

Mulberry Bush School

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

Inspection dates	19/01/2016 to 21/01/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Children make excellent progress in the residential provision, particularly in relation to their emotional well-being and safety, restoring positive relationships with families and maximising future life chances. Children reflect on the changes they have made and that they continue to make.
- Staff balance the need for children to have choices with their need for clear boundaries that help them feel safe. As a result, children are safe and feel safe.
- Children are given the opportunity to play and be children; this is achieved by staff in a nurturing but not risk adverse way.
- Staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of the individual needs of each child, working consistently to support them to reflect and learn from the way they may feel internally.
- The wrap around approach to residential life involving a 'network team' ensures that children achieve and succeed. Therapeutic approaches are embedded in all practice and clearly understood and implemented by staff.
- Strong and focused leadership encourages the residential community to be the best it can be; there is a highly professionalised approach. The senior team are inspirational and ambitious in promoting positive experiences for all children that come into the school.
- Effective quality assurance systems ensure a consistent drive toward improvement. Senior management are quick to identify weaknesses and act upon any concerns identified through this monitoring.

- The ethos and expectations of the home extends from the staff to the children; appropriate challenge to behaviour or attitudes by peers is part of the therapeutic process that helps children to adapt coping strategies.
- Young people feel very comfortable with staff and interact well with them in a relaxed manner. The highly individualised support, keeping young people at the centre of practice, generates a culture of respect and acceptance.
- Children benefit from having their views and opinions valued and promoted to an excellent standard; they have a strong student voice and contribute fully to the community.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school's recruitment process consistently follows best practice.
- Ensure pupils are given the option of an independent return interview following any incident of missing from care.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was announced to the headteacher on the morning of the first day of the inspection. An initial meeting was held with the head of care and director. Discussions with care staff, senior leadership team, maintenance, medical, head of the family networks and therapy team and the chair of governors 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 and a range of professionals connected with the school. Phone calls were made to social workers and a discussion took place with a parent. A vast array of records, documentation and databases were inspected and assessed. Meals were taken with pupils and a range of activities were observed.

Inspection team

Emeline Evans

Lead social care inspector

Melissa McMillan

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 31 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 23 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 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children thrive by living in a highly inclusive community where they have excellent, effective relationships with the staff who care for them. Children have a very strong affiliation with their residential house. The children expressed how much they enjoy being in the residential houses and what fun they have. All children who come to the school are residential pupils; they feel they belong at the school. One child explained they all struggle at times but it is also about supporting each other and being part of the community in order to move forward.

Children benefit from having their views and opinions valued and promoted to an excellent standard; they have a strong student voice and contribute fully to the community. An inclusive approach empowers them to affect their daily lives and futures. A large number of avenues are available for children to express their views and to put their requests forward. Children say they feel listened to and that their views contribute to decisions made regarding the school. Children are very aware of how to make a formal complaint and this is encouraged by the staff team to ensure they are heard and any concerns are fully considered and acted upon.

The school has a range of specialist teams on site including a therapy and family network team. This enables excellent relationships to exist between the school and the parents and carers and also other professionals. All the teams integrate and are central to how the school operates; as a result a high quality of care and excellent outcomes are consistently achieved. In addition to the in-house services the school provides, they have developed excellent working relationships with external professionals.

Children make exceptional progress in many aspects of their development from their starting point upon admission to the school. They have more confidence, self-awareness, social skills and individual awareness. Children develop an understanding of their own behaviours and how these affect others. In addition, they develop self-management strategies through this understanding. There is reflection and acceptance from both staff and children that behaviours are a form of communication and by using alternative means of communication this will lead to significant emotional progress.

Staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of the individual needs of each child, working consistently to support them to learn from the way they may feel internally. Young people are secure in the knowledge that people are available to help them process traumatic events and experiences. The opportunity for the development of more socially acceptable behaviours is therefore maximised. Excellent attachments have been formed as a result of the trust that has been formed.

Staff and children celebrate achievements and each child has their own individual goals, this assists children to understand and value their achievements. A huge variety of ways are made available to ensure all children can make progress which are built seamlessly into the everyday life of the school.

The pastoral and residential provision at the school is outstanding. It is viewed as an area of excellence within the school and the surrounding area. Children benefit from living in a nurturing supportive environment that ensures all their individual needs are met. They are supported by an extremely dedicated and knowledgeable staff team who have the children's well-being and progress at the heart of all they do. The wrap around approach involving a 'treatment team' ensures that children achieve and succeed. Therapeutic approaches are embedded in practice and clearly understood and implemented by staff.

Children are extremely well prepared for transitions both moving into the school and onto other placements. All people involved in the child's life are fully integrated into this process and this ensures children's emotional and social development is paramount. Staff are very skilled in ensuring the process of induction into the school is handled sensitively and at the families pace as this can set the tone of their ongoing relationship. During this period, children are introduced to the residential routines and staff's expectations of children in their care. Effective communication between the residential, academic and therapy staff teams assists this process as all parties work together to develop holistic plans for individual children which ensure consistency of care. This communication continues throughout the children's time at the school. The school as a whole has very high expectations for the children in their care and cohesive working is seen as essential to achieving this.

Staff have a very good understanding of each child and help them to further enhance their sense of identity. This is achieved through exploring each child's individual interest and developing confidence in themselves to enable them to progress. A varied and comprehensive programme affords all children excellent opportunities to engage in activities. The range of extra-curricular pastimes not only focuses on a considerable number of leisure activities, but equally on personal development and fulfilment. Children stated 'we have so much fun.' Children are given the opportunity to play and be children; this is achieved by staff in a nurturing but not risk adverse way. Observations indicated that children are able to explore and develop attachments through play and a sense of confidence in their ability is achieved. A child commented, 'I really like it here, I like the adults, and they are kind, friendly and play with me.'

The staff team's knowledge of the individual children they care for is incredibly detailed. This along with the strength of the staff relationships with children forms the foundation for all work the team undertake. Staff are exceptionally committed to providing children with the best possible care, support and opportunities to develop, thrive and grow. All work undertaken is therapeutic and purposeful. Relationships are based on respect, honesty, knowledge and a very child-centred approach. There is a 'network team' around each child to promote all areas of physical, emotional and psychological health. The team work together to enable strategies to be put in place not only for the child but also for families and carers. This has resulted in children making outstanding progress in

developing healthy attachments. There are robust policies and procedures in place for the handling, administration and storage of medication, which is closely, adhered to in practice and which safeguards children's health. Staff ensure children lead a healthy lifestyle and take part in regular exercise. Children receive education on health-related topics such as smoking, drugs and alcohol. This is delivered at an age-appropriate level. There is effective liaison with Child Adolescent Mental Health Service who regularly come in to the school. There is a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure any concerns in children's emotional health are identified and addressed and the necessary support put in place.

The individualised treatment plans are comprehensive. These are frequently reviewed and updated, to ensure they reflect children's current situation. These plans ensure that emerging needs are continuously addressed by being well focused and rigorously implemented. These plans are monitored by the child's network team and they also provide a range of information on children's history and the impact this has had on their emotional and social development.

Contact where appropriate is maintained and promoted, staff advocate on behalf of children to be able to have more regular contact when requested. Support is provided to each child and the families in order to ensure contact is successful and meaningful, staff support children emotionally through this process. Partnership working is exceptionally effective.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Overall, there are good arrangements to safeguard children. The children say they feel safe. Effective management and adherence to robust policies ensures all are protected and supported. The open culture embedded in the school ensures that the children benefit from an approach in which their emotional and physical safety is paramount; staff and children work together in a community to resolve any issues that group living may have. Children are beginning on the journey to recognise that, at times, their behaviours are not safe and staff need to step in to ensure they are helped and supported to recognise and address this.

Staff benefit from receiving high quality safeguarding training. This is frequently refreshed to ensure staff practices reflect current development in safeguarding. All potential risks and indicators around Child Sexual Exploitation and radicalisation are very well understood by staff. Staff interviewed were able to demonstrate their knowledge in this field. Well-established links have been made with the local safeguarding team and the management team ensures that their practice is in line with current legislation. Safeguarding is a key component of the thorough induction programme for all new staff. There is excellent oversight from senior management, which enables them to be fully aware of any safeguarding concerns and ensures they have confidence in the processes in place. Appropriate information is provided to commissioners of prospective placements to enable them to be clear on the assessed risks and strategies used to reduce and

prevent these.

Children have a clear understanding of what the school expects from them. These expectations are based on good community living, tolerance, acceptance of the individual and respect. The main focus of behaviour management is positive reinforcement and reflective practice. This develops the children's understanding of their own behaviours and how they can self-manage. It also looks at the affect their behaviours have on others. In addition, children learn tolerance and respect from the excellent role modelling the staff provide.

Children regularly sit with staff and talk as a group about their day. This includes discussion on what difficulties they may have experienced, how they can put things right and what support the other people can give them in achieving this. These sessions are very influential; they enable children to see the effect their behaviours have on each other but also they learn how to support and value others.

Staff are very proactive in diffusing situations and recognise indicators when children are struggling in the group. Children are constantly given options and individual support prior to them reacting in a negative way. There is a consistent and therapeutic approach to care observed within all the staff teams. The school's preferred method of intervention for de-escalation and physical intervention is implemented under very rigorous and meticulous management systems. The school is committed to ensuring that the data collected and used for monitoring behavioural intervention strategies is used effectively for influencing change for children across the school. For example, staff are constantly reviewing individual children's behaviours and interventions, and always seeking the best approach for supporting children through challenging situations. This is completed by working collaboratively with the positive handling instructors based within the school. The school no longer sanctions the use of risky holds such as ground floor restraints except in an emergency when all other options have been exhausted. There has been a remarkable decrease with only four being recorded in the last year. Staff have been provided with alternative strategies and skills to de-escalate situations. The behaviour management policy has now been amended to ensure it clearly specifies the grounds when certain measures can be used only in an education setting. In addition, risk assessments now clearly define precautions to take into consideration when using certain holds on children. Recording is much more detailed.

There is careful selection and vetting of staff who work with the children. However, the school could not demonstrate consistent good practice with regard to the independent visitor. Although the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service check has taken place the school has not undertaken written references, these were sought during the course of the inspection. This was not seen to have an impact on children's safety, as the visitor had not spent any significant time unaccompanied with children.

Children have gone missing since the last inspection; these have been for brief periods of time only; the school has taken all incidents seriously and acted appropriately. They work together with the child and other professionals to try and establish the reason the child has gone missing. Children spoken to were able to discuss the reason for this and understood that they placed themselves at risk. They also recognised that they

need to look at alternative strategies when they are angry or anxious. At present staff undertake return interviews following all absent or missing incidents. They children are currently not given the option of an independent person to complete this work. This does not give children an opportunity to speak to some-one external to the school about reasons for leaving the school site.

Some children in the Ofsted point-in-time surveys reported that they felt bullying was an issue. Staff recognise that some children find it difficult living in a group at times and put the necessary strategies in place to reduce anxiety which may be perceived as bullying by some children. Children have various opportunities to be able to inform staff if they feel they have been subject to bullying and this then involves restorative meetings; the 'whole school' approach works exceptionally well in observing and acting on unusual or inappropriate behaviours. This approach involves staff from all sectors of the school including care, education and therapists. It contributes to an environment which is non-judgemental and provides a safe space for children with complex needs who, at times, are unable to communicate their needs in socially acceptable ways.

Health and safety is taken seriously at the school. Staff work very hard to provide children with a safe nurturing environment in which to live. This is achieved through a good risk assessment process; risk assessments are seen as living documents. Fire safety is also well managed and supported by clear records.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Strong and focused leadership encourages the residential community to be the best it can be; there is a highly professionalised approach. There is a commitment to fully support all the teams working in the school with development. The senior team are inspirational and ambitious in promoting positive experiences for all children that come into the school. They are able to recognise the impact the school has had on the children and how they have progressed given their starting points. They lead by example and use all the necessary recourses to ensure they fulfil their aims highlighted in their statement of purpose. A therapeutic environment has successfully been created.

Senior staff are exceptionally experienced and well trained for their roles. Despite being in post for a considerable time, they remain committed and enthusiastic about their work. The staff team speak very highly of these individuals. They praise them for their support, their extensive knowledge (which they are keen to share) and their approachability. This is reflected in the staff's passion for their work.

Staff are extremely sensitive and supportive towards children who find the concept of residential arrangements difficult and this extends to supporting individual families. Children's emotional well-being is central to all aspects of care provided. Staff teams work tirelessly ensuring that children's personal needs are being met by working intensively with education staff, therapists, families and carers. When necessary, the senior management team will make difficult decisions in reviewing a school placement if it is not appropriate for the child. This is extremely rare, and its infrequency

demonstrates how well the residential service considers children's holistic needs and what is most appropriate for them individually and as a group.

The staff team are extremely committed to their work and are well trained for this. Staff training is given a high profile and all staff when they have completed their induction undertake a foundation degree in therapeutic work to equip them with the skills they need to work with very vulnerable children. The training programme for staff is excellent and is kept under review so that it meets not only the needs of the current group of children but also addresses any developments in the sector and children's increasing complex needs.

Effective quality assurance systems ensure a consistent drive toward improvement. Records are maintained to a high standard with regular monitoring taking place to ensure their accuracy. Senior management are quick to identify weaknesses and act upon any concerns identified through this monitoring. Considerable progress has been made in relation to the monitoring by an independent visitor. A new visitor is now in place who visits on a monthly basis. The report format has been revised with an improved method of recording any actions identified and work undertaken to address these. The content of reports for independent visits is now consistent.

Staff are thoughtful about the relationships they build with children. When they move from the assessment house to other houses in the school staff seek to maintain these attachments. This gives children the confidence to build new relationships and experience successful attachments.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	23
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to13
Headteacher	Mr Andy Lole
Date of previous boarding inspection	01/10/2014
Telephone number	01865 300202
Email address	Cday@mulberrybush.org.uk

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