

Marland School

Inspection report for residential special school

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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

Marland School is owned and operated by Devon County Council. It is a residential special school providing education and care for up to 38 male students, aged 11 to 16 years, who have experience behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties. Currently, there are 32 young people boarding at the school.

The school is set in its own grounds in a rural location. The school main building houses the administration and boarding areas, some teaching areas, the school hall, main kitchen, dining room and laundry. Other separate classroom areas are located in detached units set behind the main building. Students have either a single bedroom, or share a bedroom with one other student. Residential accommodation includes common rooms and dining areas allocated to year groupings of students and recreation rooms. Outdoor play areas and sports facilities are available in the school grounds. An additional leisure facility used by students is the school's woodland area, which is located approximately two miles from the main school site.

Summary

This was an announced inspection of all key national minimum standards, carried out by two inspectors.

The inspectors found that the school is providing a good standard of care overall. Strengths of the school include the effective leadership and management of the school; the well-qualified, committed and experienced staff who communicate and engage well with the young people in their care; cohesive working between care and education staff, which provides consistency of care for young people; a strong focus on providing person-centred care and education that meets individual needs; good communication with parents and others involved in the young people's lives; excellent investment in staff training and development.

Areas of improvement for the school include ensuring that electrical equipment brought to the school by young people is safety tested, a healthy option is provided at every meal, governor monitoring visits are undertaken every half-term and all areas used by young people out of school time are kept as homely as possible.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has taken effective action to meet two of the three recommended actions made at the last inspection visit, that is those relating to recording of sanctions and ensuring that all staff receive supervision once every half term. A bound book is now used to record sanctions imposed at the school. Discussions with managers and staff and inspection of supervision records show that systems are now in place to ensure that all staff are receiving regular supervision in line with the national minimum standard. The third recommended action related to the frequency of governor monitoring visits. Whilst there has been a good improvement in the number of visits undertaken by governors in the past academic year, a visit had not been made every half term, which does not meet the national minimum standard.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school provides a healthy environment for young people, which promotes and encourages their good health and development. Young people's physical, emotional and mental health needs are identified and actively promoted in their day to day care. The school has good arrangements in place for each young person to receive medical, optical and dental treatments while accommodated at the school. The school has improved links with specialist health and other professionals, ensuring that young people's medical and emotional needs are being properly assessed and services provided to meet them. Young people are provided with appropriate advice, guidance and support by staff to help them keep healthy and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Staff encourage and support young people to be physically active, eat a healthy, balanced diet and avoid substances harmful to health.

Meal-times are social occasions with young people and staff sitting, eating and conversing together. Staff encourage and support young people to develop good social skills at meal times. Meals are nourishing, well-presented and cater for young people's individual dietary requirements and preferences. Young people are encouraged to eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. Menus for main meals now include a low fat option for young people to choose from. However, tea and supper options are less well nutritionally balanced.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are good systems in place to ensure that young people are protected from harm and their welfare promoted. Young people's privacy is respected and information about young people is handled confidentially by staff. Young people's records are kept safely and securely. Staff are provided with appropriate guidance and training in safeguarding young people's welfare to ensure that they can care for young people suitably and safely. For example, staff have undertaken training, and have the opportunity for on-going training, in safeguarding awareness and procedures, the use of physical interventions with young people, first aid, food hygiene and fire safety. Staff have a very good knowledge and understanding of the needs of the young people in their care and of risk factors, which could affect young people's safety, or good health and development. The school maintains good communication, and links, with parents, placing officers, the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), the education welfare officer and the local police to support young people, ensure that they are kept safe and are provided with appropriate advice, support and guidance, when needed. One placing officer said, 'Very good communication and involvementSchool makes contact when any issues arise... Links with relevant professionals are made when needed (phone or letter) and copied into letters to parent... Staff always reply efficiently when I contact them'. Another commented 'Always updating me if any concerns/positives'. Comments from parents included: 'Staff are knowledgeable and very friendly. They keep up excellent communication also between parents and child. Marland has also been very good with written procedures and protocol'; 'Excellent communication. Always kept up to date'; 'There is excellent communication between the school and myself, regular contact by phone and visits to the school'.

Staff follow the written guidance and procedures in place when a young person is missing or absent without authority, or when it is necessary to search a young person's possessions, to

ensure the young person's, or other's, safety and well-being. The school makes notifications to the appropriate authorities of significant events relating to the protection of young people in the school, where required. It takes appropriate action to safeguard and promote young people's welfare when these events occur. One parent reported, 'Staff provide a safe environment for pupils and act quickly in an emergency informing me as soon as they are aware that my son has gone missing.'

Young people know how to, and feel able to, complain if they are unhappy with any aspect of living at the school. They feel confident that any complaints they make are taken seriously. Young people are informed of the progress of the consideration of their complaint and the outcome. Minor, or day-to-day, issues are swiftly dealt with, as and when they arise. As a result, it is rare for matters to reach the stage of a formal complaint. Parents feel that the school is good at dealing with matters they raise. One parent commented, 'Any worries I may need to discuss with staff would never go as far as becoming a complaint'.

The school has active strategies in place to reduce the potential for bullying and manage instances of bullying behaviour when they arise, or are reported. Information for young people on what to do if they are being bullied is well displayed around the school. There is an open discussion within the school about bullying, its effects and what to do about it if you are being bullied, or observe others being bullied. Young people are encouraged to report any bullying they experience, or observe. Staff closely monitor the young people's whereabouts for their safety and actively manage group situations to ensure that peer interactions are positive and comfortable for all parties. Reports of bullying are well recorded, and actively monitored and addressed. The school's monitoring system shows that instances of bullying have reduced in number.

Staff work consistently and cooperatively together for the benefit of young people at the school. They provide young people with consistent and safe boundaries, which are reinforced by a well-defined system of incentives to support and encourage young people to maintain safe and acceptable patterns of behaviour and improve their social skills and interactions with others. Individual intervention plans and risk assessments underpin behaviour management strategies. Young people confirmed that they are involved in setting their personal targets, that they understand what they are expected to do and that personal targets set are achievable. They think that the system of behaviour management is fairly managed and enjoy gaining points and rewards. Staff are trained in the use of a method of physical intervention accredited by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD), so that they can safely intervene if necessary to prevent a young person causing likely injury to themselves, or others, or serious damage to property. Incidents and the use of physical intervention with students are well-recorded. Instances of physical intervention have reduced by a significant amount in the past year.

Positive steps are taken to keep young people, staff and visitors safe from the risk of fire and other hazards. Risk assessments of the premises are carried out, recorded in writing and regularly reviewed. Regular safety checks are carried out on fire safety equipment. Fire drills are undertaken. A written record is kept of both. Risk assessments are also undertaken and risk management plans put into place in relation to young people's behaviour, needs and activities they undertake on and off-site. However, personal electrical equipment brought into school by young people is not being safety tested by the school. Parents have confidence that the school has good measures in place to ensure that their child is kept safe on and off-site.

There is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers at the school. Criminal Record Bureau checks are renewed every three years, which is excellent practice. Visitors to the school are monitored to ensure young people's safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Care and education staff work closely together to support young people's educational progress. Care staff are familiar with the educational needs and progress of the young people in their care. There is very good liaison between care and teaching staff with effective exchange of information about a young person's needs and progress at the beginning and end of the school day. Care staff actively encourage young people to do well in school, for example, by showing interest in their day and praising their achievements.

Young people are enabled and encouraged to engage in a wide range of purposeful and enjoyable leisure activities both on and off-site, for example, playing football, surfing and other water sports, bike-riding, playing pool, computer games and board games. The school has its own transport so that young people can access activities in the wider community. Parents feel that the school provides excellent opportunities for their child to participate in activities they enjoy and which are beneficial to them. One parent commented, 'Our son has shared lots of interest into games time, their Bluetooth room, outside activities, trips with staff and other students, collecting discs/pebbles on outings. Likes group time with the other children'. Another parent said, 'My son loves the activities at school. He is particularly keen on motorbikes and Scalextric.' A third parent reported, 'Staff have consistently encouraged my son to pursue hobbies, and helped to continue this interest i.e. photography'.

Young people say that they have good relationships with the staff and feel supported by them. Young people reported that the staff are 'one of the good things about the school'. Care and education staff work well together to support young people via the key worker and personal learning manager system. The school has a person-centred ethos and is well-focused on providing individualised care and support to each young person in accordance with their needs and wishes. The staff team is stable and provides very good continuity of care. Staff are well-qualified and committed to providing a high standard of care and individual support. One parent commented, 'Full credit to the school - they do ensure that all the children achieve their full potential'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run through the well-established school council meetings, the key worker system, 'open door' access to the Principal and other senior managers at the school and an annual student survey. Student council representatives are proud of their role in ensuring that the student body voice is heard. Young people at the school are also encouraged and supported to represent young people's views in the wider community, for example at the North Devon Student Voice conference held in July this year. Young people confirmed that they are involved in meetings about their progress and in thinking about future plans. Parents feel that the school maintains very good and effective communication with them about their child's needs, progress and their life at the school. Staff are caring, patient and empathetic and work hard at establishing

relaxed and supportive relationships with young people. Parents feel that their child is treated with respect at the school and encouraged and supported to treat others with respect also.

Admission and leaving processes are very well planned and sensitively handled. The school aims to establish a good rapport with young people and parents prior to admission, through an exchange of visits and information. Young people are provided with an induction booklet to help prepare them for life at the school and assist them to settle in. One parent reported, 'We were shown great care in introducing Marland to us and we repeated our visits as it was a very difficult decision. Marland were always welcoming and reassuring. Also sent home photos of our son's first day, which was comforting! ... On the whole he has settled in well'. Transitions from the school are also very well planned and implemented.

The school uses a written placement plan, which outlines how each young person will be cared for, at the school, in accordance with their assessed needs. Young people are allocated a key worker to provide them with individual support and guidance, ensure their welfare is promoted and monitor that they are being provided with day-to-day care at the school in line with their placement plan. Key workers regularly make time available to meet with young people on an individual basis. The school contributes to all statutory reviews for young people and actively enables and supports young people to participate in review processes.

Young people are encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their parents and families while living away from home at the school. The school actively welcomes family visits and hosts events throughout the year to which families and others involved with students are invited.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people wear the school uniform during the school day but can wear their own clothing outside of school time. Young people have their own personal requisites and toiletries and these are not shared. Young people can bring items with them to personalise their bedroom, if they wish to. Many young people choose to bring games consoles and other electrical equipment for their personal use.

Young people are given good assistance and support by staff to develop key basic independence skills and prepare them for the transition into adulthood and independent living. The school has established very good relationships with other agencies, such as Connexions and a local further education college, and provides good and effective personalised support for young people who are making the transition from school to employment, or into further education and training. Three of the recent school leavers obtained apprenticeships, which is an excellent achievement. Young people very much enjoy the opportunities for work experience the school provides them with, whether this is earning additional pocket money by helping in the school kitchen, or through an external work experience placement, for example, in game keeping or motor mechanics, or a community project.

Boarding accommodation was found to be clean, generally suitably and comfortably furnished and well-maintained. Young people's bedrooms are comfortably and suitably furnished. Young people are encouraged and supported to personalise their bedrooms. Bathroom, shower and toilet areas were clean, well-maintained and odour free. Shower facilities have been recently upgraded. It was evident that the premises staff work hard to manage the day-to-day upkeep

of the school buildings and the grounds. Care staff said that premises staff were very responsive and act swiftly to undertake any minor repairs and make damaged areas safe.

However, as the premises mainly consist of an adapted building, the design and layout are far from ideal. Staff try very hard to make all of the residential accommodation as homely as possible but cannot achieve this in all areas as some parts, for example, common rooms, are used as education areas also and so have a more utilitarian than homely aspect. The lack of separation of residential areas from teaching and administration areas is a major drawback of the premises. The management and staff of the school are very aware of the building's limitations. The school has been lobbying long and hard for funding to provide separate, more appropriate boarding accommodation that can be made comfortable and homely in all areas and that will allow for young people to be cared for in smaller groups, more in line with individual needs.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has produced a prospectus and written information for young people, which describes what the school sets out to do for young people it accommodates and the manner in which care is provided. Young people's needs, development and progress are recorded well in their individual case files. Records are kept up-to-date and stored securely.

The school is effectively and efficiently managed. The Principal, supported by the senior leadership team, provides strong and clear leadership of the school. Communication at all levels within the school is very good. Managers are committed to being available to young people and staff and are viewed as accessible, approachable and supportive both by young people and staff. Staff reported that they feel well supported and enjoy working at the school.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff have received training in equality and diversity and there are appropriate policies and procedures in place to support good practice in this area. Staff are enthusiastic, capable and committed to working cohesively to provide good personalised education and care to each young person. The stable staff team provides very good continuity of care for young people. Appropriate staffing levels are maintained at all times.

Investment in, and support for, staff training and development is excellent. The induction training programme for staff is well-planned and thorough. Care and education staff undertake on-going training jointly at times, which promotes good communication and joint working. Care staff are supported to undertake professional development training, such as National Vocational Qualification at levels 3 and 4 in Caring for Children and Young People and relevant management qualifications, ensuring that young people are being cared for by competent and skilled staff who are trained to meet their needs.

The school's financial situation is well monitored, as are other areas of the operation of the school. There has been an improvement in the number of monitoring visits undertaken by governors, with at least one visit per term having been undertaken in the past academic year. However, the frequency of visiting should be at least once per half-term to meet the national minimum standard, so the recommended action from the previous inspection visit has been repeated.

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):

- ensure that menus provide a healthy option at each mealtime (NMS 15)
- ensure that there is a system for the prompt testing of portable electrical equipment brought to school by young people for their personal use (NMS 26)
- ensure that members of the governing body undertake monitoring visits once each half term (NMS 33)
- continue to improve the school's residential accommodation and facilities for pupils outside of class time so that, as far as practicable, a homely, residential environment is created and maintained in all of these areas (NMS 24)