

# Holbrook Centre for Autism

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Elaine Cray

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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**

Holbrook Centre for Autism is a residential special school that provides specialist education and care for pupils with autism, aged between 5 and 19 years. The school is maintained by the local authority, Derbyshire County Council.

Residential pupils stay one night a week, between Monday and Thursday, in term time. There are seven single occupancy bedrooms in two separate, self-contained units. A total of 27 pupils currently use the residential service throughout the week. Pupils have their meals, except lunch, in the units.

Residential pupils can access facilities within the school and also use community resources in nearby towns; the school has its own transport. The residential provision was last inspected on 21 March 2012.

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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	good

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- This service is judged good overall with an outstanding judgement for outcomes for residential pupils. The recommendation and areas for improvement from the last inspection are met.
- The high emphasis placed on life skills means pupils grow in maturity and confidence. The proactive and innovative strategies used to support residential pupils results in high levels of progress and readiness for the transition once they leave the school.
- Residential pupils enjoy outstanding outcomes as a result being able to extend their use of a combination of communication processes. They are empowered to express their views, extend their friendships and access a variety of opportunities. This improves the quality of residential pupils' lives and increases their positive self-esteem.
- Residential pupils enjoy their stays in the residential unit because they value and benefit from positive and trusting relationships with staff in a supported and nurturing environment. Residential pupils clearly enjoy and value their friendships with each other and their behaviour is a credit to the pupils and staff of the service.
- There is a clear ethos of mutual respect which permeates throughout the routines and practice delivered. Regular and on-going communication between parents, carers, the care team and education staff ensures a consistent focus on the best interests of the pupils.
- The safety of residential pupils is given high priority. Residential pupils are protected with good working relationships with key agencies to promote safety

and manage behaviour. Staff are proactive and creative in managing behaviour and making sure all young people are safe.

- The school meets the vast majority of the national minimum standards for residential special schools. There are a number of significant strengths in the provision, not least the excellent developments in young people's levels of confidence and independence skills. Two national minimum standards are not fully met but do not directly impact on outcomes for residential pupils.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Residential pupils' outcomes are outstanding. They grow and develop because the service recognises and values them as young people with diverse individual needs. Parents talk in terms of children being 'made to feel worthy and valued as an individual' and developing into a 'confident, self-assured young person with a real zest for life.'

Residential pupils stay in a nurturing and enabling environment. Their individuality is celebrated and explored. They learn and thrive because proactive and creative strategies ensure all pupils of all abilities are engaged with and enjoy their stays at the residential service. Residential pupils can interact and enjoy the company of others, because communication processes are inclusive and meet their varied needs.

Residential pupils develop good self-esteem because they enjoy positive, interactive and stable relationships with staff. They show concern for others, have meaningful interactions and make friends with other young people using the service. They develop excellent social skills and become less anxious.

These improvements impact on young people feeling more confident and able to try new experiences. They take a much fuller part in their family and social lives. Parents frequently comment about their children being far more motivated to attend school on the days they are due to stay overnight at the residential service.

Residential pupils take pride in contributing to and helping each other with day-to-day living arrangements in the houses. They develop life skills because their contributions are facilitated and embraced in the running of the houses. Group living routines, networks to support communication and a variety of education opportunities mean that pupils are enabled and supported. Parents greatly value 'the emphasis on developing independence and an understanding of the community' and how 'independence has improved enormously.'

Photographs show residential pupils proudly demonstrating their achievements, including doing their own washing, making beds and cooking a meal with their friends. They grow in confidence and develop increasing independence. Some pupils are embarking on their Duke of Edinburgh award, others now go swimming and all pupils enjoy activities in the local community.

Health outcomes are significantly improved for the residential pupils. Their health is promoted as they enjoy cooking, they learn about healthy eating choices and actively enjoy exercise and activities. Residential pupils develop knowledge and understanding of their own health. These improvements include better personal hygiene, learning about growing-up and being involved in taking medication.

Parents and professionals identify significant progress and positive experiences for young people using the residential service. Comments about the service exemplify that residential pupils are encouraged to reach their potential and provides 'major benefits for life ahead.'

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

The quality of the residential provision and care is good. Clear induction procedures facilitate a needs-led transition to the residential service for each young person. Pupils settle well and the process responds to the diverse and complex needs of pupils and the input from parents and carers.

Staff make consistent efforts to provide a sensitive, nurturing, fun and interactive environment for residential pupils. Staff have in-depth knowledge and exceptional dedication to the needs of the young people. The consistent and individualised care results in high levels of self-esteem and sense of achievement for young people.

Communication processes, include verbal, written, symbol and signing systems. Residential pupils are consistently supported to enhance their understanding and ability to communicate. Staff ensure residential pupils have a meaningful understanding of their experiences and are able to contribute their ideas and views.

Progress is consistently celebrated, reinforced and communicated. Residential pupils are consistently congratulated for 'good waiting' and 'good choosing'. Staff also make excellent use of smiling, physical gestures and positive eye contact to reinforce the clear pride and praise they have for the young people.

Residential pupils benefit from and enjoy a range of activities. They are fully involved in choosing what they would like to do. The activities plan is arranged with a balance between pupils' preferences and an onus on developing and extending their education, physical and social development.

Care planning is comprehensive and provides effective strategies to care for the residential pupils. Plans are effectively implemented with input from residential pupils, parents, education staff and other support agencies. Residential pupils progress because care plans focus on target setting with good consistency of care due good liaison between the residential and education staff. While the pupils' needs are fully addressed and plans are reviewed regularly, not all care plans are fully updated.

The arrangements to promote and monitor health and medical needs are an outstanding feature of this service. Residential pupils benefit from good health due to extensive staff training and effective monitoring systems. Residential staff are proactive and knowledgeable in the implementation of medical protocols. There is excellent liaison with a variety of agencies to support pupils with medical, physical, mental and emotional health needs.

Residential pupils are protected with safe and effective medication procedures, including staff training and awareness of how medication impacts on behaviour.

Catering arrangements are an excellent example of how staff place young people at the centre of their practice. Evening mealtimes build choice, independence and group living into the young people's routine. Residential pupils are encouraged to choose a meal, guided with healthy options and included in some part of the mealtime process. Staff are patient and consistently reinforce and implement the individual communication processes in place for each young person. All residential pupils enjoy the food, learn practical skills and take part in a social event as all pupils sit down together to enjoy their evening meal.

The residential accommodation is purpose-built and part of the school. Facilities are of a good standard and are safe and very well-maintained. Residential pupils can relax and feel warm and comfortable. Resources for the pupils to play and spend leisure time are available at the school. The accommodation and facilities support the learning and personal development of residential pupils.

Parents' comments about the staff include, 'extremely helpful, friendly and supportive' and 'staff are imaginative in their approach to education; this is not so much a job as a vocation.'

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The safety of residential pupils is good. There are clear elements of outstanding practice in terms of behaviour management at this service. Residential pupils' behaviour improves and this impacts on their education and social opportunities. There is a strong emphasis on understanding behaviour in terms of learning disability, communication, understanding and sensory challenges.

Residential pupils are protected by robust procedures for safe recruitment and the monitoring of staff. Residential pupils are safe because they are looked after by well-trained staff who consistently implement safeguarding arrangements.

Welfare is promoted and protected by a range of policies and procedures for child protection. Residential pupils are protected with an effective staff awareness of the countering bullying policy. Staff know what to do should a pupil go missing from the service and are supported with clear written procedures.

Residential pupils are supported with comprehensive behaviour management plans and positive handling plans. The use of physical intervention or sanctions is rare due to the excellent early interventions and de-escalation strategies used by staff. While individual behaviour plans are detailed and consistently implemented, there are some which are not fully up to date.

Risk assessment and management is effective. All activities, environmental features and behaviour are routinely and robustly assessed to ensure safety. Risk management strategies are proactive, well-resourced and effectively monitored. Residential pupils have every opportunity to try new and challenging opportunities in a safe and structured way. There are regular checks on the security and safety of the residential unit, school building and grounds. Records are detailed and accountable, showing regular staffing and ensuring that residential pupils have practical understanding about keeping themselves safe, both in school and in the community.

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

The management and organisation of the residential provision is good. Parents, residential pupils and other interested parties are informed about the aims and facilities of the school's residential service. Parents value the induction process and say communication is effective because they are reassured and the children settle well.

The service is effectively staffed with well-trained, experienced staff who value each other and place the interests of pupils at the centre of their practice. While there have been changes in the leadership of the school, the residential team has remained stable. The interim leadership arrangements have fully supported staff and placed the views and needs of the residential pupils in high priority.

Routines and procedures are clear, well established and operate consistently to provide a safe, sensitive and motivating environment for the residential pupils. The residential service provides a child-centred culture of respect, individuality and achievement. Leaders, managers and staff show insight into the diverse backgrounds and needs of residential pupils, but lack confidence in how to express their understanding of ethnicity and race.

All required policies, documents and records are in place and support effective staff practice and management of the service. The head teacher implements clear strategies to track trends of behaviour, achievement, develop staff practice and clarify criteria to measure success and progress.

Monitoring of the service's performance and impact on outcomes for residential pupils is a focal point for the leaders and managers for the school. Reports are routinely submitted to the board of governors. Self-evaluation is an emerging

strength of the residential service and there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

## **National minimum standards**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

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

- ensure all placement plans are amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs.
- develop staff training and awareness so as to ensure staffing arrangements take children's ethnic and cultural backgrounds into full consideration.

**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.**



21/11/2012

To all residential pupils at the Holbrook Centre for Autism

### **Inspection of Holbrook Centre for Autism**

Thank you for making me welcome and helping me with the inspection. I am writing to let you know the residential provision at Holbrook Centre for Autism has been judged to be good overall.

There are outstanding outcomes for young people, a good quality of care, good systems for safeguarding and good leadership and management.

I could see you really enjoy your stay at the school. You learn well, improve behaviour and learn new skills. Your parents told Ofsted the school has a number of strengths and continues to improve.

Some of the key strengths I identified were how you become more independent and how much you really enjoy the range of activities available to you. You very much value your relationships with staff. Your views are very important to the staff and they make sure you have good communication systems so you can have your say.

The school has been asked to improve some of the records that help with your care and behaviour. Also that staff learn a little more about race and culture.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Cray