

Hunters Hill (Residential) School

Hunters Hill School, Spirehouse Lane, Blackwell, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 1QD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Hunters Hill is a residential special school. It is maintained by Birmingham City Council. The school has three residential properties. The school caters for 130 pupils, with a capacity for 32 residential placements. It accommodates boys from 11 to 16 years old. The school has pupils who have been diagnosed with social emotional mental health, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, an autistic spectrum disorder and Asperger syndrome. The residential provision is currently closed.

The residential provision was last inspected in an integrated inspection in October 2018.

Inspection dates: 18 to 19 September 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and widespread failures, which mean that children and young people are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded.

Date of previous inspection: 16 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

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:

- Any treatment received by a child is recorded in a written or electronic school record (separate from NHS records) to which only appropriately designated staff have access. (National minimum standard 3.9)
- Accommodation is appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, cleaned and maintained, and reasonable adjustments are made to provide adequate accessible accommodation for any children with restricted mobility. The accommodation contains suitable specialist facilities to support children whose disabilities require them. (National minimum standard 5.4)
- The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured. (National minimum standard 6.2)
- The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. (National minimum standard 6.3)
- 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. (National minimum standard 11.1)
- The school has and consistently implements a written policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed; and arrangements for searching children and their possessions. (National minimum standard 12.1)
- A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force. Records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of reasonable force and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. (National minimum standard 12.6)
- Staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and where relevant the local authority's policy, in relation to children going missing and their

role in implementing that policy. Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with the police where appropriate. (National minimum standard 12.8)

- The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary. (National minimum standard 13.1)
- The school's leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. (National minimum standard 13.3)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (National minimum standard 13.4)
- The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix 1. (National minimum standard 13.7)
- The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate. (National minimum standard 13.8)
- The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate. (National minimum standard 13.9)
- For all persons over 16 (not on roll of the school) who after April 2002 began to live on the same premises as children but are not employed by the school, an enhanced certificate with a barred list information must be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). (National minimum standard 14.2)
- There is a written agreement between the school and any person over 16 not employed by the school but living in the same premises as children (for example, members of staff households). This specifies the terms of their accommodation, guidance on contact with children, their responsibilities to supervise their visitors, and notice that accommodation may cease to be provided if there is evidence that they are unsuitable to have regular contact with children. They must be required to notify an unrelated designated senior member of staff if they are charged with, or convicted of, any offence. (National minimum standard 14.3)
- Children are actively encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of residential provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Children are not penalised by raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith. (National minimum standard 17.1)
- The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to residential provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). (National minimum standard 18.2)
- Every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to supply the information to the child), and add personal statements or statements correcting errors. (National minimum standard 22.1)

- Each child's file includes the information in Appendix 2 (individual records).
(National minimum standard 22.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

The residential service was operational up until the end of the summer term. During the summer break the local authority received a number of alleged safeguarding concerns. A decision was made by the local authority to temporarily close the residential service from the start of the new academic year. At the time of this inspection the residential service remains closed.

The alleged concerns are currently being investigated. The head of care is currently away from the school and two members of staff have left. These sudden changes have created uncertainty for the children, their families and the remaining members of staff.

Since the last inspection in October 2018, little progress has been made to meet eight breaches in the national minimum standards. As a result of this visit, a further 12 breaches in the national minimum standards have been identified.

There are serious and widespread failures in how children's care has been managed. The level of oversight in safeguarding children is inadequate.

The progress to improve the internal decoration of the residential houses has been far too slow.

Children spoken with during the inspection all have positive stories of their residential stays. They said that they had trusted adults with whom they could share concerns. However, these relationships have at times been severely compromised. For example, a member of staff failed to follow the school's complaints procedure when a child raised a concern about their practice. The member of staff made the decision to investigate the child's complaint themselves and made no record of their action. This failure to follow the school's complaints procedures has jeopardised safeguarding processes that are designed to protect children and staff.

Children told the inspectors about the range of activities offered by the residential service and how much they have enjoyed these, especially the residential trips.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: inadequate

Senior managers could not locate essential safeguarding information about the residential service during the inspection. Essential details relating to when children go missing from the school are absent from central records. This means that it is impossible to establish whether the rights steps are taken to safeguard children at times when they are vulnerable and at risk.

When information is found, the records made are often missing essential details or

are an inaccurate record. The school's website contains out-of-date information and policies that have not been reviewed. Some policies contain inappropriate language that has not been identified by senior managers. For example, the behaviour management policy includes language that indicates that children will be subject to being 'hung drawn and quartered'. This shows a significant failure to provide adequate oversight of essential records and policies that are important for the care and welfare of children.

One child had to be taken to hospital after cutting their hand on a piece of broken glass. Staff failed to record details of the medical treatment and advice given by the hospital. This demonstrates a total lack of basic understanding of the importance of having careful, objective and clear records that help to promote and safeguard children's health.

Senior managers have failed to implement a strong safeguarding culture in the school. This compromises children's rights to be listened to and respected. It also means that staff do not have clear procedures to follow when children raise concerns. For example, staff and designated safeguarding leads have failed to follow procedures that are designed to keep children safe. In one instance, a child made an allegation against a senior member of staff after receiving an injury. Although this was reported to the headteacher, the explanation given by the member of staff was accepted at face value. The headteacher failed to refer the incident to the designated officer or to demonstrate any professional curiosity and no support was offered to the child following the allegation. This demonstrates a failure to take appropriate steps to protect children when they raise concerns.

When senior managers have delegated responsibility to a member of staff to investigate a safeguarding concern, no senior management oversight has been put in place. One member of staff delegated to investigate a child's concern has now left and there is no record to evidence whether the investigation was ever carried out. This management failure has compromised any opportunity to understand what has happened and to improve practice.

Residential staff have failed to ensure that children have effective risk assessments in place to mitigate any risks they may face. When significant incidents have occurred, little consideration is given to the importance of updating records. In one case this failure has left staff without essential information about a child's risk of self-harming.

When physical interventions have been necessary, the records made by staff are ambiguous and lack enough detail about the incident. This shortfall in recording does not provide an accurate account of events and this compromises children's well-being.

Staff lack awareness of the residential behaviour management policy and how to implement it consistently and appropriately. For example, staff do not understand what measures of discipline are considered to be a sanction. For example, staff will decide to send a child home in response to poor behaviour. However, when staff use

this measure of control the staff fail to make a record of their action.

Safeguarding checks for family members of staff who live on the school grounds are not completed effectively. For example, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check has not been carried out for one family member. Further, managers have not ensured that any of the people who live on-site have signed a conduct agreement as required by the school.

This catalogue of shortfalls means that children are not helped and protected.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The head of care is currently away from the school. The deputy head of care has assumed responsibility for the residential service.

Children's case files and care plans are contradictory and lack essential information. For example, one child's case file does not indicate who has parental responsibility for them. The same child's legal status is also missing. This demonstrates a failure of care, attention and understanding of the importance of keeping accurate records.

Records offer little value to those whose role it is to monitor the quality of care, such as the governors for the school. Poor record-keeping and a failure to follow procedures are symptomatic of the poor understanding of safeguarding across the residential service. This is further compounded by residential staff who are not trained in how to use the electronic recording system effectively.

One designated governor is assigned to oversee the residential service. This role includes regularly meeting up with the head of care. Although the head of care has submitted reports about the quality of care to the governors, these reports have failed to reflect many of the safeguarding concerns identified during this inspection.

An independent person visits the school each half term. The visitor's reports have provided some level of challenge to senior managers. Despite this challenge, the senior leadership team has failed to take any action to address significant weaknesses in the provision and quality of care.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC043050

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Andrew Lomas

Type of school: residential special school

Telephone number: 0121 445 1320

Email address: head@hunthill.bham.sch.uk

Inspectors

Ricky D'Arcy, social care inspector (lead)

Alison Cooper, social care inspector



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