

High Close School

Barnardos, High Close School, High Close, Wiltshire Road, WOKINGHAM, Berkshire, RG40 1TT

Inspection dates

25/01/2016 to 27/01/2016

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

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Arrangements for ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils are of an extremely high standard with practice supported by robust policies and procedures. As a result pupils receive an exceptional high quality of care and protection.
- The leadership and management of the school is highly effective. Recent changes to the leadership of the residential provision have been well thought out and executed; successfully maintaining a consistent and excellent standard of management. Senior leaders and middle managers know the school's strengths and are continually looking at areas for development, some being research led by The Barnardo's Charity.
- The pupils benefit massively from the residential experience which has a highly positive impact on pupil's educational and social development. Parental feedback is hugely complimentary about the difference the residential provision makes. One parent said this school 'is heaven'.
- Young people are at the centre of practice. Staff focus on individual needs and wishes of the pupils. Relationships formed are nurturing, professional and trusting. One young person said 'staff are great, they have really helped me and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else'.
- Safeguarding encompasses everything the school provides and practices. It is fully embedded across all aspects of the school. Highly experienced and qualified senior staff lead on child protection and safeguarding. They are supported by a staff team who are also extremely well informed of their responsibilities in

recognising and referring any concerns they may see or hear.

- The school successfully promotes and celebrates British values; such as promoting equality and diversity and respect for others.
- Residential pupils enjoy a high standard of accommodation that is extremely well resourced and spacious. Young people have fun and respect their surroundings.

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 heads of care supervision is well recorded.
- continue to review and develop the half termly, national minimum standard 20 visits by an external person.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of this inspection. An initial meeting was held with the Principal and two acting heads of care. Interviews were held with key staff, including the Principal, two acting heads of care, social worker, bursar, a governor, project workers, residential managers and office manager. Face to face discussions were held with visiting social workers and parents/carers. Lunch and supper were taken with the residential pupils plus both formal and informal discussions were held with young people. Parents/carers were invited to make comment during the inspection; one parent replied via email. Parent view showed insufficient entries to provide data. Feedback was sought from the local authority designated officer (LADO) prior to the inspection. A good range of activities were observed. In addition, records and key policies and procedures were viewed.

Inspection team

Liz Driver

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

High Close School is a non-maintained school operated by Barnardo's. It provides for day and residential pupils of both genders aged from seven to 18 years, with most boarders being of senior school age. There are 80 pupils on roll, with provision for 36 boarding. At the time of the inspection there were 26 residential pupils; nine girls and 16 boys. The school is set in seven acres of woodland within easy walking distance of Wokingham town centre. There are four residential units on the school site. There is a pattern of fortnightly boarding and residential pupils usually return home on alternate weekends and during school holidays. The school takes young people who have been unable to succeed in mainstream school and have statements of special educational need arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The range of additional specific special needs with which the school is working is broad and may include young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia, autistic spectrum disorders, speech and language difficulties and visual and auditory impairment. The last inspection took place in March 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Pupils make excellent progress at this school and benefit greatly from the residential experience. Taking their starting points, pupils make exceptional progress in all areas including education attendance and achievement. Many previous poor or non-school attenders now attend school daily and enjoy the experience. In addition, pupils make excellent progress in managing their challenging behaviours. They develop alternative ways of expressing their difficult and challenging emotions. Pupils acknowledge the progress they have made; one pupil stated 'staff have really helped me with my anger management, I feel I am able to control myself better'. Parents and carers comment positively about the school with comments such as 'it's a fantastic school, staff not only help my child but they give me excellent support as well, we work as a team'.

Residential pupils are part of a highly integrated school community that includes group living, education and therapy. The exceptionally good relationships between all the teams in the school results in pupils knowing the whole school staff team understand their difficulties and are working together to help them progress. As well as making excellent progress educationally and behaviourally pupils also successfully learn to make new friends, grow in confidence, take on roles and responsibilities and develop social skills they will need as adults.

Residential pupils develop constructive relationships with the staff team who provide consistent and stable support so pupils can learn to live with their peers successfully. Behaviours improve because of the practices and strategies in place. Staff are respectful and treat pupils with dignity and care. In return pupils trust staff and warm to them. This first-rate role modelling results in excellent individual progress made by the vast majority of young people. Pupils receive care that is sensitive, nurturing and highly professional.

A wide range of activities are on offer both on and off site. Pupils are encouraged to participate in activities they may not otherwise do so; this stretches them and teaches them how to manage feelings outside their comfort zone. Activities include; Judo, music lesson, cadets, dance and social trips. Activities positively support their social development.

Residential pupils are successfully prepared for transitions. Staff provide high calibre support in independence skills learning. Individual independence programmes prepare young people approaching adulthood for their next step. The school has an impressive track record of pupils going on to further or higher education.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential pupils receive outstanding quality of care. At the last inspection the school was advised to make some changes relating to medication administration. As a result of managers reviewing medication arrangements, plus the regular reviewing of staff's competency in administering medication, practices have improved and now provide a very high standard of safety, oversight and robustness.

Residential pupils benefit from care delivered by staff who are led by an effective senior and middle management team. Individual needs are consistently met to a high standard. Social workers and parents/carers confirm the high standards of care.

Pastoral care is exceptional. The staff team know the pupils extremely well and deliver, as part of a multi professional approach, consistently high quality care. They practice with sensitivity and professionalism. Pupils respond well to the supportive and nurturing approach. Individual emotional and mental health needs are highlighted in pupil's records that provide detailed information about each pupil, including their health requirements. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and receive sensitive and well planned guidance regarding health issues; for example self-harming. External expert advice, including child and adolescent mental health services and cognitive behavioural therapy are sought and provide individual programmes of intervention. This informs care planning and ensures the pupils and their families receive the correct levels of support and guidance. Excellent links and relationships have been developed with a wide range of external agencies that ensures timely effective help is delivered.

The arrangements for catering meet a high standard. Meals are varied, healthy and special diets very well catered for. Both the in-school and in-house food provision are constantly reviewed as a result of pupils feedback; generally via the school council. Pupils overwhelmingly say the food is very good. Residential pupils are encouraged and supported to shop, prepare and cook food on their units. The inspector shared meal times with the pupils and staff and found them to be very sociable and well organised events that the pupils clearly enjoyed.

The care provision is integrated across the whole school, day and residential. The multi-disciplinary approach ensures pupils receive the correct input from the most appropriate professional. In addition, there are successful links between education and residential staff through formal and informal daily meetings and communication methods such as email.

The school provides a wide range of activities that pupils enjoy. Residential pupils say there are lots of activities they can do. Staff listen to suggestions and ensure individual choices are met wherever possible. Staff actively support pupils to join in local community clubs. As a result pupils experience new activities that they can succeed in, this raises their confidence.

The residential accommodation is of a high standard. The four individual houses are spacious, well maintained and homely. Pupils can personalise their bedrooms with posters and photographs. Resources such as books and games are provided; pupils enjoy the time they spend with the staff. One pupils said 'I always win at table football, it's fun playing against the staff'. Houses are run by individual managers, who ensure the living environment meets the needs of the pupils. They were seen to operate smoothly with very suitable house rules consistently applied.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The arrangements for pupil's safety are outstanding. Safeguarding is a high priority across all areas of the school. The school is pro-active in implementing and sustaining excellent safeguarding practices. Those who take the lead in child protection and safeguarding are knowledgeable and experienced and have developed excellent working relationships with external agencies. As a result, allegations and concerns are managed effectively. The school employs qualified social workers who play a key role in the management of safeguarding procedures and in providing guidance to the staff team. A real strength is the work the social workers do with families and carers, offering support from referral stage through to transitions and maintaining contact throughout their child's time at the school if needed. Staff receive excellent training on all aspects of safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation, self-harm and radicalisation. As a result residential pupils consistently report they feel safe at the school.

The school is particularly strong at delivering guidance to pupils about how to stay safe when using social media. An e-safety committee ensures everyone is constantly reminded to keep up to date with changes and to report any concerns.

The school has implemented a new behaviour management policy since the last inspection. The introduction of a new method of responding to challenging behaviours has resulted in a massive reduction in the number of physical interventions being carried out. Staff are very well informed of individual behaviour targets set; they manage challenging behaviours consistently and effectively. Staff have responded extremely positively to the more therapeutic method of managing behaviours. There is excellent monitoring and analysis of all behavioural incidents including any physical interventions. This enables leaders to identify trends and patterns and to develop strategies to minimise future risky behaviours. This has been a great success in practice, as can be seen in the massive reduction of physical interventions. Pupils know what is expected of them in regards to behaviour and work closely with their key workers to set targets so they can see the progress they make, which for most pupils is exceptional.

Countering bullying is threaded throughout the day-to-day life at the school. It is not a significant issue for the residential pupils and any instances are dealt with quickly and effectively. A reward and consequence system operates across the school. Pupils are proud of their many achievements and happily display their certificates in their individual houses.

Recruitment procedures are robust and provide for enhanced protection. Pupils play an active role in the recruitment process which gives them confidence in the school's procedures of safe selection.

The school provides a safe environment where all necessary health and safety checks are undertaken. Robust systems ensure all aspects of health and safety are managed effectively. Fire drills take place on a regular basis and as a result pupils are very well informed of action to take if a fire did occur.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding. A very experienced team of senior leaders oversee the running of the school and the residential provision. The leaders of the residential provision work collaboratively with the education and therapy teams. This results in a whole school approach to the care and education of each individual pupil.

Due to unforeseen circumstances the head of care role is currently vacant. Two acting heads of care have fulfilled the role since October 2015. Both have shown their commitment to maintaining the residential provision to an outstanding standard. They complement each other in their skills, work extremely well together and have continued to make changes for the benefit of the pupils. They are experienced in residential care and have many years' experience of working with pupils with special needs. They have suitable qualifications to fulfil their roles. The governors are currently agreeing future arrangements for the head of care role; however, whilst this is on-going the current acting heads of care are providing exceptional management standards that ensure residential pupils are safe and receive excellent care. The acting heads of care are closely supervised by the Principal. They meet daily to discuss any issues. Although the supervision is excellent it is not as well recorded as it could be.

The school meets the objectives laid out in its statement of purpose. This provides professionals with information so that correct placements can be made and provides staff with clear information about the ethos of the school.

The residential provision is at the heart of the school. Staff, parents and pupils are extremely complimentary about the value of boarding and its contribution to pupil's personal, social and academic development. One parent said 'I don't know where I would be without the school and the support I get from the school for my child'. The staff team is experienced and enthusiastic. They are keen to develop practice; as can be seen in the positive attitude they have in implementing new behaviour management methods. Staff carry out their duties with a smile and engage respectfully with each other. This provides good role modelling and lets the residential pupils know that staff really do care about them. One member of staff said 'I love it here, I always come to work happily and enjoy making a difference to the children's lives'.

Communication and liaison with parents is another real strength of the school. A placing social worker also spoke very positively about the 'brilliant' communication between herself and the school. Both pupils and parents know how to raise a concern or complaint. Pupils have numerous avenues through which they can raise concerns. One concern raised by two residential pupils during the inspection was immediately acted on and effectively resolved by one of the acting heads of care. Pupils know, and say, that they can freely raise issues and that they will be taken seriously.

The school made an accurate self-evaluation of its performance and is keen to develop further. Monitoring visits are undertaken by an external person, with reports submitted to managers, leaders and the governing body. The frequency of the visits and the detail in the reports is an area that has been highlighted by the acting heads of care to be developed further. The governors take an active role in the residential provision and visit individual houses very regularly. They produce reports that are fed back to the heads of care, principal and governing body. Any recommendations made in the reports are discussed, addressed and followed up at the next visit. The school effectively analyses its practices; from physical interventions, accidents, bullying incidents and progress made by pupils. The acting heads of care are instrumental in not only viewing data but putting context to the data; this they do extremely well.

The three areas to improve, made at the last inspection have been addressed to a very high standard. All medication procedures are now robust and safe, with staff being regularly assessed for competency in administering medication. In addition, pupil's views are clearly sought, and documented in detail, relating to all control and discipline measures.

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	110181
Social care unique reference number	SC011327
DfE registration number	

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	26
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to18
Headteacher	Mrs Zoe Lattimer
Date of previous boarding inspection	11/03/2015
Telephone number	0118 9785767
Email address	Zoe.lattimer@barnardos.org.uk

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