

Whitstone Head School

Whitstone Head School, Whitstone, HOLSWORTHY, Devon, EX22 6TJ

Inspection dates	17/09/2013 to 19/09/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate	4
Outcomes for residential pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of residential provision and care	Inadequate	4
Residential pupils' safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is inadequate because

- Residential pupils and their parents state that boarding at the school is enjoyable. As a result of boarding, residential pupils have gained skills and made friends. However, there is no formal evaluation or documentation of progress to support these views. Care plans do not contain regularly evaluated, clear aims and targets to ensure that progress is being made and that skills are being learned.
- Health needs are met and medication is well managed. Residential pupils enjoy the meals provided. During weekdays, meals provide a nutritious and balanced diet. However, at weekends there is a reliance on takeaway meals that do not provide the nutrition that residential pupils need.
- Child protection procedures are robust and implemented in practice. Health and safety responsibilities such as fire prevention and gas and electrical safety checks are well managed. However, staff are risk averse and do not allow residential boarders to learn skills from taking assessed, age-appropriate risks.
- Staff in the school and residential provision do not communicate effectively with each other. This means that the 24-hour curriculum is not being implemented to ensure that residential pupils build on the topics and skills they are learning during the school day.
- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is rated as inadequate, mainly due to ineffective leadership and management. Shortfalls have been found in relation to the monitoring of care practices and confusion in relation to staff roles and responsibilities. As a result, there is poor staff morale and dissatisfaction. There are no systems in place to drive forward improvements in the quality of residential care. Independent monitoring visits are not taking place. There is no awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the residential provision and how these will be addressed. Some national minimum standards have not been met and this impacts negatively on the welfare and outcomes of residential pupils.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

The school was informed this inspection was taking place by a telephone made at 9.00 a.m. on the morning of the inspection, which commenced at 12 noon.

A tour of all four boarding houses was undertaken. There were discussions with parents and residential pupils, observations of mealtimes and activities, discussions with school residential staff, the head teacher, head of care and governors.

Records and documents were scrutinised and evidence triangulated. Information prior to the inspection was gathered from Parent View and returned surveys. School policies, boarding routines and the Statement of Principles were scrutinised on the school website.

Inspection team

Christina Maddison	Lead social care inspector
Nigel Parkes	Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Whitstone Head School is a non-maintained residential special school providing education for 37 pupils aged between 10 and 16 years who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many pupils are diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum. Most pupils have diagnosed mental health conditions. Currently the school is able to provide boarding for up to 32 residential pupils.

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 National Curriculum and has a programme of outdoor education and outdoor pursuit activities.

The school is situated on the edge of Whitstone village in Cornwall. It comprises a large country house and grounds with an adjacent education building and gymnasium. Two attached buildings, situated in the grounds, have been converted into four boarding houses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- **The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.**
 - Where a child is in care and will be leaving care on leaving the school, the school agrees with the young person's responsible authority what contribution it should make to implement any Pathway or other plan for the child before the child leaves school. These arrangements should support that young person's needs, and promote a smooth transition. (NMS 2.7)
 - All children, including those with special dietary, medical or religious needs, are provided with meals which are adequate in nutrition, quantity, quality, choice and variety. (NMS 8.1)
 - Reasonable protection is provided for children's personal possessions and for any children's money or valuables looked after by the school. (NMS 9.3)
 - Children take part in age appropriate peer activities as would normally be permitted by the parent in relation to their children or as outlined in any placement plan. Decision-making and any assessment of risk to the child should be undertaken from the perspective of a reasonable parent. (NMS 10.2)
 - The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (NMS 21.1)
 - There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. The school's governing body or proprietor has a

system to monitor care and welfare provision in the school. (NMS 13.1)

- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)
- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the Headteacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)
- Every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to supply the information to the child), and add personal statements or statements correcting errors. (NMS 22.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Inadequate

Pupils make good educational progress at the school. They have successfully maintained their educational placements when previously they have not been able to achieve this at other schools. However, pupils progress and outcomes are negatively affected because staff are not implementing the 24-hour curriculum to promote learning and progress between the school and residential provision. Communication between the academic staff and residential staff is not effective and leads to inconsistencies for residential pupils. For example, staff report that on occasions, a residential pupil will return from education in a distressed state and staff have not received any information about what has happened during the school day and how they should maintain consistency of support.

All residential pupils have the opportunity to participate in a range of recreational activities such as rambling, beach visits and cinema trips. However, due to a risk-averse approach by staff, pupils are not able to access activities in the community such as sports clubs and walking to the nearby shop alone on a regular basis. This means that residential pupils are unlikely to make friends outside the school and gain independent living skills.

Relationships between residential pupils are positive and bullying is not an issue at the school. Staff are aware of and meet any cultural or spiritual needs. For example, residential pupils are able to attend religious services, according to their faith.

Parents report that as a result of boarding, residential pupils make progress with their social and personal development. Staff report, for example, that residential pupils are now able to eat with a knife and fork, which they could not do on entering the school. However, due to a lack of effective care planning and clear, documented evaluation of the residential pupils' individual progress, the school is not able to evidence their progress from their starting points.

Most residential pupils report that they are happy when boarding. However, other residential pupils report that they are not allowed necessary freedoms and opportunities to develop independence skills. One residential pupil said 'this school is like being in a prison.' Consequently, residential pupils are not well prepared for leaving school because they are not always being equipped with the skills they will need in the future.

Residential pupils are asked for their opinions about the menus provided and how their bedrooms should be decorated. House meetings are regularly held to discuss ideas and suggestions and these are acted upon.

Quality of residential provision and care

Inadequate

Comprehensive assessments, including consideration of cultural and specialist individual needs, are undertaken and documented prior to pupils being admitted to the school. This ensures that the school is the appropriate placement for a pupil and that it is able to meet their needs. However, care planning processes following the initial assessments are poor. The school has recently devised a new format of documenting care plans and needs. However, this does not comprehensively detail the residential pupils' care needs and how these are to be met. Plans do not contain termly targets for progress and achievements and so it is not possible to measure if pupils have made progress as a result of boarding at the school.

Named key workers work specifically with pupils for whom they have responsibility. However, there is a lack of direction and guidance in care plans; for example, regarding how staff are to manage individual young people's behaviour. Staff commented 'we are winging it and staff are

doing different things. It is chaos.' Staff are committed and caring, but disputes between management and staff teams are impacting on residential pupils in terms of low staff morale and distraction from the care task.

Residential pupils are not being supported to be as independent as possible and gain skills with daily living tasks. There are no transition plans in place to document what skills should be gained before residential pupils leave the school and how they are to be supported to achieve these skills. Pupils are sometimes able to cook meals and shop for ingredients and some pupils are being supported to attend college, but there is little monitoring of progress, or celebration of achievements that have been made.

Pupils commented positively about meals provided. Staff and residential pupils eat together in a calm and relaxed atmosphere in the school dining room. Menus and meals sampled evidence that generally the school provides a healthy and nutritious diet. However, on Saturdays and Sundays pupils eat takeaway meals, such as burger and chips, rather than being encouraged to cook their own meals with staff support. This means that pupils are missing an opportunity to cook in order to develop independence skills and are not eating a nutritious and balanced diet at weekends.

The residential accommodation is generally well maintained and homely. Residential pupils are able to personalise their bedrooms but are not able to lock valuable and precious items away to keep them safe, as bedrooms do not contain lockable storage facilities. Not all boarding accommodation provides residential pupils with access to an outside telephone line without going through staff. However, the head of care is addressing this shortfall and all pupils are able to contact their families and helplines through use of their personal mobile phones.

Effective individual healthcare plans ensure that residential pupils' health needs are fully understood and met. This means that residential pupils maintain good health. They have access to healthcare professionals such as occupational therapists, psychologists and the looked-after children's nurse. The arrangements for the administration of medication are safe and managed by designated staff.

Residential pupils' safety

Adequate

Arrangements for maintaining the physical safety of the residential accommodation in the school are well managed. For example, electrical and gas appliances, fire equipment and alarms are regularly tested. All residential pupils know what to do if there is a fire in the school when they were boarding.

Risk assessments are in place for the buildings, individual pupils and activities. However, residential pupils describe staff as 'over-protective', due to their reluctance to allow managed and assessed risks. This impacts on residential pupils' potential to learn new skills by participating in activities outside of the school. For example, one pupil said they were not allowed to walk alone to the local shop, and did not understand why. Instead of undertaking a risk assessment of this activity, staff had made no effort to make this possible.

Residential pupils said that bullying is not currently an issue for them. Parents commented that when there was an issue of bullying, staff dealt effectively and sensitively, working with pupils to end the bullying. There has been no physical restraint used since the previous inspection and staff have all received physical restraint training, in case there is a need to intervene. Sanctions imposed are minimal and appropriate. Residential pupils say 'sanctions are fair, for example, if I won't get up for school then I have to go to bed early that night.' There have been no incidents of residential pupils going missing from the school without permission. Residential pupils say that they feel safe boarding at the school and they are sure that staff keep them safe.

The school has robust recruitment procedures in place for assessing the suitability of staff to work with residential pupils. Recruitment records hold all necessary checks and references to ensure that staff are suitable.

Staff are confident, well trained and knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures in the school. For example, they know to whom they should report any concerns. The head of care has good links with the Local Authority Designated Officer for child protection and the local police. This ensures that she is up to date with recent safeguarding and child protection practice. Necessary safeguarding protocols and procedures are in place.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Inadequate

The residential provision of the school is not effectively managed or led. Leadership is weak and ineffective. As a result, there is poor morale amongst staff, who are distracted from caring and supporting residential pupils because of internal disputes and a lack of clarity and understanding regarding their roles and responsibilities. This shortfall continues despite a re-organisation of staff roles and structures, following a recommendation from the previous inspection.

There is little evidence that records are being monitored for any trends and patterns. One example is a lack of monitoring and evaluation of behaviour management incidents. This lack of evaluation means that the school is not clear about residential pupils' individual progress, the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision and how it plans to improve and develop in the future.

The school has not developed a system for monitoring and developing the quality of care within the residential provision. For example, no system is in place to gain the views of residential pupils, their parents or placing authorities regarding the quality of care provided. Documented monitoring visits from an independent person have not been taking place. This means that there is no independent overview of the quality of care provided in the residential provision to drive improvement and pupils do not have the opportunity to give their views through these visits.

Staff receive training in all essential topics such as safeguarding, safe physical intervention, first aid and working with pupils who have autism. Many staff have worked at the school for a number of years and this provides continuity of relationships for residential pupils. Staff are described by residential pupils as 'fun people, I like the staff very much.' There is always a sufficient number of staff on duty to meet the residential pupils' needs. Staff supervision is taking place on a regular basis but has failed to tackle the dissatisfaction and poor morale evident among staff. Annual staff appraisals have not taken place to ensure that staff continue to have the skills necessary to meet the residential pupils' needs.

Residential pupils know how to make a complaint and feel able to do so. A recently introduced, child-friendly complaints form ensures that all pupils are supported to complain, whatever their level of communication. Complaints made have been appropriately dealt with and complainants responded to.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	134062
Social care unique reference number	SC041515
DfE registration number	908/7001

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.

Type of school	
Number of boarders on roll	10
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 17
Headteacher	Mr David McLean-Thorne
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/06/2012
Telephone number	01288 341251
Email address	whitstonehead@btconnect.com

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