

# Whitstone Head School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Chris Passmore
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	4 March 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 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**

Whitstone Head School is an approved non-maintained residential special school providing support and education for young people aged between 10 and 16 years who are emotionally fragile/vulnerable and have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Young people are largely referred by local education authorities but sometimes by social services or health authorities.

The school is run as a specialist centre providing education to national examination level allowing access to further education and employment. The school works to the Revised National Curriculum and has a programme of outdoor education and outdoor pursuit activities. Whitstone Head School is situated on the edge of Whitstone village. It comprises of a large country house and grounds with an adjacent education building and gymnasium. Attached buildings have been converted for boarding purposes. The majority of young people board but the school is also registered to take a small number of day pupils. The boarding facilities provide spacious accommodation and the school grounds offer extensive play and recreational areas. A team of residential care staff support boarding. Each young person has a link care worker. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged. Education is supported. Young people have access to a large range of extra curricular activities. The selection process is carefully managed and young people are assessed on a trial basis to ensure that the school is able to meet their education and care needs. The maximum number of young people that can be provided with boarding accommodation is 32.

### **Summary**

This was an announced annual inspection against key national minimum standards for residential special schools. The inspection also took into account some non-key standards that are felt to be an integral part of the ethos and function of the school. The overall outcome judgement is that the school provides young people with a service that consistently provides them with outstanding care and support. Staff are flexible in their approach and adapt to the individual needs of young people. The service is reflective about its practice and standards of care are sustained over time. Direct contact with parents during the course of the inspection reflected their feelings that the school works with them and provides their children with unique lifestyle and developmental opportunities.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There was one recommendation arising from the last inspection relating to the circulation of visiting governor's reports. The school has fully implemented this recommendation and samples of letters that accompany the reports were seen as well as records showing that governors visit the school frequently outside of these reportable visits.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The school takes action to ensure that health needs are carefully assessed. This is done through comprehensive pre-admission information gathering, working closely with allied health

professionals and the development of clear health plans for individual young people. Although in most cases parents retain the responsibility for meeting health needs, staff go the extra mile and work in conjunction with parents or on their behalf to support young people and maintain their holistic welfare. In-school support for mental health is a strength and the principal and leadership team work closely with local mental health community teams and specialists. Care staff are now involved in receiving mental health training to better equip them to understand and care for young people with fragile mental health conditions.

Physical exercise through outdoor activities and use of the school's fitness suite is encouraged and promoted as part of a healthy lifestyle. The school has Healthy School's status and is currently part of a pilot project working towards the Healthy Schools Plus award. Young people learn about a healthy diet, drug and substance abuse, sex and relationships and smoking through the application of the 24 hour curriculum across the staff teams. Staff promote and extend learning through general discussions and by supporting individuals with particular problems.

Mealtimes are relaxed and social occasions. Young people are well catered for in terms of a healthy balanced diet, the quality and quantity of the food provided which is mainly fresh produce, sourced locally and home prepared. The chef and kitchen team play a major part in the holistic care practiced throughout the school. Young people are consulted regarding their favourite meals and these have been incorporated into the menus. Individual eating patterns are taken into account and though these frequently change from day to day, they are treated sympathetically and discretely.

Young people have opportunities to practice their catering skills during the school day and their efforts are shared with peers' further promoting social and life skills. Care staff take young people shopping on a regular basis and at weekends the routines around meals are more relaxed with young people often eating out, having a take-away or shopping for ingredients and preparing their own meal, with staff supervision.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

The complaints system is well known to young people. They feel able to speak informally to staff about their concerns, complaints or bullying incidents. All matters raised are taken seriously by the school and dealt with promptly. Young people and parents stated they could talk to a range of people at the school and acknowledged the school always acted on information given though opinions on the eventual outcomes sometimes varied.

The approach to child protection and overall safeguarding is well coordinated across the school. Staff provide a stable and safe environment for young people, remain aware of their whereabouts and are flexible in their approach to individuals. Care staff know each young person well and are vigilant and responsive to any potential concerns. Young people say that they feel safe at the school and in boarding. All staff at the school receive comprehensive safeguarding training which is updated regularly and the school's designated child protection officer maintains good links with local safeguarding team members. A series of risk assessments are in place in relation to particular needs, activities and lone working. Privacy is well respected and staff understand the importance of confidentiality.

Bullying incidents are dealt with efficiently and effectively with support given to all parties involved. Staff vigilance, pupil numbers and the level of staff supervision means that staff are

well placed to intervene in any potential incidents. Young people's time is well structured and they are engaged in activities they enjoy and choose. The behaviour management systems are effective in minimising the use of physical restraints whilst helping young people to understand the importance of developing positive and respectful relations as well as the negative impact of bullying. All this means that bullying is less likely to occur.

Young people are further protected by the school's absence without authority procedures though these do not happen with any notable frequency currently. Where absences have been recorded staff have followed procedure and the young person has returned safely to school.

The team approach to behaviour management is impressive and outstanding. Young people enjoy sound relations with staff based on honesty and mutual respect. They have a clear understanding of expectations through consistent boundaries set by the team. This means that the service enjoys a good deal of success in terms of maintaining a well ordered and happy environment.

Appropriate sanctions are used by the staff team within the context of the behaviour management system. This usually involves a loss of rewards; young people feel that the sanctions are fair. Staff are trained in physical intervention and receive regular refresher training. The use of physical interventions however, is infrequent. This is because the team are able to manage behaviour effectively without resorting to physical contact.

Procedures to vet staff and visitors to the school are in place. Staff are checked before they commence work at the school including obtaining a Criminal Records Bureau check. All files sampled were consistent in their content; the single central record was up to date and confirmed vetting information from the personnel files. The principal and bursar hold safe recruitment certificates and this training is to be extended to other key staff.

There are systems in place to protect young people, visitors and staff from environmental risks and hazards. These include fire drills and safety equipment checks, gas and electrical safety checks and, health and safety risk assessments.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

There is a smooth transition between education and care. Staff across the site work in conjunction with each other in order to facilitate optimum opportunities at school for each and every young person. Communication between education and care staff is excellent. Links between the two are well established and organised. Staff understand each others remit and are respectful and supportive of the role that they each play in providing holistic care and education to young people. Care staff promote educational attainment and take time to praise individuals for their participation and achievements at school. They also support and encourage young people to achieve their potential in practical ways. These may include shopping, budgeting, independent travelling and social skills such as group living or work experience.

Excellent leisure opportunities are available to young people either on site or in the surrounding countryside and coast. Young people have the opportunity to take part in different activities whilst being supervised by staff with specialist sports and activity qualifications.

Young people are provided with individual care and support in line with their needs and wishes. Staff know young people well. They take time to understand their specific circumstances. In turn, young people feel that they can talk with staff and will turn to them if they have a concern. The team will seek out appropriate outside professional support for individuals when it is required.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

There are systems in place to ensure that young people are listened to. Young people participate in small group meetings on their residential units as well as school council and individual discussions with staff. All young people have a key worker who they can spend time with while in residence. A suggestion box is available in the hallway of the main school building. Overall, young people say that they like the staff team and that they feel able to approach them and that they are listened to. Parents and carers are made welcome and their views are valued. The head of care, principal and care staff are pro-active in supporting parents and carers. There is a partnership approach to the care of young people which involves a team around the child, working together with parents, carers and other professionals in order to maximise the potential of each young person.

Staff are provided with pertinent up-to-date information about young people's care need. Placement plans are created for each young person based on their educational statements. These set out young people's assessed needs and direct staff in how to provide individual care. Placement plans are updated in line with need and there are systems in place to ensure that staff are made aware of changes.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are assisted to develop skills for adulthood. There is a great deal of one-to-one work carried out with young people to help them develop life and social skills. Young people attend work and college placements and are helped to develop budgeting skills and use public transport. The school is working with parents and carers, as well as professionals, to develop more extensive and appropriate post compulsory educational work or study opportunities for young people.

The residential areas are homely and domestic in style. Bedrooms at the time of inspection were mainly single occupancy although there are rooms throughout the school's residential provision that can be shared, subject to an assessment for compatibility. Shower, washing and toilet facilities are sufficient in number and close to the sleeping accommodation. On-site facilities for leisure activities are good; there is a games room, computers, outside play area and fitness suite. School facilities including the sports hall and sports fields are also available. In general, the property is well maintained, decorated to an acceptable standard and clean.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The management and staffing arrangements at the school are excellent. The principal provides strong leadership and vision across the school, leads by example and is supported by members

of the leadership group. His dynamic approach to the provision of holistic care to young people with complex needs is much appreciated by parents and respected by staff across the school.

There is a strong emphasis on team working. The stability of the care staff group means they have developed a sound knowledge of each young person which enables them to provide care in an insightful and informed way. Overall, the team offers a stable, efficiently organised and consistent environment crucial to the young people. Their enduring commitment, consistency and enthusiasm is outstanding. This is demonstrated through an approach that requires energy and dedication. This continues to underpin the successful outcomes for young people achieved by this service.

An ongoing programme of staff training is in place which includes National Vocational Qualification's and all mandatory training such as child protection, first aid and fire safety. A system is in place to induct new staff. The head of care supports the team through the supervision process and there are regular group staff meetings.

The service is monitored by a visiting governor who produces reports in line with recommendations. These are circulated to the governing body but governors are pro-active at the school and are frequent visitors, as recorded in the visitors' log.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Policy documentation in relation to recruitment and care practice is adhered to. There is a policy promoting equality and diversity that applies throughout the school. A system of monitoring and addressing bullying in all its forms has been implemented. Young people get to sample and to prepare foods from differing cultures. There is exceptional inclusion across the school and the needs of young people do not in themselves exclude them from mainstream activities. Staff support this diverse group of young people to participate as fully as possible, encourage them to try new experiences and prepare them for life in the wider community.

## 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

There are no recommendations.