

High Close School

Barnardo's, High Close School, High Close, Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1TT
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special 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 81 pupils on roll, with provision for 36 boarding. At the time of the inspection, there were 26 residential pupils. There are four residential units on the school site. The school takes young people who have been unable to succeed in mainstream school and who have statements of special educational need arising from social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and speech, language and communication needs. This inspection was aligned and took place at the same time as an education inspection.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 28 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Safeguarding documentation does not always detail the decision-making processes undertaken.
- Staff have made decisions regarding child protection concerns, but delayed referring and taking advice from the necessary external agencies. The school's safeguarding policy has not been followed in all cases.
- In one case risks and vulnerabilities have not been recognised or considered in relation to potential child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.
- Insufficient monitoring means that the senior team are not always informed of certain areas in need of development as identified through this inspection. The information gathered through monitoring has not been sufficient or well used.
- Key-work sessions do not always detail the advice and support offered to young people to protect themselves in unsafe situations.
- The organisation's recruitment policy is not in line with statutory guidance.
- The quality and quantity of food across the houses is inconsistent. Some menus did not reflect healthy living.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Good relationships exist in the school and young people confirm that they have positive relationships with residential staff and with each other.
- There is a wide range of activities on offer to the young people, which has improved social interaction and developed young people's confidence.
- Young people make progress both academically and personally. Progress for some young people has been remarkable, with young people themselves able to explain the difference the residential provision has made to their outcomes.
- Very good relationships exist between the staff and external professionals, which helps consistency to be achieved.
- The introduction of the family liaison team has been very positive; it provides an invaluable resource to families in supporting contact and home placements.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 11.1 The school ensures that:
arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 13.8 The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate.
- 13.9 The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate.

Recommendations

- Ensure that each child's placement plan identifies child-centred targets specific to the residential setting.
- Ensure that meals provided are consistently adequate in nutrition, quantity and quality.
- Document the risk assessment of the residential environment, including the location of young people's bedrooms to enable review.
- Ensure that the policy and processes for staff recruitment follow the necessary guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- Ensure that the independent visitor reports provide adequate challenge and evaluation.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Significant shortfalls were found during the inspection in relation to some of the decisions and action taken to safeguard young people and, therefore, in the effectiveness of the monitoring in the school and its oversight by the senior leadership teams. This is the area most specifically requiring improvement.

The relationships between each of the staff groups and young people are some of the strengths of the service. Nurturing and respectful relationships are evident and young people generally talk positively about the staff teams and report that staff are 'friendly' and 'it's like a second home here'. Each young person is valued as an individual and staff members' positive ways of working enable strong attachments to form. This enables young people to explore past and present experiences. This also develops and improves their emotional well-being. This is creating the basis with which young people may both develop and sustain appropriate relationships with peers and family.

Young people receive individualised care which enables them to develop. They are able to describe the impact that the residential houses have had on their progress. Young people were proud to share examples of improvements they have made and how they now have more of a belief in their own potential. A number of young people described how they can now walk away from situations when they used to get angry. Others explained that they now have friends, which is something that is extremely important to these young people. Young people are beginning to deal with the issues that affect their emotional well-being. Key-work sessions are used to offer support; however, some sessions need to be more supportive and offer direction and advice. It is not clear what impact these sessions are currently having to develop young people's independence, or to protect themselves from unsafe situations. Areas such as e-safety are not fully explored. In addition, the targets for young people would benefit from being more child friendly and specific to the residential setting. Not all young people currently understand the outcomes or the targets in place.

The development of a family liaison team in the school has helped maintain positive family relationships, and it also supports young people to remain at home. Parents are very positive about the support that they receive in managing their child's behaviour. Relationships between staff and parents are described as being positive and professional. Feedback from parents includes, 'Staff are flexible in their approach and open to ideas from all areas. I have found them to be friendly, approachable and knowledgeable, and I am sure that they are doing the very best to give my child as positive a future as is possible.'

Young people are able to express their views and, if they raise complaints or concerns, they are taken seriously. An open atmosphere enables any disagreements to be resolved and requests to be made. The student council continues to provide a structure for young people to put their views to the school.

The range of activities young people engage in is a strength of the school. Young people's day-to-day experience is a positive one; they are actively involved in participating in decision-making in each of their residential houses in areas such as the menus and trips into the community. This underpins a strong sense of belonging to their individual residential home.

Health and medication management, including links with health professionals, is a strong area of practice. Specific staff members take the lead in areas such as diabetes to ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. Food is of varying quality and quantity. Young people are involved in planning menus; however, there has been insufficient oversight, which has failed to promote many healthy choices. This is an area that would benefit from being improved.

The staff teams manage transitions into the school at a pace relevant to the young person's needs. During the pre-admission period, decisions about placements' suitability are made. Compatibility of young people is considered when they access the residential houses. However, there are no records of the risk assessments for the sleeping accommodation. Although there are no young people sharing rooms, informal discussions take place when considering which room to allocate to which child. The absence of documentation means it is difficult to appraise the decision-making process in this area. There are however risk assessments for the sleeping accommodation with regards to health and safety and fire safety.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

During this inspection, concerns were noted in a number of child protection records. There was a lack of clarity about the action taken when there is a safeguarding concern. When reports are signed off, it is not evident the reason why and the outcome taken, and if any learning has taken place, or whether actions, such as retraining of staff, are required. In two cases, decision-making by the school took place before consultation with the local authority, which potentially undermined any action they may have wanted to take. This is not in line with the school's safeguarding policy and procedure. When this occurred, follow-up action with the staff involved was not recorded. It is, therefore, not clear if senior staff have ensured that staff are competent in their safeguarding responsibilities in the light of these failings.

Young people's specific risks and vulnerabilities in relation to child sexual exploitation and radicalisation have not been assessed. Referrals have not been made to ensure the safety of the young people and others; this was evident in one case, where the vulnerability and risks for a young person were not explored. This lack of recognition puts young people at risk. When there are identified risks and incidents in relation to internet use, records, for example in key-work sessions, fail to demonstrate the actions taken or if the opportunities for one-to-one time are appropriately used. The absence of good recording inhibits the evaluation and review of whether the strategies in place are effective to support and manage these risks.

Young people don't go missing from this school. Each young person has a plan and

process in place were this to occur, which forms part of young people's behaviour support plans.

Staff manage issues of self-harm and challenging and aggressive behaviours well. Staff use creative strategies around self-harm, which have been effective in reducing these behaviours. Young people are able to talk about how they now manage their previously challenging behaviours compared to their starting points. They gave examples of how they are no longer physically restrained, which was previously the case due to their aggressive behaviours. Bullying has been recognised by staff and is an area they have worked on to improve in the residential time. Young people spoken with felt that instances of bullying have been dealt with effectively by residential staff. A parent stated, 'There have been some issues with bullying and the staff work tirelessly to try and resolve the issues and do their utmost to make my son feel safe at school.' There are some positive and innovative ways around the promotion of good behaviour; for example, increasing young people's understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people has supported a culture of acceptance to develop.

Those responsible for carrying out recruitment processes have undertaken the necessary training. However, references for new staff are not undertaken until after the appointment of staff. This is not in line with statutory guidance. The senior management team has been challenging the organisation with regard to this. The policy has yet to change.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The leadership team shares a strong ambition and vision to ensure that the outcomes for young people are the best they can be. The team is very reflective about issues raised during the inspection and is determined to make changes. It is keen to continuously improve the residential provision. The team has young people's interests at heart and leads in a child-centred manner. The two heads of care are approachable and work alongside the staff to ensure that the staff teams have the necessary support.

The enabling culture of the residential provision promotes new experiences for the young people. Residential staff act on high aspirations. The staff have a clear understanding of the aims and ethos of the school. The residential provision is meeting its aims in relation to providing a nurturing environment where young people learn to believe in their own potential. Young people are clear that they are happy and progress as a result of the residential provision. Leaders reiterate this.

However, there has been a lack of oversight of a number of areas identified during the inspection, either by the leadership team or through the wider governance. There is some external scrutiny by the governors, but it is difficult to ascertain what impact this has had. The head of care in each post are aware that monitoring is an area to be improved. This lack of recognition of the weaknesses has now resulted in a lack of decisive action being taken to prevent shortfalls. Areas identified as requiring

monitoring include sanction records, incident records, supervision records, and safeguarding procedures and referrals. The senior leadership team needs to ensure that it has adequate systems in place to monitor the records and issues, and to take action when weaknesses are seen so trends and patterns are identified.

There are regular independent visits to monitor and report on the conduct of the school. The visitor will provide some challenge; however, the senior team has recognised that this is an area to be further improved and developed. This has yet to take place.

There are sufficient staff deployed to meet the needs of the young people. There is a strong group of suitably qualified and competent staff. Young people talk positively about the staff. One said, 'Staff are great. They are around for you.' Staff make themselves available to young people and are on hand to support them if they are feeling upset or homesick. Young people's views are fully taken into account by the staff and senior leadership team.

Staff are receiving regular supervision that provides them with the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Staff report that they undertake essential training, and all new staff complete an initial induction programme. This practice contributes to them understanding and meeting the needs of young people.

The management and staff team work with other agencies for the safety and welfare of the young people. This inter-agency working ensures that there is a team approach in meeting the specific needs of young people. There are positive relationships with professionals and parents which enable a close partnership to be created. Feedback from parents include, 'Residential staff work hard to look after the children in their care and have excellent communication with parents.' The school implements a procedure that ensures that young people and their parents or carers are aware of how to complain. Complaints are taken seriously and responded to swiftly. Equality and diversity is promoted in the residential accommodation and challenged when discrimination is seen to have taken place.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it

complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC011327

Headteacher/teacher in charge:

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector(s)

Emeline Evans, social care inspector (lead)
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