

Shapwick 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

Shapwick School is registered with the Department for Education and with the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic pupils (CReSTeD) under the 'special provision' category. It is inspected by both Ofsted and CReSTeD.

The school specialises in supporting boys and girls whose education has been adversely affected by dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. The school does not accept students whose primary need is emotional and behavioural difficulties. Approximately half of the students have a statement of special educational needs.

Occupying two separate rural village sites approximately five miles apart on the Somerset Levels; the school is within easy driving distance of several towns. Shapwick Preparatory School in Burtle provides for children in the age range of eight to 13 years. Boarders are accommodated in Chapel Hill Farm, which is a short walk from the school. Students aged 13 to 18 years are educated at Shapwick Senior School. They are currently accommodated in four single-sex boarding houses.

The Old Vicarage provides accommodation for male sixth form students, however it is on the Shapwick Preparatory School site. Sixth form students can attend Bridgwater College and also receive specific support for their learning needs at Shapwick School.

Younger boys are accommodated at the Manor and also at the Lakes in the village of Meare, approximately four miles away. Girls are accommodated in Greystone boarding house in Shapwick, the major part of which is a new build designed specifically for boarding.

The school currently has 152 students on roll across the two sites of which 94 are boarders. The remaining students are day pupils.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. The recommendations from the previous inspection were also followed up.

This is an extremely well managed school with a strong and committed staff team which provides very good quality education and boarding for students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and associated problems. There are very strong links between educational staff, care staff and therapists who are employed by the school. This holistic approach enables students to achieve very good outcomes. The individual needs of each individual student are known and recognised by all staff and all staff work to ensure that each student's individual needs are fully met. Students state that they feel very well supported at this school and they are very positive about boarding here. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout all the standards inspected.

Three recommendations were made at this inspection.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection two recommendations were made. The first recommendation was for the school to develop the current absence policy to include what actions should be taken by the senior management team in the event of a child being absent without authority. The second recommendation was for management to consider formalising the current informal supervision arrangements and provide an annual appraisal for non-teaching staff. Both of these recommendations have been met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a dining room on each of its sites and so there are two dining rooms in all. Both dining rooms are clean, bright and colourful and have visual displays on the walls. Meal times are relaxed and orderly occasions. A main meal is on offer plus a salad bar with a vegetarian option. The salad bar offers imaginative dishes such as rice, pasta, couscous and baked potatoes. Special diets for health or cultural reasons are arranged for students as and when required. All young people are very positive about the meals on offer and no criticisms have been expressed. Food is of an exceptionally high quality and staff in both dining areas have been given a five star award from the environmental health department of the local authority. All staff on both sites have also received training in food hygiene. Staff arrange for students to get involved in menu preparation and a recent exercise involved students choosing and planning menus for a whole week. All meals are prepared on site and the school engaged a nutritionist earlier this year in order to ensure that the menus on offer are healthy.

Staff promote a healthy life style and ensure that students' health needs are very well met at this school. All parents complete a health questionnaire prior to their child's admission. Consents for first aid treatment and the administration of prescribed and non prescribed medication are also obtained prior to admission. Students are registered with a local general practitioner and the school's general assistants arrange medical appointments for students as and when necessary. Any medication is given out in the boarding houses in the morning and evening by house parents. The school's general assistants give out any lunch time medication in school. All medication records are accurate. The school has a small sick bay in the Manor which students can use if they are ill. Arrangements can also be made for any child who is ill to be accommodated in their own particular boarding house. All staff working in the houses have received training in first aid and records are kept of any period of illness or of any accident. The school ensures that students are educated about the dangers of smoking and drug misuse through the provision of a personal, social and health education programme.

The school employs four occupational therapists and four speech and language therapists. These therapists take a very holistic approach and promote students' health and well being as well as providing services which help to meet their educational needs. The therapists see the students on a one-to-one basis or in groups and students can self refer as well as being referred by staff. This service is very well received and has a very positive impact on students' outcomes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff are very aware of the need to protect students' privacy and they ensure that case records are kept safely and securely in offices on both sites. All students who board in any of the houses

have access to payphones which are sited on each floor of each boarding house. Telephone numbers of ChildLine and other organisations who assist children in difficulties are displayed in close proximity to the pay telephones. Younger students in Chapel Hill Farm are encouraged to speak to their parents at least once a week and a 15 minute slot on one of the house telephones is allocated to each child for this purpose. Older students are allowed to use mobile telephones in the boarding houses although they must hand these telephones in to staff during the school working day and can only use them after school. All students within the school have access to email and social networking sites and they are given advice and support on how to use these sites appropriately. Accommodation within all the boarding houses is conducive to maintaining privacy. For example bathing and showering facilities are designed to a very high standard and ensure privacy.

The school has very good policies and procedures in place to safeguard the students. Staff and students are aware of complaints policies and procedures although they state that they currently have no complaints. A complaints log is kept for the purpose of recording any complaints; however there have been no complaints since the last inspection and students spoken with at this inspection state very clearly that they love the school and like living in it. The school has two joint head teachers. The pastoral head is also the designated person responsible for safeguarding and child protection. He has received safeguarding training at level 2 and has also ensured that all boarding staff have received safeguarding training at level 1 or above. Ancillary staff also receive basic safeguarding training from the head teacher; however one member of the ancillary staff team states that she would like more in-depth safeguarding training. The head teacher states that he has arranged for level 1 and level 2 safeguarding training to be delivered on site from January 2011 to all staff including ancillary staff. Staff are aware of the need to protect students from bullying and cyber bullying and there are appropriate policies in place to guide staff with regard to these issues. Students do not currently report any bullying across either of the sites although they do state that there are occasional squabbles and disagreements in the boarding houses. They regard these minor disagreements as normal. The school has very clear policies and procedures in place with regard to absence and the authorisation of absence. These policies are adhered to in practice and there have been no incidents of absence without authority since the last inspection.

Staff at this school work very closely together to ensure that students' needs are met and behaviour management is very much a team effort. Teachers, care staff and therapists are all involved in behaviour management and approaches to behaviour management are discussed at weekly meetings. A system of positive reinforcement is used and students can win house points and also be awarded merit ties. Green cards are used to indicate rewards and red cards are used to indicate sanctions. Any rewards are always read out in assembly. The school has a list of permitted sanctions although sanctions are rarely used. A restraint policy is in place and there are also restraint logs for the purpose of recording restraints in both the preparatory and senior schools. There have been no incidents of restraint since the last inspection. Staff state that they are very well aware of some of the difficulties that their students face and they prefer to concentrate on what students are good at rather than what they struggle with. Students are given good opportunities to discuss their rights and how they feel about any issues in evening house meetings. House staff are very clear that their overall objective is to build students' self-esteem and increase their resilience. Therapists state that they are working towards the same objectives and wish to help students to function at a higher level. Students state that the school has helped them and they feel much more confident as a result of being there.

The school has fire risk assessments in place for all the boarding houses and there are regular fire drills. Fire alarm systems are checked on a weekly basis. Environmental risk assessments have been drawn up for all rooms in all buildings and all electrical equipment is tested annually. Robust systems ensure the safe vetting of staff and visitors and young people state that they feel safe. A variety of staff were asked, during the course of this inspection, if they believe students at the school are safe and they all unanimously stated that they believe they do everything possible to ensure the safety of students in their care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school ensures that boarding provision supports educational progress very well and there is very good communication between teaching staff, residential staff and therapists. In particular all care and education staff meet on a weekly basis. This ensures a holistic approach is taken to learning. Both school sites have good library facilities and there is also internet access in all of the boarding houses. Students have designated preparatory time every evening in the houses so that they can concentrate on their homework and students state that they appreciate all the support they receive to assist them with their education. One student said, 'This is better than my other schools. Brilliant.' Another student said, 'This is much better for me. I get lots more support.'

Students also state that there is an opportunity to have a group discussion with house parents in the boarding houses each evening where they can discuss any issues that may have worried them during the day. One student said, 'There is always some one to talk to if you have a problem. We can talk to our tutors, the head of house and the head.' An independent counsellor also visits the school and young people are able to access this counselling service if requested. Staff adopt a nurturing approach towards the students in their care and they are very proud of the good outcomes that students achieve. One staff member said, 'I'm amazed at how the children turn out. It's lovely to see how they come on. They gain confidence here.' Another staff member said, 'It's always nice when the students come back after they have left and tell us about what they went on to achieve. One of our former students is now an international rugby player.'

A wide variety of activities are on offer to students who board. Activities are arranged in the evenings and also on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Activities on offer include barbecues, fete days, photography, craft club, badminton, cookery, aerobics, football, rugby and netball. Staff are also aware that the school is located near sites of scientific interest and local nature reserves and they try to ensure that students are able to take advantage of these local facilities. Students confirm that there is always a lot to do and that they are never bored.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school has very robust admissions procedures in place and all potential students' paperwork is thoroughly read by the senior management team before any initial visit by a prospective student. If staff feel that the school may be able to help, nurture and support a particular student they will invite the student to visit the school alongside parents. Following a tour of the school the student will be invited to visit again for a period of two or three days. If this visit goes well and everyone is satisfied that the school is the right place for any particular student they will then be able to start school during the following term. This means that students

have been appropriately assessed and matched with the school before they are placed and the high quality of the matching helps to ensure a good final outcome for each individual student. The school has a handbook which it issues to all new students. This contains some good information although some parts of the handbook do need revising as they mention a former boarding house which has since closed. Students confirm that once resident at the school they are very much able to get involved in day-to-day life and are frequently consulted by staff. There are regular meetings in all of the boarding houses at the end of the school day and these meetings provide a forum for students to discuss their views. There is also a School Council to which students may be elected.

Approximately half of the students at this school have a statement of special educational needs and are funded by local authorities. The remaining students are funded privately. However staff prepare care plans, which are known as 'reviews', for all students in their care including those who are funded by the local authority. The school is also very proactive in ensuring contact is maintained with parents while students are resident. In particular regular times are booked for parents to call younger students.

The school has more male than female students. Due to these differences in numbers there is currently a designated boarding house for male sixth form students. Female sixth form students remain in Greystone boarding house in Shapwick. This house currently accommodates all female boarders within the school. All older students are encouraged to increase their independence; for example through learning to use public transport independently or through developing their culinary skills in the boarding houses. All older students also learn how to prepare a curriculum vitae and write a letter of application during lessons at school. Residential staff state that encouraging students to increase their independence is part of the school's holistic approach which involves developing young people's self-esteem and confidence. Therapists state that they see the development of resilience as very important. This means that all staff are working together holistically over a long period of time to ensure that when students leave this school they leave with far more confidence than when they arrived and are ready to face the world.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school currently has five boarding houses in operation and the accommodation provided in all of the houses is of the highest quality. All houses have newly replaced carpets throughout and are furnished to a very high standard. Students' rooms contain sturdy beds, modern wardrobes and desks or chests of drawers of a very high standard. All boarding houses have large modern kitchens where young people can prepare snacks such as 'cheese toasties'. They are also equipped with lounges and games rooms which are spacious and comfortable. The bathing facilities in all of the houses is of the highest quality with ample private showering facilities and also some comfortable bathrooms. All students' dormitories are decorated and furnished to a very high standard and students have safe boxes in which they can store their valuables. Students are very enthusiastic about their rooms or dormitories and the words, 'I love my room,' are very frequent when students discuss their provision. Students are encouraged to personalise their rooms and also to keep them tidy. All rooms are very well presented and it is clear that students take pride in them.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a Statement of Aims which accurately reflects what the school sets out to do for the students it accommodates. Information about the school can also be accessed on the website and the school produces a prospectus which provides parents and students with information about the school's aims, staff qualifications and life in boarding. There is also a staff handbook which gives good guidance to staff.

Each house is staffed with two house parents and a number of assistant house parents. House parents live in the boarding houses and assistant house parents assist them or relieve them on their nights off. Residential staff are also assisted by cleaners who clean the houses each morning and by the school's general assistants who oversee the students health care. They arrange medical appointments for students as and when necessary. Staff state that they are a very happy team and work well together and staff turnover is very low. Staff feel extremely well supported and they state that they get on with their line managers. The school has recently introduced a rolling annual appraisal system. Some boarding staff have received an annual appraisal and other annual appraisals are in the process of being arranged. All boarding staff confirm that they have received training in food hygiene, safeguarding and first aid. Staff also receive specific training in working with dyslexic children.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All staff know each student in their care individually and are very aware of what they need to do to support and encourage each individual child and to build up each child's resilience. Impressive attention is given to each student's needs when developing care plans or therapeutic interventions. The school has disability and discrimination policies and there is also a school accessibility plan.

The school's governing body arranges for a person to visit the school on its behalf on a regular basis for monitoring purposes. Monitoring visits are unannounced and generally cover the requirements stipulated in the national minimum standards. However on some occasions visits have been carried out in the school holidays when students have not been present and a recommendation is made that these visits are generally carried out during term time.

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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Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to

- revise the student's handbook (NMS 1.1)
- consider further developing safeguarding training for ancillary staff (NMS 5.8)

- ensure that children always have opportunities to meet with the visitor who carries out the monitoring visits. (NMS 33.3)