

Appletree School

Natland, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7QS

Inspection dates

12–13 November 2013

Reason for inspection

The inspection followed a complaint and notification to Ofsted related to the use of restraint and to the school's implementation of the policy for behaviour. Inspectors were asked to consider the school's training, recording and monitoring of the use of restraint; and how the school manages instances where pupils run off. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors were in school for one day and a half. One inspector had a background in social care and one in education. The children's home was not inspected, but two senior leaders from the care staff were included amongst those interviewed.

The inspection was unannounced.

Conclusions

Inspectors were asked by the DfE to look at two aspects of the school's work.

■ 1. The training, recording and reporting procedures for use of restraint.

Inspectors found that these met requirements but made some suggestions on how the school could improve practice further.

There is an appropriate programme for training school staff on the use of restraint, suitable for this type of school. The plan for training has been suitably updated, but should be reviewed after a period of time to check its effectiveness. Non-teaching staff should be trained. The school's leaders should formally evaluate with staff the usefulness of the training programme, to check that it meets their needs.

School staff showed a very sound understanding of the training and good awareness of the school's policies. Staff have become increasingly more skilled in techniques to avoid using restraint. Pupils can explain what the techniques for restraint are and what they feel is or is not appropriate.

There are suitable systems for recording when restraint has been used. Pupils and staff review each use of restraint. 'Good practice' sheets encourage the sharing of what worked well. Leaders analyse the records on restraint to see any patterns. This information could usefully be pulled together across the home and the school to gain a fuller picture.

Some aspects of practice could be refined: written plans to support pupils' behaviour are not always promptly adjusted when records indicate a change of approach to managing their behaviour is required. The school does not systematically review the patterns of restraint and injury that are referred to social services.

Staff know what the procedures are for reporting any serious incident. However, official notifications to Ofsted and social services are not always signed off as accurate by a senior leader.

Inspectors saw sufficient justification for the use of restraint. This fits with the school's view that restraint is a last resort. Staff exercise their professional judgment about when to use restraint. In this respect, the school has regard to the most recent guidance issued by the Department for Education.

However, there are 'grey areas' in the school's practice in restraint. There is no clear direction given to all staff on what to do if a pupil exits the building or grounds and whether to intervene more decisively to safeguard pupils from imminent harm. The Principal said that the school would look at this urgently.

■ 2. The effective implementation of the policy for good behaviour with regard to pupils running off or going missing.

Inspectors found some shortcomings in how the school deals with instances where pupils run away or threaten to run away from school. The inspection evidence led inspectors to judge that regulation 9 of the independent schools standards regulations was not met because the school does not always implement its behaviour policy effectively to prevent pupils being put at risk of significant harm, or harming others.

There were a number of significant differences in the accounts of recent incidents provided to inspectors by teaching staff, the school's leaders and the written notifications. Some important details were missing from notifications.

Records examined show that police are not always called promptly, as specified in the school's written policies for behaviour and for missing children. Staff appear to operate an unofficial policy of 'watching pupils from a distance', when they attempt to run off. It is not made clear in the policy or in guidance to staff how a pupil is to be kept in sight or for how long, nor at what point staff should intervene. Existing procedures do not provide a clear line for decision-making for staff to use about who is in charge during such incidents.

Inspectors judge that this is too vague and has put pupils at risk of serious harm or death, as they are able to easily run off site when upset.

It is a common feature of the school's practice of 'watch from a distance' that pupils go beyond the school's boundaries and grounds alone for varying lengths of time 'to cool off'. This practice is not part of the school's written behaviour policy. It has led to pupils throwing rocks, damaging property and vehicles; leaving the school grounds, going across the road, into a wooded area or to look at gardens of nearby houses; and accessing a railway line. Inspectors judge, given the age and vulnerability of the pupils, that this practice puts pupils at risk of harm, including from the road adjacent to the school, the nearby railway line and strangers.

The school's leaders may wish to explore whether further facilities could be provided securely within the grounds for those pupils who feel they must leave the classroom.

Conclusion

Inspection evidence shows that the school's leaders do not always respond appropriately to potentially serious incidents, to consider what lessons should be learnt for the future and, where necessary, to change practice. Inspectors acknowledge that the school makes some adjustments to their practice, after serious incidents, such as improving the means of calling the police, but judge that these adjustments are of a minor nature only.

In conclusion, inspectors recommend that in order to meet the regulation to promote good behaviour effectively the school's leaders should:

- urgently review the behaviour management policy and strategy, and the 'missing child' policy, taking actions to try to reduce all known risks to pupils, including absconding, and provide clear guidance to staff
- ensure that these policies underpin all the school's strategies and practice, so that these adequately and effectively safeguard children
- check that the school's practice for managing behaviour follows the agreed written policy and that all staff understand and follow this
- commission an urgent, independent review of security of the school's grounds and seek professional advice in order to reduce the opportunities for distressed or angry children to leave the grounds
- organise an urgent, independent review involving school staff, managers and any other relevant agency of the implications for school policy, layout, resources and practice of serious incidents and current practice
- consider the results of such a review and implement all appropriate recommendations, monitoring robustly the changes made to practice and safety
- systematically analyse the patterns of restraint and injury, incidents when children go missing, and referrals to Cumbria social services and act on any findings
- co-ordinate the monitoring and analysis of use of restraint across both the school and the children's home, as well as separately
- promptly adjust pupils' behaviour support plans when records indicate a change of approach is required
- ensure that notifications to the appropriate authorities and to Ofsted provide a full and accurate picture of serious incidents and are signed off as such by a senior manager.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 ('the Regulations') as amended by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

The school must ensure that that they implement the written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils effectively.

Regulation 9

Inspection team

Honoree Gordon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dick O'Brien

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about this school

Appletree is an independent special school for pupils aged six to eighteen years old, which is also registered as a children's home. The premises are located together on the outskirts of a small village. The school has additional premises 'Next Steps' located one mile away in the town centre for older pupils who follow a vocational programme of education.

The school opened in 1995. It is registered for eighteen boys and girls aged from six to sixteen years who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It opened in November 1995. There are currently 14 pupils on roll, two of whom attend 'Next Steps'. The current pupils at the Appletree site are aged from eight to twelve. All but one pupil have a statement of special educational needs. The school admits pupils from a number of different local authorities and all are in the care of a local authority.

The school and home aim to support pupils to grow emotionally and socially, to learn to cope with school and to return to families and day schools. The previous inspection of the education provision was in November 2011.

School details

Unique reference number	130367
Inspection number	433233
DfE registration number	909/6048
This inspection was conducted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005.	
Type of school	Pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	6–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Appletree Treatment Centre Ltd
Headteacher	Mr Rob Davies
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£77,640
Telephone number	01539 560253
Fax number	01539 561301
Email address	admin@appletreeschool.co.uk

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