

Inspection report for Children's Home

Unique reference number	SC030367
Inspection date	02/12/2010
Inspector	Clare Davies
Type of inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	24/06/2010
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent, charitable school is also registered as a children's home. The school accommodates up to 42 boys and girls, usually aged between nine and 19. The school follows the principles of care and education developed by Rudolf Steiner. The school has residential accommodation in eight houses known as house groups. Four of the school's house groups are attached to the main school campus, the remaining four house groups are all situated within a mile or so of the school. The trust that runs the school has been accredited as an awarding centre for National Vocational Qualifications.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection assessed the service against all the key national minimum standards for children's homes. The school received three days notice. An integrated inspection of the education and welfare took place at the same time. The inspection of the organisation's independent school is reported on individually. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

This continues to be an outstanding service for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The staff work collaboratively across teams; their dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to working with students contribute to this outstanding provision. High quality care, guidance and support for students is particularly effective because it supports each individual in very specific ways and ensures all are looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment.

Students enjoy the experiences offered that includes a wide range of activities. The supportive, caring environment helps to build up the students' self-esteem, enabling them to form positive relationships. Two recommendations have been made in relation to the recording of pocket money and the safety of bathroom door locks.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no actions or recommendations made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

This service delivers outstanding health care to its students, providing a holistic approach to their physical and emotional well-being. Individual needs are identified as part of the admission process to ensure that the school can suitably meet them. Students are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles with a balanced diet, physical exercise and good personal hygiene.

Good quality food is sourced from local suppliers where possible and the menus reflect nutritious meals. Most house groups have a cook who provides lunch, students can assist care staff in preparing the evening meal. Students leave school to return to their house groups for lunch, and meals are taken as a group in a family-style setting. Students report that they like the food and can arrange an alternative if there is something on the menu they dislike. Older students in some smaller house groups are supported to shop, prepare and cook for themselves as part of their life skills programme. This helps them prepare for their independence and enjoy the benefits of cooking healthy meals for themselves.

Personal, social and health education is delivered in the classrooms, in the house groups and on an individual level. The school nurse supports this area, talking with groups and individuals about their personal development and physical changes with their bodies. A range of therapeutic support has always been available to students at this school. To improve this service, from September this year, a support centre dedicated to therapeutic services has been established off site at another location belonging to the provider. The multi-disciplinary team can provide art therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, counselling, eurythmy, play therapy, psychotherapy and speech and language therapy. The new support centre has been incorporated into the school timetable where each class attends as a group for a morning or afternoon. During this time they can attend a talking and listening group and have the opportunity to meet with a therapist for an individual session. This approach has enabled all students to access therapeutic support without any stigma of being withdrawn from classes. The support centre has been designed to be very welcoming and is resourced with an abundance of art and play materials to enable students to readily engage. Staff and therapists will formally review this aspect of the service after a full term. Initial feedback is very positive and students have engaged well, accepting weekly attendance as part of the school timetable. This has introduced therapeutic support to many students who previously were reluctant to try.

Parental consent is obtained for the administration of medication, first aid and other treatments as required for individual students. Protocols are in place for students with particular medical needs. This ensures that the student, their parents, the staff and health care professionals agree to a written plan on how to manage their medical conditions. Medication is stored securely and records are made of any administration. Not only have the staff been trained in first aid skills, but many of the students have the opportunity to attend this training. The health and medical welfare of students is monitored closely to ensure that the correct support is being provided.

Observations of any changes in students' well-being are noted and discussed to consider any changes required to medication or therapeutic input.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The utmost importance is given to the safety and well-being of students, staff and visitors. This responsibility is accepted by all staff regardless of their role within the school and is incorporated into high-quality care. Policies and training support staff with safe working practices, all staff receive a handbook on commencing their employment.

The open culture encourages students to express their views and raise any issues of concern. Student complaint forms are readily available to be completed alone or with staff support and records show that many use this procedure to raise any issues considered unjust. Students are encouraged to offer solutions and many respond in a mature sensible manner. Contact helplines are advertised in the house groups and the independent visitor attends the school at least once a month.

Good safeguarding procedures exist throughout the school. All staff are trained on how to report any concerns. The Registered Managers work well with the local authority safeguarding teams for children and adults as some students are over the age of 18 years. The Registered Managers have attended external training events with the local authority and some staff have attended training on safer recruitment practices. This is reflected in the robust recruitment procedure adopted by the school with accurate information collated on to a single central record of all staff appointments. Visitors are checked for identification and escorted around the site. These systems help protect students from unauthorised individuals gaining access.

The policy to counter bullying is clear and offers support to those who engage in such behaviour to consider the impact of their actions on others. Incidents of bullying are low and dealt with by staff. Students are encouraged to talk about any concerns of being bullied through circle time, key work sessions and with adults they can relate well to. Good staffing levels and supervision at times of transition enable a good awareness of bullying behaviours and, therefore, keep it at a low level. Staff are fully conversant with the procedures to follow if a student should go missing, there is always on-call support from a senior member of staff.

To support students in managing their behaviour and progressing in their personal development, they have targets within school and the care setting to address change in some areas of their behaviour. Staff work very closely together, exchanging information to know what each student is working towards in order that they can support them appropriately. There is a co-ordinated approach from the care staff, education staff, therapists and senior management team. This ensures that students receive a consistent response and are able to diminish some of their behaviour that may have a negative impact on themselves or others. Progress is rewarded with a grading system linked to a level of privileges for activities and independent free time.

When behaviour has an impact on the safety of a student, others and the environment, the staff attempt to diffuse the situation and provide an opportunity for the students to express themselves in a different manner. When staff need to physically intervene they follow an accredited method that they have received training on. Comprehensive records are made and an analysis of patterns and trends. Records collated into graphs clearly identify when physical intervention has occurred in the school day or the care setting. Placement plans detail likely behaviours and strategies on how they can be managed and minimised. All staff can access such plans using the school database; this promotes consistency in practice. Sanctions are recorded and monitored by senior managers, young people are often involved in determining suitable sanctions and there is an emphasis on some contribution to the school community or house group. Staff have received written guidance on the completion of reports relating to physical intervention and sanctions to ensure these records meet the regulations. Staff report that this is helpful in ensuring all the key information is reported.

Health and safety issues are taken very seriously with robust policies and procedures in place. The local fire service visited in the summer and were satisfied with fire safety procedures, no recommendations were made. Designated staff regularly check fire safety systems, and respond to reported hazards and maintenance matters. All staff are responsible for ensuring the safety of the site and they receive relevant training. Safety matters are reinforced with students through lessons, activities, fire drills, use of school transport and expectations of their behaviour. The school has given great consideration to the safety of undertaking activities, particularly off site. A list of approved activities, their location and the frequency of use has been issued. This means that every activity on the list has an in-depth risk assessment and has been visited by a member of staff. Each house group is required to plan their activities in advance and seek approval by the senior management team. Activities not on the approved list require significant notice to the senior management team for the request to be considered and approved.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The individual support available to each student is outstanding. Staff understand students and their behaviours exceptionally well and are very knowledgeable of their individual needs and the implications this has for their care. Collaborative working across the staff teams maintains the needs of each student as the focus of their work. Students develop strong relationships across the staff teams, an allocated key worker system works well supporting students within the house groups.

There is a very impressive range of activities both within the school and off-site that broaden students' experiences and contribute to their personal development. There are many opportunities to try new things relating to sports, music, art and craft. Students with particular talents are supported in developing these interests at school or in the local community. Students report that they enjoy taking part and during the

inspection students went swimming, horse riding and for night walks. The provider has purchased a local wood that is being developed as an educational facility.

Students' educational achievement is greatly enhanced through the holistic approach applied across the school. Individual Education Plans include targets incorporated into placement plans ensuring students are supported throughout their waking day. Education and care staff work closely together ensuring smooth transitions between settings to avoid disruption for students and their routines. The World Cup football competition was embraced during the summer in the classroom and with an opportunity to watch some matches. Students had some lessons on each nation's culture and history as well as sampling some traditional food of the teams playing at the time. The school ensures that students 'enjoy and achieve' as stated in one of its objectives for young people 'to assist each young person to discover their individual talents and potential and how these can be used creatively'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Individual placement plans clearly identify a student's needs and how they will be met. The placement plans address areas of risk and strategies to minimise them along with key information relating to medical, educational and social needs. The placement plan is available electronically for staff; this ensures current information is incorporated and the plan remains up to date. Ongoing assessment contributes to the regular update of these plans, formal reviews take place to consider the statement of special education and for children looked after by local authorities. The complex needs panel is a forum to raise any concerns or changes to a student's plan. Serious decisions are discussed at the placement meetings attended by a Registered Manager, the head teacher and chief executive of the organisation.

Students are supported in maintaining contact with their families where appropriate. To ensure a safer use of mobile telephones, the school offers a basic model to students that has no internet access or camera facilities.

Students may choose to have a mobile phone with a camera providing they follow the contract agreement of appropriate use. In addition, students can use school phones privately and they each have a school email account. Parents are kept informed of their child's progress and school events through monthly distribution of the daily records, reviews and newsletters.

Attention to detail is given to any student joining the school. The move is considered carefully and planned at a pace that is commensurate with each student's ability to cope with the transition. Similarly, when students leave they receive support in preparing them for change and to move on. There is great value placed on the views and opinions of the students. Discussion is encouraged in house group settings, individually and more formally through the school council. Students have contributed to decisions on changes to the uniform, the young person's guide and the school newsletters. The students contributed well to the inspection by welcoming the inspectors with great hospitality, talking proudly about their school and showing

examples of their hobbies and activities. Students are encouraged to make a positive contribution in the school and within the local community; inspectors observed many students supporting each other and offering kindness. Some students assist with grounds and maintenance staff at the sites owned by the provider and some help with gardening.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Independent living skills are promoted throughout the classroom and the house groups. This varies from managing personal hygiene without prompting to cooking a simple meal or using public transport. The strong links between education and care support the development of life skills. For example, the value and use of money will be addressed in the classroom and then practised through spending pocket money whilst out on trips and activities. Students are supported to integrate in the local communities using leisure facilities, restaurants and shops. There were some administrative errors noted in the records of students' pocket money. However, students were not being disadvantaged and received the correct amount.

There are eight house groups and they are all in very good decorative order providing a homely environment. Young people like their bedrooms and the sense of belonging to each house group. Bedrooms can be personalised with photographs, posters and choice of duvet covers and soft furnishings. Regular visits by a health and safety officer ensure maintenance matters are dealt with promptly. One house group bathroom does not have a suitable lock, to ensure that staff are able to gain access in an emergency.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All staff have received training in this area and the school celebrates difference. The World Cup competition provided an opportunity to focus on different nations; this was encompassed within the curriculum and the care setting. The school has formed links with a project in Romania and a school in Zimbabwe. Staff members have visited each project and contributed books, IT support and equipment. Students have been corresponding with letters and pictures and developing an awareness of their contrasting worlds. Specific religious beliefs are not promoted; many festivals and celebrations are observed including selected Steiner festivals. Staff receive training on the origin of many festivals to ensure they understand their true meaning.

The school is organised and managed in a manner that delivers and maintains an outstanding level of care. The two appointed Registered Managers have the expertise, skills and knowledge to effectively manage the residential provision with clearly defined roles. They contribute to the senior management team and the cohesion of this group is a strength of the school with a determination to continually

raise standards in the delivery of care and education to the students. There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the complex needs of the students and to support them in their activities. Any staff absences are covered from within the staff team. Unit managers and senior members of staff regularly work on shift in the house groups to have direct monitoring of the service delivered and to be available to students and staff. This ensures they have a full understanding of day-to-day issues and how young people and staff are feeling.

Excellent training opportunities are provided for all staff regardless of post. Several staff are trained and skilled to deliver some training directly to staff. For other areas, external training providers are used. A dedicated training day of the week shows what commitment this provider gives to professional development and a fully trained workforce. All care staff are trained or working towards a National Vocational Qualification at level 3 and four unit managers have achieved level 4 with another four currently working towards this award. The training department is preparing for a new accredited qualification from 2011.

There are sound established systems to monitor care practices and the development of the service. Through self-evaluation this school strives to further improve and raise standards for the benefit of students.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that children's money is held in safe keeping for them and children sign the records. In particular, ensure that all staff understand the correct use of record keeping to avoid administrative errors with pocket money (NMS 11.8)
- ensure that staff (not children) are able to open the doors to bathrooms, showers and toilets from the outside in case of emergency (NMS 25.6).