

Bramfield House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 935/6036
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Inspection number 342528
Inspection dates 6 – 7 October 2009
Reporting inspector George Derby
Social care inspector Dorrit Andrews

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 10 -18

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000² having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

Information about the school

Bramfield House School is a residential special school which is located in the village of Bramfield in Suffolk. It is registered to admit up to 55 boys with behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties and currently has 48 on roll; a number of pupils have additional difficulties such as autism, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. Each pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Up to 45 boys can board and currently there are 40 pupils in residence; the residential provision was last inspected in January 2009 and the school in January 2007. This inspection was undertaken jointly by an education and social care inspector.

Over the past 12 months, the school has expanded its facilities and now has a separate residence, Ibstock House. This is for Year 11 boys where a greater emphasis is placed on independent living. In the main residence, there are also semi-independent living facilities for Year 10 pupils. With the approval of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the school has just started a post-16 facility and has three students on roll. In the last 12 to 18 months the school has also faced considerable recruitment difficulties in relation its teaching staff; much effort has gone into ensuring that there were enough teachers to teach the groups. From the start of this school year, this situation has largely been resolved.

The school states in its aims that the qualities and needs of the individual are valued within a safe supportive community. The school's philosophy and ethos is based on strong interpersonal relationships with good role models providing a nurturing and caring approach. Close collaboration between education and care is of critical importance to the school. It is at the heart of the shared approach to the curriculum, to the guidance and support for pupils and to addressing their behaviour difficulties.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Evaluation of the school

The school is successful in getting the pupils back on the right track and in addressing their severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. As a result, their behaviour is good, as is their personal development. School and residence work extremely well together to support the emotional needs of pupils and the boarding provision overall is good. Much work has gone into developing the curriculum over the past nine months by the expanded and strengthened senior leadership team. They have a clear view of the strengths of the school, what needs developing and a good plan is in place to improve provision further. The quality of education is satisfactory and welfare, health and safety are good; rigorous procedures are in place to safeguard pupils. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory; all regulations are met except one.

Quality of education

The quality of education is satisfactory and the school is successful at meeting the social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils. In this way, it opens doors for pupils so they are ready to learn. For some it takes longer than for others but, nevertheless, over their time in the school their attitudes to learning are positive and they understand that there is a purpose to their education. Most leavers go onto college to extend their education or follow another pathway which involves training or employment. Satisfactory support is provided for their learning and pupils make satisfactory academic progress. For some, they make considerable leaps in their attainment and some go on to achieve GCSE passes at C grades, especially in science and art. Others achieve lower grade passes but, nevertheless, this represents satisfactory progress across a small range of examination subjects. The rate of progress increases the longer the pupils are at the school; for boys who live at the school, the residential provision has a big impact on their attitudes and their liking of school.

The curriculum is satisfactory. The curriculum is reasonably broad. Although pupils' statements of special educational needs require the full National Curriculum to be taught, music and a modern foreign language are not part of the school's programme. Pupils across the school have access to a sound range of awards; access to a wider range of vocational opportunities is planned. Schemes of work are now in place for all subjects and activities taught, although horticulture is at an early stage. These clearly show how pupils will progress through the topics and themes set for each of the year groups. Although there was a lack of provision at the time of the last inspection, from this September information and communication technology is now systematically planned and is fully taught. Pupils are now working towards a Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) qualification. Curriculum policies clearly outline the key aspects to be taught and learned. However, there is little mention of how information and communication technology can support learning and little use of this occurs in lessons. For relatively new courses, such as horticulture and for the new post-16 provision, schemes are being developed and

personalised for pupils. The school is currently relying on published programmes from the award bearing bodies such as City and Guilds and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. Pupils also undertake adult literacy and numeracy awards, as well as sports leader awards. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is mainly subject based with few vocational or college opportunities. Work experience occurs in Years 10 or 11. Connexions and careers guidance advice is provided from Year 9. The school is looking at how it can plan for a continuity of pupils' experience across the ages of 14 to 18 now that it has a post-16 facility. Already a key strength of the latter is the way it highly personalises the programme for each individual student.

While most requirements of statements are met, there has not always been enough systematic support where pupils struggle with their literacy skills or have specific learning difficulties. This is being quickly addressed by the head of education who has been instrumental in strengthening assessment procedures when pupils arrive at the school and also in identifying their key needs. A special educational needs coordination role is developing suitably. Reading support has been provided by teaching assistants in the past and assessments undertaken to identify improvement in reading and spelling each year. However, some pupils' reports show ongoing issues with literacy which clearly are also a barrier to learning in other areas.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory as are the school's assessment procedures. A key feature of most lessons is the strength of relationships between staff and pupils and way that staff use non-confrontational methods to manage pupils successfully. In the best lessons, staff are highly skilful in the subject, activities challenge pupils well, and questioning is probing. Learning objectives are clearly stated and shared with pupils. In the main though, staff often state what the teacher is going to do or the activities the pupils will undertake, rather than specifying what they will learn. Too often, the work provided is the same for all pupils, despite a wide range of ability in each class.

Teaching assistants encourage pupils well and in some subjects dedicated teaching assistants' subject knowledge adds much to pupils' learning, such as in design and technology. However, this is not the case in information and communication technology and during plenary sessions there is a missed opportunity to make full use of their valuable skills. Pupils enjoy contributing to activities and become active learners when they can use the interactive whiteboard, although in a few lessons observed this is merely used as a display board rather than use made of its interactive features.

The youngest pupils are grouped together in the 'nurture class' and during the inspection most of these were boys newly admitted to the school. Although the school states that in this class there is a focus on nurturing and learning to learn, this was not evident. The programme consists mainly of 'formal' subjects and some integrated topic activity but misses the opportunity to provide support in a properly set up nurturing environment based on key nurture principles and practice.

Assessment procedures are now firmly in place and the school collects a lot of information about pupils' academic progress and personal development. However, it does not yet use or bring together all this information in a systematic and coordinated way to evidence the progress made or to fully identify trends and patterns in pupils' achievement. Marking is variable in quality and does not always identify how pupils should improve their work. Homework, to support learning in school, is only provided if parents request it. Help is given to pupils where they need to catch up on work missed. Lack of homework was a concern expressed by many parents on their otherwise very positive inspection questionnaires.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Education and care teams work effectively together to support pupils' good personal development, especially their improved confidence and self-esteem and their enjoyment of life at Bramfield. The new multi-element plan, drawn up between education and care staff, focuses well on the key things a pupil needs to do to address their personal difficulties, as well as helping them to learn and apply themselves. This is a great improvement on the separate care and individual education plan targets previously in place and focuses well on removing the barriers to learning. The way staff work together with pupils has a positive impact on pupils' good behaviour and excellent attendance and helps to bind together a cohesive community. Mealtimes are extremely calm and are exemplary social times. All staff act as excellent role models and provide outstanding emotional support. Pupils say, 'staff are always here for you'. Activities leading to awards in sports leadership and scuba diving also impact positively on how pupils manage themselves and guide others. Pupils make a positive contribution to the whole residential community through their weekly meetings, although there is no school council helping to steer the development of the school. Pupils are adequately prepared for their social and economic well being through workplace opportunities, award bearing courses and through the newly introduced personal finance course.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. Staff are knowledgeable about the school's robust child protection procedures, what to look out for and how to refer any concerns to the appropriately trained designated staff. There is a good range of policies to support the health and welfare of pupils and staff give close attention to nutrition, diet and exercise. There is generally good attention to keeping the site safe, although a few relatively minor issues were raised during the inspection by inspectors. Pupils are well versed in fire safety and escape procedures. Pupils report that bullying sometimes occurs, although they know that it will be dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Key to the success of the school's management of pupils' behaviour is the policy and system for gaining points and rewarding good behaviour. This is highly valued and well understood by pupils; they know what they must to do

to gain the points and what happens if there is a problem. The process is nearly always consistently applied.

The school complies fully with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2001 and has a three year plan for increasing accessibility to the accommodation, curriculum and information.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are robust and rigorous procedures in place to ensure that staff are properly vetted and all the required recruitment checks are undertaken.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively, safely and securely. The parent company has invested a great deal in the school and notable improvements have been to teaching accommodation, such as the food technology facility, the residential accommodation at Ibstock House as well as in the main house. There is a good range of specialist facilities, including a swimming pool, and a horticulture area has been developed in the school grounds.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

There is a good range of information available to parents, carers and local authorities. The requirements for school and boarding are met. Reports about pupils' progress are sent out annually and provide a reasonable picture of pupils' achievements and progress. The school is planning to make reporting more frequent and to ensure it is aligned with pupils' annual reviews of their statements.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures fully meet requirements for education and boarding.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding is good with five outcome areas judged as good and boarders' enjoyment and achievement judged as outstanding. The school meets all key National Minimum Standards and exceeds a number of them in relation to individual support provided to boarding pupils.

Pastoral support is a strength of the school and boarders receive outstanding individual support in line with their needs. The physical and emotional health needs of pupils are promoted and supported in partnership with other professionals, including the school's nurse. Qualified first aid staff are always on duty and staff follow clear procedures for the management and administration of medication. Good

records are maintained and medication is securely stored. Pupils are provided with a balanced diet and contribute ideas to menus. Mealtimes are well organised with clear routines to support the development of social skills. Many pupils refer positively to the range of food provided and being able to make individual choices.

Clearly written policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils and staff are very aware of their responsibilities towards the children in their care. All staff receive appropriate child protection training and regular updates and strong links are maintained with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children. Bullying is not identified as a problem at the school and pupils have a clear understanding of what to do if someone is making them unhappy. Individual risk assessments identify potential conflicts which are linked to handling strategies and the setting of targets with children. Staff work hard to promote tolerance and respect for one another across the school community.

The management of behaviour is based on establishing positive relationships with pupils, the use of behaviour plans and identifying strategies of support. Staff receive regular training and maintain appropriate records of sanctions and the use of physical intervention. Children fully understand the school's point system to reward effort, behaviour and good attitude and view it as 'helpful' and 'fair'.

Policies and procedures are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils. However, not all risk assessments are dated to provide evidence of review. A health and safety audit of the site has recently been completed and work is already underway in response. Regular fire drills take place and children and staff are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Suitable procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff.

Pupils receive outstanding pastoral care which contributes greatly to their development. Care staff are familiar with the educational needs of pupils in their care and actively encourage progress. Good communication systems are in place between care and teaching staff for the effective sharing of information and the promotion of pupils' welfare. The school's activities programme develops pupils' social skills, increases their confidence and self-esteem as well as providing opportunities to keep active and relax.

Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to express their views. Current forums include key worker sessions, boys' meetings, use of a suggestion box and newly introduced 'circle time'. Pupils report that they feel able to go to a wide range of staff with any worries and that they are listened to.

Boarding accommodation is pleasantly decorated, furnished and clean and is provided in the main building and in a new boarding provision in the grounds for Year 11 pupils. The new provision offers domestic style facilities to support the development of pupils' life skills and is much cherished by the boys living there.

The leadership and management of boarding are strong and contribute highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. Staffing levels are sufficient for the number of boarders and the activities they are involved in. Boarders report that they always know who is on duty and that night staff are readily available and always respond kindly to them. A number of boarders stated they felt 'safe' knowing night staff were close by. Boarders are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to help them progress and develop. The development of the new boarding house has resulted in some staff changes and these have been carefully managed to provide consistency for boarders and support to staff.

Systems are in place for the monitoring of pupils' welfare both internally and externally by the Acorn Group.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of the one listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that all the provision identified in a pupils' statement of special educational needs is provided (paragraph 1(2)(e)).

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated regulations.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- ensure that what pupils are to learn in lessons is specific, clear and shared with them and that work is suitably planned to meet their different needs and abilities
- ensure that pupils' needs which are additional to their behavioural difficulties are fully met and that a nurturing environment is provided to support the youngest pupils

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- make better use of information and communication technology to aid pupils' learning
- systematically monitor pupils' progress and make full use of all the data available to identify trends and patterns in progress so support can be targeted where it is most needed
- maintain a record of menus as served (NMS 15.4)
- include the date on risk assessments to provide evidence of review (NMS 26.3).

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Bramfield House School		
DCSF number	935/6036		
Unique reference number	124879		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1970		
Age range of pupils	10 - 18		
Gender of pupils	Male		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 48	Girls: 0	Total: 48
Number of boarders	Boys: 40	Girls: 0	Total: 40
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 48	Girls: 0	Total: 48
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls: 0	Total: 8
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,675		
Annual fees (boarders)	£48,903		
Address of school	Walpole Road Bramfield Halesworth Suffolk IP19 9AB		
Telephone number	01986 784235		
Fax number	01986 784645		
Email address	d.jennings@bramfieldhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Dee Jennings		
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education		
Reporting inspector	George Derby		
Dates of inspection	6 – 7 October 2009		