

Philpots Manor 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

The school is an independent residential special school and further training centre. The school provides a holistic approach to education based upon the social and educational principles of Rudolf Steiner. It specialises in provision for children and young people of either sex between the ages of 9 and 19 years of age who have been unable to learn and develop within mainstream education. All students demonstrate some degree of emotional, behavioural, communication or learning difficulty. Students who board at the school live in small residential care groups in five separate houses within the grounds. There are 34 pupils at the school; a vast majority of these also board. The boarding arrangements are flexible; students return home every weekend. The school was last inspected in September 2011.

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

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

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Students receive a good standard of care, support and guidance which addresses their educational, social and behavioural learning needs. Students say they really enjoy staying at the school and make progress as a result. Parents and carers feel students are well cared for while living there and that they are kept safe.
- Outcomes for students are outstanding. The holistic approach of the school ensures the individual needs of students are of paramount importance. This is particularly seen in the excellent approach to supporting students through periods of transition and towards life after statutory education.
- Relationships between staff and students are close and meaningful and is a core strength of the schools ethos. Young people state they have a number of people to whom they feel able to communicate their needs, wishes and views. Students appear extremely comfortable with their house parents and the caring environment.
- The standard of accommodation is good with students benefiting from living in a peaceful and nurturing environment.
- Students are kept safe without unduly limiting their opportunities to participate fully in activities and pursuits. Robust safeguarding protocols are implemented in practice, with all matters of health and safety being rigorously addressed across the school.
- The approach toward equality and diversity underpins practice, allowing students good opportunities to learn about and appreciate difference.
- The management approach is effective and young person centred. A number of

staffing changes have occurred since the last inspection which has provided some challenges to the school as a whole. Nevertheless an experienced care staff team continues to provide care that places the individual needs of students first.

- The one recommendation made at the last inspection has been now been met. All national minimum standards have been met. Shortfalls have been identified as areas to consider for improvement. These include a more consistent approach to recording the views of students after they have received a sanction or been involved in a restraint. These shortfalls do not negatively impact on the care provided to students.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students are looked after as individuals and share extremely positive relationships with staff. These relationships assist them to make significant progress in their learning and personal development. One local authority education specialist noted that a good number of students have thrived since being at the school and have made huge progress as a result.

The ethos of the school is one of mutual respect and understanding as seen in the relaxed and open atmosphere. The staffing structure ensures a consistency of care which enables valuable attachments to be formed and developed between students and the staff who care for them, very often over a large number of years.

Communication is a cornerstone of practice with students afforded a multitude of opportunities to express their views and feelings. Students say they are, 'listened to', and contribute to the running of the school, in areas such as activity planning. Students who use non-verbal communication are assisted to utilise their written and artistic skills to express their feelings and thoughts. As a result, such cues are instantly known allowing students to be fully integrated into the life of the school.

Care is promoted to an exceptional standard with a high staffing ratio ensuring the specific needs of students are met during the day and night.

Students are extremely comfortable in the company of staff with house-parents providing a family orientated living experience. An excellent approach empowers students to choose certain staff members, outside of the living group, who they can go to for help or advice. Students say the school is, 'like being in a family' and that they are, 'really cared for'. Similarly, parents and carers feel the school provides a safe and caring environment where students make considerable progress, from their given starting points.

High expectations of behaviour and attitude are embedded in the culture of the school. Students receive excellent encouragement and support to behave well and to appreciate others. Students understood the rules and consider them to be fair. The behaviour of students is extremely good.

Students are provided with excellent assistance in planning for life outside of school. Invaluable opportunities are made available such as work experience placements which enable students to pursue their career choices. Close liaison ensures transitions such as moving on to college are thoughtfully planned with input from the education and residential teams. Students play an active role in the process and significantly improve their confidence and self-esteem as a result. Students confirmed 'they had changed since being at the school' and 'had grown so much more in confidence having made great progress'.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential provision and care is good. Students receive excellent pastoral support which assists them to engage fully in the educational, social and vocational aspects of school life. An experienced and knowledgeable staff team work closely together to provide joined-up care and a positive sense of community living. A flexible approach allows students the opportunity to stay at the school at various times during the week. A majority stay all week, although for some students staying several nights suits their needs and wishes much better.

Students are not admitted to the school unless a full assessment of their needs has been completed. The dynamics of each living group are sensitively considered to ensure new students are suitably matched to a house and house parents. The process includes visits to the school by the prospective student and their parents or carers and an overnight stay, before a final decision is made. Good information is available before students arrive at the school with a website also offering a good overview of residential life and the school in general.

Students benefit from receiving consistent care and staff input. Students are allocated a designated member of care staff who plays a key role in implementing their care plan and liaises regularly with their parents and carers. Students move into specific houses and generally remain there through their school years. Similarly house parents normally stay in the same house for many years and therefore provide a stable family environment. Volunteers at the school join for a year and are designated to work at one house for the duration of their stay. Information relating to independent advice and support is openly displayed.

A good standard of care planning is in place which provides staff with guidance in how best to meet the individual needs of students. Personal education plans are completed that provide an individualised approach to meeting the holistic needs of students and take account of cultural backgrounds and personal learning abilities. Students who previously struggled in larger schools, due to short attention spans, have benefitted greatly from the smaller learning and living groups. These students say they now feel, 'part of a community' where previously they had not.

Activities are a strength of the school with a varied amount of pursuits available

throughout the week and a key component of the day. Trips away from school include visits to local places of interest, swimming, kayaking and indoor rock climbing. The countryside setting of the school also allows many games to be played on site. Students are helped to pursue their own interests with many enjoying the school's horse riding facility.

The physical and medical needs of students are generally well considered and addressed. A qualified nurse has been appointed since the last inspection who has a very good understanding of the needs of students. Health care plans highlight specific areas of need including current medical issues and any medication being taken. The storage and administration of medication is appropriate with medicines only given by trained staff. Minor shortfalls in the storage of homely medicines had recently been identified by the nurse. This was responded to swiftly with more rigorous procedures being implemented; none of these shortfalls had impacted negatively on the well-being of students.

Students benefit from having their emotional well-being addressed particularly well. On site therapeutic interventions are readily available with students able to access specific therapies as part of the holistic approach to care and education.

Students receive a good standard of catering provision which provides variety and choice. Menus confirmed that meals are balanced, with fresh vegetables and salad options. Opportunities are available for the individual houses to plan and prepare their own evening meals, which students seemed to really enjoy. Some students raised concerns as to the quality of meal provision. The school responds individually to students who raise issues and seek to resolve them directly. For instance, clarifying the content of a gluten free meal and including a student's meal request on the next menu. The school carry out an annual survey to gauge the opinions of all students; although this year's survey is now overdue.

Boarding facilities provide students with a homely environment with all living areas in a good condition. The décor of the environment is family orientated and students have been able to personalise their own rooms should they wish. Students benefit from on-site facilities which include a sports hall, a sports field and outdoor play areas.

Students can easily keep in contact with their parents, family and friends. House telephones are available should students wish to call home or receive calls. No student raised any concerns regarding keeping in touch with the people they care about. All students go home at the weekend.

Residential pupils' safety

The approach taken in regard safeguarding students is good. Minor shortfalls were identified in the recording of sanctions and restraints. The school ensures students are kept safe with robust policies and procedures being implemented effectively in

practice. Clear lines of responsibility ensure key people are identified as taking the lead on safeguarding matters across school, with all staff receiving training in child protection. When issues arise, they are addressed swiftly and include liaising closely with Local Safeguarding Children's Boards when required. A comprehensive recruitment process ensures no members of staff or volunteers work with young people until all required checks have been completed; all persons living on site are subject to similar procedures.

The culture of the school promotes the notion of community and of respecting each other. Students state that bullying is not a problem, with robust processes in place to consider the behaviour of students. Staff are mindful of students who may be vulnerable to being bullied, with high staffing ratios significantly reducing the chances of such behaviour going unnoticed.

A rigorous approach is taken toward students leaving the school without permission. Clear protocols have been established to respond to such events, including working with the local police. Incidents of this nature are rare, with students being supported to make considerable progress in reducing their tendencies to 'run off' at times of stress, frustration or anger. The location and layout of the school enables students to take time out and to find space should they feel the need.

Students receive good advice, guidance and support to address their negative behaviours. Individual plans include targets such as reducing swearing or aggressive behaviours with progress being reviewed routinely. The giving of sanctions are kept to a minimum with the older student living groups having none recorded since the last inspection. Those sanctions given were appropriate and in keeping with the nature of the misdemeanour. Students commented, 'I have made great strides in my behaviour since being here' and 'I have been helped to learn how to deal with my feelings so much better'.

Staff are trained in dealing with situations that may require the use of restraint. Staff seek to engage students in dialogue wherever possible to avoid the need to intervene physically. As a result, the levels of restraint within the residential environment are very low. Records of restraint and sanctions are generally completed in detail, with staff talking to students to ascertain their views. However, several reports did not contain the views of the student concerned.

An excellent approach is in place to address health and safety matters. All required tests, drills and servicing of equipment occur without delay, including the routine testing of fire safety equipment and the undertaking of fire evacuations involving students. Assessments are completed on all areas of the school with trips away from the site being rigorously considered before they occur. Such risk assessments do not limit young people from engaging fully in pursuits and activities and indeed highlight a positive risk aware approach rather than risk averse.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the boarding provision is good. Management is clear and effective with boarding integral to school life. The aims of boarding are clearly identified and acted upon in practice. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and cover all aspects of care, support and intervention, being updated and reviewed annually. All records are stored securely and are generally accurate and up to date.

Leadership of boarding is strong, with unforeseen and challenging circumstances, being responded to in a progressive and pragmatic fashion. Since the last inspection there have been significant staffing changes. The previous head of care left the school with a new person employed just days before this inspection. In the interim period the running of the residential provision was overseen by the head of school and other senior staff. Despite such developments the quality of care provision has remained good with a continuing focus on meeting the individual needs of students.

Since the last inspection, improvements have been made in the approach towards meeting the medical needs of students with an on-going programme improving the standard of accommodation and facilities.

The monitoring of care provision is robust, with all records and care practices being regularly reviewed. Key areas of care are assessed for patterns or shortfalls, with the findings used to inform and improve staff practice. Required monitoring visits are undertaken by an independent person and provide a comprehensive review of the quality of boarding which include the views of young people themselves.

High numbers of staff are deployed day and night to meet the needs of students. An experienced and stable staff team work hard to support the purpose of boarding. While some staff acknowledged that morale has been badly affected during the recent period of staff re-structuring, none of this impacted on the students. Indeed, existing staff have shown considerable commitment in providing young people with a continuity of care, thus further nurturing the sense of community. No student raised any issues that there had been any disruption to their school or residential life during this period of transition.

Complaints are dealt with swiftly and appropriately, while the views of young people are sought in matters which affect them. Few formal complaints have been made since the last inspection. Ideas and opinions from students are routinely sought and considered.

The school ensures that excellent communication is maintained with parents and carers. The school works hard to establish and maintain positive and effective contact with parents, carers and placing authorities. Joint working allows strategies to be implemented both within boarding and at home, which in turn assists young people and their families to make progress.

All national minimum standards are met, with three areas identified that the school can improve further.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure the new medication administration policies and procedures are implemented.
- ensure that wherever possible the views of young people are recorded following the use of restraint or the giving of sanctions.
- ensure the school's process of annually assessing the views of young people in relation to the quality of meal provision is completed.

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.



07/11/2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Philpots Manor School

As you may remember Ofsted recently inspected the boarding houses at your school. The inspector visited the houses, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. Some of you talked with the inspector as a group, while others were spoken to when he visited for lunch and tea.

Your school provides a very good caring and supportive place for you to live. You said there are different members of staff who you can talk with and that they listen to you. The inspector was very impressed with the activities that you are offered, especially ones where you can try new and exciting experiences.

The inspector saw excellent behaviour and noticed that staff helped you to consider the feelings of others. In fact you all seemed to care about and respect each other lots and seemed to get on ok. You said the rules are 'fair' and that you are helped to think about the best way to deal with your problems.

Your health is looked after well at the school, especially when you need extra help with your feelings or thoughts. You receive a variety of meals with plenty of food to eat. Not all of you felt you enjoyed the meals but there are occasions when your house parents cook meals in the houses.

The staff work very hard to help you through your time at school and support you to learn and develop in many ways. This is especially true in the way that staff treat you as individuals and help you to think about your future independence and life outside of school, like going on to college or employment.

You live in houses that are in a good condition and are looked after by house parents who really care about you. It was really nice to see how some of you have personalised your own bedrooms.

At the end of the inspection the inspector asked the school to keep improving a few things. Like the way medicines are given and recorded and for your views to be recorded as often as possible if a sanction or restraint has happened.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Whatley