

Meadows School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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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

Meadows School is situated in Southborough, Kent and is a non-maintained residential special school, owned by Barnardo's Children's Charity. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The residential provision offers a separate house for girls, situated in a residential area of Southborough and two houses for boys. Both of these buildings are located within the school's grounds and the girls' house is within a short walking distance of the school, situated very close to the town centre of Tunbridge Wells.

The school was last inspected in November 2010.

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

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

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the school's residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils enjoy the experience of boarding and parents report positively on how the school cares for their children. There is a very stable and experienced staff team who provide a consistently high quality of care. Pupils thrive on the very positive and constructive relationships with them. Equality and diversity is very well promoted throughout the school's residential provision.
- There is good overall provision for safeguarding the welfare of residential pupils, with some outstanding aspects, especially related to behaviour management. Pupils feel safe within the residential provision and there are clear and effective arrangements for ensuring their safety. Staff are acutely aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and know each pupil's vulnerabilities.
- Outcomes for residential pupils at the school are outstanding. They receive high quality care and support and make excellent progress in their personal and social development, especially when bearing in mind their starting points. Care staff contribute very effectively to the progress that pupils make. There are close working relationships with parents and with other professionals involved with pupils.
- Pupil's emotional well being is promoted to an excellent standard. The school ensures that they receive swift access to psychological and psychiatric services and have access to therapies which further support their well being.
- Residential pupils engage in an extensive range of activities that they enjoy and which enhance their personal and social development and enrich their life experiences. There are excellent links with the local and wider community which

benefit pupils.

- Healthcare provision at the school is excellent. Healthy lifestyles are successfully promoted and there are established relationships with external health professionals which benefit pupils. The meals provided are of a very good quality and feedback from pupils is very positive.
- The residential accommodation is of an excellent standard. All areas are well maintained and provide very comfortable living areas. Provision to support pupils in developing their independence is detailed and of an excellent quality.
- The national minimum standards have not been fully met. Three recommendations made at this inspection relate to ensuring that internet access is achieved for the girl's boarding house, ensuring that the head of care receives regular formal supervision and to ensure that reports written after monitoring visits are received promptly by the school.
- The school has successfully addressed the recommendations from the previous report. The residential provision has significant strengths and no weaknesses which have a direct impact on the outcomes for residential pupils.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Their experience of boarding enables them to develop their social, life and independence skills to a significant standard, especially when bearing in mind their starting points. Residential pupils are encouraged and enabled, with excellent support, to develop constructive relationships with their peers as well as the adults caring for them. Residential pupils develop tolerance and understanding of each others problems and speak of how they have developed during their time at the school. 'I would probably be locked up by now if I hadn't come here' was a comment made by one pupil. Another pupil said 'I've learnt a lot, I'm different now.'

Residential pupils thrive in an environment where tolerance and understanding of each other is embedded in the culture. This leads to a setting where support is forthcoming from both adults and peers at times of distress or unsettled behaviour. The nurturing environment enables them to develop their life and social skills to a significant degree. They experience success and have positive acknowledgment which helps them to develop their self esteem and sense of worth.

Residential pupils, on the whole, enjoy their boarding experience. They are offered an excellent range of enriching activities and experience success in their academic endeavours, often for the first time in their lives. Their behaviour is, overall, of a very good standard and they benefit from having clear boundaries and detailed behaviour management plans. These plans ensure that members of staff know what strategies and approaches to use for each individual and this enables residential pupils to have the opportunity to maintain positive behaviour.

Residential pupil's views are central to the running of the residential units. They are able to influence choices such as activities and menus and have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and feelings to various members of staff. Residential pupils have ready access to key workers, tutors and other residential and teaching staff as well as being able to voice their opinions via the school council. Additionally, they have independent visitors who visit the residential units on a regular bass. 'There's always someone to talk to' was a comment made by a pupil.

Residential pupil's health is promoted to an excellent standard. They have ready access to any routine health needs such as a doctor or dentist. They particularly benefit from a setting where their emotional well being is promoted to a very high standard. Psychological guidance is easily accessible as well as access to a counsellor. The routines and support they receive from the staff also enable them to feel emotionally safe and very closely supported.

Residential pupils benefit from particularly well planned and structured independence programmes. Each pupil has a plan aimed at developing their life skills at a pace and level appropriate to their understanding and ability. They experience excellent support and this ensures that they receive opportunities to become independent and confident members of their communities.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Pastoral support offered to residential pupils is supportive and nurturing. Each residential pupil receives a thorough induction in order to prepare for life at the school. There are efficient links between educational staff and residential care staff. Good communication is achieved and it is clear that all members of staff are kept up to date with relevant information about each pupil.

Residential pupils are offered excellent opportunities to develop their academic abilities as a result of detailed education and care plans. The plans contain achievable targets and the effectiveness of the plans is assessed at regular reviews.

Behaviour management plans and crisis intervention plans are of a particularly high standard. These enable members of staff to have an excellent knowledge of what approach is needed to ensure residential pupils have their emotional needs and positive behaviour supported and developed. Additionally, a very experienced and stable staff group work closely together to provide consistent care underpinned by excellent relationships.

Members of staff ensure that the residential pupils have access to a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities. These enable them to develop their self esteem and confidence and to show them that leisure time can be spent productively and positively.

Members of staff ensure that residential pupils have access to excellent health services and information. Routine health care needs are met with the staff facilitating appointments and ensuring the residential pupils are supported to attend these. Access to specialist health care, such as psychologists and drugs services is also arranged promptly if needed. This approach ensures that the residential pupils have their emotional well being and health promoted to a particularly high standard. Systems to ensure that medication is recorded and administered are robust. Healthy living is encouraged and this is provided not only by ensuring the residential pupils have access to health care, but by encouraging exercise and a healthy diet.

Food is of a good standard and individual dietary needs, whether culturally related or health related, are known and met. Meals are well ordered social occasions which are seen as an opportunity to develop social skills.

Residential accommodation is of an excellent standard. The houses are comfortable, well furnished, and maintained to a very high standard. Residential pupils are able to personalise their own rooms. While the internet is available in two of the three residential houses, it is not accessible to the residential pupils in the girl's house which is situated off site. This compromises their ability to use the internet in their free time and to use it help them complete some home work tasks in the evening.

Residential pupils are able to contact families, carers and loved ones by using their own mobile telephones or the house telephones.

Residential pupils' safety

There is good provision at the school for ensuring residential pupils are safe and protected from harm. Recruitment procedures are effectively implemented. The thorough and robust recruitment procedure ensures that only adults who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children, are employed.

The safeguarding of pupils is a priority within the school. The head of care is a designated person with responsibility for child protection and has received training relevant to the role. Care staff have a good awareness of safe working practices and complete child protection refresher training on an annual basis. They are proactive in promoting and protecting the welfare of pupils and effectively implement the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. Residential pupils feel safe within the residential provision and report that bullying is not a significant problem. Incidents that do occur are seen to be taken seriously and addressed effectively by staff. The school has a system whereby any incidents of bullying are filled into specific forms kept for this purpose. This facilitates the process for the member of staff responsible for monitoring bullying. The forms are not always completed and so the member of staff responsible gleans the information from the incident book which also contains information about events not related to bullying. Consistent use of the 'bullying sheets' would make monitoring for the member of staff easier.

There is an effective and comprehensive approach to managing behaviour at the school. This means that staff are consistent and fair in dealing with unwanted behaviours. Parents commented that the behaviour of their child has improved since they started at the school. On occasion the residential pupils can present behaviour that challenges the staff and routines. Members of staff were observed to be calm and consistent in their approach. Physical restraint is used only as a last resort, and rarely occurs. Residential pupils say sanctions are fairly given and they understand why they are given. Positive behaviour is encouraged and celebrated. Residential pupils are seen to behave with tolerance of each other and to show insight into each other's challenges and problems. This leads to a culture where residential pupils can offer meaningful and effective peer support. Excellent relationships between pupils and staff enables the sensitive and nurturing support to be very effective.

The safety of the school and residential provision is monitored effectively. Fire precautions and fire equipment are checked on a regular basis. Fire drills are held regularly and all residential pupils receive an induction which includes fire safety and evacuation. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on site and off site activities. Detailed individual risk assessments address behavioural issues of the residential pupils. These include strategies to manage the risk and how to support the residential pupils. The premises are secure and a CCTV system also ensures additional security, particularly at night.



Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and leadership of the school is good. The school's ethos and aspirations are contained in the prospectus and on the website. Residential pupils have a handbook which outlines what the school provides and their rights and responsibilities. The induction handbook for new residential pupils is particularly well presented. The residential provision is effectively managed and ensures consistent care across the different residential houses. Residential pupils benefit from houses with clear routines and boundaries and are nurtured to develop tolerance and understanding of each other's behaviours and idiosyncrasies. Diverse needs are catered for sensitively and this results in fair and equal treatment for all residential pupils.

The boarding houses are very well run and daily routines run smoothly. Residential pupils benefit from a consistent and committed staff team who have good opportunities for professional development and who are well supported and supervised. A thorough induction program ensures new members of staff are very well prepared to work at the school. This means that staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff feel confident to undertake their roles and receive training which enables them to keep up to date with current practice. The head of care receives an annual appraisal but does not receive regular formal supervision. Although this does not affect his effectiveness, it does not give him the opportunity to reflect on his practice on a regular, formal basis.

Staffing levels ensure the individual needs of residential pupils are able to be met effectively and policies and procedures in place support and promote good practice across the school. Parents report very good communication with the school and are pleased with how promptly they are informed of any incidents. Comments made by parents included 'They're passionate about the kids', 'They are on the ball' and 'They understand the children.' Pupils and parents are aware of how to complain if they are dissatisfied with any part of the service they are receiving.

Key records are monitored on a regular basis by the head of care. The monitoring of the records is on a half termly basis although the school's policy on this subject says that the monitoring should be on a monthly basis. This does not impact on the welfare of the pupils or quality of the service. The head teacher reports on the running of the school and boarding provision on an annual basis. Although there is good evaluation of individual areas of practice, there is no formal overall evaluation of the boarding provision.

While visits from an independent visitor occur on a monthly basis and verbal feedback is given to members of staff at the time, the reports for these visits are not made available to the head of care promptly. This makes it difficult to respond to recommendations or observations on a formal basis.

All information is appropriately and safely stored to ensure that confidentiality of records is maintained. Records kept are thorough and give a good account of each residential pupil's time, experience and progress made at the school.

All recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. The statement of purpose is up to date and relevant and the contact details for Ofsted are available for pupils and parents. Medication is the subject of a robust monitoring system. It is clear that there is a strong ethos of improving the outcomes for the pupils and to reflect upon practice.

The shortfalls identified under this heading are not considered to be significant weaknesses and do not have a direct impact on outcomes for residential pupils.

National minimum standards

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

- Suitable facilities for both organised and private study are available to boarders. (NMS 5.4)
- 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)
- Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the Headteacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, organisation, or partnership. Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body), within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. (NMS 20.3)

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that all members of staff follow the school's policy with regards to completing bullying sheets.
- monitor key records on a monthly basis in line with the school's policy on this matter.
- devise a system whereby the effectiveness of the boarding provision is evaluated on a formal basis.

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.



20/10/2011

Dear pupils

Inspection of Meadows School

As you will know Ofsted recently inspected the boarding houses at your school. The inspectors visited the houses, had meals with you, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. Many of you sent in questionnaires. We also received questionnaires from some parents and most of the members of staff. We found that you were all very helpful and honest with us.

We think that your school provides an excellent standard of care for you. We think that you progress very significantly when you come to the school and that the staff work very hard with you to help you deal with your problems and to have a better chance for a positive future.

We think that your school is a safe place for you to live. We are particularly impressed by the relationships which you have with members of staff and your key workers.

We are also very impressed by the activities which you can do and the fact that you can have activities in the school as well as the local community, such as army cadets and swimming.

We saw you all trying to behave very well and thought that you were very tolerant of each other, even when people were having a difficult time. We are pleased that you can all telephone your home and loved ones.

We have asked that the internet access to the girls boarding house is sorted out. This has been a problem for a while and needs to be addressed.

Overall we are very impressed by your school and think that it does an excellent job to try and get what is best for you.

We really enjoyed meeting you all and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Taylor and Andy Robinson.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Taylor