

High Close School

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

Inspection dates	28/11/2016–30/11/2016	
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	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- There is strong evidence of young people progressing since starting at the school, often exceeding both their own and other's expectations.
- Young people spoken with felt that the exceptional progress made was due to the residential environment and staff being highly supportive and nurturing.
- Young people are positive ambassadors for the school and show true respect for their residential community. They talk proudly about the progress that they make and enjoy the communal atmosphere and the friendships that they have formed.
- Behavioural expectations are very high. Challenging or difficult behaviour is calmly managed through good use of relationships and de-escalation skills. Young people feel that their behaviour improves because of the encouraging and supportive help that they receive.
- Parents and carers spoken to about the residential provision were highly positive and confirmed the difference that it has made for their children.
- Staff place young people at the heart of everything that the school does. They are encouraged and empowered to put forward suggestions for the development of the residential community.
- Leaders and managers strive to be the best and take the young people with them on this journey.

- Staff invest quality and purposeful time with all the young people. As a result, young people flourish.
- The residential provision is organised and managed exceptionally well. Effective safeguarding of young people is central to all decisions made.

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 all records are kept under review and monitored. This specifically refers to the single central record and governors' training.
- Ensure that epilepsy awareness training takes place for all relevant staff.
- Ensure accurate recording of concerns and complaints after they have been raised verbally.

Information about this inspection

The notice given to schools is a minimum of one hour before the inspection team arrives. Ofsted carried out this inspection with one and a half hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of residential practice over two evenings; informal group and individual meetings with residential pupils; informal discussion during shared meals; meetings and discussions with the principal, and two leaders for care, residential staff, two members of the governing body (one with a safeguarding lead), the field social worker, and the premises and facilities manager; discussions with parents and with a visiting social worker; contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority; a tour of the accommodation; scrutiny of the wide ranging documentation; and review of responses on Parent View.

Inspection team

Emeline Evans

Lead social care inspector

Natalie Trentham

HMI

Full Report

Information about this school

High Close School is a non-maintained school operated by Barnardo's. It provides for both day and residential pupils, irrespective of gender, 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 27 residential pupils. The school is set in seven acres of woodland, within easy walking distance of the town centre of Wokingham. 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 January 2016.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

There is good evidence to show that young people have progressed since starting at the school, and often exceed both their own and other's expectations. Young people were confident and excited to describe the progress that they have made. They are able to reflect on the journey that they have made and are extremely proud of what they have achieved. Young people spoken with felt that this exceptional progress made was due to the residential environment being highly supportive and extremely nurturing. Young people were very willing to be part of this inspection process and commented, 'I think I have come on so far in my adolescent years. I couldn't have done it without them all; they are my family, I thank them so much.' Other comments included, 'What has helped me is the adults keeping on at me, telling me I'm better, telling me I will get there and having the confidence in me.' Young people are now optimistic about their future life chances. The result of the school's highly nurturing and inclusive approach is that young people move on from their starting points and make significant progress during their time here, emotionally, socially and academically. This is shown by improved self-esteem and confidence as they take on new situations and challenges, for example making their own way to college and being able to manage without getting angry and frustrated in a range of social situations.

Parents and carers spoken to about the residential provision were extremely positive and they commented, 'The whole school approach to all aspects of behaviour, learning, enrichment and care is exceptional. She [daughter] is now a different child.' And, 'The staff really care about helping the children succeed in life in imaginative and different ways.' There is a sense of strong partnership working with parents, carers and professionals to ensure that young people succeed.

Young people have made considerable improvements in their behaviour and recognise this for themselves when reflecting on the changes that they have made during their time at the school. Young people disengage from self-harming and destructive behaviour and find other ways to understand and manage their difficult and challenging emotions. They utilise new skills and, through open discussions in key work sessions and the support offered, they are able to put protective measures in place. They say that staff are excellent at teaching them to use coping strategies. They then learn how to use these in other situations, at home for example. Young people's outcomes can be easily tracked. Staff recognise and respond if, sometimes due to young people's emotional fragility, they need to go back to a previous step. Where setbacks are experienced, there is a determined and committed approach to finding ways of helping young people to overcome their difficulties. This ensures that outcomes are not only achieved but sustained.

Staff place young people at the heart of everything that the school does. They are encouraged and empowered to put forward suggestions for the development of the residential community through individual and group discussions. As a result, young people invest in the provision, as they know that their views and opinions are valued and respected.

The residential provision is organised and managed very well and effective safeguarding is central to all decisions made. The support offered in the residential provision is seen by the young people as the reason that they are able to succeed. Leaders and managers strive to be the best and take the young people with them on this journey. They use a range of monitoring to improve experiences for the young people and there is a commitment to continually focus on what else can be done. Young people achieve excellent outcomes because of the commitment and determination of managers and the staff team.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The quality of the individual support for young people is exceptional. Staff invest quality and purposeful time with all the young people. As a result, young people flourish. It is evident that staff are passionate about the work that they do and this is reflected in the high regard that young people hold for them. Young people spoke extremely positively about the residential staff. A comment from a parent also reflects the impact that staff have, 'Our daughter absolutely loves 'the school' and has thrived there. She is a different child and we are so thankful to the staff for their kindness and professional competence.'

Strong leadership provides excellent direction and guidance that helps to shape staff practice and routines on a day-to-day basis. As a result, young people clearly benefit from a service that is flexible and responsive to their needs.

Staff individually and as a team are highly effective in providing excellent care and in the promotion of the health and well-being of each young person throughout their stay at the school. This is evident from the application of thorough assessment and induction procedures that ensure that the school admits those who they can help to achieve successful outcomes. Staff seek to constantly ensure that young people are being supported through external resources. This enables any needs to be fully explored and management strategies put in place. Staff utilise a range of partnerships with external professionals and they have successfully engaged agencies within the young people's home area to ensure that they are effectively meeting the needs of the young people holistically. They go to great lengths to make these links, which enable young people to progress and this progress to be sustained. Managers and staff have a proactive way of working.

The senior leadership recognised the links between education and care could benefit from being strengthened. They now have an operational group meeting every morning to ensure that information is shared. This enables the school to achieve a seamless transition between school and to the residential provision. This provides young people with continuity and consistency of care in support of their social and educational arrangements. Academic and residential achievements are frequently celebrated by the school. This reinforces and promotes the positive culture of success.

Young people benefit from a huge range of activities and are able to choose times to be involved in activities off-site on an individual basis. Young people are encouraged to try new activities and to develop their interests. Staff are also mindful and sensitive to activities that young people will be able to continue when at home or in their foster placements. Young people were ecstatic about the range of activities on offer. They say

that they are able to have fun and develop friendships. This is achieved by staff in a nurturing but not risk averse way. Observations indicated that young people are able to explore and develop attachments through this play and a sense of confidence is achieved.

Each of the residential houses are individualised to meet young people's needs and they reflect each young person's personality and interests. They are homely and welcoming. A range of communal areas enables young people to have space if required but still to be given a sense of belonging to the group. Mealtimes are seen as social occasions with an opportunity to reflect on the day. Young people were observed to really enjoy this time and staff were able to use these opportunities to successfully reinforce appropriate role modelling.

While at school, young people are supported to access routine and specialist services such as occupational and speech and language therapists. The school effectively utilises its links with specialist services to ensure that specific health needs and conditions continue to be assessed and met. They actively refer concerning behaviours on to the necessary professionals to enable young people to be fully supported in all areas of their emotional and psychological health.

Equality and diversity is central in how the school operates. Each young person is treated as an individual and young people are also able to reflect this. Diversity is valued and embraced. Care planning documentation is comprehensive and clearly outlines specific support needs. Plans are monitored closely by designated key workers and are regularly reviewed to ensure that they provide safe and appropriate care for young people.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Any risks associated with self-harming, going missing and offending have been fully recognised and young people have progressed significantly in minimising behaviours in these areas. Young people were able to reflect on the progress that they have made, 'I've done a fair amount of self-harming at this school. I never would talk, but staff would keep at me. With massive support I built such strong relationships I knew I could trust them. Now I haven't self-harmed for a year. That's because every single person has helped me.'

This is just one of the many comments from young people and clearly evidences the impact that the school is having on changing young people's risky behaviours and how they have given the young people the skills and strategies to keep themselves safe.

At the last inspection, the home had very recently moved to a new method of responding to challenging behaviours. The full impact of this move can now be fully recognised. The number of physical interventions has dramatically reduced. Front ground holds are no longer used and there is an emphasis on de-escalation. Young people are able to describe the impact that this approach is having on their own management of their behaviour. Young people are now able to take responsibility and recognise what they need to do to change behaviours. The leaders have continued to use research-informed practice to monitor the impact of behaviour management,

findings are shared with the staff team. One young person stated, 'Now, most of the time I can take myself away from situations before it escalates and talk to someone before I lose it and become angry. Talking helps me now because I have developed positive relationships with adults.'

Staff are very clear on procedures that they would need to take if they were concerned about a young person's well-being. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of safeguarding processes. There is regular consultation with external professionals to gain advice on referral and any changes in practice. Excellent oversight from senior management enables them to be fully aware of any safeguarding concerns and ensures that they are confident in processes being used.

Young people believe that any instances of bullying are taken seriously. Staff are proactive in identifying any behaviour that could be interpreted as bullying and dealing with it in accordance with policies and procedures in place. The systems for recording and monitoring are rigorous, as are any necessary interventions. The senior leadership team is currently reflecting on how staff manage and monitor any bullying and looking at a more restorative and creative approach. This will enable young people to take more responsibility for any bullying behaviours. The senior team and staff are constantly reviewing all safeguarding practices to ensure that any strategies make a difference to young people.

The school works together with the young people to monitor safeguarding arrangements and young people understand very well how and why this promotes their welfare. Young people rarely go missing and there has been only one instance since the last inspection. Appropriate action was taken. The school worked together with the young person and other professionals to try and establish the reason for going missing. This resulted in changes to contact arrangements. The young person was open on the reason and recognised that they need to look at alternative strategies when they are angry or anxious. Effective planning with all agencies enables risks inside and outside of school to be reduced.

The recruitment, selection and vetting of staff are effective and promote young people's safety. There is an excellent approach to health and safety matters, which is underpinned by comprehensive health and safety policies. The physical environment is safe, secure and helps to protect young people. Any matters relating to safety and maintenance are promptly addressed. This results in the accommodation, grounds and activities being safely maintained and managed.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

There are two leaders for care who are now permanently in post. They are beginning to settle into this role and fully recognise areas to develop and are both committed to ongoing continuous improvement. The senior leadership team has a child-centred approach, which provides the staff team with a clear focus on the necessary practices needed to successfully help young people develop academically, emotionally and socially. All the staff team members including managers are inspirational and ambitious in promoting positive experiences for all young people that come into the school. They are constantly seeking ways in which to improve these young people's experiences.

Regular reports from a newly appointed independent visitor now provide challenge and insight into practice. There are rigorous monitoring tools in place and trends and patterns are being identified to improve outcomes for young people. There is clear oversight to ensure that they are implemented effectively in practice. However, there has been a lack of oversight by the senior leadership team in relation to ensuring that the single central record is continuously kept up to date. In addition, the leadership team did not have details of the governors' safeguarding training. On discussion with governors, it emerged that they do have the necessary safeguarding training in place but there is a lack of recording and oversight. The leadership team recognises the need to develop monitoring practices.

There is external scrutiny by the governors who are able to and do challenge the school. This demonstrates how the leadership team learns from their visits and improves practice and experiences for young people.

The school implements a procedure that ensures young people and their parents/carers are aware of how to complain. Complaints and concerns are taken seriously, being responded to swiftly and in a rigorous manner. Good communication is maintained between the school and parents, carers and placing authorities. However, when verbal complaints are received, recording could be strengthened to ensure its accuracy.

The two leaders for care provide excellent day-to-day support as well as delivering formal supervision and appraisals. These processes are used effectively to promote the professional development of the team and to maintain high standards of work practice. Staff regularly participate in mandatory training and learning workshops to update their knowledge and skills as well as completing specialist training to address any specific areas of need. The team has recognised the need for training in epilepsy awareness due to one recent admission. However, this has yet to take place. There are sufficient staff deployed to meet the needs of the young people. Young people talk very positively about the staff. One young person said, 'The staff are there always with open arms to give me hugs and to chat.'

The ethos of the residential provision is shared with all necessary people and very well demonstrated in practice. Families and foster carers are fully involved in this process. The strong relationships across the school and the links that have been enhanced between education and care have enriched these relationships with others.

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	872 7006

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	80
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 18
Headteacher	Zoe Lattimer
Date of previous boarding inspection	25/01/2016
Telephone number	0118 9785767
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