

North Hill House

North Hill House, Fromefield, FROME, Somerset, BA11 2HB

Inspection dates

09/02/2016 to 11/02/2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good **2**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good 2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Young people benefit from the fantastic commitment and dedication from all staff. They place the wellbeing of young people at the centre of their practice. Parents are very satisfied with the quality of care provided. 'My son has greatly increased his trust and confidence, he would not have progressed without the support of the residential placement.'
- There is a robust approach to the safety and welfare of young people. Staff are trained in safeguarding procedures with regular updates. There is an effective partnership with the local authority for the protection of young people and the management of allegations. Thorough recruitment procedures ensures that all adults are checked for suitability before working at this school.
- Young people are supported to manage their behaviour. Staff enable young people to become self-aware and to be able to follow strategies to reduce their anxieties. The senior management team apply in-depth analysis of behavioural incidents to monitor events and staff practice.
- The residential provision is managed well. Young people receive highly personalised care. They enjoy activities and develop interests in the community that can be transferable when they are at home with their families.
- The use of an information management system is evolving. Reporting procedures are gradually streamlining into one system for analysis. The monitoring of sanctions is not always undertaken in a timely manner.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

- 12.6 A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force. Records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of reasonable force and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the quality of the records of young people's meetings to ensure they consistently demonstrate a response to their requests. Young people should be able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced at 09:20 on 9 February 2016 and commenced later that day at 12:00. Inspection activities included discussions with residential pupils, parents, the principal, the head of care, residential staff, the senior management team, support staff, regional operation managers, local authority representatives and the independent visitor. Key documents and policies were reviewed and contact was made with the local authority designated officer (LADO). Meals were sampled with pupils and the inspector observed activities. A tour was undertaken of the residential provision and school facilities. The responses on Parent View were considered along with written contributions from residential staff, including those who work during the night.

Inspection team

Clare Davies

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

North Hill House is an independent residential special school for boys and girls, aged 6-19 years, 27 of whom reside at the school during the week. The residential accommodation is provided in five areas, four of which are located within the school and the fifth is in the nearby town for pupils in post 16 education. The school is situated on the edge of the market town of Frome and provides for pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorders (Asperger syndrome) and associated learning difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in February 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

The residential provision offers young people with autism a positive environment where they make good progress. Individual targets encourage and support young people to achieve in their academic and personal development. Young people benefit from the cohesive approach across the school from teaching staff, care staff and therapists. The effective management of transitions is strong. Good communication and handover meetings promote the consistency of care.

Staff have a very good understanding of young people's vulnerabilities and their underpinning disabilities and emotions. They anticipate well when young people are likely to become anxious and upset, implementing plans to distract from negative behaviours. Such actions provide young people with strategies to manage their own behaviour when they feel an impending loss of control. Personalised 'Time to Think' plans are created with young people to equip them with methods of coping at times of stress. Key people and places are listed in these plans to offer support.

Incidents of bullying are challenged by all staff. Two designated staff members take the lead in responding to reports of bullying and promoting kindness to others. This project has developed to include representatives of young people. This encourages others to speak up if they are a victim of bullying and provides a strong link between young people and staff to 'sort it out'. The mis-use of technology is often a vehicle for bullying. Young people sign up to agreements in the safe use of technology. They receive guidance on e-safety from teachers, residential staff and the local community police officer who is well known as a regular visitor to develop positive relationships between young people and the police force.

Young people progress in their learning and many are successful in achieving formal qualifications. A young person says that after attending four schools this is the only one that has helped him. A parent reports that their child's progress is 'massive' after former schools declared their child as 'unteachable'. Many young people are studying for GCSE examinations and some are predicted to achieve 'A' grades. Another parent reports how this school supported their child with a re-take to boost their GCSE grade from 'C' to 'B'. A parent states that their child 'has successfully moved back into mainstream education, due to the support of the residential placement'.

As young people are resident for a maximum of four nights, their general health care needs remain the responsibility of their parents or carers. Residential staff are trained in first aid and the safe administration of medication. Monitoring of medication by the independent visitor, and the head of care, identified some shortfalls in recording. As a result, more rigorous monitoring occurs each week and this practice has effectively ensured an improvement. Healthy living is promoted through diet and exercise in particular, by playing football and using a local gymnasium. Education, residential and therapy staff have a coordinated approach to support young people in understanding puberty, personal hygiene and sexual health. For example, a social story shows a young person how to apply deodorant each day as part of their routine.

For young people who struggle to settle at this school, there are many creative approaches to support them. Reduced attendance, outreach support and innovative timetables with a focus on the interests of young people. The senior management team recognise when this school is no longer able to meet the complex needs of some young people. Their commitment to young people continues until they have an alternative educational provision.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The outstanding quality of care is child-centred and highly personalised. Young people's needs are well understood and met by staff. Staff respond to individual personalities and traits, they are highly skilled in being able to tailor responses to effectively support young people.

The comprehensive admission process ensures that an in-depth assessment identifies what young people's needs are and how they can be met. Introduction to the school and the residential provision can take several months at a pace comfortable to the young person. As a result of such personalised care, young people succeed and develop a secure base from which to develop their learning and personal development.

Collaboration, and effective communication, across the school brings all staff together with the shared commitment to providing a safe, fun learning experience. Residential, education and therapy teams work well together, ably assisted by support staff. This extends to waking night staff who report, 'we feel very much part of the whole staff network'. Parents report high levels of satisfaction about the care their children receive and how well the school staff work in partnership with them. 'This school is fantastic for him (our son), they are very supportive and adaptable to his needs.'

Young people are supported to respect others and develop tolerance through group living. Staff appropriately challenge the views and behaviour of young people when any issues of negative peer conflict arises, including bullying and racism. An open culture to discuss and celebrate difference addresses inequalities. Young people receive support to recognise and understand their autism and how this can impact on themselves and others. This enables young people to develop in confidence as they learn about their own strengths and develop a positive self-view.

The residential accommodation has improved following a refurbishment of each of the four lounge areas. Consultation with an interior designer ensured that the colours and patterns reflect the needs and choices of young people. Young people benefit from single rooms with en-suite bathrooms and they enjoy personalising their own space.

The house off site is homely and offers single rooms for older students who attend local colleges for their education. This resource provides an excellent 'stepping stone' for young people to increase their living skills and experience some independence through living in the town and using public transport and community facilities. Since the previous inspection young people have chosen a name for the house to avoid the stigma of calling it 'the post 16 house'. A young person has made a beautiful wooden sign with a carved decoration to name this home.

Young people are provided with opportunities to try new activities and develop personal interests. Some school resources are available in the evenings such as the information technology room, food technology classroom and the sensory room. Many activities take place off site, using local leisure facilities and for some young people, they develop sufficient confidence to join local youth groups such as, a football club, cadets and scouts. Those with an interest in art have met a local artist for inspiration. This has led to a public display of art work by young people.

Staff are suitably trained in the protection of young people from their induction as new staff, through to continual professional development. All staff are trained to level 3, this is above the minimum requirements and ensures that staff have the depth of awareness in child protection matters such as, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Training events explore lessons learnt from serious case reviews and provoke staff 'to think the unthinkable'. The senior management team have developed effective partnership working with the police and the local authority designated officer (LADO).

Five members of the senior management team are trained sufficiently to be designated safeguarding officers (DSO). This high number of DSOs ensures that there is always one on duty and available to young people and staff. Staff are alert to report any concern, no matter how small it may seem. A new electronic reporting system ensures that all DSOs are informed of every concern being reported in order to assess what action is required to protect young people. Allegations, and suspicions of significant harm, are appropriately reported to external agencies for an independent assessment. The LADO reports that this school has robust safeguarding procedures, and contact from the DSO's is 'professional and thorough'.

Risk assessment provides a visual guide for young people, and staff, with the use of a traffic light system applied to individual behaviour. Staff proudly report how young people progress and their red high-risk ratings reduce to amber and green as they settle and improve their behaviour over time. Risk management is effectively applied to the environment and activities, on and off site. There are no incidents of young people going missing to report. At times of stress, young people have walked away from staff supervision and have been followed at a distance to ensure their safety before returning to school.

Leaders and managers have invested in an information management system to report and monitor on the behaviour of young people. Senior managers scrutinise the data for any patterns and trends. Outcomes are good for the reduction in the use of physical intervention. Records show that over the last three years, the total number of incidents in the school have fallen by 46% for the year 2015 compare to 2013. The depth of recording and analysis of any physical intervention is now additionally applied to low level interventions. The senior management team are keen to understand these positive interactions with young people to inform what works well. Such interventions, invariably avoid the need to escalate in the use of physical contact and restraint.

The use of sanctions, as a consequence for negative behaviour, lacks the in-depth monitoring that is applied to other areas of behaviour management. For example, some entries in the bound book have not been entered within 24 hours as required. This has led to some entries not being in chronological order. Management oversight of these records is also delayed, limiting the opportunity to modify or cancel any sanction that may not seem appropriate. For example, a sanction 'to miss going off site for activities' has no timescale recorded for how long this should apply. The impact on young people is minimal as sanctions are not frequently issued. The head of care has already identified this as a training need and has raised the matter of sanctions versus rewards with residential staff. A training session is planned imminently to address this shortfall.

There is a serious commitment to the health and safety of young people, staff and visitors. Fire evacuation procedures are known and understood by young people through regular practices at different times of the day. Adaptations are made for those young people with a visual impairment to reduce the risks of trips and falls. Robust monitoring of equipment, and checks of the grounds and accommodation, ensure that young people are in a safe environment.

The recruitment procedures adopted ensure a rigorous assessment occurs when appointing new staff. The effective use of a form to identify any gaps in employment or education at the shortlisting stage, provides a line of enquiry during an interview. This attention to detail contributes to safer recruitment for the protection of young people.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. Since the previous inspection a new head of care has been appointed. He is an experienced manager and is suitably qualified with a level 5 diploma in the field of residential care.

Residential staff report that there was a period of staff shortages and, with the introduction of a new head of care, this caused some anxieties. Staff report that now the situation has settled down and staff vacancies are very low. One to one staffing is predominantly arranged to effectively support young people. Core teams of staff are identified for some young people. This ensures that they feel secure with regular staff who provide strong consistent response to their care needs.

New staff, employed during the last six months report very positively about their induction and the ongoing training opportunities. One member of staff said, 'Since joining in September 2015 I feel I have received an incredible amount of support from the school and its existing staff members'. Another reported, 'I feel as though as I am supported by staff in the school, especially whilst I was a new member of staff. The Senior Management Team were very welcoming, patient and helpful and made me feel like a part of the team straight away'.

To communicate with all staff the principal writes a weekly newsletter. This provides staff with an overview of current events and issues within the school. In response to staff feedback on the newsletter, more detail is provided on the residential provision to address the previous imbalance of reporting on educational matters. The newsletters capture celebratory news regarding achievement by young people, and staff, in addition to messages from research on autism, education and residential care.

Staff report that they enjoy their role in supporting young people and receive good levels of support and training. Staff requests to have specific training on the management and understanding of self-harming behaviour is being met with planned events this term. Staff say that the information management system to record behavioural incidents is a great development and improves the quality of record keeping.

The principal is supported by a senior management team, all of whom are visible in the school and the residential provision. They are actively involved to drive and promote this child centred provision. The leadership of this school strives for young people to achieve and be able to successfully transfer from this school into further learning, training or employment. The success of this objective is evident as the destinations of leavers includes university, college and employment.

Placing authorities report high levels of satisfaction with this school listing the following strengths; the child-centred approach, good communication and the production of high quality written reports. A placing authority representative said, 'They invest in children and prepare them well to move on'.

Leaders and managers monitor the quality of the residential provision to inform their self-evaluation. They seek the views of young people, parents, carers and professionals through the

educational review process and through regular contact. The senior management team are reflective and learn from incidents and complaints. External scrutiny from regional managers and an independent visitor contribute to raising the standards of care. As a result, the senior management team are aware of the strengths of this residential provision and areas for development.

Record keeping is variable. There are some excellent examples such as the de-brief for young people after an incident, in comparison to some records that require improvement. For example, young people are regularly consulted through meetings but the records fail to consistently evidence the response to the issues they raise. This shortfall has minimal negative impact on young people as they frequently receive verbal feedback however, these response are not backed up within the records.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	131975
Social care unique reference number	SC033014
DfE registration number	933/6200

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	27
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	6 to19
Principal	Mr Swavek Nowakiewicz
Date of previous boarding inspection	24/02/2015
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