

High Close School

Barnardos, 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 a national charity. It provides for both day and residential pupils, aged from seven to 18 years. There are 77 pupils on roll, with provision for 36 boarding. At the time of this inspection, there were 18 residential pupils living in three residential units on the school site.

The school admits children and young people who have statements of special educational need arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. .

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 September 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
---	------

The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
---	-------------

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 25 June 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Holistic and thoughtful care helps children to progress very well. Staff help children to understand how their emotions affect their behaviour, and to change their responses and reactions to these. One older boarder wrote that when they started at the school they were 'a very troubled child, in need of a lot of support' and that they 'have gone from being angry and violent all of the time to feeling great about life and [now only] occasionally feeling down.'

Staff attentively support new children to move into boarding. They focus on helping children understand the routines and rules and help them to develop friendships. Managers carefully consider which house a child should live in and where their bedroom should be. However, records of the assessments which managers complete do not always contain their reasons for decision making.

Children's involvement in all aspects of the school and their care is supported well. There are formal systems, such as the school council, which add real value to the school community. Earlier in the year, council members were worried that bird droppings continually landed on the staff's cars and suggested the trees be cut back. This action was taken and exemplifies the strong community spirit at the school, where everyone works to support one another.

The wide range of frequent activities that staff arrange are a positive aspect of the school which children appreciate. Inspectors found many examples of how staff promote children's interests, such as becoming a school librarian, starting a school newspaper and working with the maintenance team. A parent also commented that 'they go to great lengths to find activities that children want to do and use these as opportunities to help them develop skills.'

Building relationships and providing parents with support are strong elements of staff practice. Parents trust the support they receive from staff and feel supported both in and out of school. One parent said how she had appreciated the family resource team being available in school holidays; another commented '[we] couldn't be without them'.

Children benefit from easy access to therapeutic support. The links between staff from education, boarding and therapy are well established and effective. Together, these teams help deliver coordinated care which meets children's needs exceptionally well. Children's needs are identified and addressed quickly, which reduces the potential impact of longer-term problems on a child's life. This assists children to develop their resilience.

Preparation for adulthood is well considered. Staff reflect carefully about how to prepare and support pupils to move on successfully. They are proactive and forward thinking. This enables them to influence plans at an early stage, which improves their

chances of success. This is particularly helpful for young people who have complex needs and will need a high level of ongoing support.

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

Staff have a wide understanding of safeguarding, which they use well to think through and manage safeguarding concerns. Staff skilfully assist children to understand and develop strategies to keep themselves safer. One child, in discussion with a staff member, was able to identify how well she had managed to change how she responded when she became anxious. This is enabling her to have a better understanding of risk and has reduced the number of incidents which occur.

Staff are persistent and inventive. They always look for ways to help children to make small changes which can have a big impact. For example, staff helped a child by assisting her to put aside some difficult issues that she had been dealing with that term. This resulted in her enjoying a good summer holiday and a having a positive return to school.

A parent wrote in a letter to the school: 'Every time [name of child] struggled, the staff would ask what they could do differently... It is this approach which has helped [name of child] to grow into the young person she is today.'

Leaders and managers continually look for areas for improvement that will increase children's safety. Children's ability to use email safely is improving because of a plan to let them learn in a safe environment. Children can make mistakes and develop their knowledge about how to keep safe online at a suitable pace, and with an appropriate level of staff monitoring.

Generally, safeguarding referrals are made appropriately and there are numerous examples of where appropriate action has been taken to safeguard children. The local authority designated officer for safeguarding is positive about how staff consult and work with her when concerns arise. During the inspection, staff hesitated to consult the safeguarding team about an incident involving a child who had no social work involvement. This was addressed during the inspection; however, this creates a risk that the same levels of consultation with safeguarding bodies may not be consistently applied if a child does not have a social worker.

Care planning is reflected in staff practice. For example, there are excellent discussions with children which support the child to know what they do well, what they are working on and how they might achieve this. Staff follow individual plans if a child is considered absent or missing from the school. In one or two plans the detail sometimes differs from the actions being taken, because the written records are not always updated. Children rarely go missing from the school and for those who have a history of going missing from school, episodes have significantly reduced. Leaders and managers made plans during the inspection to review all risk assessments regarding missing episodes, to ensure that records reflect practice

appropriately.

Health and safety monitoring of the premises is generally satisfactory. However, where the responsibilities for oversight of health and safety fall between the wider organisation and the school, monitoring procedures are less clear. The school's fire risk assessment is undertaken by the organisation's building surveyor. The risk assessment documents were not kept on-site but were provided during the inspection. This assessment did not provide enough detail to identify what staff need to do to ensure that high standards in relation to fire safety are maintained. Leaders and managers confirmed that they would address this, and they also booked themselves further training to understand the organisation's health and safety responsibilities in more depth.

Self-harming behaviours are identified, and staff are given good guidance on how to support the child to reduce these behaviours and what action to take if staff are concerned. The school has ligature cutters, but managers reported that these have not been used for five years and staff training in their use has not been updated. Managers should ensure that staff have the right level of training in the event that such equipment is required

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers provide exemplary leadership and management which promotes children's safety and well-being. There is a detailed development plan which is continually reviewed and revised.

Leaders and managers achieve their goals by continually looking for and implementing improvements. For example, leaders and managers:

- have a strong vision for the school and recognise the value of good-quality support to staff. Leaders and managers have recruited new governors who have experience in a variety of areas. This provides managers with an appropriate level of challenge and informs continual service development
- have identified that children at the school currently have more issues relating to self-harm and have implemented plans to ensure that they can minimise this. For example, they have increased and reviewed staff's training in understanding mental health, specifically in relation to self-harm
- continually make good use of the independent visitor's reports and advice to identify shortfalls and improve practice
- ensure that staff ideas are encouraged and used for improvement. For example, house managers suggested that staff well-being plans should be in place for all staff, not just those who need one. This creates a culture of inclusive practice where staff well-being is seen as part of management's role.

The leaders and managers' oversight of boarding is systematic and thorough. This results in well-planned care and staff support. They continually look for improvement. For example, they are working to improve the oversight and understanding of differences and similarities in the education and boarding provisions. For example, while data is collected about restraints, the computer system does not easily allow managers to review the differences between the use of restraint in boarding and education. The changes being developed will support managers to have better access to this data in order to inform service development.

Staff support is well organised and appreciated. Regular supervision helps staff to reflect and develop their practice. Any questions about staff practice are thoroughly investigated and appropriate action is taken. Staff's ambitions are supported, for example all house managers are completing an appropriate management qualification. Appraisals are thoughtful, acknowledging staff's strengths, their developmental needs and setting development targets for the coming year.

Leaders and managers are exceptionally skilled at creating a learning and reflective environment. They have established an inclusive attitude to problem solving which all staff adopt. This results in a motivated and knowledgeable team of staff who are proud of their ability to look after and improve children's lives.

Training is generally well organised and reflects children's needs. Staff complete appropriate qualifications within the required timescales. One focus for development has been to improve staff's report writing. Inspectors found that records were generally well written but, at times, these were not written in plain English. For instance, the term 'heightened' was used to describe children's behaviour. The meaning of this was not clear.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

- Staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. Training keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the school. (Residential special schools, National minimum standards, 19.1)

In particular, the school leadership team should ensure that the staff team are adequately trained in the use of any specialist equipment that is available to them.

Recommendations

- The school leadership team should review that the boundaries they set for consulting with the local authority safeguarding officer about how concerns are consistently followed up if a child does not have a social worker. The review should ensure that their decisions work well with the local authority's own thresholds.
- The school leadership team should:
 - ensure that they consistently review children's records so that there is clarity about where to ensure all plans are updated appropriately when a change is made and information relating to how incidents are managed are kept together rather than be stored in differing files
 - ensure that all records which staff make are written in plain English wherever possible
 - ensure they record how they make decisions about how they can meet new children's needs.
- The school leadership team should develop the fire risk assessments further so that these contain detail which assists managers to monitor whether any changes or reviews are necessary.

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: SC011327

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mark Shears

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 0118 978 5767

Email address: high.close@barnardos.org.uk

Inspectors

Ruth Coler, social care inspector (lead)

Daniel Healy, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2019