

Mulberry Bush School

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

Inspection dates	30/09/2013 to 02/10/2013	
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

- Children are at the centre of practice. Outcomes for children are excellent, with children making progress in all aspects of their lives. There is a shared ethos of mutual respect of each professional's role which permeates the culture of the school. All staff work exceptionally well together to ensure there are positive outcomes for the children in their care. Consequently children make excellent progress in social skills, managing their own behaviour and in developing their emotional resilience.
- The leadership and management of the school is outstanding. The management team set high standards for staff as well as themselves. They drive forward the positive ethos of the school. The senior management team ensure they have independent critical friends to challenge and inform practice. They are proactive in sharing their expertise in training and in therapeutic child-care practice. Staffing is a key strength of this school. Staff training, support and guidance are of the highest standard exceeding national minimum standards. Staff are extremely motivated and committed to the children in their care to have the best possible outcomes. Staff demonstrate high levels of competency.
- Children's safety is of paramount importance to all staff. Staff understanding of safeguarding issues is excellent and is underpinned by the comprehensive policies and regular training. Behaviour management is carefully risk assessed and behaviour management plans agreed with interested parties. High risk physical interventions are not embedded in the culture of the school and are used as a last resort. However, not all records, in particular across education and care settings, consistently record the de-escalation and alternate strategies used prior to such an intervention.
- Health is promoted to an outstanding standard. Children have access to a paediatric nurse who oversees all their health needs. Meals are of an excellent standard, are healthy and of sufficient quantity. Children contribute their views on food.
- Children have a voice in the school. There are numerous opportunities, informal and formal, to make their views known. They have easy access to an independent advocate.

This is a school where children are at the centre of practice.

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 was notified of the inspection three hours before it commenced. Time was spent in the boarding provision where an evening meal was attended. Observations were made of the therapeutic care techniques being applied in practice. Meetings took place with the children, staff, head of care and various other professionals. Children's views were sought through face-to-face contact, school council minutes and questionnaires. Parents and placing social worker views were sought through telephone contact. Not enough responses were received on ParentView to access the feedback. Records, policies and procedures were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Keith Riley	Lead social care inspector
Jennie Christopher	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 26 children 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 February 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure consistent reporting of incidents across care and education settings, in particular the de-escalation and strategies used prior to high risk physical interventions and debriefs.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

The emotional well-being of children significantly improves during their time at the school. They develop alternative ways of expressing their difficult and challenging emotions. Clear and concise analysis of behaviours, making excellent use of technology, means strategies and approaches are under constant review to ensure optimum progress for each individual child. This means that the number of incidents requiring high risk physical intervention are significantly decreasing. There is excellent placement stability during which time the levels of support are able to be decreased. Children make excellent progress in a range of key aspects measured to reflect their emotional well-being, such as improving self awareness or being able to play.

Children's opinions are valued. They have numerous members of staff and adults to whom they can voice their thoughts and feelings. Children are able to speak out as individuals or as groups and feel they have a voice in the school. They are able to influence choices such as activities. Children say they feel safe and secure and identify staff they can talk to about their wishes and feelings. The school council ensures children take responsibility to influence the culture so that the wider impact of behaviour, such as spitting, is understood and addressed positively. Consequently such behaviours are eliminated.

Children are more confident and independent because of the wide range of opportunities for them to develop personal and social skills. Children are empowered because they are able to choose their favourite activities and extend their social skills through effective links with the wider community, such as joining a local football team. Building up life skills is positively embraced in the routines and activities offered.

Children have their health care needs met extremely well. There is easy access to a paediatric nurse who oversees the health of each individual child. Emotional well-being is central to meeting such needs with therapeutic interventions readily available to those who need them. Staff say, 'The school try very hard to exhaust every avenue of therapy with individual children.' Self destructive behaviours, such as self-harm, are rare. Other challenging behaviours are reducing.

Children are provided with very good opportunities to learn independent skills in accordance with their age. They demonstrate excellent social skills such as serving others at the meal table and engaging in conversation. Children receive comprehensive support and guidance during periods of transition. This means there is success, for example a foster carer reported that her foster child can now spend all the holiday time at home due to the work done by the school with the child.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the school's boarding provision for children is outstanding. The integration of new children is expertly managed, engaging parents, prospective children, care staff and therapeutic staff in a carefully planned induction process. Pastoral support offered to children who are placed in the school is extremely supportive and nurturing. The team structure is organised so that all staff are closely involved with children at all times throughout the day and evening. Children benefit from consistent support, care and guidance in all areas of their lives.

Children actively enjoy a wide range of after school activities. They make excellent use of the on site facilities, engaging in a variety of activities which stimulate them as well as supporting their education and exercise. Children are encouraged to participate in off-site activities such as a local youth clubs or joining a local football team. Children enhance their social skills and build self-confidence. Their self-esteem is greatly enhanced.

Health care planning ensures that staff know and can meet all of the needs of the children. Children benefit from the advice and guidance from a paediatric nurse on site. Any specific needs are made known to members of staff and arrangements to meet them are implemented to a high standard. Specifically, close multi disciplinary working involving professionals such as therapists, teachers, care staff and forensic psychologists ensures that childrens' emotional and psychological well being is protected and nurtured to a very high standard.

There is a robust approach to the storage and administration of medication including controlled drugs. Practice is overseen by the on-site paediatric nurse. Any errors are dealt with swiftly and addressed in consultation with other medical professionals. This has happened on one occasion since the last inspection.

Equally the arrangements for food are of a high standard. Meals are varied and healthy with any special dietary requirements catered for. Children benefit from a culture where they are continually learning how to stay healthy. Individual attention is given to special occasions such as birthdays, for example the chef ensures there is a home-made cake to reflect any special interest of the child to celebrate their special day.

Children live in an environment that is maintained to an exceptionally high standard. The warm and comfortable lounges provide spaces where children relax and feel comfortable. Bedrooms are not shared and are highly personalised. Children have a sense of identity and belonging.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The arrangements for children's safety are outstanding. The culture embedded in the school ensures that the children benefit from a robust and rigorous approach which treats their emotional and physical safety as paramount. All staff are aware of the robust policies in place and closely adhere to it in the event of any concerns. This ensures all are protected and supported.

The Head of Care ensures that all the relevant agencies are informed of any safeguarding issues. This ensures that strategies and plans can be developed in the event of any concerns being identified. Swift and decisive action is taken, for example in re-training staff when specific issues are identified.

Children benefit from the safe selection of suitable staff with all appropriate clearances and qualifications, supporting the provision of a high quality service. The safe selection of staff and confidence of children in this process is greatly enhanced by their meaningful involvement in the interviews.

The school has an excellent anti- bullying approach, such as utilising anti-racism courses. The approach seeks to support the victim whilst providing guidance and education to the perpetrator. The close monitoring of this positive approach ensures that the victim is constantly engaged and their views incorporated into the resolution.

Behaviour management plans are in place for those residential pupils who need extra support. These are developed using input from different disciplines such as care staff, therapists and education staff. On occasion, incidents of restraint involve the use of high risk strategies. These are agreed with the placing authority and carers. Excellent monitoring and analysis of trends and behaviours enables the school to develop strategies to minimise such interventions. Records demonstrate this is successful. The frequency of such interventions is diminishing. All members of staff and the children involved in restraints have an opportunity to debrief and to discuss each incident and to implement any points learnt as a result of this. Physical interventions are in line with Department for Education guidance. Parents say it is appropriate to intervene given the level

of challenging behaviour. Placing social workers say they are happy with the methods being used and that children are making significant progress in managing their behaviour. Clear de-escalation tactics and lower level interventions are used first. However, there is some inconsistency in how this is recorded, in particular between education and care staff. The management have recently identified and discussed this with clear plans to improve.

Any concerns about the escalating behaviour of any child are fully discussed with other professionals such as the psychiatrist and the placing authority. Strategies are agreed and implemented to keep children as safe as possible. Exclusions are extremely rare when the school decides it cannot meet a child's needs. This has happened on one occasion since the last inspection.

Staff are fully trained in the behaviour management techniques they use. Regular practice and accountability ensures there is sufficient challenge to all interventions and feedback into practice. This ensures that high risk interventions are not embedded in the culture of the school, rather they are used as a last resort. Positive behaviour is actively promoted through various reward schemes, for example children are able to earn 'care miles' to access other activities that interest them.

On rare occasions children are identified as absent without authority for a short period of time. A robust and rigorous procedure is implemented swiftly to keep children as safe as possible. Missing from care is not identified as an issue. However, there are agreed protocols with the local police in place should this event arise.

Regular health and safety checks are completed, including fire drills and fire alarm checks. Since the last inspection there has been a significant upgrade to the fire protection. This means that the frequency of false alarms has been minimised.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

Leadership and management of the school is outstanding. A very experienced senior management team offers excellent oversight and monitoring of the school. Practice is under constant review and challenge to ensure the high staff performance and conduct remains at an excellent standard to meet the needs of severely emotionally damaged children, many of whom have experienced foster and adoptive breakdown.

There is a robust admissions procedure including an on-line initial assessment tool and visits to the provision. Children are carefully assessed as to whether their individual needs can be met at the school within its aims and objectives in the statement of principles and practice. This means there is every chance of success for children placed at the school. Placement breakdowns are extremely rare.

The quality of the staff team is a significant strength of the school. The skills, experience and backgrounds among the staff team are diverse and wide ranging. There is excellent staff retention. Staff are trained to a standard that exceeds national minimum standards. They have excellent support and supervision that makes staff feel valued, appreciated and respected. They demonstrate their wealth of knowledge about children's needs and how they cope during very challenging and complex situations. They show an understanding in working with young people who are vulnerable due to their past experiences and therefore at times require intense levels of support and intervention. Models of therapeutic support are clearly demonstrated in placement plans. They are carefully followed by staff to implement the purpose and ethos of the home. Children are cared for by an extremely competent and motivated staff team who are extremely well supported themselves.

A range of meetings, in addition to daily handover meetings, are held to ensure excellent communication is maintained between the residential, teaching and therapy teams which ensures that staff keep up to date with the immediate and on-going needs of individual children. There is excellent cohesive working to provide continuity and consistency of care. The school maintains effective communication with parents.

Children have a voice in the school through a number of avenues such as the school council, an independent visitor and easy access to members of the senior management team. Children report excellent relationships with their key workers. They say they can share their worries and concerns. There is an easily accessed complaints procedure with clear outcomes. Children are able to say if they are satisfied with the outcomes of any complaint they raise. There is very easy access to an independent advocate via a direct phone link in the homes. Children can easily raise any concerns.

The monitoring of the quality of care is taken extremely seriously. In addition to the robust internal monitoring there are inspections by an independent visitor as well as peer visits by the wider therapeutic community. Such visitors act as critical friends who offer challenge, advice and guidance to maintain and improve the provision to improve outcomes for children. The senior management team have been proactive in forming an advisory group, with university academics, on therapeutic residential care. Residential family weekends are also held to support families and improve outcomes for children.

Training is seen as essential to outstanding care practice. The school ensures that staff are trained over and above national minimum standards, for example the school have developed a foundation degree course, with a local university, in therapeutic child care. The majority of staff have completed or are completing this qualification. The quality of the training offered is recognised through national accreditation.

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	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.

Type of school	
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Mr Andy Lole
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/02/2013
Telephone number	01865 300202
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