

Walworth School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Steve Pearson

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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.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Walworth School is a maintained residential special school which provides education and residential care for boys and girls of primary and junior school age, who have a statement of special educational needs and emotional or behavioural difficulties. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe. Acorn House, the school's residential building, is located behind the main school and comprises four residential units, each having its own living and sleeping areas. The number of children residing at the school each night may vary and they stay for two to four nights each week. The school does not provide residential care at weekends or during school holidays. The maximum number of children that may reside at the school is 10 and the maximum number of children receiving education is 72. The residential provision was last inspected on 25 May 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	satisfactory
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of residential care is good. The care provided enables children to make very good progress in their social, emotional and behavioural development.
- Residential children enjoy their time in the residential unit and they and their parents/carers speak highly of the quality of care.
- The school has made good progress since the previous inspection and it has met all of the recommendations that were made by Ofsted. Monitoring of the quality of care is effective.
- The school does not meet all the national minimum standards although the shortfalls do not have a significant impact on children's welfare.
- Children are safe and feel safe. However an expert's recommendation regarding a sub-standard fire door has not been addressed.
- Managers need to update some policies and make staffing rosters clearer.
- The staff are effective in ensuring that all children have equal opportunities and they recognise and respond to their individual needs and preferences.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Residential children achieve good outcomes as a result of the care they receive in the residential unit.

Residential children gain useful skills and knowledge about issues which will be

helpful to them when they are older and living independently. For example, the staff help them to bake cakes or make meals in the residential unit kitchen. Residential children are prepared for their new school at age 11 because they visit the new senior school in their final term, or staff from the new school visit them.

The children are healthy and make good progress in terms of physical and emotional health. They get on well together and get on well with the staff. All the surveys from parents/carers showed that they strongly agreed that the experience of boarding helped their child's development. Residential children said: 'We do lots of activities where we run about so we keep fit.'

Ofsted received 17 surveys from residential children and these showed that the overwhelming majority of them enjoy the residential experience. Children benefit from interaction with other young people both in the school and outside it, for example, by meeting other young people at activities in the community. One parent summed this up by saying in a survey that they were, 'very happy with the care and can see a big difference in our child's behaviour and his socialising with other children'.

Residential children get on well with each other and with the staff. They said: 'There is some bullying but it's mainly name-calling and the staff stop it straight away.' All the residential children who completed surveys agreed that the school deals well with bullying.

The staff also ensure that all children are given every opportunity to develop positively and to feel valued and included. They have a significant say in how the residential unit and the school as a whole is run. Every month the staff hold a house meeting and gather children's views. Residential children also have a 'worry box' into which they can put any confidential concerns they may have. Since the previous inspection a member of staff has gained funding from three separate sources and this has been spent on improving the provision in the residential unit. Residential children had a significant say in the decision that it should be spent on sports and outdoor equipment.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential care is good and the school meets most of the national minimum standards in this judgement area. Residential children enjoy a high level of support from a team of staff who are consistent and very experienced. There are also good levels of staffing which help to ensure needs are met. Effective procedures are in place to ensure that new residential children are introduced to the residential experience appropriately. Children said: 'We can talk to the staff about anything and we can talk to a person from outside who visits us often as well.'

The staff team provide the residential children with a range of information about how to keep emotionally and physically healthy. Staff from the local authority

psychological service and the child and adolescent mental health service visit regularly. There is good accountability for the administration of any prescribed medication residential children may be taking. All residential staff are appropriately qualified in first aid. However, the school does not have a written policy regarding administration of first aid and so the staff are not enabled to be clear about the application of their first aid training within the school setting. This means national minimum standard 3.6 is not being met.

Residential children said in their surveys and in discussions with the inspector: 'We can ring our families when we want to and in private.' The children have access to two telephones in the residential unit on which to make and receive calls.

The residential accommodation is homely, clean and well-maintained. Children said: 'We can keep our belongings safe if we ask the staff to look after them for us.' Some residential children added: 'It would be nice if we could lock our bedrooms.' Residential children like having the same bedroom each time they stay and they can personalise their rooms with their own posters and so forth.

Residential children like the food. It is varied and nutritious and they have a vegetarian option at each meal as well. Residential children can always gain access to fresh drinking water but some said: 'The cold water from the bathroom is too warm if we want a drink during the night.'

The children take part in a wide choice of activities both within and outside of the school. They have access to a well-equipped gym and sports hall. They also take part in events in local parks where they socialise with other young people in the community. Residential children said in their surveys and in the inspection: 'There are lots of activities and plenty to do in our spare time.'

Each residential child has a residential placement plan which is clear and up to date. This helps the staff to be clear about the needs of each child and their role in how to help ensure their needs are met.

Residential pupils' safety

The arrangements in place to ensure the safety of residential children are adequate and the school does not meet all of the national minimum standards in this judgement area.

Residential children are safe and feel safe. All the children and parents or carers who completed a survey agreed that the school kept them safe. The premises are maintained in a safe condition. Professional technicians regularly service the electrical equipment, gas appliances and equipment for preventing, detecting and extinguishing fires. Hazards to children are assessed annually but not all of the recommendations arising from them have been met. Specifically, a health and safety expert assessed the premises and made a recommendation to make an exit door in

the lounge fire-proof. This recommendation has not been addressed and consequently national minimum standard 7.1 is not being met. All other recommendations have been met.

Exit doors are electronically locked during the daytime and evenings. This prevents unauthorised access to the school and also prevents young people from going missing in order to safeguard their welfare. Such doors are released by fobs carried by the staff or activation of the fire alarm system. It is therefore very rare that residential children go missing. This system of restriction is not explained in the Statement of Purpose. Consequently important information is not being made fully available to parents/carers or professionals.

Residential children said: 'We do fire drills and these are done in residential time as well as school time.' The staff carry out these drills at an appropriate frequency. However, they do not record the names of children who take part in a residential time fire drill. This makes it harder to monitor who has experienced fire evacuation procedures, leading to a risk that some children may be insufficiently prepared.

Effective arrangements are also in place regarding child protection, countering bullying and promoting good behaviour. The school's written policy regarding behaviour management is not sufficiently up to date and does not reflect current government guidance. This means that national minimum standard 12.2 is not being met and there is potential for the procedures regarding behaviour management to be inappropriate

Relationships between the residential children and the staff are very good. The staff provide clear and consistent boundaries and the same staff work with the children every night of the week. This gives children a very strong sense of security and structure.

Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that staff recruited to work with young people are suitable and safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good, although the school does not meet all of the national minimum standards in this judgement area.

The head of care and the team of residential staff provide residential children with a high degree of consistency, structure and routines. The same staff work every night and so children feel settled and secure.

The head of care, headteacher and an external visitor all monitor the school's records and quality of care on a regular basis. They then take action where necessary to address shortfalls. Such monitoring takes account of the views of residential children and their families and carers. The managers of the school are mindful of the national

minimum standards and use them to guide their practice.

The staff team receive good support through regular one-to-one supervision, regular staff meetings and good levels of training. All the residential staff are knowledgeable, experienced and have appropriate qualifications for their field of work.

The school has a complaints policy and the headteacher was addressing a complaint at the time of the inspection. The format for recording how a complaint is investigated does not provide for an explanation as to whether it is upheld or not. This means the outcome of each investigation is insufficiently clear. The school deals with concerns appropriately. This was summed up by a parent/carer who said in a survey: 'I can always contact the staff who always deal with any concerns I may have appropriately.'

There is a strong ethos of helping young people to achieve their potential. They have the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities and leisure interests. The staff involve them in discussions about the running of the residential unit on a regular basis. All young people are encouraged to take part and to experience a sense of belonging. One member of staff said: 'We play games with the children which have a high degree of inclusivity. That way they don't feel left out.' Children's cultural and spiritual needs are also clearly recorded in their residential placement plan. This helps to ensure that the staff are aware of these important needs and their role in meeting them.

There is very clear communication between the staff and parents/carers. One parent/carer said in a survey: 'We find communication between the school and ourselves excellent; we are kept informed of any issues and the progress our child is making. We strongly feel that the school is meeting our child's needs.'

The school's policy about how to respond if a child goes missing is not up to date and does not reflect current government guidance. This means that national minimum standard 15.6 is not being met and there is potential for the procedures to be inappropriate or insufficient.

Records about residential children are comprehensive and up to date. The residential placement plans are clear and appropriately detailed. This helps the staff to be aware of children's needs and about their role in meeting such needs. Each residential child has a key worker who takes a one-to-one interest in them to ensure their needs are being met effectively.

The recording format of the staffing rota does not clearly depict which staff are on duty at a specific time of the day on a particular date. This means that national minimum standard 22.4 is not met and that in the future, if anyone should need to look back at the records, it will be more difficult to establish who worked in the residential unit at a particular point in time.

National minimum standards

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

- The school has, and implements, appropriate policies for the care of children who are unwell. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, administration of medicines and dealing with medical emergencies. The provision of accommodation for children who are unwell has regard to any requirements set out in regulations relating to school premises. (NMS 3.6)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards') and any requirements set out in regulations relating to school premises. (NMS 7.1)
- The policy complies with relevant legislation and guidance and is understood by staff and children (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 12.2)
- Staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and where relevant the local authority's policy, in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy. Staff actively search for children who are missing, including working with the police where appropriate. (NMS 15.6)
- The school keeps a register showing: For each child resident at the school - the dates of admission and departure of each child, who was responsible for their placement in the school, where they were living/accommodated prior to arriving at the school, where they are living/accommodated on leaving the school; and the placing authority and legal status (if applicable) duty rosters recording the identities of the staff and other persons who actually worked at the school or with children from the school, by day and night. The above records are retained for at least 5 years from the date of the last entry. (NMS 22.4)

What should the school do to improve further?

- Make clear, when recording the outcome of any complaint investigation, whether the complaint was upheld, partly upheld or not upheld.
- Make clear in the Statement of Purpose that the school's door-locking system prevents exit from (as well as entry to) the residential unit and other parts of the school without the use of electronic fobs.
- Record the names of children who take part in each fire drill in the residential unit.

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.



09/07/2012

Dear residential children

Inspection of Walworth School

Thank you for helping me to inspect Acorn House on the 9th to the 11th of July. It was good to talk to you and hear your views.

I was very pleased with how well the head of care and staff look after young people in Acorn House. You told me you enjoy staying in Acorn House. You take part in lots of activities in the school and outside of the school. One of the staff has got some money from some organisations outside of the school and you helped to decide what to spend this on. It is good that the staff ask you about how you think Acorn House should be run.

You told me that if you had any concerns you would tell the staff or the head of care. You also said you could tell the independent person who visits Acorn House often.

I was pleased to see that you all get on well with each other. Some of you said there is a bit of bullying but it's mainly name calling and the staff soon make sure it stops if they hear it. I was also pleased to see that you generally behave well in Acorn House. Sometimes the staff give out a sanction to any young person who behaves poorly. They do not do this very often and if they do give out a sanction then it is fair. Occasionally they may need to restrain a young person but again this does not happen often and is only done for the right reason.

I think the care provided by Acorn House is good. I have made some suggestions about how things could be a bit better. For example, the door in the gallery needs altering and some of the guidance for staff needs to be changed so that it is in line with guidance from the government.

Once again, thank you for your help at the inspection.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Pearson