

# Whitstone Head School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Chris Passmore
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<b>Head/ Principal</b>	David McLean-Thorne
<b>Nominated person</b>	Lin Hills
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	04/03/2010

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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 or vulnerable and have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Young people are largely referred by local authorities but sometimes by 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 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 and 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**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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 offers pupils 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 school is reflective about its practice and its standards 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 children with unique lifestyle and developmental opportunities. Others commented through questionnaires; all were positive in their summary of the school's operation.

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

There were no recommendations made as a result of the last inspection.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils' health needs are carefully and comprehensively assessed through pre-admission procedures, close working with allied health professionals and the development of clear health plans for individuals. In most cases parents or guardians retain responsibility for meeting general health needs, however, staff also advocate on behalf of pupils to maintain their health and welfare. Arrangements for medication are again individually tailored to ensure that boarding pupils always have sufficient medication available while residing in school as well as when they are at home. The head of care has established very good relations with the local health centre and staff to ensure the best outcomes for those pupils who board at the school.

In-school support for mental health is a particular strength of Whitstone Head and enables pupils with complex needs to have more immediate and relevant support. There is also close working with local mental health community teams and specialists.

Physical exercise is encouraged through outdoor activities, sport and the school's enrichment projects. The diversity of opportunities provided by these activities means individual pupils are able to take part in healthy lifestyles while being involved in activities to which they are suited and find enjoyable. For the less sports orientated there are activities such as gardening and walking the dog, while the more energetic have opportunities including football, surfing and mountain biking. The school also has a fitness suite on site which is popular during the autumn and winter months.

The school has Healthy Schools' status and has recently achieved Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Healthy Schools Plus status. Young people learn about a healthy diet, drug and substance abuse, sex and relationships and smoking through personal, social and health education and the application of the 24-hour curriculum across the staff teams. Staff have excellent interpersonal skills and promote and extend social learning through general discussions and by supporting individuals with particular problems. Individual personal targets reflect issues of personal development, relationships and behaviour. These are consistently applied to pupils by staff across the school throughout the day.

Mealtimes are relaxed and social occasions between staff and pupils. There are opportunities for sharing, helping and communal duties woven into each mealtime. Staff are quick to praise positive behaviour but gentle and discreet with any reproaches. Pupils are well catered for in terms of a healthy balanced and nutritious diet and all commented positively through their questionnaires.

The quality and quantity of the food provided are very good. It 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. This ranges from regular discussions with individual pupils at the kitchen gate to the chef participating

in pupil activities to gauge their energy needs. Pupils are regularly consulted regarding their favourite meals and these are incorporated into the menus. These include cultural preferences and particular recipes requested by individual pupils. Eating patterns are taken into account and though these frequently change from day to day, they are treated sympathetically and discreetly. Staff complete food diaries and these are analysed by the chef to track eating patterns and identify any areas of potential concern.

Pupils have opportunities to practice their catering skills during the school day and their efforts are shared with peers and members of the local community, further promoting social and life skills. Care staff take boarding pupils shopping on a regular basis, and at weekends the routines around meals are more relaxed with meals 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 pupils. They feel able to speak informally to staff about their concerns, complaints or bullying incidents. There is a very clear ethos of zero tolerance of bullying throughout the school. Any incident or comment that makes an individual feel uncomfortable is considered to be an act of bullying. This message is reinforced through the use of posters, individual discussions and whole school meetings. The school takes all matters raised seriously and deals with them promptly. Pupils 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 incidence of reported complaints or bullying is low and boarding pupils stated it was not a major issue in the school.

The approach to child protection and overall safeguarding is extremely well coordinated across the school and planned to improve further. There is a designated person responsible for child protection and plans to increase this to three trained and qualified persons are in place. The overall effect of this will enhance the cover available throughout the day and across the school. All staff at the school receive comprehensive safeguarding training which is updated regularly and the designated child protection officer maintains extremely good links with local safeguarding team members.

Staff across the school provide a stable and safe environment for pupils. They remain aware of pupil whereabouts and are flexible in their approach to individuals. Staff teams know each young person well and are creative in their approach to individuals. They are vigilant to individual moods and recognise early signals of stress in pupils. They are proactive and responsive to potentially critical situations and thereby manage to deflect or defuse individual reactions. Young people say that they feel safe at the school and in boarding. 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.

Pupils' 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 while 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 infrequent and the need for physical intervention is lowered.

The school has a policy for action where a pupil goes missing. Pupils are often not where they should be at a given point in time but the behaviour support team is excellent at finding these pupils. They are usually within the confines of the school and its grounds and the team occupies them until they feel they can return to scheduled lessons. Episodes where pupils are truly missing are few and no pupil has been away from the school campus for any significant period of time.

The school's approach to behaviour management is both effective and outstanding. Pupils enjoy sound relations with staff based on honesty and mutual respect. There are clear understandings of expectations through consistent boundaries set by the teams. This means that the school enjoys a good deal of success in terms of meeting its stated aims of pupils being in an environment in which they feel good about themselves.

The staff teams use appropriate sanctions within the context of individual behaviour management plans. This usually involves a loss of rewards or withdrawal of activity; pupils feel that the sanctions are fair, in the main.

Staff are trained in physical intervention and receive regular refresher training. However, the use of physical interventions has dropped considerably. Staff teams have training in mental health issues and a latitude of approach which encourages them to be resourceful and creative in meeting individual pupil needs. Staff have access to clear and comprehensive assessments of individual pupils and agreed care plans. They have the support of experienced seniors who can support their thinking without the need for protracted delays in decision making. Pupil behaviour is therefore responded to quickly and results are fed into continuous reviews and shared with colleagues across the staff teams.

There is a comprehensive recruitment procedure that is in line with the principles of safer recruitment in schools. A single central record is maintained and is comprehensive in coverage and inclusive of checks on governors, agency staff and work placements. The school also has a policy of refreshing Criminal Records Bureau checks every three years. Evidence of checking overseas work placements is also in place.

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

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

The provision is outstanding.

Staff across the school work cooperatively and communicate well with each other. This enables pupils to maintain their education and enjoy their time in boarding. Communication between education and care staff is now very good. There is a close liaison between the head of care and the director of education. They are both part of the leadership group but communicate over and above the parameters of this membership. Links between the two are well established and organised. Staff understand each other's remit and are respectful and supportive of the role that they each play in providing holistic care and education to each pupil. 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 while being supervised by staff with specialist sports and activity qualifications. Pupils are encouraged to take part in physical and endurance challenges on a national level. Training and skills instruction is available from qualified staff, and pupils compete with their peers in open competitions.

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.

Pupils have a variety of opportunities and means of communicating their views and wishes, and are listened to. Boarders participate in small group meetings on their residential units and individual discussions with staff. All pupils have a key worker who they can spend time with, in education or in residence. A suggestion box is available in the hallway of the main school building as well as there being a school council. Overall, young people say that they like the staff of the school, they feel able to approach them and that they are listened to. Parents and carers are made welcome and their views are valued.

The whole school staff team are proactive 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. Admissions are well planned and each



pupil is given careful consideration. Their individual needs are weighed carefully against the facilities and abilities of the school to ensure a match. Where there are initial failures in the placement plan staff are committed to giving pupils a second chance, within agreed boundaries and mutual expectations.

Staff are provided with pertinent up-to-date information about young people's care needs. 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 regularly reviewed and updated and there are systems in place to ensure that staff are made aware of changes.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Pupils are assisted to develop skills for adulthood. There is a great deal of one-to-one work carried out with pupils to help them develop life and social skills. Older pupils attend work and college placements as part of their transitional plan. They are helped to develop budgeting skills and use public transport. The school works with parents and carers, as well as professionals, to develop more extensive and appropriate post-compulsory educational work or study opportunities for young people. Through their work with other agencies, such as Connexions, the school is able to evidence the fact that a majority of pupils who leave the school go on to sustained further education or vocational training.

The residential areas are homely and domestic in style. Bedrooms at the time of inspection were single occupancy although there are rooms throughout the school's residential provision that can be shared, subject to assessments of 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 school provides

pupils with a stable, efficiently organised and consistent environment crucial to pupil needs. The enduring commitment, consistency and enthusiasm of staff across the school is outstanding. It is demonstrated by their energy and dedication and continues to underpin the successful outcomes for young people achieved by this service.

There is an ongoing programme of staff training which includes National Vocational Qualifications 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 school's board of trustees and governors are increasingly proactive in the school and involved in every aspect of its function. Members have a sound understanding of the ethos of the school and support the Principal in the delivery of an effective service. The board has a sound knowledge of the day-to-day functions of the school and well-developed strategic and overall development plans. This forward thinking enables the school to make positive progress to meet the changes and challenges within the area of specialist provision it provides. Visiting governor reports are circulated to the governing body.

As well as monitoring carried out by the board of trustees and governors the Principal has a robust system of monitoring for cross-school provision. This evidence is detailed, cross referenced and comprehensive.

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 continues to be effectively implemented. Pupils sample and 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 community activities. Staff support this diverse group of pupils to participate as fully as possible, encourage them to try new experiences and prepare them for life in the wider community.