

White Spire

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Christopher Garrett
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Address	White Spire School Rickley Lane Bletchley MILTON KEYNES MK3 6EW
Telephone number	01908 373266
Email	admin@whitespire.milton-keynes.gov.uk
Registered person	Milton Keynes Council, Learning and Development Directorate
Head of care	Liz Bull
Head / Principal	Liz Bull
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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

White Spire School is a mixed co-educational special school for children and young people aged five to 19 with moderate learning difficulties. The school is maintained by Milton Keynes Council and is situated in Bletchley, close to Milton Keynes. The school is close to a range of community and leisure facilities for young people to access.

The school currently offers boarding places for up to 20 of its pupils on a flexible basis; three boarders were using the service at the time of this inspection. The boarding accommodation is on the first floor of the main school building.

Summary

The purpose of this visit was to conduct an unannounced, full inspection of the home. During the inspection all of the key national minimum standards (NMS) for residential special schools were inspected. Some additional standards were also inspected.

The overall standard of care for the young people at the school is good. Some aspects of how the school promotes the welfare of the young people are outstanding.

There is evidence that the school is committed to the inspection process and uses this positively to reflect on the care provision. A programme for the refurbishment and upgrading of the boarding accommodation has been implemented. The young people are cared for by experience and qualified care staff who have an extensive understanding of the needs for young people with moderate learning difficulties. The young people are helped to acquire a range of life and social skills that helps them to gain confidence and increases their level of independence. The young people enjoy their residential experience. The staff are committed to providing a safe environment for young people and have good awareness of their roles and responsibility in safeguarding them. Relationships between the young people and the staff are good. All of the young people identify staff members who they feel comfortable about approaching with concerns or issues and are confident that these will be listened. A significant feature of the school is the commitment that is given to allowing the children to make choices and be involved in key decision making.

The school has recently experienced some significant changes in leadership and management of the school. An interim headteacher has appointed and she has taken positive steps to ensure that the school has fully responded to the points raised during the last inspection. The overall standard of care provided to the young people has been maintained through this period. However, the monitoring of records by the school and governing body has been inconsistent.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school was asked to review the facilities available for the young people to use as for their life skills programme and to improve the quality of the furnishings within the boarding accommodation. A domestic style, fully equipped kitchen has been installed and provides a excellent resource for the young people to practice their life skills. The sitting room has been

completely refurbished and a dining room has been created. The sitting room has been furnished with domestic style furniture that has been chosen by the young people. The school has taken appropriate steps to improve the quality of the accommodation and facilities for the young people.

The school has taken positive steps to improve the levels of fire safety. Arrangements have been made to ensure that all fire safety equipment is routinely checked and serviced in accordance with appropriate schedules. Records are kept when this is undertaken. The school's fire risk assessment has been reviewed by the fire safety officer. A process for assessing whether the young people need a personal emergency evacuation plan has been implemented. These steps help to keep the young people safe from the risk from fire hazards.

The school was asked to review the availability of qualified driver during boarding periods. The school has purchased a people carrier that can be used by staff who do not have a mini bus licence to transport the young people. Qualified mini bus drivers are available to transport larger groups. These arrangements ensure that the young people are able to routinely access offsite activities and events.

The school was recommended to establish a supervision programme for care staff. Arrangements have been made for a senior member staff provide supervision for the care staff. This is provided on a regular basis. Supervision follows a set agenda and records are kept. These arrangements ensure that the young people are cared for by staff who are themselves properly managed and supported.

The school was asked to ensure that its vetting and recruitment procedures are in accordance with the national minimum standards. All employment references are verified by phone with referees. Senior staff understand that newly appointed boarding staff are not allowed to take up their posts until a satisfactory criminal record bureau check has been obtained. These arrangements help to ensure that young people are not exposed to potential abusers.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The young people's health needs are actively promoted on a day to day basis. The school offers flexible boarding arrangements. The longest period that a young person may stay at the school is four nights. Consequently, the primary responsibility for the medical welfare of the young people remains with their parents, guardians or carers. Information on the young people's health is collected during the admission process and recorded in their individual health plan. This ensures that staff provide continuity and consistency in meeting and managing their health needs. The young people's welfare is safeguarded by the school's policies and procedures for the administration storage and dispensing of medication and for providing first aid and personal care. All staff with boarding responsibilities receive training in the administration of medicines and in first aid. These arrangements ensure that the young people have access to suitably trained staff at all times. The school nurse offers additional levels support and provides a link with parents and other external medical services.

The young people are provided with healthy meals that meet their individual dietary needs and preferences. The young people demonstrate a good awareness of healthy eating. Both the school and the boarding menus are drawn up in consultation with the pupils and boarders. Menus offer a good variety, including a vegetarian alternative, and routinely make use of fresh

meat, vegetables and fruits. Special cultural and medical diets are catered for. All of young people are happy with the quality and quantity of their meals. The daily salad bar is popular with both staff and the young people.

The boarders have the opportunity to plan and prepare some of their evening meals as a part of their on going life skills programme. The recently installed kitchen in the boarding provision enhances this programme and provides a well equipped domestic work base for the young people to practice and develop their cooking skills. Mealtimes are social and orderly occasions.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The care staff have developed practices that demonstrate respect for the young peoples's privacy and helps to ensure that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained. The general supervision of the young people is provided with sensitivity and in a non intrusive manner. The young people's records are kept safe and secure.

However, the majority of the young people require access to a landline to make and receive personal telephone calls. These are made using a school phone. Consequently, this requires the involvement and permission of the care staff and calls may not be in private. Whilst generally satisfied with the current arrangements the young people are unclear if they can arrange to have a phone call in private.

Parents, carers and guardians are provided with details of the school 's complaints procedures. The young people have access to a child friendly complaints form. However, there is an expectation amongst the staff that any issues or concerns can be dealt with informally. The school has a system for recording formal complaints and the action that has been taken. Formal complaints are rare and none have been logged by the school for over a year.

The school has robust procedures in place that ensure the young people's welfare is promoted and that they are protected from abuse. Regular training is provided to the whole staff team on child protection and safeguarding awareness. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in responding to an allegation or suspicion of abuse. The response to any child protection concern is led by the headteacher who is the school's designated person. The headteacher has completed appropriate training for this role.

There is a clear and consistent message in the school and the boarding provision that bullying is not acceptable. The school takes positive steps to raise the pupils and staff awareness of bullying and has developed a range of different strategies to address and manage any incidents that occur. The care staff and young people advise that bullying is not an issue in the boarding provision.

The school has written guidance on the action that should be taken if a young person runs off from the school and or takes him/ herself away from the safety and supervision of the staff. However, this is not an issue during boarding time.

The school's measures of control are based on encouraging good behaviour and on the young people learning self control and taking responsibility for their own behaviour. Staff actively promote and reinforce good behaviour. Close links between the care and education teams ensures that the young people receive consistent praise, acknowledgement and recognition

for displaying appropriate and helpful behaviour. The young people develop clear understanding of the behaviour that is expected from them. The young people have decided on a range of sanctions that can be used by the care staff. This encourages them to take on some ownership of their actions and ensures that they are fully aware of the possible consequences when their behaviour is not acceptable. The large majority of young people say that the sanctions are fair. Behaviour within the boarding provision is consistently good, and sanctions are not often required. All staff have received training on positive handling which includes the use of de-escalation techniques and physical interventions. Care staff use their training effectively and the use of restraint is rarely needed.

The school takes positive steps to keep the young people, staff and visitors safe from fire and other hazards. Systems are in place for the regular checking and servicing of fire safety and detection equipment. Practice evacuations are routinely undertaken. A process of assessing the pupil's need for a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan has been implemented. The school provides briefings on fire awareness and schools fire emergency procedures for all staff.

The school has good security measures which includes all visitors being required sign in and wear a visitor's badge during their visit. The process for risk assessing all of the off-site activities and parts of the building accessed by the boarders is fully established. The care staff take positive steps to raise the young people's awareness of danger. The young people routinely receive advice on personal safety issues including the dangers of dark alleyways, stranger danger and water safety.

The school has reviewed its procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff to ensure compliance with the requirements of national minimum standards. The interim headteacher is fully aware of the need for boarding staff to be fully vetted before they take up their posts. Criminal record bureau checks are completed for all staff and governors are updated every three years. The systems in place contribute to the safeguarding of the young people and help to ensure that they are not being exposed to potential abusers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The boarding provision's contribution to the young people's educational progress is well established within the school. Close links between the education and care teams enable a regular exchange of to take place and ensures that there is a consistency and continuity in the management of the young people. The residential life skills training provided by the care team promotes the young people's independence and self confidence and provides a practical outlet for their skills to be put into practice.

The young people are actively encouraged by staff to take part in leisure activities both inside the school and in the community. A monthly activity programme is put in place following consultation with the young people. This offers a wide variety of activities and experiences that are accessible to all the boarders and provides an extension to their residential life skills programme. The programme is devised to engage the young people's interest and provides them with the opportunity to develop new recreational skills and to socialise and interact with other young people with similar or different learning difficulties. The activity programme is popular with all of the boarders.

The young people receive and have access to individual support when they need it. The school has links with external agencies that can be accessed to provide a range of services including medical and therapeutic support and advice. On site support is provided by the school for young people who present challenging behaviour. The residential provision has established strong links with a local Children's Right Service. Young people have the opportunity to engage in individual and community programmes provided by this service. Each of the young people are encouraged to identify a network of adults who can offer them support and advice. All of the boarders identify at least one adult within the school who they feel comfortable about taking an issue to and are confident would listen and act on their concerns.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The routine consultation with young people about the way that the school and boarding provision are run and on key life decisions is fully integrated into the care practice within the school. There are a number of established forums which the young people can use to raise issues and express views. There is ample evidence that the young people are listened to and that they have been able to exert influence and bring about changes. The young people are actively encouraged to participate and contribute in their statutory and internal reviews. One of the young people explained the importance of attending her/his boarding review. 'It's about progress and whether I am ready to start integration' (planned gradual reduction in boarding.)

The relationship between the care staff and young people is good and based on mutual respect and understanding. The young people are fully aware the care staffs roles and responsibilities. Clear and consistent boundaries are maintained. Care staff take an active interest in the young people and take positive steps to keep themselves informed about their progress and on any events that are happening to them.

The objectives for a residential placement are agreed in consultation with the local authorities placement panel, school and parents. Each of the young people have a placement plan which provide details of how their needs have been identified and are to be met. Individual targets are set and primarily focus on the young people acquiring life and social skills. These are routinely reviewed and updated. Placement plans and other information relating to the residential placement are kept in a series of files. These are well organised, kept secure and contain extensive information provided by both parents and the young people.

Each boarder has a separate care file which contains a comprehensive archive made up of photographs, certificates and other documentation that records the boarder's involvement and participation in activities, their successes and achievements. These are given to the young people at the end of their placement and provide an excellent personal record and of their stay in boarding.

The boarders experience thoroughly planned admission and leaving processes. Routine consultation takes place with the young people and their parents, guardian or carers regarding the purpose and objective of a residential placement. Prospective boarders are invited to experience some aspects of the residential experience before making a commitment to boarding. The young people's placement plans are routinely monitored and there are regular meetings held to discuss their progress. Following agreements between the school, local authority and home, the young people's boarding placement is gradually reduced with the objective for them

to return to living full time at home. Specific targets are set to help all interested parties work consistently together on the young people's placement and integration plans.

The care staff are fully aware of the importance of the boarders being able to maintain contact with their families and carers. The school's flexible boarding arrangements means that the young people may have regular personal contact with their family, guardians or carers during the week and at every weekend. The boarders (subject to any agreed restrictions) can have access to a school phone or make use of their own mobiles to make and receive private phone calls.

There are established systems in place which ensure the care staff have regular communication with the young people's parents, carers or guardians. These provide a routine opportunity for information to be exchanged and for home and school to be kept up to date on events or incidents affecting the young people. The information is used by the care staff to monitor the boarders' progress towards their placement objective.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The standard relating to young people leaving care and being prepared for the transition into independent living is not applicable in this setting.

The school has demonstrated a commitment to improving the standards of boarding accommodation, the quality of the furnishings and to ensuring that it provides sufficient space and facilities to meet the boarders' needs. A programme for upgrading all of the residential provision has been implemented.

The boarding accommodation is located on the first floor to the rear of the main school building. General access is through the main school. Security measures are good and contribute to the safety of the students.

The accommodation which is reserved for the sole use of the boarders is arranged around a long single corridor. Male and female bedroom accommodation is clearly separated. Current levels of occupancy allow each boarder to retain their own beds regardless of the number of nights that they stay. The bedrooms accommodate one or two boarders. The boarders are able to personalise their bed spaces if they wish. Bedroom furniture is sparse and personal storage space limited. The overall standard of decoration and repair in the bedrooms is satisfactory.

The boarders' sitting room has been completely refurbished to a high standard. The domestic style furniture is of good quality and has been chosen by the boarders. A domestic fully equipped kitchen has been installed and provides an excellent resource for the young people to practice their life skills. A dining room is in the process of being fitted out and provides an additional homely space for boarders to have their breakfast and evening meals and to use for some activities.

The young people are very pleased and proud about their new facilities. Overall they take care and an interest in their accommodation. There are no signs of vandalism or malicious damage. The accommodation is kept clean and tidy. Boarders help with the cleaning of their rooms as part of their independence training but the overall responsibility is that of the school cleaning

and maintenance staff. Staff are very proactive and creative in trying to provide the young people with homely accommodation.

There are sufficient bathroom and toilet facilities for the number of boarders. Male and female facilities are separated and provide a reasonable level of privacy. The standard of decoration and repair is satisfactory. The toilet, bathing and showering areas were found to be clean, tidy and free from offensive odours.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The school provides parents, carers and guardians with a statement of purpose that sets out what it intends to do for the young people. Prospective boarders are given a copy of a handbook titled 'A children's guide to boarding at White Spire School.' This is presented in a colourful and accessible format and provides the young people with a range of information including details of the daily boarding routines, activities and what to do if they have any concerns. Collectively the statement of purpose and the guide provide ample information to enable parents and other interested parties to determine the purpose, values and objectives of the residential provision.

The residential provision currently provides accommodation for up to five young people who stay between three to four nights a week. The care team currently consists of two experienced fulltime care staff. Additional support is provided by members of the education team who assist the care staff with sleep in duties. The young people all receive a high levels of supervision. The school has taken positive steps to ensure that the young peoples individual and group needs and interests are met and accommodated. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the current number of boarders. However, steps have been take to increase staffing levels to provide additional supervision and flexibility. The manner in which the staffing is arranged provides a good level of consistency, continuity and predictability essential for young people who have moderate learning difficulties and associated emotional and behavioural problems.

The young people are looked after by staff who have the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to care for them. The care staff have all completed mandatory training in child protection, positive handling techniques, food handling, first aid, fire awareness and training on the administration of medication. Education staff who undertake some boarding responsibilities complete similar training modules. This helps to ensure a consistency and continuity of care. Where and when required the staff training is routinely updated and/or refreshed.

The school has implemented system to provide regular one to one supervision to the care staff. These arrangements have been welcomed by the care staff and provides them the opportunity to raise discuss and reflect any issues relating to care practice within the school.

The school is organised and managed in a manner that delivers and maintains an good standard of care. The young people are cared for by experienced and qualified care staff. Both staff members have successfully completed National Vocational Qualification Level 4 in care for children. The care staff have developed good practices which are child focused and encourage the young people to develop self confidence and self esteem. The young people enjoy their boarding experience.

Robust arrangements have been put in place to cover the previous headteacher's unforeseen departure at the end of the last term. The interim headteacher provides good leadership and has been instrumental in ensuring that the school has acted upon all of the recommendations made following the school's last inspection. The standard of care being provided to the young people has been maintained during this period of significant change

The responsibility for the monitoring of the schools records has not been allocated and consequently these have not been checked for several months.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All of the young people are valued and respected as individuals. They are encouraged and helped to make personal choices and there is no assumption that any of them are incapable of doing this. There is equal access to all activities and resources regardless of gender or ability. The young people are encouraged to actively participate in community projects. The school is able to meet individual medical, dietary and cultural needs as required. Documents demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities, valuing diversity and avoidance of inappropriate discrimination in all forms. Care staff have undertaken training in equality and diversity.

There is a established procedure for a member of the governing body to visit and report on the conduct of the residential provision. However a number of recent unannounced visits have been scheduled when the young people and staff have been away from the school. Consequently checks on records have not been consistently undertaken.

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):

- review the young people's access to the telephone (NMS.3)
- ensure that all residential records are routinely monitored (NMS.32)
- ensure that the governing body consistently produce a written report on the conduct of the school. (NMS.33)