practice. Relationships among the boarding group are good and there is a real sense of community as boarders support each other to achieve tasks, wait for peers to finish meals before moving on and have developed some very meaningful friendships. There are no issues or any suggestion of intolerance around different likes and dislikes, personal beliefs or appearance. In the dormitories there is a clear level of respect and understanding of the need to behave in an appropriate manner including being quiet at night while younger boarders are settling. For many boarders this ability to empathise with the needs of others is a newly developed skill.

All boarders have developed a strong sense of personal identity and their sense of self-worth is fully encouraged and supported. Independence skills are developed at rates appropriate to individual understanding and ability. Skills learnt include shopping, reading, gardening and cooking basic meals. Boarders are also supported to go into the community independently but this is very highly risk assessed and the benefits balanced against this risk. The ultimate aim is to enable vulnerable young people to be able to take some control of their lives and this is being achieved very well by most boarders.

All boarders say they are happy to stay at the school and recognise they get a great deal out of these stays. They take full advantage of the activities, opportunities and experiences they are offered and have developed a range of new skill as a result. Boarders have been supported to develop a wider range of diet than when they arrived, to understand and identify their own medication and why they are taking this and to use cutlery appropriately without the need for shields on their plates. These show some remarkable achievements and progress for young people. Close links between care staff and parents ensures new skills are consistently supported and encouraged at all times and this has reinforced them until they have become part of the everyday life for young people.

Boarders are in good health and they are aware of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles. Discussion about the need to exercise if eating lots of doughnuts to burn off the calories, for example, show that they have developed a sense of how different aspects of their life impact on their health. Health needs of boarders are fully met, both physically and emotionally through ready access to a range of health professionals.

Boarders are supported to make the transition to new schools, colleges or adult placements and are fully ready for this when the time comes. The support, guidance and advice they receive is linked to their individual plans and, together with the life skills they have learnt, allow them to move on successfully to their future placements.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care provided in this school is outstanding. Young people who wish to become boarders benefit from a highly individualised, sensitive and inclusive induction to the boarding provision. This includes having a number of 'extended days' where they use the boarding provision until they feel happy to begin to sleep over. Parents are fully involved in this process as the school carry out home visits and invite parents in to take part in some

activities during the extended days. Impact risk assessments look closely at the way new boarders will affect the established group and this also helps decide which dormitory group they will join. This allows for a well-rounded, very open approach to boarding and ensures all boarders are happy to be accessing the service.

Boarders benefit from a very joined up service from pastoral and academic staff to ensure continuity and consistency of approach. This is supported by twice daily meetings between senior staff from both teams where thorough and detailed information is passed over. This ensures that short-term information, such as behavioural changes, are known by all staff who work with the pupils. This allows for young people to be fully supported at times of crisis or illness.

The residential staff are a very experienced group with a good mix of age, knowledge, skills and gender. This allows for young people to experience a range of appropriate adult role models. The work of the staff is guided by detailed, highly personalised care plans, which are regularly reviewed and updated. However, these are not consistently being signed and dated by staff and, where appropriate, young people. The involvement of boarders in this review process ensures they are aware of their targets and the progress they are making.

All residential areas are very well appointed, brightly decorated and very well maintained. Each bed space is large, appropriately furnished and has been individualised by the use of posters, clocks, radios and bedding. This allows for the boarders individual personalities and interests to be expressed. All boarders have a lockable bedside cabinet to store personal possessions and adequate storage space for clothing and other belongings. Dormitories also have a lounge area where young people can relax, adequate bathroom facilities and a sleeping in room for staff in order to support young people overnight. There is a communal lounge for use by all boarders and a small kitchen where they can prepare drinks, snacks and supper. Main meals are taken in the dining hall and there is always a minimum of two choices of each course. Special dietary requests are managed well and there is no attention drawn to these. The catering staff will prepare gluten free options in order to ensure young people with intolerances do not miss out on a full choice of available food. The food available is plentiful, varied and contains a very good mix of all five food groups to support boarders health and provide excellent quality nutrition.

Boarders have access to a very wide ranging and stimulating activity programme. This includes a camera club run by a parent governor. Boarders have taken pictures in a range of settings having learnt about the composition of photographs and how to use both digital and analogue cameras. A range of these pictures have been displayed on boards around the school and the children are rightly very proud of what they have achieved. Other activities include maintaining the Chinese Garden, social games, games consoles, cooking, reading, swimming, bowling, trips to football matches and nature walks. These activities support educational achievement, are used to support learning about the environment and support physical health and well-being. Boarders evaluate new experiences, such as a recent trip to London, to show what they have learnt from this and use this to support with their constantly evolving life skills.

Boarders health and well-being is very well supported by staff. There are very detailed health plans in place where necessary. These are informed by parents and the school nurse and ensure that individualised health needs are fully addressed. Boarders have access to a therapist who works closely with the school, there are close links with child and adolescent mental health services and care staff regularly support young people to attend doctor's appointments where parents are unable to do so. Together with clear arrangements for supporting boarders who are unwell and very clear systems for the administration and recording of medication this approach ensures that boarders physical and emotional health needs are fully met.

The arrangements in place to ensure boarders are kept safe and protected from harm are outstanding. Boarders are kept safe at all times by very high staffing levels, good staff awareness of health and safety issues, clear risk assessments and staff having guidance from a range of comprehensive and detailed policies.

Boarders all said they feel safe at school and this was clearly supported by both parents and social workers. There are a range of health and safety checks which are carried out regularly and these are thoroughly recorded. All boarders are involved in fire drills, often twice each term, and staff run through the emergency procedures with them regularly to ensure they remember the systems. This practice of continual reminder and practise ensures young people would respond appropriately should there be an emergency situation.

There are very clear policies in place for addressing bullying and boarders do not identify this as an issue. All boarders complete internet safety classes and this ensures they know how to keep themselves safe and that cyber-bullying of others is unacceptable.

Boarders do not go missing from this school but there are very clear policies and procedures in place for staff to follow should this occur. Due to the high level of vulnerability of boarders this policy has been produced in conjunction with the local police to ensure a prompt and appropriate response.

All staff have received appropriate levels of child protection training including domiciliary staff. Staff who carry out home visits have done advanced training and this enables them to pick up on any issues external to the school which may be giving cause for concern. There are two senior designated staff with responsibility for safeguarding and they have a very good understanding of their role and when it may be necessary to refer concerns to external agencies such as children's services. This ensures that young people are kept safe at all times and that any concerns, allegations or disclosures are appropriately addressed. There have been three referrals to outside agencies since the last inspection. These have been appropriately and sensitively followed through with the well-being of the young person being of paramount importance. This has included liaising with social workers and police forces both locally and in other parts of the country. The professional, considered and consistent approach to safeguarding ensures any risk to young people is dealt with at the earliest opportunity and that they are protected from harm, abuse or accidental injury.

Promoting positive behaviour is a clear strength of this school and the behaviour of young people towards each other and adults is extremely good in the main. The use of physical interventions and sanctions are entirely appropriate to the behaviours being exhibited by young people and have been well recorded. Young people are always given the opportunity to discuss sanctions and restraints following their use. This allows them to understand why they were given and to find alternative ways of managing their feelings in the future. The low incidence rate of restraint and sanctions would show that young people are benefiting from this interaction and learning to self-regulate their behaviour in a very positive manner.

There are very effective and thorough vetting procedures in place for new staff and a clear record of all of these checks is held centrally. There are also clear procedures in place for escorting visitors to the school site to ensure they cannot gain unsupervised access to children. Large, open areas of the school site are covered by close-circuit television as it is not possible for the whole area to be continually manually monitored. This supports the safety of young people as uninvited adults would be picked up on the system. The application of these measures ensures boarders are protected from harm or abuse by staff and from other adults who come on to the site.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding. The boarding provision at this school is definitely viewed by all staff as a valuable and integral part of the services the school are able to offer. The links between senior academic managers and the managers of the boarding provision are extremely strong and the open information sharing invaluable in ensuring a consistent high quality service for boarders.

Boarders benefit from clear, well-known structures, routines and boundaries which contribute to them feeling safe when they stay. They are supported by experienced, well-qualified and well-trained staff who know the young people and their families very well. High staffing levels allow for individual and group needs to be fully met. Staff receive regular supervision and there is a great deal of additional informal supervision and discussion which further supports them in fulfilling their roles effectively. More detailed recording of informal supervision would be beneficial especially where this impacts on practice, welfare or safeguarding issues. Annual appraisals review performance and set challenging and stimulating targets for the year ahead designed to enhance the way staff work with boarders. Staff practice is informed by a range of detailed policies and procedures all of which fully meet the requirements of the national minimum standards.

The head of care provides regular summaries of the boarding provision to a governors committee. This includes progress made in the boarding provision in terms of numbers of boarders, specific achievements of individual boarders and the group and new experiences they have supported boarders to enjoy. The regular monitoring by managers ensures the service continues to evolve and that the positive impact on boarders lives is recorded and these achievements celebrated. The school is monitored by an external visitor each half term, alternating between a Norfolk County Council senior manager and the governor with specific responsibility for boarding and safeguarding. Each of these provide a report to the school which is used in conjunction with internal monitoring to drive the provision forward. The visiting governor is new to this role and her recent report did not fully cover checks on attendance, complaints physical interventions or risk assessments as would be expected. This has had minimal impact as all other reports have noted this information and the head of care also monitors these areas for her own records. This shortfall has been addressed through the provision of a checklist by the head of care to support future visits.

There have been no complaints received since the last inspection. Young people are well aware of how they can make a complaint and staff regularly cover this with them in keyworking sessions to ensure they are fully aware of systems. This open approach ensures young people would raise concerns appropriately if there were areas about which they were unhappy. Boarders views are taken into account throughout the provision of their care and they are clear that staff listen to their thoughts and feelings and act upon their requests.

Boarders have a wide range of highly diverse and complex needs which the staff team address fully. Every opportunity is given to every boarder to take part in trips, outings and activities. If this means arranging for one-to-one staffing, updating of risk assessments, staff working additional hours or changing plans this is done without fail. There is a clear sense of inclusivity about this provision and this extends to the boarders wanting their peers to have the same experiences and opportunities as they do.

Contact with parents and the placing authority is very good and these strong links allow for the development of a continuous plan of care and consistent approach to behaviour management. Parents and social workers comment on the fact staff go 'above and beyond' to ensure the needs of the boarders are met.

Records held by the school are accurate, current and appropriate and are stored in a locked office to which boarders do not have unauthorised access. This ensures the confidentiality of young people's information. The school has fully addressed the one action point from the previous inspection by ensuring that the staff handbook makes it clear that staff have the opportunity to discuss any physical intervention they are involved in with a relevant adult.

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

Unique reference number	121256
Social care unique reference number	SC038284
DfE registration number	926/7004

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.

Type of school	Maintained Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	120
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Kahn
Date of previous boarding inspection	03/07/2012
Telephone number	01362 693915
Email address	office@frednicholson.norfolk.sch.uk

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