

Helen Alison School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Lucy Ansell
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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

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society, moving to its present site in Meopham in 1991. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder aged 5-19 years of age. The school is situated on the edge of the village in a semi-rural area close to a park with an adventure playground, shops, mainstream schools, library and railway station. The residential provision is situated several miles away from the school building on the Overcliffe at Gravesend. The residential provision comprises the Junior and Senior Houses and two flats based in a third house occupied by senior pupils of the school. All of the houses are Victorian and are within close proximity of each other. The aim of the school is to 'provide education specifically geared to meet the needs of children and young people with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder in a safe, stimulating and structured environment to enable each individual to reach his/her fullest potential and to prepare him/her for adulthood as full and equal members of society'.

Summary

This was an announced inspection completed over two days by one inspector. All of the key standards were inspected and the recommendations from last year's inspection were reviewed. This school offers a high level of care and support to pupils, from a competent multidisciplinary team. There is a complete wrap around service for boarding pupils with total integration between the residential and educational staff and services. There are excellent communication and behaviour management systems in place for pupils with special needs and good contact and support given to families. The school also has a very high ratio of specialist staff to assist in both the school and the residential site. The overall residential buildings were both practical and homely with nice clean furnishings and décor.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The residential homes were advised to ensure evidence of consent and consultation for sharing rooms was evidenced in the young peoples' files; this has now been provided. The recommendations made concerning the personnel files have been implemented. It was recommended the school provide detail of title and start date, with a copy of a photo. It was also recommended that a file audit sheet be included in the files and any missing information pre the Care Standards be included on this sheet. The staff had no budget for buying birthday or Christmas presents for pupils; now the friends and associates of the school fund raise and have taken this issue forward. The school was encouraged to adopt better consultation processes particularly with regard to the older pupils. The school had a blanket policy with regards to alcohol, prohibiting young people over the legal age making informed choices. This policy has now changed and the young persons who are eligible can make full choices regarding their use of this.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Individual medical care plans for each boarder are kept securely at all the houses. These are comprehensive and clear, and kept under constant review. They include signed parental consent

forms for medical treatment and first aid. The school and the houses maintain a record of any allergies and the current medication being administered. Parents give written permission to administer homely remedies. The staff supports the parents to access regular and specialist health care services, but it does have links with the local surgery if needed. The school provides an excellent multi disciplinary team to ensure the students' health outcomes are being met in a multi faceted approach. Communication and behavioural support from the school's team of speech and language therapists and educational psychologists are crucial to the overall development of the pupils health and well being. Virtually the entire staff team is first aid trained. Staff training is cascaded down to them on administering medication and ensuring the medication administration record sheets are correctly filled in. However, the school does not record how it ensures this training demonstrates competent practice. The school ensures a robust safe system is in place for transporting medications to and from school and home. The medication policies and procedures are comprehensive. The meals provided by the school's catering team continue to be of an excellent standard and the school is hoping to achieve the Healthy Schools status. The food served is wholesome and nutritious and a variety of choices are offered. In the main, students commented positively on the food and confirm the homes and school continues to seek regular feedback from them with regards to menu, personal choices and quality. Favourite foods, allergies and other dietary requirements and preferences are recorded in boarders' files, reviewed and provided for, in practice. Pupils are enabled to make choices at meal times through various systems of communication. The main kitchen is clean and the area is well equipped and maintained. Snacks and drinks are provided within each residential area and the boarders are enabled to be as independent as possible in preparing their own snacks and drinks. All the students spoken to embraced healthy eating and offering a healthy lifestyles was taken into account when looking at activities and choices.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The working practice of the staff team serves to protect the privacy of boarders and clear procedural guidance is implemented to ensure information of a confidential nature is appropriately safeguarded and shared. Boarders are confident their concerns and issues are effectively listened and responded to. They simply tell staff if they are unhappy about anything and are happy that is subsequently dealt with. The complaints form for the boarders to use is child friendly and available in two formats, however, the school does not centrally record all the various issues from the different houses. Boarders say that instances of bullying do happen; a high number of these are historical recollections but say the school effectively implements its own guidance. The subject is also covered in assemblies, PHSE and house meetings. They say they feel safe. All matters pertaining to child protection are comprehensively and robustly covered. Training in this field is mandatory every year within school inset day and all staff are invited to attend. Policies and procedures are congruent with legislation, and training material from the local Social Services safeguarding team is used. Every member of staff from every discipline is familiar with child protection procedures and takes their own roles and responsibilities very seriously. Procedures for reporting significant events and unauthorised absences are in place and understood, though actual occurrences are very rare. The staff team has received appropriate training in the use of physical interventions, though the school has changed the provider of this training. So now far greater emphasis is placed upon rewarding positive behaviour and using de - escalation techniques before invoking physical means as a last resort. The policy on behaviour management is clear and concise. Observations of working practices further demonstrate that boarders enjoy positive relationships with their care givers,

with appropriate boundaries being understood by all parties. The Bursar retains an overall responsibility for health and safety matters. Alongside the Head of Residential, he's taken responsibility for the residential areas falling under this heading. This has resulted in a complete audit of all health and safety matters, including fire, security and premises; risk assessments for activities have been completed. Fire records and evacuation practises are up to date; the school has adequate insurance cover and electrical and gas appliances are safe. Risk assessments are subject to ongoing review and completed for every outing and signed by a senior member of staff. Boarding areas offer a safe environment, all windows are suitably restricted and hot water temperatures are regulated. The recruitment policy is sound. The school's recruitment process is robust and serves to ensure thorough vetting. Staff personnel records support this with all required information on the staff files. The personnel staff hold too much CRB information on file.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff work across the teaching, residential and therapy teams to ensure a seamless approach is followed between school and boarding. Boarder's development is seen as part of the 24 hour curriculum, which continues in the residential units and is not restricted to the academic part of the school. The therapy team have a flexible timetable which allows them to spend time in school and boarding and after school clubs further enhance educational and social development. This is assisted by a whole team approach in identifying and setting educational and social targets for pupils. The houses provide quiet areas and time to complete homework and the school is looking to install wireless free internet to the houses during summer renovations. The wide range of evening activities also help contribute to the encouragement of personal and social development. Personal education/contact books go home for parents to also work at set targets. The quality of life for boarders is excellent and excels in promoting their independence and ensuring they are always offered a choice. Appropriate and meaningful leisure activities are provided. Boarders are particularly positive about this aspect of service provision. An abundance of opportunities is already in place, regarding participation in the community and local school links are well established. Other examples of regular activities include bowling, cinema, Cubs, ice skating and accessing local parks. The school also run a separate respite service during the weekends and holidays, again specifically for autistic young people. Care files detailed very clearly the individual and specific needs of each boarder. This aspect is very carefully explored throughout the assessment process and thereafter, through annual reviews. The school continues to provide a high level of individualised support to boarders from all multidisciplinary teams. Communication systems and behaviour programmes are well established. They are a crucial element of the individualised support delivered, in order for boarders to progress. Boarders are allocated with a key worker, however, they are encouraged to develop appropriate relationships with all of their care givers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school actively engages boarders in meaningful consultation. The student council is in the process of being set up. Boarders have recently been actively involved with staff recruitment. Each house has student meetings which they are enabled to participate and be fully involved, given some boarders are non-verbal. The Person Centred Approach used also encourages boarders to discuss their own needs and wants and is an aid to decision making. The school

has celebration ceremonies termly and weekly achievement assemblies, with Pupil of the week for every class and special mentions, for example, sports or activity merit, being kind or coping with a disappointment really well. This has created a real sense of community within the school and residential provision who are also included. Boarders were asked to comment on the residential part of the school, however, the surveys were not suitable for the boarders. So the school devised its own in various different formats so all pupils could contribute. The school places significant importance upon the acquisition of communication skills and has its own speech and language team. All staff receive ongoing training in various communication methods that meet the needs of the boarders. The admissions process is well delivered through a sound multi-disciplinary assessment. The school is explicitly clear about the needs it can and cannot provide a service for. Boarders are, therefore, within an environment that fully maximises their potential. Such assessments continue into regular multi-disciplinary reviews and this process ensures care plans are specific and up to date. Boarders enjoy regular means of contact with their parents through various means, including telephone and email, parents are free to call or visit the houses at any time. Parents commend the level and degree of communication received from the school, via phone calls, termly reports and communication books.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Overall, the young people live in accommodation which is homely and maintained to a high standard. Furniture and fittings are of a good quality and the boarders are consulted with regards to décor. The bedrooms have all been personalised in accordance with the occupant's wishes and where possible they have a single bedroom if they choose this. The home has clear consent shown on file that a boarder is happy to share a room. Boarders wear their own clothing outside of the school day. The boarders are all encouraged to keep their own personal monies in lockable storage in their bedrooms. Excellent and creative methods to encourage the use of life skills of the boarders; these are appropriately risk assessed and aimed to help them achieve as much independence as possible. The school has a culture of being very encouraging and positive 'you can do that, how can we help you achieve that', which is picked up by all the students and staff.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Information and literature about the school is readily available to parents and boarders and is subject to an annual update. The website is informative and continually updated. This is a school where there is a high level of care and support given to pupils from a competent multidisciplinary team. There is a complete wrap around service for boarding pupils with total integration between the residential and educational staff and services. There are excellent communication and behaviour management systems in place for pupils with special needs and good contact and support given to families. The school has this year created more opportunities to celebrate the successes of the students and embarked on the Healthy Schools Programme. Although staffing was an issue at the beginning of last year this has now been resolved and they are fully staffed. This has created opportunities for the students to be involved in the recruitment process of new staff. The high staffing levels reflect the guidance set out in the statement of purpose to meet the needs of the boarders. The high staffing also ensures continuity of care and cover for absences and sicknesses. Staff are well-organised and structured; they all know each other's roles and responsibilities and lines of communication, both informal

and formal are very good. Supervision is happening on a frequent basis, along with yearly appraisals, however, the team leaders have not had formal training in giving supervision. There are very good training and development plans for staff and the school has a dedicated training coordinator. He is responsible for managing the training programmes; the training matrix in place clearly shows that all training is up to date. New staff receive a comprehensive induction and core training period. Of the staff 100% have or are working towards achieving the NVQ Level 3 childcare qualifications. The school provides a wide range of enriching experiences for the students, underpinned by an extensive body of knowledge about Autism that informs their practice. They consistently seek new experiences and opportunities for the students, and ensure their are all respected as individuals.

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, 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 school is recording all staff are demonstrating competent practice, after undertaking medication administration training (NMS 14)
- ensure the school is holding a central record of any incidents of complaints or bullying (NMS 4 & 6)
- ensure the school holds the relevant CRB information on file (NMS 27)
- ensure the date of admission on to the residential unit is clear (NMS 11)
- ensure all team leaders who undertake the role of supervision are given training in this (NMS 31)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.