

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Dawn Taylor / Carole Moore
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Date of last inspection	16 October 2008
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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 provision is a children's home registered by Ofsted and a 52 week independent residential special school, registered and approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) for boys and girls aged six to 18 years with severe and complex learning needs. It has 10 residential homes with places for a total of 72 children. All students' have a statement of special educational needs and are funded, currently, by 38 local authorities. Many who enter this service have had several unsuccessful placements in previous schools. Each home is managed by a team leader and line managed through the Care Management team and the Head of Care.

The homes are as follows and accommodate the following number and age range of children:

Beech is a group home that accommodates six children and young people over 14 years,

Birch is a group home that accommodates 11 children and young people under 16 years,

Bracken is a group home that accommodates seven children and young people under 14 years,

Maple is a group home that accommodates three children and young people under 16 years,

Elm is a group home that accommodates seven young people over 14 years,

Firs is a group home that accommodates seven young people over 14 years,

Orchard is a group home that accommodates seven children and young people under 16 years,

Home Farm is a group home that accommodates four young people over 14 years,

Oak is a group home that accommodates six children and young people under 16 years and

Rowen is a group home that accommodates six children and young people under 16 years.

This service is a charitable organisation run by a board of trustees.

Summary

This service was inspected over three days by an integrated inspection team made up of two education inspectors and two social care inspectors. It was a full inspection that looked at the key standards from the Children's Homes National Minimum Standards and previous recommendation.

The overall outcome judgement for this service is good. Being healthy and enjoying and achieving are judged to be outstanding. Positive contribution, economic wellbeing and organisation are judged to be good.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The provision continues to demonstrate commitment to ensuring the service meets National Minimum Standards.

At the last inspection visit, the provider was required to continue to train staff to Level 3, to ensure the right mix of skills and qualified staff on duty. The setting continues to make good progress in addressing this requirement but have not yet met the 80%.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The physical, emotional and mental health needs of each student are actively identified and promoted by a skilled professional team of staff that include a team of nurses, speech and language therapists, psychologist, occupational therapists, an art therapist, care and education staff. From initial assessment, throughout schooling and on through to transition the school provides students' with appropriate guidance, advice and support on health and personal care issues. This is delivered through a range of forums that include social stories, individual discussions with key staff and the school curriculum.

Each individual student's particular health needs are identified in their health plan, which sits alongside an educational and care plan. These are monitored and reviewed by the nursing team and other core staff on a regular basis.

Students' health needs are further promoted by an informative range of policies and procedures that are known to all staff and proactively implemented in practice. Information on health and wellbeing, and teaching aids related to these areas, are produced in formats appropriate to students. For example, social stories and symbols are used to help individual's learn intimate care tasks.

All staff, including ancillary staff, receive induction and ongoing training on speech, language and communication, first aid and other health related topics. All senior staff administering medication undertake safe storage, handling and administration of medication training. The nursing team also undertakes a monthly audit of the houses' storage, administration and records of medicines.

Students' are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs by a team of experienced catering staff who are integral to the life of the school. Students' are encouraged to eat a healthy diet and fresh fruit is always available in the houses. Menus are on display and students' can choose from a wide selection of meals. Vegetarian and culturally appropriate foods are available. Mealtimes are seen as social events that help students' with differing communication difficulties improve their social interactions. The school's kitchen has recently been awarded the top five star rating by the environmental health authority.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Student's privacy and dignity is respected and there are policies and procedures covering privacy and confidentiality. Staff are able to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of them in their day-to-day practice. Confidential information is shared appropriately with regard to child protection and information regarding the students is stored in a secure location. All

staff as part of their induction learn how to undertake personal care, however, they are not able to undertake any intimate care until they have completed behaviour management training and safeguarding training. This rule also applies to agency staff.

Whilst no formal complaints have been raised since the last inspection the provision has processes in place to manage complaints and concerns quickly and to resolve complaints in a manner students' and their families both understand and can agree with. Parents and carers are fully aware of the complaints process and staff use an outstanding variety of communication aids to help young people raise any particular issues. Students' are assisted to communicate their concerns through the use of the 'Listen Up' pack promoted by Mencap. This is specifically designed to help children and young people with learning disabilities complain about the service they receive. Staff are also trained in and promote the use of this tool to assist students' in communicating their views.

The quality of relationships between staff and students' is outstanding and reinforces the very caring atmosphere that can be witnessed throughout the school. Students' receive clear information about countering bullying. Staff are very clear that any form of behaviour that causes distress to others, regardless of intent, is treated as a serious matter. Staff are provided with effective procedures to investigate any incidents and monitor outcomes. Students' are also provided with a clear statement that is set out in the 'Golden Rules' handout for students. This communicates a clear description of the expected standards of behaviour, which encompasses the ethos and principles of the setting. Staff respond positively and calmly to challenging behaviour. A new system of managing challenging behaviour has been introduced and this is in its early stages of practice. Staff receive outstanding support and guidance from the psychology department and there is regular monitoring and reflection of practice. Clear records are maintained of sanctions and physical interventions.

Students' are being kept safe because staff demonstrate a clear understanding of what their key role and responsibilities are in terms of protection. All staff undertake child protection training, which is regularly updated. However, level 2 training for the designated safeguarding officers has lapsed beyond the every two years as stated in DCSF guidance Safeguarding Children and Safe Recruitment in Education 2007. The school contacted the local authority during the inspection and the four designated safeguarding officers are booked on refresher training.

The school has regularly updated risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds including fire, and students' behaviour and activities. These assessments are taken into account in the daily activities of the school as well as the houses and any activities off site and enable students' to fully participate in activities, which could potentially present significant or unusual hazards. This further ensures the overall health and safety of the students'. However, areas have been identified both in the grounds and in the houses of risk assessments that have not been carried out effectively.

Students' are protected by the setting's robust recruitment systems that ensures all staff employed complete the necessary recruitment checks and are deemed suitable to work before commencement of employment. A high number of key staff have recently attended safer recruitment training, this demonstrates the school's continuing commitment to the further development of the staff vetting procedures. The school does not currently follow up all written references with a verbal check, that is recorded in writing. This would add an additional element

to the recruitment process that is a higher standard applied to services other than children's homes and would further safeguard children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Students' receive individualised assistance, with appropriate assessments and plans in place. Considerable effort is put into combining social, emotional, educational, care and health needs into a package, which will not only meet identified needs but promotes development. The individual houses use a variety of communication systems to meet the needs of the students', these include Picture Exchange Communication (PECS), signalong, photos and symbols. This promotes the school's commitment to ensuring students' are presented with genuine and meaningful choices that they can understand.

Students' spiritual development is outstanding. Students' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence are strong because they are valued within the school community and their contributions and efforts are noticed and rewarded.

There is an established policy and ethos that promotes positive outcomes for students' education. Students' receive excellent support and encouragement with their educational attainment. The setting provides a 24-hour educational curriculum and all students' have a Statement of Special Educational Need as well as an individual plan. Good links are maintained between the residential settings and the educational staff and this positive partnership works to enable students' to reach their full potential.

Students' education is further promoted through opportunities for participating in the further education curriculum for students from 16 to 19 years. The further education curriculum sets measurable standards of achievement over a three year study period. The programme permits students' to be assessed and to achieve accreditation that is nationally recognised. The outcomes for students' are positive and important for building and developing confident young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Students are respected as individuals and are supported by clear plans, which reflect their needs and wishes. These plans include behavioural development plans and risk assessments, which enable young people to maintain their levels of independence in a safe manner. The homes are currently in a phase of transition as they are changing systems and developing student development plans, which will ensure that education, care and psychology all work together in a holistic way to effectively meet students' needs. The targets set for each student are regularly monitored and adapted to ensure maximum progress is made.

Students' are encouraged, enabled and supported to contribute to their care by using a variety of communication aids. 'Communication passports' are a really effective way to engage with the students' and staff are imaginative and use a variety of social stories to enable students' to talk through their feelings. The student council is another avenue for consultation and students' are pleased and proud to be members. Opportunities to discuss issues are accessible to all, through elected members of the student council, at house meetings, during circle time and in lessons. Important ethical values are often topics for whole school assembly.

Students' social development is very strong and reflects the whole school ethos in which staff are excellent role models. Students' are supported to understand and become involved in the wellbeing and happiness of others around them. Students' make effective contributions to community life and enjoy raising money for charities. For example, coffee mornings raised money for the MacMillan Trust.

The preferred mode of communication for contact with parents is held on file for each student. A real strength in this setting is the family resource centre, which offers an outstanding service to families. Staff work hard in developing partnerships with parents and encourage contact visits on a regular basis. The family flat, which is housed in the main school building, provides the opportunities for whole families to stay on site and spend time with their child.

Family services also ensure that a student moves into the setting in a planned and sensitive manner. The team provide outstanding support and guidance to all new students' and their families. Visits are made to the family and a pre admission assessment is carried out to ensure there is a full and detailed picture of the student. Families then visit the site with their child to enable the transition to be successful.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Students' are well supported with their transitional move when they approach adulthood. There is a dedicated worker who ensures that the move is well-planned and both the student and the family are well prepared and have a good understanding of these next steps in the student's life. Staff complete a profile of the student who is leaving plus their communication passport, thus providing all the relevant details about specific needs to ensure a successful transition. Staff work hard to enable students' to have regular opportunities to develop practical skills and social skills for future supported living.

The school has a very good standard of accommodation for its students'. The school site is in the process of being significantly developed and refurbished. A new purpose built educational building is about to be opened and has been completed to an outstanding standard. The school works to a development plan that continues to identify areas of development with timescales for completion. This work demonstrates the commitment by the school to continue to promote the facilities available to students' and staff on site.

The accommodation provided for students' is very comfortable, well heated and lit. Students' can choose to decorate their bedrooms and many are personalised, which helps them take pride in their surroundings as well as helping them to develop ownership of the environment.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Students' continue to benefit from a well-managed service that is having a positive impact on the quality of their care and education. The setting has an up-to-date Statement of Purpose that fully discusses what support and help can be expected from the school and children's home. The information is comprehensive and effectively communicated. Staff are aware of the key principles and philosophy of the service and share this clear vision.

The standard of care is outstanding and promotes positive relationships between students' and adults. The care setting, with its excellent support and guidance through a clear management structure, is successful at meeting its aims to foster social awareness and mutual respect within the school community, by encouraging a happy and caring atmosphere through a professional and motivating environment. All staff, teaching and non-teaching, are committed to providing an exceptional level of support and guidance for all students'. The staff are excellent role models, demonstrating courtesy to students', parents' and visitors' to the school, and this contributes to the school's positive ethos.

Students' are looked after by staff who are themselves proactively supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting students' welfare and meeting their individual needs. All staff receive a comprehensive induction, regular supervision and annual appraisals. All staff are provided with comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance that promotes the strong values and ethos of the school. Staff continue to receive a comprehensive range of in-house training to ensure their childcare practice remains up-to-date. This is a strong point of the setting. As a result, staff are suitably trained to support the diverse needs of the children and young people with complex learning needs.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The environment promotes the individual and diverse identities of students' and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding. The setting provides students' with excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It successfully fulfils its aims of developing and extending students' in a spiritual, cultural and social sense and fostering social awareness and mutual respect within the community.

This service has substantial strengths and where areas for improvement emerge the management team recognises and manages them well. There are very clear lines of management and communication. The senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as complaints, child protection and discipline logs.

Regulation 33 and Regulation 34 visits are well established and valued by staff and management. This internal monitoring and regulation ensures praise and acknowledgement of good practice but also addresses shortfalls with an appropriate measure of rigor.

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 Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
26	ensure all assessments of risk are carried out to a high standard and identify and address all concerns across site - Regulation 23	31 July 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all designated safeguarding officers receive local authority level 2 safeguarding training, with refresher training every two years NMS 17.8 and Safeguarding children and Safe Recruitment in Education 2007
- ensure all written references are followed up by a verbal check, that is recorded in writing prior to a staff members employment NMS 27.1.
- ensure that 80% of the workforce are qualified to NVQ Level 3 Regulation 25, 26 and 27