

# Mulberry Bush School

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

<b>Inspection dates</b>	01/10/2014	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is good because

- Outcomes for children are outstanding. Children learn tolerance and respect for each other through the role modelling of staff. They make great strides in their personal development by working towards the joint objectives agreed by residential, therapeutic and education staff. As a result children become more confident and their behaviour improves.
- Assessment and transitional arrangements for residential placements prior to placement and within their school life are meticulous and centred around children's individual assessed needs. In turn, this provides a strong basis for ensuring that the needs of children resident in the four units at any one time are needs led.
- The whole-school approach towards meeting the needs of children is seamless. Staff communicate and work effectively with specialists employed by the school, external professionals and parents and carers. This approach drives forward consistency while constantly increasing knowledge and understanding of children's needs, progress and development.
- The vigilance of staff and their sound knowledge of children's complex needs contribute towards a safe and nurturing environment. Safety is clearly a priority and through observation it is clear children experience a sense of feeling safe.
- Monitoring and analysis of trends and behaviours enables the school to develop strategies to minimise the use of high risk interventions. Records demonstrate this is successful with the number of high risk holds decreasing. Safeguarding is robust but points for improvement have been made in relation to record keeping and the behaviour management policy; shortfalls were not observed in practice.
- Leadership and management of the residential provision are excellent. There is a strong culture of continual improvement. Children are cared for by an highly competent and motivated staff team who are extremely well supported themselves.

- Internal monitoring systems are wide ranging and evolving to enhance the recording of statistical data, centred upon the outcomes for each child. However, to further improve one aspect of monitoring, the school is asked to review the quality of reports produced by independent visitors so that the content is more purposeful and evaluative.

### **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 inspection was announced on the morning of the first day of the inspection to the head of care. An initial meeting was held with the headteacher, head of care, deputy head of care, CEO and director. Discussions with care staff, and also catering, maintenance, medical, activities, therapists and a governor took place. All four residential units were visited throughout the inspection and at different times of the day and evenings. Inspectors met with pupils, the senior management team, a broad range of professionals connected with the school. They evaluated responses from staff and pupils who completed point in time surveys which were distributed during the inspection. Phone calls were made to social workers and two foster parents were spoken to when dropping their children off. A vast array of records, documentation and databases were inspected and assessed. Meals were taken with pupils and a good range of activities were observed.

## Inspection team

Emeline Evans

Lead social care inspector

Maire Atherton

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. 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 22 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 October 2013.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop a separate behaviour management policy for the residential provision.
- Review the content of children's risk assessments and positive handling plans, ensuring that vital information relating to identified risk are included in the risk assessments.
- Review the systems for recording measures of control and discipline to ensure all required information is consistently recorded.
- Review the reports produced by independent visitors so that the content is consistent and provides more meaning and evaluation in its findings.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for children are outstanding. They are making exceptional progress and achievement in relation to their extremely challenging starting points, as a result of their placements. They are able to feel safe and secure in an environment which is highly inclusive and where they develop remarkably positive and productive relationships with the staff who care for them. This benefits pupils not only during school time but at weekends and holidays when they are at home. Parents and foster carers have access to the school's family network practitioner team and where necessary, members of the residential team. This form of outreach support promotes continuity of care for children during non-residential times.

Children benefit greatly from improved behaviour, greater self-confidence, increased independence, tolerance of others, and better social interaction, all nurtured through their placement here. 'They keep working together to develop strategies to help him' and 'they build on her strengths and skills' and 'very pleased that she is presenting as calmer and with fewer incidents', were comments received during the inspection from social workers. Challenging situations are dealt with calmly, effectively and professionally. Staff are knowledgeable of children's assessed and very individual needs and know when and how to intervene without compromising the safety and care of others. Children's progress is measurable and their abilities to cope with change improve through staff supporting children to undertake transitions within the school which prepare them for moving on to further placements.

Children's health care needs are met extremely well with a particular emphasis on addressing their emotional well-being. Children benefit immensely from the school's on-site therapy team. The accessibility of this team means that children are not waiting for long periods of time for the therapeutic input they may require. Equally, staff are well supported by this team and the guidance and support they receive, helps develop their skills in working with the children. The schools healthcare arrangements are highly effective with close integrated working between the school nurse, all the teams within the school and with external professionals. This promotes children's physical, emotional and psychological health.

A culture of mutual respect has a strong presence throughout the school. Children are encouraged to live together with understanding and appreciation of each other. The culture of the school promotes equality and diversity with children not raising undue concerns of bullying or harassment. Children are treated as individuals and as a result care is tailored specifically to meet their needs. Children are provided with a number of avenues to express how they feel and say they are listened to. The school council system enables children to have an opportunity to take on new challenges while building positive relationships with each other. Views are put forward and listened to, children feel empowered and they are able to make a contribution to the schools development.

Children enjoy the wide range of activities available and readily engage in new experiences. The types of activities they take part in are stimulating and purposeful. This in turn enables them to develop skills and at times challenge themselves. These opportunities increase children's self-esteem and confidence which many lack prior to taking up residential placements at the school.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Outstanding

The quality of the school's residential provision is outstanding. Children experience a very personalised and rewarding time. Individual attention to detail is incorporated into every child's day. Pastoral care arrangements are extensive and wide-ranging, extending into support offered to families and foster carers by the family network practitioner team. This creates a supportive

and nurturing approach to the care of children. Everyone is aware of their role and responsibilities and how to achieve these. Staff are active listeners and are quick in responding in a therapeutic manner to children, including to the often unpredictable behaviours through which they may express their needs. This approach helps alleviate any unnecessary anxiety for children and supports them in communicating their needs more coherently. Staff determination and persistency help each child to secure the maximum benefit from their placement.

Admission to the school is carefully considered to ensure the individual needs of each child can be met. Referrals to the school are assessed in detail and involve consulting the on-site therapy team for advice and guidance. Such an approach ensures a full assessment of needs prior to placement. Excellent communication systems are forged between staff working in each of the residential units, the rest of the school and with external professionals, parents and foster carers. The effectiveness of this communication enables all information to be exchanged and to help make a difference for children and all those involved in their care and welfare particularly.

Children benefit immensely from a very effective and well-managed 'network' system. All staff play an active role in ensuring that this system works for the benefit of each child. Children's integrated treatment plans including identified targets and objectives are monitored periodically for effectiveness and appropriateness. All teams within the network group work closely together to ensure a holistic approach is achieved in this monitoring; there is clear communication and ownership. Parents retain primary responsibility for addressing the routine health needs of their children, however, the residential provision makes excellent provision for supporting parents where necessary and for addressing any specific health related needs. Staff work closely with health professionals involved with individual children including the child and adolescent mental health team. They are proactive in raising any concerns and seeking the appropriate advice. This ensures the provision of safe and effective care.

Healthy lifestyles are actively promoted within the residential houses. All individual dietary needs are catered for with specialised menus and meals. Children say they enjoy the meals with a good selection of home cooked meals available. Mealtimes are well organised with the small numbers of children eating together creating a relaxed and important aspect of the day. Children are all able to participate in a remarkably wide range of activities, which contribute effectively to their physical and emotional well-being. Arts and crafts, baking, swimming, soft play, shopping, and visits to local parks are some examples of these.

Residential accommodation is of a good standard. The houses are comfortable and maintained to a suitable and homely condition. Children are able to personalise their own rooms and do so with posters and photographs. Children appear very comfortable in their living environments and generally invest in maintaining their condition with little evidence of damage.

Children are able to contact families and carers by using the house telephones. Contact is supported and encouraged by the staff to ensure children are able to speak to parents and carers about any needs or issues they may have while away from home. Staff are very aware of these arrangements and support children emotionally during these times. Arrangements are made for children to be able to easily contact the advocate either through the use of a direct dial telephone or during the advocate's regular visits.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

**Good**

Safeguarding arrangements within the residential provision are good. Children say they feel safe and are kept safe by staff who are knowledgeable about the safeguarding policies and procedures and how to implement them in practice. 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. The school have

expertise in safeguarding issues and provide safeguarding training for the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

There is a robust whole school behaviour management policy; however, there is not a separate policy for the residential provision. This currently refers to grounds for which physical intervention may be used in an education setting. Staff spoken to are aware of the more limited grounds applicable in the residential setting. Behaviour management techniques are implemented effectively by staff and the school are mindful of the challenging behaviours of children and seek the most appropriate ways to manage them. Staff work hard to support children in addressing their most difficult behaviours, which can include aggression. Staff are trained in the use of physical interventions and only apply them when necessary. Regular practice and accountability ensures there is sufficient challenge to all interventions and feedback into practice. On occasion, incidents of restraint involve the use of high risk strategies. Monitoring and analysis of trends and behaviours enables the school to develop strategies to minimise such interventions. Records demonstrate this is successful with the number of high risk holds decreasing. The school aims to diminish these holds in the near future and behaviour management plans are being modified to deliver this. Individual positive handling plans and risk assessments are in place for children. However, these plans do not explicitly detail health risks and therefore do not identify precautions to take into consideration when using the more restrictive holds. This does not enable staff to be fully aware of all the risks posed for each individual child. Staff spoken to were, in practice, aware of all current health risks .

The school implements an appropriate sanctions policy, which allows children opportunities to learn from poor behaviour. The use of sanctions is appropriate with alternatives to punitive measures considered. For instance restorative sanctions are used which encourage the children to take responsibility for their actions and to give back something to the community they have transgressed. Sanction records are kept electronically by the school; there is some inconsistency in the detail recorded. This makes it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of all interventions. The management team has identified this as an area for improvement.

A rigorous approach ensures situations where children leave the school without permission are responded to appropriately. Staff are mindful of what to do in such situations and have clear protocols in place with the local police. On the few occasions that children have left the premises without permission staff acted swiftly to ensure their safe return. Records of such matters provide a detailed and accurate account of events and their outcomes.

Children are protected through the robustness of recruitment and vetting processes. All prospective employees undergo comprehensive screening for establishing their suitability. Recruitment processes are consistent and all staff involved in recruitment attend relevant training for ensuring that their skills are up to date and staff are kept abreast of best practice.

Health and safety within the residential provision is well managed with effective oversight by the senior management team. Routine servicing and checks take place as required. Maintenance is undertaken promptly and there is a clear programme of refurbishment and development. Fire safety precautions are checked on a regular basis, including the servicing of firefighting equipment, testing of alarms and the undertaking of evacuation drills. Risk assessments are routinely reviewed, updated and endorsed; these assessments include environmental checks as well as on-site and off-site activities.

### **Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding**

The management and organisation of the residential provision is outstanding. This is a result of the school's commitment to providing a residential provision which is child centred, child focused and personalised to the needs of each child. Boarding is fundamental to the school's ethos with

the management teams working together across the school to meet the holistic needs of the children. They have identified areas of improvement and are moving forward in achieving these. The school demonstrates a very strong commitment to the continuing improvement of the residential provision and the service it provides for children and their families and carers.

Staff are extremely sensitive and supportive towards children who find boarding arrangements difficult and this extends to supporting individual families. Staff work tirelessly for ensuring that children's personal needs are being met and this often means working intensively with education staff, network teams and families. The quality of this communication supports each child with the personal, emotional and learning skills and abilities they need to be able to cope in a family, school and the community.

The school implements a clear procedure that ensures children and their parents/carers are aware of how to complain. Complaints are taken most seriously being responded to swiftly and in a rigorous manner. Records of complaints confirm an appropriate response with details including the nature of the issue and their outcome. Excellent communication is maintained between the school and parents, carers and placing authorities. Placing social workers state that the school works very well with parents and carers and supports them in caring for the child concerned.

Effective staffing arrangements ensure that there are well-trained, experienced and suitable staff on duty. Staff development is valued and promoted. On commencement of employment, all new staff undertake a detailed induction which has been mapped by the training department to Children's Workforce Development Council induction standards. In addition, in the first year of service new staff are enrolled on a foundation degree in therapeutic child care. Staff are trained to a level that exceeds national minimum standards. The organisation has committed to this level of training as they have recognised this contributes to the high retention of staff. Staff say that they feel valued, are well supported by the leadership team and empowered to take on new initiatives. These opportunities give staff the scope to excel and experience the impact and effectiveness of working in an inclusive and child-centred environment. Formal and informal supervisions are regular and staff benefit from this ongoing dialogue and communication.

Children enjoy spending time with staff in each of the houses. Each of the staff teams are passionate about their work and demonstrate this through their conduct, professional approach and knowledge of each child's needs. The dynamics of each staff team ensures that children's needs are communicated and acted upon efficiently and respectfully. Children have a voice in the school through the school council, boarding house meetings, an independent visitor and easy access to the senior management team. Views are actively sought and incorporated into development plans where feasible. Children report excellent relationships with their key workers. They say there are many adults that they can talk to if they want to share any worries or concerns.

The head of care and unit managers robustly monitor records to identify and take action in response to any emerging trends and themes. There is additional monitoring by independent visitors and these include opportunities for children and staff to speak in private with the visitor. However, in some instances, the content of reports of independent visits is inconsistent. For example, the reports confirm what records or processes have been sampled, but there is no further information about the impact or value of these findings.

At the last inspection, it was recommended that the reporting of incidents across care and education settings was consistently recorded; in particular the de-escalation and strategies used prior to high risk physical interventions and debriefs. Recording has improved and the school has introduced detailed debrief records which are completed shortly after the incident. These are used robustly by the management team to identify any patterns or trends.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123330
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC013039
<b>DfE registration number</b>	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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Non - Maintained
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Andy Lole
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	30/09/2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01865 300202
<b>Email address</b>	Cday@mulberrybush.org.uk

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