

InFocus Charity

InFocus Charity, Topsham Road, Countess Wear, Exeter EX2 6HA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

InFocus Charity is a specialist school for young people with complex needs, including a visual impairment. Children can attend school as a day pupil or stay on site in the residential provision.

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 February 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **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 provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 2 July 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The school offers good-quality personalised care and support for young people with often complex needs and sight impairment. Each young person has a carefully planned bespoke package of care and support.

Young people benefit from the meaningful relationships with the adults who care for them. Staff can interpret the often subtle nuances of young people's communication and respond effectively to meet their needs, often avoiding anxiety and stress.

Young people make progress and are encouraged to do as much as possible for themselves with the appropriate support. Each has targets for improvement and young people commonly make progress in communication, self-care and getting about. Much of the work with young people is exceptional.

All young people are encouraged to communicate their feelings and wishes and make as much choice as possible about decisions that affect them. Young people's views are sought constantly throughout their stay, but also on a formal basis in meetings and through the school council.

Young people have access to a wealth of specialist support to meet their needs including therapists, pastoral support and advocacy, and nursing care. Young people are provided with the specialist aids they need, for example to improve their ability to communicate or to get about.

The site offers some fantastic activity opportunities for young people, a swimming pool, hydrotherapy pool, a state-of-the-art sensory room, and a mechanical horse which creates an authentic riding experience for those unable to access horse-riding lessons.

Activities enhance young people's life experiences which has a huge benefit on both their physical and emotional well-being. In addition, the pastoral support officer has a range of anatomically correct models used to help young people understand their bodies, feelings and issues of privacy and consent.

All the young people attend the school or college, and some staff work across both areas. This provides for continuity of care and allows targets which promote progress to be shared across both disciplines.

Feedback from parents and stakeholders is positive. Some parents have fought for years for a placement at this school, and others report that this is the only place they feel comfortable leaving their child.

The environment is suited to the needs of the young people. It is clean and well maintained. Each young person has their own bedroom which is personalised. The extensive grounds offer lots of opportunities for exercise and exploration.

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

Placement plans lack sufficient detail of the monitoring arrangements for young people who need night-time observation. On two occasions, the monitoring of incidents by managers was not robust. An opportunity to improve practice and ensure the correct level of night-time observations for young people was missed.

Levels of support for young people have been impacted by both the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing issues around the recruitment of care staff. Minimum staffing levels have been considered in line with young people's safety. However, on several occasions, young people were not provided with 1-to-1 care as agreed in their placement plans.

Risk assessment to support staff who may be lone working is not readily available. This could compromise the safety and welfare of young people and leave staff vulnerable.

Behaviour management is focused on understanding young people. The staff are skilled in interpreting and understanding behaviour. The staff are attentive and able to intervene quickly to avoid frustration, anxiety or distress to young people. Staff are also clear about the likes and dislikes of the young people and offer support which avoids behaviour that could challenge others.

Staff receive both the essential and specific training required to fulfil their responsibilities to the young people. The staff are clear about the process of reporting safeguarding concerns or allegations, and they work in partnership with external safeguarding agencies.

The grounds are safe and secure. All visitors are checked to ensure that they have a valid reason to be on the premises.

For the most part, young people appear content and happy in the residential home. Several young people told me they enjoy their time here. For others, their progress indicates that they feel safe and trust the staff to take care of them.

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

The sufficiency of staffing and staff deployment is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing issues with the recruitment of care staff. This recruitment crisis is now also restricting the availability of agency staff to cover in emergencies.

The quality of supervision provided to staff is variable. Supervision is not always purposeful and often lacks identified actions for development. Some policies have not been reviewed in line with current practice. In particular, the lone working and the intimate care policy have some ambiguity.

Monitoring of incident reports is not fully effective. One incident did not lead to sufficient professional curiosity so that effective safeguards could be put in place.

Leaders and managers are aspirational for the young people. The head of care is suitably qualified and experienced. She is visible and available within the school and has the confidence and trust of the care staff. They work collaboratively with all stakeholders to support positive outcomes for young people.

Independent visitor oversight and monitoring by trustees offers a good level of scrutiny and adds to the safety and welfare of young people.

The physical environment is maintained to a high standard that is comfortable and meets the needs of the young people. No damage or wear and tear has been observed during this inspection.

Managers, leaders and staff have high expectations and aspirations for all young people. The school has been on a journey of improvement which is yet to be fully embodied in practice. The inspector is assured that leaders and managers understand, and have the capacity, experience and knowledge to make, the necessary changes. Where possible, they took immediate action to address shortfalls found at this inspection.

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

- Extend the provision of purposeful good-quality supervision to all staff.
- Ensure that all policies are clear and fully implemented in practice.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- 15.9 Where only one member of staff is on duty at any time, a risk assessment has been carried out and recorded in writing, identifying any likely risks to children, staff and members of the public.
- 15.1 There is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school.
- Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include: records of developmental checks; health monitoring required by staff; intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues.
- The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate.

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: SC022223

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Jane Bell

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector

Janice Hawtin, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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