

Meadows School

London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 0RJ

Inspection dates 04/02/2013 to 06/02/2013

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

- Boarding is central to the culture of the school and is outstanding. Young people benefit considerably from receiving excellent levels of care from staff who clearly understand their individual needs. The school nurtures ideas of mutual respect in an environment where difference is valued.
- Young people make significant progress in their learning, personal development and education. The school promote the notion of the whole person. In doing so young people have their emotional, social, behavioural and educational needs met to the highest standards.
- The school is successful at keeping young people safe. A culture of safety ensures all risks are considered in depth without limiting opportunities for young people to participate fully in the things they enjoy. Young people feel they are safe and well looked after.
- An excellent approach to management ensures boarding is organised efficiently and effectively with young people placed firmly at the centre of practice. The quality of relationships between young people and staff is outstanding. An extremely stable, committed, experienced and enthusiastic staff team provide care that is focused and skilled.
- Young people say they thoroughly enjoy staying at the school and note how they have made 'massive strides' since being there. Similarly parents/carers said that young people receive excellent care and support and particularly praised the school for going above and beyond in their duties.

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 school were notified of the inspection four hours before it commenced. All three boarding houses were visited with evening meals and activities being attended. Meetings took place with young people, the head teacher, head of care and care staff. Telephone interviews were held with parents and social workers, while information contained within the schools records and policies and procedures were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Kevin Whatley

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Meadows School is situated in Southborough, Kent and is a non-maintained residential special school, owned by Barnardo's Children's Charity. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The residential provision offers a separate house for girls, situated in a residential area of Southborough and two houses for boys. Both of these buildings are located within the school's grounds and the girls' house is within a short walking distance of the school, situated very close to the town centre of Tunbridge Wells.

The school was last inspected in October 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure records of sanctions and the use of any physical restraint are completed fully and in line with the schools own policies and procedures.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for young people are outstanding. Young people benefit from having their needs met in an individualised manner which enables them to make significant progress. Parent/carers spoke most positively about the support and guidance provided for young people and stated that, 'staff go above and beyond in their duties; they are fantastic and the progress my son has made is unbelievable.'

Young people receive excellent pastoral care. High quality relationships between young people and staff is a particular strength of the school. Young people say they share extremely positive relationships with the staff who care for them. Comments such as 'they really do care about me' and 'I can always share my feelings with them', were indicative of the views expressed by young people. Interactions between young people and staff are open, honest and relaxed. Care staff clearly understand the specific needs of each young person in their care. Such insight allows them to encourage, guide, and when necessary, challenge young people appropriately. The atmosphere of the living groups was one of mutual respect where young people feel safe and cared for.

Young people make significant progress at the school. In many cases such progress is exceptional given their starting points on admission. All young people have emotional and behavioural difficulties with a number also having additional complex learning needs including autistic spectrum disorders. Young people have their care needs comprehensively addressed leading to vastly improved outcomes. Young people admitted to the school with very poor educational histories are supported and guided to engage in their learning. For example young people who have histories of multiple exclusions and long periods of failing to attend previous school placements, are settled and achieving to a high standard. Young people stated that, 'I was a nightmare when I first arrived and hated school; I am now just about to take my exams and will be staying on in the 16 plus provision.' Another noted, 'I have been to many schools due to my behaviour, this is the only one that has actually worked.'

Young people are provided with excellent guidance regarding how to behave appropriately. As a result they are able to significantly improve their abilities to deal with feelings of anger, frustration or upset. Many young people arrive at the school with problems associated with their behaviour and attitude, including violence and going missing. The rules of the school are firm but fair with young people clearly aware of the expectations of behaviour. An excellent and holistic approach toward behaviour management allow for individual intervention programmes to be implemented alongside the expectations of living together as a group. Young people were seen to be encouraged to treat each other with respect and had developed empathy for their peers and others. Young people clearly gain valuable insight into their own issues and have significantly reduced the risks they are to themselves or others since being at the school. Young people commented that, 'I would be locked up by now if it was not for the help I get here' and 'with the help of staff I have learned to control my anger so much more.'

Young people living at the school are a most valuable part of the culture with their views and wishes taken fully into consideration. Young people felt they were always listened to with communication between them and staff being vociferous, yet respectful. The open and inclusive atmosphere of the school ensures young people have a strong voice in all areas of school life. Young people said, 'there is always someone I can talk to.'

Young people have their health care needs promoted to an excellent standard. They have ready access to health services such as a local doctor should they require one. Young people benefit considerably from an outstanding approach toward addressing their emotional well-being. Expert

advice and guidance is readily available and focuses on ensuring the holistic needs of young people are always taken into account.

Young people clearly enjoy staying at the school and make considerable progress in all areas of their life. The school encourage and support community cohesion with young people integrating well into their local surroundings. Such opportunities are used to develop the independent living skills of young people to an excellent level. For example young people with very poor levels of self-esteem and confidence have been sensitively supported to vastly improve their ability to travel independently. As a result their feelings of self-worth have grown enormously and they are much better prepared for life once they leave the school.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Pastoral support offered to young people is extremely supportive and nurturing. Excellent levels of communication are maintained across the school which ensures information is shared easily between education and care staff. Such an approach leads to young people receiving consistent support, care and guidance in all areas of school life.

Admission to the school is carefully considered to ensure the individual needs of each young person can be met. Referrals to the school are assessed in detail and now includes young people being visited in their own homes by care staff. Such an approach ensures a full assessment of needs and greatly enhances the matching process, while simultaneously aiding communication with parents/carers. Young people and their parents/carers are able to visit the school with moves being planned sensitively and with the young person in mind.

Young people have their placement needs addressed through an excellent process of care planning. Care plans are detailed and take account of the educational, emotional, behavioural, social and physical needs of the young person concerned. Such comprehensive plans enable staff to have an excellent knowledge of what approach is needed to ensure young people have their specific needs supported and developed. Such planning is implemented consistently in practice. An experienced and stable staff group work closely together to provide continually high standards of care which are underpinned by excellent and meaningful relationships.

Young people are provided with excellent opportunities to develop their academic abilities. Attendance rates are very high as are the achievements of young people. This is most telling given their often poor starting points. Education and care staff work closely together to ensure there are shared goals in place in respect of educational progress. Education plans contain achievable targets and the effectiveness of the plans are assessed at regular reviews. The school has recently developed a 16 plus provision, which is allowing young people to continue on in their learning and development in an environment in which they know, trust and thrive. Good links are maintained outside of the school with a number of young people successfully engaging in vocational courses at local colleges and work experience placements.

An excellent level of activities and pursuits are made available to young people. Young people can choose from a range of interesting and stimulating activities which match their wishes and interests. A uniquely individualised approach allows young people to pursue their own interests without being limited by group living. Young people are involved in the local community, such as attending sports clubs and sea cadets, with regular excursions taking place to leisure centres and places of interest. As a result young people have been able to gain invaluable experience and life skills and develop much improved feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.

Young people have access to excellent health services and information. Routine health care needs are predominantly met by parents/carers as young people go home at the end of each week. The

school have very good links with local doctors surgeries with staff being suitably trained in first aid and the giving of medication. Robust systems ensure that medication is recorded and administered appropriately. Healthy living is encouraged and this is provided not only by ensuring young people have access to health care, but by encouraging exercise and a healthy diet. All individual dietary needs are catered for with specialised menus and meals. Young people say they enjoy the meals, while parents/carers praised the focus on healthy eating.

The emotional needs of young people are met to an outstanding level with their well-being being at the core of practice. The school have established excellent programmes of on-site support, which includes speech and language therapy, counselling and clinical psychology. This ensures young people to receive expert intervention programmes which can be implemented swiftly. Similarly staff benefit from having access to specialised support and guidance whenever required. Health care professionals praised most highly the manner in which the school work with them and how the focus is clearly on meeting the individual needs of young people.

Residential accommodation is of an excellent standard. The houses are comfortable and maintained to a very high standard. Young people are able to personalise their own rooms. Since the last inspection internet access is now available in all residential accommodation with very good safety advice provided. Young people appear most comfortable in the living environments and obviously invest in keeping them free from damage or misuse.

Young people are able to contact families and carers by using their own mobile telephones, house telephones or email. Contact is supported and encouraged by the staff to ensure young people are happy and able to speak to parents and carers about any needs or issues they may have while away from home. Parents/carers said, 'communication is brilliant; they always keep me informed of everything that is going on and not just when something has gone wrong.'

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The school's arrangements for promoting young people's safety are outstanding. A culture of safety ensures the school are successful at keeping young people safe. There is excellent provision for ensuring young people are protected from the risks of harm without limiting their opportunities to engage fully in school life. Robust recruitment procedures are effectively implemented, which ensures that only adults who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children are employed.

The safeguarding of young people is a priority within the school. Designated persons are in place to take the lead for child protection. All staff receive up to date training in safeguarding and display a sound understanding of key policies and protocols. Staff are proactive in promoting and protecting the welfare of young people and effectively implement the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. Young people say they feel safe and cared about at the school. Bullying is taken most seriously and is highlighted throughout the school, such as with posters and anti-bullying messages on how such behaviour affects others. No young person raised concerns that bullying was a problem. Any issues that arise are dealt with fairly and swiftly. Young people were seen to behave with tolerance toward one another and to show insight into each other's challenges and problems. Young people develop good friendships and enjoy each other's company.

A rigorous approach ensures situations where young people leave the school without permission are responded to appropriately. Staff are mindful of what to do in such situations with clear protocols in place with the local police. On the rare occasion that young people leave the premises without permission they are provided with excellent opportunities to learn from their actions and to minimise the risk of this happening again.

Young people are provided with excellent support, advice and guidance to enable them to behave well. Expectations of behaviour are clear throughout the school. Staff work hard to promote good behaviour and are extremely successful in helping young people to dramatically reduce their inappropriate behaviours and attitudes. Comprehensive behaviour management plans and risk assessments are in place which guide staff in how to keep young people safe. Over the last year the school has introduced a new behaviour management system. This allows for all incidents to be recorded, assessed and monitored on one central database. The comprehensive format ensures young people are closely tracked and include analysing the impact of any programmes of intervention. Young people who arrived at the school with substantial problems such as with aggression and violence, have been assisted to significantly reduce such behaviour. One young person noted, 'I used to get angry all the time; they have helped me learn to cope with how I feel and now I am a completely different person from when I first came here.'

Parents/carers say the school are, 'brilliant' at helping young with their challenging behaviours. Many young people have complex needs, which can include histories of poor school attendance and anti-social behaviour. Staff maintain high levels of communication with parents/carers and on occasion have visited young people at their homes when they have refused to attend or been involved in inappropriate behaviour in their home areas. This has directly led to them successfully returning to school and engaging in positive work in avoiding anti-social behaviour when at home.

An outstanding approach toward the use of restraint culminates in a culture where the need to intervene physically is virtually nil. The calm and open atmosphere, coupled with the skills of the staff team, mean that young people are continually encouraged to talk about their feelings and to find appropriate ways to deal with their fears, anxieties or worries. Staff have been given up to date training and receive restraint refresher training annually. Since the last inspection the school have adopted a new model of physical intervention which basis a majority of practice in de-escalation techniques. There has been just two incidents of actual restraint in the boarding provision since the last inspection, a period in excess of one year. Any incidents in the school are recorded and reviewed appropriately. One minor error was found in the recording of a restraint, whereby the time of the actual hold had not been confirmed in the correct section; however this had been recorded in the incident form itself.

The school ensure young people are provided with firm but fair rules and boundaries. Young people say they understand the rules and that the use of sanctions was fair and they understand why they are given. The use of sanctions are kept to a minimum with very few imposed. Young people are given opportunities to add their comments when a sanction has been awarded; several entries in the relevant log did not confirm the response provided by young people. While this minor shortfall showed a slight inconsistency in record keeping, it had little impact on young people themselves.

The safety of the school and boarding provision is monitored effectively. Fire precautions and fire equipment are checked on a regular basis. Fire drills are held regularly and all young people receive an induction which includes fire safety and evacuation. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on-site and off-site activities. Strategies to manage risk and how to support young people are written into placement plans. The premises are secure and the school has comprehensive systems in place to ensure the safety of all pupils and students.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The management and leadership of the school is outstanding. The ethos of the school promotes

individuality and difference and nurtures the notion of mutual respect. Excellent standards of care practice demonstrate a clear determination to support young people to be the best they can be. The school strives to improve and aspires to be an exemplar of practice.

The guiding principles and aims of the school are contained on their website and within the Statement of Purpose. The website provides an excellent overview of the school and boarding provision and includes virtual tours of the living environment. Since the last inspection the guide given to young people newly admitted has been greatly improved. The guide now includes an innovative question and answer section, which allows young people an interactive opportunity to learn about the school, its staff and life when living there.

An excellent managerial approach ensures the boarding provision is run effectively and efficiently. The particular needs of young people are placed firmly at the centre of care. Young people benefit significantly from living in houses with clear routines and boundaries. The ethos of each house promotes the development of tolerance and understanding of each other's behaviour. Diverse needs are catered for sensitively and this results in fair and equal treatment for all young people.

The smooth running of each house ensures young people receive consistently high standards of care. An extremely stable, experienced and skilled care staff team provide care that is firmly focused on meeting the individual needs of each young person. Very good training opportunities are made available for staff, many of whom hold qualifications in excess of those required. Alongside compulsory training, such as physical intervention, staff are provided with specific training including working with young people who self-harm. Young people benefit from a staff team who are motivated and well supported to undertake their roles. Staff said they were given excellent formal support and guidance and were most positive about the improvements they see in young people's lives.

Staffing levels ensure the individual needs of young people are met effectively. Policies and procedures are in place to support and promote excellent practice across the school. Parents/carers report as having excellent communication with the school. One parent said, 'I know my child is safe and cared for, the work staff do is just fantastic.'

Young people and their parents/carers are aware of how to complain if they are dissatisfied with any part of the service they are receiving. A full complaints system is in place if there should be a need for parents to complain. One complaint has been made in the last year which has been fully addressed. The extremely low number of complaints clearly indicates the importance placed on communication and openness adopted by the school as a whole.

Standards of care are robustly monitored with a clear focus on seeking to improve at every opportunity. Improvements made since the last inspection has seen the reporting format enhanced to have a more defined assessment of care. Any issues or patterns of inappropriate behaviour are addressed swiftly by the senior management team. Monitoring visits by an independent person take place half-termly. The visits assess standards of care practice and always involve gaining the views of young people themselves. The subsequent reports help to assess the progress of development in boarding and what new developments are required for the coming year. An excellent approach ensures a young persons version of each report is made available to them shortly after the visit has taken place.

All information is appropriately and safely stored to ensure that confidentiality of records is maintained. Records are thorough and give an excellent account of each young person's experience and progress made at the school.

All three recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Regular supervision

is now provided for all staff with annual appraisals of practice being completed. Incidents of bullying are now recorded in a consistent manner, while the girls house has been fitted with internet access.

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	119029
Social care unique reference number	SC024060
DfE registration number	886/7011

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	Non-maintained
Number of boarders on roll	18
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Mr Mike Price
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/10/2011
Telephone number	01892 529 144
Email address	meadowsschool@barnardos.org.uk

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