

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Clare Davies
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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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 seven houses known as house groups. Three 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

This inspection was announced with short notice given. The inspection focused on all the key national minimum standards for children's homes. The school provides outstanding outcomes for young people, two recommendations have been made relating to record keeping and fire safety.

This school adopts a proactive approach and strives to develop and raise standards to improve the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of young people. Staff across all departments work extremely well together for the shared goal in caring safely for the young people and providing opportunities for individuals to succeed. To complement this holistic approach there are therapists and health professionals that make up a multi-disciplinary team.

Young people benefit from enthusiastic staff who feel supported in their professional development through excellent training opportunities. Young people enjoy the activities available and the individual support to meet their social and academic targets and to develop their life skills. The senior management team demonstrate effective leadership and bring together care and education for the shared focus of young people.

Parents think highly of this school with comments such as;

'I feel the staff do a fantastic job in helping my son with his special needs',

'I think this is a brilliant school they have certainly helped my daughter thrive in the short time she has been there',

'The school provides an outstanding level of care, guidance and education for my son',

'The staff must be commended for their knowledge of complex emotional and behavioural difficulties and for their ability to significantly improve the life chances of challenging children'.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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.

Young people receive outstanding health care and are supported in adopting healthy active lifestyles. They enjoy a nutritious, varied diet provided mainly from local organic produce. Meals are taken in house groups where staff and young people prepare breakfast and evening meals. A cook is present in most of the houses to provide a wholesome cooked lunch, some young people prepare their own lunch and evening meal as part of their life skills programme. Young people report that they enjoy the food and have opportunities to learn skills in shopping and preparing simple meals and snacks. A weekly menu on display in each house informs young people of the meals planned. Alternative meals can be arranged if requested. In addition to a healthy diet, young people are encouraged to be involved in physical exercise and an activities programme supports this. In response to requests from young people games consoles involving physical exercises have been provided across the school, these are popular particularly when bad weather limits outdoor activities.

Personal, social and health education is delivered throughout the school; in the classroom, by the nurse and from residential staff. Health and medical needs are assessed as part of the admission process and thereafter routine and special health and medical care is provided through the care staff and the school nurse who maintains close links with a local GP surgery and community health services. In addition there is a multi-disciplinary team who can provide speech and language therapy, art therapy, eurythmy movement therapy, counselling, psychology and psychotherapy. The therapists are based at the school and are available to work with individual students, offer group work, and provide training and advice to the care and education staff teams on managing complex needs.

The school nurse co-ordinates the medical care of young people and delivers training to care and education staff in the administration of medication, first aid and particular skills required to meet individual medical needs. Individual records are maintained of any medication and treatment given by the school nurse and in the house groups. Central records are not held in the school surgery therefore hindering any stock check. This has minimal impact on the safety of young people as there are sound systems in place and clear records are made as to what medication is stored securely in each house. The nurse and senior staff undertake monitoring visits to check that medication and records are being dealt with in line with school policies and procedures. Regular appointments are maintained with local dentists and opticians. A young person reported in a questionnaire, 'they do their best to make sure we are okay and help us to get better. We have a wonderful school nurse who is always happy to see us'. This represents the majority view of young people.

Records show that young people with specific medical needs have a clear protocol on how these should be managed. These have been written in consultation with young people, their parents and health professionals. Parental consent is obtained for the administration of medication, first aid, and other treatments. Staff are very observant and report any health concerns to the nurse. For example this has led to identification of a hearing loss and the need for some physiotherapy. A regular group known as the complex needs panel meets to discuss young people who have been identified as needing some level of support. This could be medical, emotional or behavioural and the panel come up with suggested medical or therapeutic support tailored to suit individual students. This meeting enables a holistic view to be taken and draws on the skills and resources within the school to respond.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The welfare and safety of young people is paramount and incorporated into high quality care practices. Staff balance their levels of supervision with the need to promote and respect young people's privacy. Policies on safe working practices protect young people and staff.

There is a formal complaints procedure available and records show that young people feel able to freely contact staff and the managers to express any worries, complaints or concerns. A manager looks into any reported complaint and ensures that the young person is informed of the outcome. There is a strong commitment to ensuring all staff are aware of the child protection procedures. Staff are informed of their responsibility to protect and report any concerns, this is explained during their induction and refreshed with training annually. The school appropriately liaises with the local authority and senior staff receive training from the local safeguarding children's board. Young people are encouraged to consider the impact their behaviour may have on others. This can involve social skills and personal behaviour plans. Measures to counter any bullying are reinforced through discussion with individuals or as a group, with policies visible on notice boards.

Young people report that some bullying does occur and they feel confident that staff deal with it with comments such as; 'The school sets sanctions when bullying occurs', 'I put in a complaint form and they dealt with it'. Good staffing levels reduce the opportunities for incidents of bullying.

Policies and procedures are in place if a young person should go missing. Staff are skilled to respond to individuals, knowing when a young person needs space to calm down and when to report them as missing. Comprehensive placement plans incorporate risk assessments. They include strategies to support young people and identify how to reduce known or likely risks. Daily record books for each young person describe incidents of positive interaction and any unusual or challenging behaviour. This information is collated daily towards the ongoing assessment of young people's needs. Information relating to any physical intervention and sanction is highlighted amongst senior staff to respond quickly to any changes required in how a young person is being supported. In-depth analysis of all physical interventions is undertaken by a registered manager, this information is used to identify patterns and trends and then strategies are employed to reduce such interventions. All staff are suitably trained in de-escalation and physical intervention techniques through an accredited training programme. Parents are fully informed of behaviour management programmes used at the school and are kept informed about their child. One parent reported, 'the staff handle any conflicts very well to make sure all children are kept safe' and this was confirmed by other comments such as, 'the staff at the school and the house respond very well to any incidents which may place the young person at risk.' Young people report that staff help them and when asked what is this school good at doing? a young person stated, 'helping you control your behaviour'.

Excellent communication between care and education teams ensure a consistent response is given to young people. The bringing together of the headteacher, the two registered managers, the school nurse, the psychotherapist and the chief executive to form the complex needs panel ensures that there is a holistic view of young people when making decisions. A social worker reported 'this school works hard to safeguard the children in their care. They show a lot of commitment to their supporting role and young people are encouraged to achieve.'

The school site and house groups are well maintained with regular monitoring by a designated health and safety officer. Environmental and fire risk assessments have been undertaken

appropriately and these are reviewed. Records show that regular fire drills take place as well as routine servicing of equipment and appliances. Fire safety training is delivered to all staff as part of their induction programme, however two doors were inappropriately propped open with fire extinguishers. There are safe policies for the use of transport and the provision of six people carriers to replace minibuses has been greatly welcomed by young people, reducing the stigma of identifiable school transport. As the vehicles are not as large as minibuses they can park in the rear car park providing greater safety away from the main road. There are regular safety checks of gas and electrical appliances. There is a robust recruitment procedure adopting good practice for safer recruitment. Recruitment is managed centrally by key people ensuring checks have been completed before permitting new staff to care for young people. Staff accompany visitors while in the home and these visits are monitored and recorded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent individual support from a variety of sources within the school and externally. Care staff, education staff, the nurse and the therapy team work together to provide the best package of care, tailored to the individual. Support staff in administration, catering, cleaning, maintenance and gardening contribute significantly to the community and young people benefit from this whole school team approach. The residential experience provides the opportunity to develop personal and social skills. These skills help them with their independence, self-esteem and in forming positive relationships with their peers and adults. Individual care targets are set and reviewed frequently. Targets for independence could lead to shopping and cooking a meal or a smaller but equally significant step forward such as packing their school bag with appropriate equipment. A social worker contributed to the inspection by saying, ' I would like to thank the staff and relevant key workers for enabling the young people to feel valued regardless of their individual complex needs.'

A grading system applies to individual support, independence and the amount of supervision required by staff. The top level provides recognition for young people who have made considerable progress in gaining independence, making a positive contribution and being a positive role model to others. Targets set with regards to behaviour are reinforced by care staff and praised appropriately. The recording systems and monthly reports recognise progress and achievement. Staff are proactive in seeking guidance and support from senior managers and the therapy team. A recent development is the provision of a separate house to provide a respite break for a young person in crisis. This allows space for the young person, away from their peer group, and provide an opportunity for staff to support them and avoid the need for a temporary suspension.

There is a wealth of activities available to young people at an individual level and as a group. A weekly activity plan is displayed in each house, young people contribute to the programme making requests for their favourite activities. Local sports facilities are used including a climbing wall, dri ski slope, golf range and riding stables. There are trips to the cinema, drama groups and youth clubs. Some individuals are supported in joining local clubs for first aid, football, youth groups and other special interests. On site there are some good resources for young people to enjoy such as music, art, cooking, computers, a library, board games, construction toys, DVD films and a games console with interactive games. The location and surrounding area provides fantastic opportunities for outdoor pursuits and the recent snowfall provided a rare opportunity to be creative with snow.

Education is viewed as an integral part of young people's development. Education targets are separate to care targets but may have similar themes. There are four handover points throughout the school day where teaching and care staff can share aspects of the young person's day. Some care staff may provide support in the classrooms and some education staff may work in the residential setting. These arrangements and the good communication between the education and care teams contribute to the consistency and continuity of care and the effective management of the young people. There are links with local colleges and Connexions. Work experience placements are available in the community and with the gardening team at a local care home for adults owned by the trust. Pocket money is available for every student to develop life skills and understand the value of money as they are supported on shopping trips and encouraged to save.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Prior to a young person arriving at this school, information is gathered towards an assessment as to how their needs can be met. This involves the young person, their parents and sometimes social workers who are all invited to visit as many times as they wish. Following a visit, a three day assessment period observes the young person further identifying their needs and their ability to respond to group living. Once the placement is confirmed a plan is produced for each young person, these documents are of a very good standard clearly setting out how the home will meet the assessed needs and key responsibilities of those involved. Staff can only access the placement plans electronically through the school network, this ensures that they are always referring to the most current plan. A manager takes responsibility for updating the plans and has access to paper documents in the event that the computer system fails.

Statutory review meetings occur at six monthly intervals and there is an annual review to look at educational progress. In reality the progress and development of young people is reviewed informally on a daily basis, monthly with a written report and there is the possibility of review at the complex needs panel. Any areas of a placement plan that need to be changed are dealt with promptly, this is a proactive service where the care of young people is not permitted to drift. Contact arrangements with family and friends are encouraged and supported where appropriate. To support families who live some distance away a property has been identified to be refurbished in order to offer a meeting place for visitors with overnight accommodation available. Parents report that communication from the school is very good, some describe it as 'excellent'.

During the initial assessment period of visiting, young people are provided with a guide to the school. This document has lots of information and is decorated with colour print, pictures and photographs. A smaller document with photographs across the site provides an insight into the trust. Young people are supported by staff and other young people to settle in and learn about house rules and routines. There are opportunities to meet with key staff to help identify who does what and what they look like. As young people prepare to leave, transition planning is implemented and some may require additional support as anxieties increase about moving on to something new. In consultation with young people, parents and placing authorities appointments may be made to visit prospective schools, colleges, residential care and semi-independent placements. There is recognition of achievement and the time spent at the school to wish young people well and future success. Post-placement support is available if identified as suitable for the young person.

Consultation and involvement of young people in decision making is integral to daily life at this school. Circle time in each house group at key points throughout the day offer an opportunity to share thoughts and contribute to the planning of the day. Consultation occurs within a group and on an individual level acknowledging some young people use communication methods such as Makaton, in addition to verbal skills. As a result of listening to young people there have been changes in activities, the replacement of minibuses with large vehicles, installation of DVD players in each house, purchase of a games console for each house and the provision to learn and play musical instruments. A member of the therapy team holds a regular 'talking and listening' group that gathers young people's views on a variety of topics.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Independent living skills are promoted through the classroom and house groups and linked to personal targets. Two of the house groups are specifically set up to prepare young people for independent living with less staff supervision and support compared to other house groups. Support is given in managing finances, completing forms, using public transport, participation with community facilities such as shops, libraries and leisure centres and maintaining a clean and safe living environment. Degrees of independence and life skills are taught throughout all the house groups appropriate to individual young people's ages and levels of maturity.

The seven house groups are all in good decorative order providing homely accommodation. The general standard of accommodation is good and the young people like their environment. Toilet and bathroom areas are suitable and the school is in the process of upgrading these areas in every house. There is a maintenance and refurbishment programme across the house groups identifying priority areas. The maintenance team are committed to ensuring that the young people have a safe and homely environment with prompt attention to any repairs. Each house provides good access to gardens and grounds giving young people the option to have some space outside the building.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. To support staff in their practice in relation to these areas a training module has been delivered by lecturers from a local university. This has included supporting specific cultural needs, exploring world religions, outside speakers who have experienced adversity due to their cultural background and holding African drumming and singing sessions. The trust supports a library project for children in Zimbabwe and has donated and installed some computers to a care home for children in Romania. Staff have visited these projects and returned sharing their experiences of the cultural differences with staff and young people. A pen pal system is being set up with the children in Romania by using the computers.

Young people are taught an awareness of their special needs and prepared for some difficulties they may encounter from intolerant members of the public. The house groups cater for male and females living together and the multi-disciplinary staff team reflects diversity through age, gender and ethnicity. The school does not promote specific religious beliefs and practices, it observes many festivals and celebrations taken from various faiths and cultures. Young people are supported if they wish to participate in religious worship.

The statement of purpose reflects the service provided and is further supported by a website and brochures. Staff training is given a high priority and staff are supported with an induction through to regular supervision and an appraisal of their work. As an award centre for national vocational qualifications, there is a strong commitment to support staff through these awards. This involves awards for care staff, domestic staff and catering. In addition to mandatory training there has been further training such as: engaging in the environment (delivered by the local university), Rudolf Steiner principles and an introduction to art therapy and many more. The managers recognise the strength of a qualified and motivated staff team and therefore invest well into a comprehensive training programme. One day a week is dedicated to training with sessions repeated to ensure all relevant staff can attend.

There are suitable staffing levels with cover for absence absorbed amongst the staff team, avoiding the need to approach an agency. There are two registered managers who have delegated tasks but jointly take on the responsibility of residential care. The senior management team work well together and provide effective leadership across the school. There is always a senior member of staff designated on duty and is available by telephone or in person if required. The commitment and dedication from the staff is a strength of the school. Staff report that they feel supported in their work through clear policies, teamwork and excellent training opportunities. A restructure of the staffing has led to the appointment of a unit manager for each house group (one manager will be responsible for the two smaller house groups). This single role replaces three team leaders and is supernumerary, therefore increasing staffing levels. The unit manager role will improve consistency and leadership within each house. Registered managers will be able to cascade information to unit managers where previously the shift pattern of team leaders had the potential to lack continuity of information.

There are systems in place to monitor the care of young people and the development of the service. House groups undertake some of their own monitoring, supported by a designated health and safety officer. One of the registered managers takes a lead in the quality assurance of the service and undertakes his own monitoring visits to the house groups. The complex needs panel provides another forum for monitoring care practices. A consultant is invited to undertake monthly monitoring visits reporting directly to the chief executive. This school is very proactive in securing innovative ways of working with vulnerable young people. A social worker stated, 'I would recommend this school any time for their professionalism, knowledge, patience and dedication to the cause'.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that the records held by the nurse in the surgery form a central record and facilitate a stock check (NMS 13)
- ensure that fire safety equipment is not used to prop open doors (NMS 26).