

# Falconer School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Sandra Jacobs-Walls

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

This is a maintained, residential special school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It provides education for both day and boarding pupils. The residential unit is School House and provides flexible boarding for up to 10 boys between Monday and Friday; evening-only support has begun recently for a small number. The last inspection was conducted in December 2010.

The school is situated in a residential area.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>good</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is good.
- Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding and their identified needs are well met. Most young people achieve personal targets in daily living skills and there is significant improvement to individual behaviour.
- Young people have grown in confidence and make positive, stable friendships with their peers.
- Young people benefit from excellent relationships with staff that provide clear boundaries and individual support within a safe and stimulating environment.
- Young people benefit fully from the school's educational opportunities and it's creative after school curriculum. There is good coordination of care between residential and teaching staff at the school.
- Safeguarding is a high priority at this school. Young people feel safe and are safe.
- The School House accommodation is of a good standard. Young people enjoy their surroundings.
- The school's management team ensures effective scrutiny of all aspects of the residential provision which means that young people enjoy a service that continually strives to improve.
- The school meets the vast majority of the national minimum standards. There are two shortfalls: the lack of an independent listener and the lack of a written agreement with staff relatives living in the same premises as children.

## Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for young people are outstanding. Young people's social and educational development is greatly enhanced as a result of the impact of the residential service. Young people share exceptionally good quality relationships with the staff group and this based on mutual trust and respect. Young people speak very highly of the skills and compassion of the entire staff group and the very positive impact this has on their residential experience. They enjoy the company of their peers and are supportive of each other. There is no evidence of any bullying within the provision. Young people very clearly feel very safe and well protected in this environment.

Young people receive personalised care and the service meets their identity needs well. They make excellent progress in addressing previous behavioural issues. They benefit from individual placement plans that explore key areas of their development. So for example, young people's individual targets typically address issues of self esteem, independence and confidence. Young people comment on the very real significant growth in their overall development and contribute this to a greater sense of responsibility. This is clearly fostered by School House's ethos and practice. Young people do not experience to any form of discrimination and staff practice is well embedded in an anti-discriminatory framework. Young people thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience and are very candid about the very positive impact it has had on their lives. One young person comments, 'School House has changed my life. I was a completely different person when I first came here, I was such a mess. Now I understand what's going on, what's expected of me and now I'm a completely different person. I've grown in confidence; it's been so good for me. I love it here'.

Young people lead healthy lifestyles and are involved in numerous creative and sporting activities. Staff encourage them to take on challenging but achievable tasks. Young people speak with pride about the resilience shown in order to achieve goals previously thought to be unattainable. They strive successfully to reach their full potential in and out of both the school and residential environment. Young people benefit significantly from staff efforts to promote their independence and develop confidence and skills that promote positive relationships with their peers and others. For example, they participate in household chores which help them develop useful independent living skills.

Young people greatly enjoy, and are enthusiastic about the creative, stimulating array of activities available to them. This contributes to their overall social development through exposure to the wider community. Typically, many young people exhibit anti-social and challenging behaviour and have trouble in developing constructive relationships with their peers. The school's commitment to ensuring innovative and exciting recreational and learning opportunities results in boarders' collective investment in participation. Young people know that staff are interested in their views, wishes and feelings and take their opinions seriously. They routinely explore and discuss key boarding issues in frequent and effective consultation. The views and

opinions of residential pupils feature in the school's formal consultation mechanisms such as school council.

Young people generally enjoy varied, wholesome meals that meet cultural or religious dietary requirements. So for example, the school caters for young people who practice the Muslim faith and those who eat vegetarian diets only, and staff are alert to young people's existing food allergies. The school has been awarded 'Healthy Eating' status in acknowledgement of its efforts to provide nutritiously balanced meals. However, some young people and staff indicate the schools provision of food is an area that is in need of improvement. In particular, the dietary needs of young people who are very physically active. Young people and residential staff would like to meet regularly with the school's chef directly to explore dietary needs and preferences.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the residential provision and care is good. Young people have access to a high level of support and benefit from the effective working relationship between residential and teaching staff. There is a clear and effective induction process that makes new boarders and their parents and carers feel comfortable and knowledgeable about the operation of the residential provision. The school's home liaison co-ordinator is an effective supportive link between young people, parents and the school. This is further enhanced because residential staff spend significant time with boarders within their classrooms during the week. This practice is highly efficient in supporting young people's personal and academic development and it is clear that the positive impact in both areas is also significant.

Young people have holistic placement plans that are comprehensive, relevant and regularly reviewed to reflect their changing needs. Staff pay good attention to issues of equality and diversity, particularly in relation to disability and religion. They ensure that individual placement plans and established targets are strictly adhered to in order to maximise results. Young people are very aware of targets set for them and are highly motivated to achieve goals. There are sound arrangements in place to address and promote young people's healthy well-being. Young people benefit from stringent monitoring and safe administration and storage of medication. Staff have effective working relationships with external health care professionals. The school employs a psychologist who is regularly on site to meet with young people and staff for consultation. This ensures that young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are well met.

Young people greatly benefit from the school's very effective key work system and the co-ordination of young people's care is the responsibility of one identified staff member. Young people enjoy and benefit from consistent interaction and guidance from designated staff who know them and their needs very well. Key work sessions are child focussed and concentrate on individual placement issues and progress. Staff documentation of key work sessions are detailed and sensitively recorded. Young

people benefit from co-ordinated learning both within the classroom and residential provision that promotes their healthy mental and emotional well-being. This high level of consistency also greatly impacts on the success of behaviour management strategies. Young people feel safe and know who to do to if they are unhappy. Young people have easy access to the contact details of independent advocacy group who are available to act on their behalf if they so wish. The school however, is yet to appoint an independent listener, an individual who would be known to young people whom they could alternatively approach with any concerns.

The quality of the residential accommodation is good and young people are very complementary about their surroundings. School House is very comfortable, well heated and lit and is very well maintained. Each young person has their room, with the exception of one room by two children on different nights, with their agreement. Young people personalise their bedrooms if they so wish and staff encourage them to display certificates of achievement and merit. Young people are proud to have the opportunity to openly display their successes and do so with enthusiasm. Their rooms are homely, well furnished with favourite toys, artwork, photographs and posters. Communal areas are well equipped with suitable play and learning materials such as board games, electronic consoles, TV, a good range of DVD's and access to computers. The corridors display young people's successes and achievements and young people are particularly enthusiastic about charting their success through the incentive scheme. This is a popular and effective feature of the school behaviour management strategy.

Young people, their parents and carers enjoy good contact while young people are staying at School House. One young person commented, 'I can talk to my mum whenever I want!' Staff encourage both parties to stay in touch and there is a sensible approach to private telephone contact and visits. Staff are sensitive to young people's family circumstances and ensure that contact is safe and appropriate for all parties.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

Residential pupil's safety is good. Young people are and feel safe while residing at School House. All staff have comprehensive child protection and safeguarding training; of clear benefit to young people and explore child protection issues in team meetings and in individual supervision. The head of care is one of three designated child protection officers and a school governor also oversees safeguarding issues in the school, including the residential provision. Young people have safe and secure residential accommodation. They are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Designated staff regularly revise building risk assessments and gas, electrical and fire precautions are safe and effective.

Managers carry out staff vetting and recruitment procedures and all staff have appropriate Criminal Record Bureau and other checks. However, recruitment files do not consistently evidence complete recruitment records as required. For example,

documented risk assessments are not completed in a timely fashion and the pursuit of written references is not sufficiently robust. This is not in the best practice with regards to safe staff recruitment. In addition, the school is yet to issue the required written agreement necessary for adults not employed by the school, but living on school grounds. While both these issues are identified as weaknesses, neither have a direct impact on outcomes for young people accessing the residential facility.

Young people are clear that bullying is not an issue at School House. Staff have access to anti-bullying policies and there are clear strategies in place to combat any bullying type incidences. Written guidance include strategies to combat racism, homophobia and cyber-bullying. Staff are particularly vigilant with regards to cyber-bullying and there are strict boundaries with regard to young people's use of personal mobile phones. Residential pupils do not abscond or go missing from the premises. Senior managers have a good working relationships with local police and implement effective interagency protocols in the event of young people being missing. There have been no such instances for a significant length of time. These good efforts ensure the safety and protection of young people in their care.

The school's behaviourist behaviour management philosophy and ethos concentrates on the positive reinforcement of acceptable behaviour to counteract negative or challenging behaviours. This is a clear strength of the school. Staff are consistent in their management of poor and unacceptable behaviour and there are very effective strategies in place. Staff consistently support residential pupils to develop skills in managing conflict. Staff comprehensively assess and document individual behavioural plans that address young people's specific issues. Young people are very aware of issues pertaining to their own behaviour and are highly involved in establishing targets that address offending or challenging behaviours. There is a consistent whole school approach to combating individual behavioural issues and consequently, behaviour management strategies are highly effective. Young people enjoy great success and they readily take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Effective conflict management means that residential staff very rarely use physical intervention with young people. There have been no instances of restraint for a significant length of time. This is to the clear benefit of young people who feel safe in the care of residential staff even during situations that are potentially volatile. Young people remain motivated to develop and establish positive relationships amongst their peers and with staff.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

Leadership and management of the schools residential provision are outstanding. Young people and residential staff are clear that School House is very well run. The school provides young people, their parents and carers, and other interested parties with clear, informative literature that accurately outlines the purpose, aims and objectives of the residential service. School routines and procedures are clear, well established and have the welfare of young at the centre of operations.

Excellent staffing ratios and deployment ensure continuity of care and foster positive relationships between young and the staff group. The staff group have effective supervision and excellent induction and training opportunities that enhance their skills in working in a meaningful way with very vulnerable young people. . The school has successfully resolved the sole recommendation from the previous inspection. This related to the professional supervision of the head of the school. Managers and staff are committed to the continual improvement of the residential provision and there are very effective, sound, wide-ranging monitoring mechanisms in place. Governor's monitoring visits focus on young people's comments and perceptions of the standard of boarding in addition to the review of key documentation and logs. There is routine consultation with staff to gauge performance and operational issues. Subsequent reports are sufficiently detailed and are used to drive improvement. While staff practice promotes an anti-discriminatory ethos, the school's equal opportunity policy does not make reference to sexual orientation. This is important to ensure that policies and practices embrace difference and do not potentially discriminate against any user. All other required policies, procedures and records are in place and meet requirements. Young people's case files are meticulously maintained with orderly, relevant and updated information.

Young people benefit from the school's clear and comprehensive complaints policies which are well publicised and on display in communal areas in School House. Young people know how to make complaints, contact advocates and get support in doing so. Senior managers have significant presence at School House and they are available to the young people for discussion. Consultation with residential pupils is a strength and there is ample opportunity for their view and opinions to be shared. This is an efficient and effective system to gauge young people's satisfaction with the residential provision and drive improvement. The school is proud of effective engagement with parents and carers. Communication and liaison is consistent, relevant and sensitive. Parents and carers are positive about the school's efforts with their children and the overwhelming impact the school has made on young people's social and academic development.

## **National minimum standards**

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the residential and teaching staff, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. The school ensures that children know who this person is, and how to contact them. Children are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside contact numbers, including the Children's Rights Director, to ring in case of problems or distress. (NMS 2.2)
- There is a written agreement between the school and any person over 16 not employed by the school but living in the same premises as children (for example,

members of staff households). This specifies the terms of their accommodation, guidance on contact with children, their responsibilities to supervise their visitors, and notice that accommodation may cease to be provided if there is evidence that they are unsuitable to have regular contact with children. They must be required to notify an unrelated designated senior member of staff if they are charged with, or convicted of, any offence. (NMS 14.3)

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- Consider introducing direct consultation between young people, residential staff and the school's chef to further promote healthy eating amongst boarders.
- Promptly document written risk assessments for newly appointed staff and promptly follow up on written references.
- Revise the school's equal opportunities policy to include issues of sexual orientation.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



25/01/2012

Dear School House pupils

### **Inspection of Falconer School**

I recently met most of you at School House's recent Ofsted inspection. Thank you so much for taking time out to speak with me about your experiences at School House. I thank you, your parents and staff for completing questionnaires that helped me understand what you all think about School House. Your comments are important in helping me judge School House as being a good service.

The care staff team work hard to make sure your individual needs are well met by the service. I know that this commitment helps you make incredible and excellent achievement in all aspect of your lives. You very much enjoy being a part of School House. Your relationships with each other is excellent and you feel safe and well cared for by staff; who are enthusiastic about seeing you make good progress.

You enjoy a fantastic range of activities like sailing, scuba diving, drama and attending local youth clubs that help you develop good friendships. Many of you are working with staff on improving your behaviour. I am impressed at how far you have all come since attending School House and I particularly enjoy, as you do, seeing all your success and achievements on display. Well done!

Staff ensure you live a healthy lifestyle and that you do your very best in the classroom. The School House building very comfortable with some very cool equipment! Staff are very interested in what you and your parents have to say about the service.

The inspection showed me that there are some areas that can be improved. This includes better discussions between you and the chef about meals, the appointment of a specific person to occasionally come into School House to make sure you continue to be happy and for the further development of some policies and practices. Despite this, you all make excellent progress at School House and outcomes for you are outstanding.

It was my absolute pleasure meeting with you and I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours Sincerely,

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Jacobs-Walls