

Alfriston School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Clare Davies
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Date of last inspection	30 October 2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Alfriston is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties in the age range 11-18 years. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. There are 101 pupils of which 20 are weekly boarders residing for three nights from Monday to Thursday. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The boarding accommodation is situated on the first floor of the main school building. Older girls can experience semi-independent living in a small flat. The school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings. The school is maintained by Buckinghamshire County Council and is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield.

Summary

Alfriston School provides a consistently high level of care to its boarding pupils. The relationships between staff and boarders are outstanding and help boarders feel secure and comfortable. Staff provide a caring welcoming and homely environment where boarders are happy and enjoy attending school. Parents agree that the care provided is outstanding and they welcome the excellent levels of communication from the school. Medical and personal needs are met by trained and competent staff, the school liaises well with other agencies. Strong management ensures that boarder safety and quality of care are monitored regularly.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations made at the last inspection. The school has developed its social and recreational programme to offer boarders a more active lifestyle. Access to the school counsellor has been extended into boarding time, no longer limited to the school day. Individual assessment of social and personal development has been introduced to track progress and identify needs.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are clear policies and procedures in place to support staff in meeting some complex health and medical needs. Medication is stored securely and the limited number of staff who are involved in the administration of medication ensures a safe consistent approach. Written parental consent is obtained for the school to give medication and a child's GP or medical consultant provides authorisation for certain prescribed drugs to be given. Parents state that they are satisfied with the schools arrangements for medical care and the boarders report that they feel looked after when they are ill. The school has not obtained parental consent for the administration of first aid. The medical support assistant and head of care liaise closely with health professionals in the community such as; a paediatrician, health visitors, disability services and the school doctor. A physiotherapist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist have regular contact with the school working with specific children. The school is pro-active in getting the right information to be able to provide the most appropriate care for boarders who may have particular medical conditions. Specialists from organisations are invited to come and talk to the staff to ensure that they have a full understanding of the medical issues

involved. Regular contact is maintained with parents when any health or medical concern arises. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is delivered through the curriculum in the classroom and involves boarding staff along with the medical support assistant. PSHE programmes for each year group are posted on the staff notice board in the boarding area to enable staff to be sensitive to boarders questions following classroom discussions. The boarders enjoy the food served and are consulted through surveys, student council and discussions with the chef. A balanced diet is provided with a minimal choice though to boarders satisfaction. All meals are taken in the school dining room, older girls in the independent flat have breakfast in their kitchen/diner and one evening meal that they prepare and cook themselves. The school kitchen has been presented with a silver award for hygiene by Buckinghamshire County Council and the school has been awarded 'Healthy School' status.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Large dormitories have been separated by low partition walls to provide some privacy for boarders. Staff are discreet in their support with personal care tasks to respect boarders' privacy. Lockers are available for personal belongings if boarders wish to have secure space. Parents and boarders have information on how to make a complaint if they are not satisfied. A simple leaflet advises boarders who to talk to and this includes external helplines. There are good relationships amongst boarders and staff to support informal resolution before the need to access the complaints procedure. Parents state that any concerns are addressed appropriately and the school are very good at keeping parents informed about their child. The head is the designated person for child protection and she has attended multi-agency training within the local authority. Staff receive regular training and written information is provided for visiting contractors to make them aware on how to respond if they should be concerned about the safety and welfare of any children at the school. All staff are given copies of written guidelines in relation to child protection concerns and are made aware of safe working practices. The school has a good reporting system for staff to inform the head of any concerns they may have about a child. The collation of these concerns may lead to contact with the local safeguarding team for advice, the head states that there are good working relationships with other agencies. Alfriston School promotes anti-bullying behaviour through the classroom, whole school events, focus week and on an individual level linked to behavioural targets. In discussion with some boarders several stated that they used to be bullied in their previous schools but not at Alfriston. There is a policy regarding any child that goes missing or leaves the school site without permission though this has not occurred within the last year. A simple behaviour management system operates with the use of warnings followed by the issue of a red card that can lead to the withdrawal of a privilege or loss of break time. Positive behaviour is noticed and praised with the use of a merit system where accumulated merit points leads to a certificate awarded in assembly. Boarders report that they understand this system and the school rules that they feel are fair. Older girls report that they appreciate the incremental responsibilities and recognise the difference from those for younger girls. Records and observations confirm that the boarders behave very well with consideration for others. The school has appropriate procedures in place to respond to challenging and disruptive behaviour and staff are trained in de-escalation techniques. The strength of the relationships between boarders and staff is indicative that there are very few incidents of misbehaviour. Fire safety procedures are in place, boarders and staff know what to do in the event of the fire alarm being activated. Records indicate that the system is being tested, a comprehensive fire risk assessment has been completed and designated staff have received training in fire safety. Risk assessments for activities and areas of the school

are in place. There are safe policies for use of transport and regular safety checks occur of gas and electrical appliances. There is a recruitment process that requires several checks to verify the suitability of the employee. A reference was lacking for one newly appointed member of staff. Clearance through the Criminal Records Bureau is undertaken for all staff. On receipt of any written reference telephone verification with the referee is inconsistent.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is excellent support of boarders' educational achievement by the boarding provision at Alfriston School. Good communication between classroom and residential staff promote consistency for boarders and the same behaviour management system is used throughout the school. Life skills and independence are key principles of the school and promoted through the 24 hour curriculum. The involvement of some teaching and classroom staff in boarding duties supports an integrated approach to the care and development of the boarders. A session for homework is part of the evening routine prior to activities. Boarders receive individual support to meet a wide range of needs; medical, social, emotional, learning difficulty and/or physical disability. Staff are knowledgeable in how best to meet these needs and when faced with a new situation appropriate advice is sought. Boarders are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and life skills towards greater independence. Each boarder has personal targets and the school has recently introduced assessments of personal and social development that will enable the staff to measure the progress of individual skills. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their daughters 'are learning to be independent'. A school counsellor is available to boarders after the school day, providing an opportunity to speak with someone who is not a member of staff. There are clear policies and procedures in place to promote equality and diversity. The school has a culture of inclusion and this was evident when all pupils from the lower part of the school took part in the school performance. Boarders are very caring and supportive of each other, aware of each others differing needs. Boarders and their parents report how they enjoy being at Alfriston School.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are formal opportunities where boarders are consulted such as the student council, boarders council, food surveys and a web-based questionnaire. Informally views are gathered through group discussion in boarding, classrooms and on a more individual level with staff. The student council has implemented changes such as; increased playground equipment, changes in the menu and a trial period to wear stud earrings. Older boarders state that they feel involved in decision making and like the fact they are treated differently at times to younger girls. As a result of a fund raising event the boarders have been asked to consider what activity they would like to do next term. Comprehensive care plans are regularly updated, they cover all aspects of the boarders' care needs in conjunction with the health and medical information. Care plans and targets are shared with boarders and their parents as appropriate and reviewed at least annually at formal review meetings. Boarders can maintain contact with parents by using a pay phone and arranging for incoming calls. As boarding is only for three nights during the week, this level of contact is suitable. Parents state that they feel very well informed by school staff and refer to excellent levels of communication between them and in particular the head of care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The accommodation is in good decorative order providing a homely feel with comfortable furniture. The boarders state that they like their accommodation and the older girls particularly like the experience of independent living in a flat on the second floor. Repairs and maintenance issues are promptly dealt with by the caretaker.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school provides suitable information for boarders and their parents with a welcome pack on admission. The school prospectus is being updated for 2008. There are good arrangements in place to provide consistent and suitable levels of staffing during the school day and boarding times. The commitment from staff is a strength of the school and any absences are covered from the existing staff team to ensure continuity of care for boarders. There is access to senior management for advice and support when needed. Boarding staff are encouraged and supported to undertake appropriate training such as; Team Teach, child protection, administration of medications, working with challenging families and first aid. The head of care has partially completed the NVQ award in caring for children and young people, level 4, the management module has yet to be finished. Additional training sessions arise as the school recognise a need and make arrangements for a visiting speaker or similar. As a result staff feel equipped and confident in meeting some complex and diverse needs of boarders. Staff feel very well supported in doing their job and meet formally with their line manager in addition to ad hoc discussions and weekly team meetings. The head of care has good systems in place to monitor records, boarders development and progress towards personal targets. The head maintains good oversight, monitoring the quality and consistency of care provided. Representatives of the governing body visit each term and provide written reports of their findings. The local authority are supporting the governors to develop the quality of the recording of these visits.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- obtain written parental permission for the administration of first aid. (NMS 14)
- ensure that safer recruitment practices are consistently applied. (NMS 27)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.