

Saxon Hill

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Jackie Callaghan
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	29 January 2009

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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

Saxon Hill Community School is a co-educational special school administered by Staffordshire County Council Education Department. It is located in a suburban area approximately one mile from Lichfield city centre. The school is part of the council's physical disability support service that offers support to people outside the school via in-house and outreach work.

The school has a 14 bed unit called 'The Sleepover Club' that offers individually based overnight care to both male and female students of the school who are aged between four and 19 years. There is a dedicated team of care staff that operates independently of, but in close liaison with, the teaching and other staff. The sleeping accommodation comprises of six times two bedrooms and two single rooms. There are currently 77 pupils on roll, including 31 boarders and 45 day students. Eleven of these students have contributed directly to this report.

Summary

This was an announced inspection and it covered all the key national minimum standards in the Every Child Matters outcome groups plus organisation.

This is a school with exceptional strengths that meets all and exceeds the vast majority of the national minimum standards. The overall judgement on the quality of this provision is outstanding. The school has developed considerable expertise in accessible communication and in engaging children with complex needs. The quality of communication between boarding staff and educational staff is excellent and staff make strong links, over matters such as child protection, health, home and education.

One recommendation to help improve the already outstanding practice has been raised as a result of this visit. Although not a weakness children may benefit from including in their placement plans their own actual written or pictorial assessment of their needs. This will further strengthen the already exceptional written plans that are in place.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's individual health and intimate care needs are recognised and taken into account at an early stage and recorded in a detailed health care plan. There is excellent access to health care professionals, such as occupational health therapists who work closely with school staff and parents to identify and meet children's unique needs. One child declared that 'staff really care for you and about you and, there is a difference you know'.

Medical consent is actively sought from parents and a signed form is retained on file ensuring children receive preventative and emergency medical treatment without delay. Staff training on administration of medication is in-depth. Staff are required to gain high-level competences

before they can administer any drugs. As a result, children reside in a healthy environment where their good health is comprehensively promoted.

All food is freshly prepared and cooked on site. Menus are planned in advance and readily displayed, so helping to promote nutritional variety for children throughout their whole day. Food is used successfully to help broaden children's knowledge and awareness of other cultures. For example, themed cultural nights where traditional dress and food tasting events take place.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children are systematically protected from harm by robust arrangements for safe personal care. Staff thoroughly respect children's need for privacy and confidentiality. There is an open approach to complaints from all sources, and staff successfully support children to use accessible democratic processes to make their views known. As part of this process staff skilfully enable children to understand the views of others.

The quality of relationships between staff and children is outstanding and reinforces the very caring atmosphere that can be witnessed throughout the school. Staff have access to information and demonstrate substantial knowledge about child protection and safeguarding requirements. The school's protective strategies are exceptionally strong and enable them to act appropriately when welfare concerns are suspected. This view is reinforced by a parent who states the school 'provides a safe and caring environment for boarders'.

Staff work hard to protect children from the impact of bullying, anti-social or intimidating behaviour and children are clear about their right to feel safe from this. Staff are sensitive and attuned to individual needs. Detailed planning and close supervision ensures a supportive response. One child voiced 'I know what bullying is and no one at school bullies me. Sleepover is fun, we do some great things. But best of all I'm with my friends'.

Staff work in partnership with children to actively engage them in dialogue about what they need to do to be ready to live safely and happily. Staff are trained to use physical intervention but the school's analysis of incidents shows there has never been the need for any physical interventions. Children have thorough individual risk assessments which help to keep them secure.

Children are actively involved in practising to evacuate the building. The children on the tour of the building proudly described what they do if the fire alarm bell sounds. It is clear that staff have fully enabled children to understand the dangers of fire.

The school has in place a robust vetting and selection policy and procedure. The senior management team ensure that staff employed at the school are deemed suitable to work with children. The headteacher, chair of governors and other key senior staff have attended advanced training on safer recruitment practices. As a result, the school has standardised the recruitment process further to promote effective safeguards for all children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is a real strength in the close and constructive child focussed links between educational and residential staff. The head teacher has deployed staff creatively to maximise on their skills which means that some staff share their time between residence and the classroom. Therefore children experience both consistent and productive support which sustains them to achieve both in and out of school.

Children benefit from innovative individual support. Key to this is a committed residential staff group who have outstanding skills in day-to-day communication. As a result, children use imaginative additional tools to enable better participation, understanding and inclusion. For example, exploring their emotions. Staff used a famous artist's drawing of a sunflower which is painted in dark colours. The children felt this made them feel 'sad'. Staff also used actual sunflowers which the children described as making them feel 'happy'. Staff explored these emotions with the children and related them to other events. This developed children's thinking.

Children are seen as individuals and staff really value the opportunity to visit and talk to parents at home to share ideas and support them. Parent's comments include, 'staff are really approachable and they listen'. 'Each child is valued as an individual and therefore, treated that way'. As a result, children experience life enhancing activities and new opportunities that enable them to take an active part in society.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Parents recognise that children have access when at sleepover to a range of opportunities that they would not be able to introduce. One parent wrote 'attending sleepover has helped my son be as independent as his disability allows'. Children, as result are inquisitive about the wider world. The vibrant displays around sleepover validate each child's unique contribution.

Children are proactively encouraged, enabled and supported to contribute to their care by using a variety of communication aids. Consequently, children's views are clearly valued and they are given choice wherever possible. There are explicit written plans which summarise how children's needs are to be met. Records document children's daily, weekly and monthly progress. Residential staffs' care practice in this area is excellent. Although children are clearly involved in drawing up their care plans, staff are missing a wonderful opportunity to get the children to record what they see as their needs. Implementing this addition to a plan may overtly outline where children see themselves and further reinforce their already excellent outcomes.

Children are helped to move in and on from the school with well informed, sensitive staff support. The school has established excellent preparation for children staying in residence for the first time. Care staff visit the child at home and work with parents to learn about the child's routines, as well as their likes and dislikes. This means that when children sleep at the school they experience consistent care.

Children stay a maximum of two nights of the week at school and then go home to their parents or carers. Staff are proactive in ensuring children maintain contact with parents when they stay at 'sleepover'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children benefit from the smart use of the time. Staff spend a large majority of their time sitting and playing with them, supporting their care and development. Resources and space are used effectively to maximise children's independence and to provide them with a secure environment in which they build and develop trust.

The school makes good and imaginative use of the buildings and grounds. This makes a safe and suitable place for children to learn and stay. Although the building is not ideal, it is well furnished and feels cared for and institutional features are minimised. For example, recent improvements have been made to the bathroom area by way of painting a sea view on the wall. This has significantly reduced the clinical feel that the bathroom had previously.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Leadership and management of the school are imaginative, responsive and effective. Children are well served by the provision as identified by its Statement of Purpose. The standard of care is outstanding and promotes positive relationships between children and adults. Staff have excellent support and guidance through a clear management structure. This structure is successful at meeting its aims to foster social awareness and mutual respect within the school community. It achieves this by encouraging a happy and caring atmosphere through a professional and motivating environment.

All staff receive a comprehensive induction, regular supervision and annual appraisals. They are provided with comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance that promote the strong values and ethos of the school. Staff throughout their employment receive a comprehensive range of in-house and external training to ensure their childcare practice remains up-to-date. As a result, staff are suitably trained to support the diverse needs of children with complex learning and health needs.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The environment promotes the individual and diverse identities of children and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding.

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 children's daily logs and care plans.

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):

- explore ways of adding to individual children's placement plans what children see as their assessed needs (NMS 17.2)