

# 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>	David McLean-Thorne
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	03/10/2006

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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 a Department for Children Schools and Families (DfCSF) Approved Non- Maintained Special School (Residential) providing support and education for children 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. 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. Children have access to a large range of extra curricular activities. The selection process is carefully managed and children are assessed on a trial basis to ensure that the school is able to meet their education and care needs. The maximum number of children 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 inspection against Key National Minimum Standards (NMS). Some non-key standards were also included but not all standards in each section of the inspection checklist were assessed. Pupils who board at Whitstone Head School enjoy good standards of accommodation, are provided with good care from experienced staff and have wholesome home prepared meals that take into account individual likes, dislikes and special requirements. There is a whole school approach to the holistic care of every pupil that is summed-up in the phrase 'team around the child'. The school responds well to the changing needs of the pupil population and in recent months has taken on the mental health needs of pupils and is now practicing psycho-social therapeutic techniques as part of its planned care methodologies. There is clear management and leadership from the Principal through the Leadership Group to staff across the whole school. All staff play their part in the care of pupils. Whitstone Head pupils are happy and friendly and there is a relaxed atmosphere in the boarding units. Obviously there are times when this calm is not so prevalent but such episodes are not dwelt upon and there is an emphasis on regaining a positive

level for the sake of the overall community. Where recommendations have been made they are meant to enhance existing good practice.

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

There were two general recommendations made after the last inspection. These were to do with varying the style and presentation of the Statement of Principles and communication between staff groups. The school has moved forwards on both of these issues naturally. There are now children's guides to each boarding unit available and communication between staff groups across the school is enabled and takes place as needed rather than having any set time slot or form. This enables children's varying needs to be responded to by the whole of the school staff team.

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

The provision is good.

All aspects of the school's provision for the health care are good with some outstanding. The school promotes healthy lifestyles by offering a variety of activities, healthy food options and individual support to children with complex needs. The staff post of Care, Health and Welfare officer is a new strand which has the potential to forge stronger links with parents and professionals as well as between education and care staff. It is a relatively new post and therefore not possible to fully evaluate but the post holder is excited and energetic about the potential of the position. There are particular developments in the area of children and adolescents' mental health services originating from the school with links to external services within the County. Pupils enjoy the meals provided. All meals are cooked on site and largely prepared from fresh ingredients. Pupils have options at each meal, there is a salad bar and fresh fruit is always available.

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

The provision is outstanding.

All procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of children at the school. The children's right to privacy is respected and promoted but staff remain aware of their whereabouts. Children are aware of how complaints can be made and absences without authority are now a rare occurrence. Procedures remain in place and appropriate action is taken by staff as required, as described by the head of care following a recent incident. There is an effective 'sweeper system' in place to gather and protect children not in classes during the school day. At other times effective staffing is in place to supervise the needs and actions of the children. New safeguarding arrangements are in place and the school retains a local contact within Social Services for all initial safeguarding issues. Safeguarding issues and professional allegations are dealt with in an efficient and effective manner when they occur. Children report low levels of bullying but offer no qualification in terms of type. In their questionnaire responses children state there is a zero tolerance of bullying in school; they have put up posters in the dining room affirming this

position. The school works to safe recruitment standards and files for new appointments confirm these standards are met in practice. All matters of health and safety are maintained and up to date with appropriate supporting certification and records in place. There is confidence that the school maintains high standards of safety and addresses issues as they arise.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The school strives to enable children to reach their maximum potential from their time at Whitstone Head. Staff across the school work together to promote children's individual academic and social skill potential. They know the children well and are aware of their individual strengths, problems and needs. New initiatives provide additional resources to cater for the more complex emotional health needs of children and all children receive individual attention as required. Children have members of staff they can turn to for help or advice as confirmed in their responses to questionnaires.

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

The provision is good.

The school accommodates children on a termly basis and is not the children's substantive home. Most children return home at weekends, boarding from Sunday to Thursday evenings inclusive. The school is run with the children's needs in mind and on the principals of Every Child Matters. Care planning is in place based on Special Education Needs (SEN) reviews and any assessed needs of an emotional welfare and social skills nature. Contact with friends and families is maintained and encouraged and staff work closely with parents and guardians. Often relationships formed at Whitstone Head are amongst the earliest, or first sustained friendships made by the pupils. Children are encouraged to share their views through meetings or individually with staff. It is also important that staff get them to look at the reality of some of these individually held views in preparation for moving on from the school.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The school is committed to preparing children for their post-school life throughout the time they are at Whitstone Head. There is an emphasis on living as part of a community and consideration of others throughout the school. At appropriate junctures pupils take part in work experience and link with other agencies who assist with their transition arrangements. The staff work hard to identify suitable work-experience placements and support children through these. Where necessary staff accompany pupils on work experience during the early stages in order that the placement may be a successful one. Further Education is also considered if appropriate and the school liaises with Colleges to identify suitable places and

provide appropriate pupil assessments. For boarders at Whitstone Head the accommodation is comfortable, well maintained and low pupil numbers make for a relaxed and cosy environment. The accommodation has individual sitting rooms with television, music and electronic games available. Individual bedrooms are well personalised and pupils are encouraged to have their own belongings around them. In addition to the sports facilities of the school, boarders have access to a games room at basement level and there are plans to convert other basement rooms into a fitness suite.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a current statement of care principles that is incorporated into the school prospectus and each boarding unit has its own children's guide to the boarding provision. Children stated they all had someone in the school they could turn to for help and advice and this was observed throughout the inspection visit, at meal times, around the school or in the boarding houses during the evenings. Many of the boarding staff have been at the school for a number of years and so have their experience and qualifications to provide consistent standards of care delivery to pupils. Staff numbers in boarding are sufficient to enable individual time for boarders as required. All staff are well managed by the Leadership Group and all work for the good of the pupils. Whitstone Head School is a community and that feeling is reinforced by the actions and consideration for others shown by pupils and staff. The community includes the Governors who are pro-active within the school. Standards of care and physical boarding standards are monitored through Governors visits. Reports of these visits are made and kept at the school. The school responds to recommendations made as a result of inspections in a timely way

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Compliance with national minimum standards**

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- enable reports made by visiting Governors to be distributed to each member of the board within two weeks of the visit (NMS33.4)
- ensure Governors visits take place at least once every half-term (NMS 33.2)