

Vale of Evesham School

Half Termly Monitoring Report by the Independent Care Standards Visitor (Standard 20)

1. **Times & Dates of “Visit”: Wednesday, 9th December 2020, 12 noon-1.00 pm and Tuesday 15th December 2020 9.30-10.15 am & 7.45-8.35 pm**
 - 1.1. The “visit” had to be an announced Zoom “visit” as a consequence of the pandemic and the tier and travel arrangements in place. The “visit” involved discussions with the Head, the Head of Care, a member of the Care Team who until recently was Interim Deputy Head of Care and the Residential Link Governor.
 - 1.2. Ofsted carried out an on-site monitoring visit to the residential provision on the 18th November following their inspection of the residential provision (5th -7th November 2019) which deemed the provision to be inadequate. I was contacted and spoke on the telephone with one of the inspectors. The monitoring visit report details the many positive changes and developments which have taken place since January and acknowledges the significant progress made by the school in relation to the residential provision. The report also recognised that “residency is now viewed as an integral part of the whole school” (Ofsted 2020). As my planned date for a Zoom visit was planned for the 18th November it was postponed into December in light of Ofsted’s visit.
 - 1.3. The re-brokering of the school was completed in early November and it is now part of a different MAT, the Central Learning Partnership Trust.
 - 1.4. I received copies of the:
 - “Sub-Committee meeting minutes for Residential” 12th November 2020;
 - “Residential Report for Governors” December 2020;
 - “Headteacher’s Report – Autumn 2020”;
 - Details of a course the Head is undertaking, the Board Schools’ Association (BSA) “Diploma in Boarding Practice – Leadership 2020/21”;
 - Details of the Level 5 course “Leadership and Management in Residential Care” being undertaken by the Head of Care;
 - Proforma for revised Residential Action Plan;
 - Sample of revised proforma for recording the individual progress of residential pupils which it is intended will be “Evidence for Learning” in January.
 - 1.5. It is disappointing for the school, the Trust and families that the pandemic over the last year has significantly delayed the re-inspection by Ofsted of the residential provision. The recently published Monitoring Report, to my mind, is positive but does not enable a revised judgment to be made. It is to be hoped that once the vaccination process has been progressed that Ofsted will resume regular on-site re-inspections of schools currently deemed inadequate so that the very

significant improvements made in the residential provision can be recognised, endorsed and celebrated.

2. Safeguarding

- 2.1. In addition to the safeguarding training referred to in my last report which took place at the start of the Autumn Term on the 3rd and 4th September, the school has also addressed the September 2020 changes in the statutory guidance for schools and colleges “Keeping Children Safe in Education”. The recently appointed Safeguarding and Pastoral Care member of staff completed her DSL Refresher training on the 6th October 2020.
- 2.2. The school has had a recent successful Ofsted virtual COVID-19 recovery visit and has in place a Post Covid Action Plan which ensures the continuing focus of the school of keeping pupils and staff safe.

3. Complaints

- 3.1. No complaints have been made regarding the residential provision since my last visit.

4. Behaviour Management Record

- 4.1. The school’s Sleuth behaviour data for the term shows a reduction in negative incidences across the term as pupils settled into the routines of the school following the disruptive preceding months. There was a significant reduction in October from the figure in September.
- 4.2. There were forty negative behaviours in the residential setting across the Autumn Term. Two male pupils accounted for twenty-four of the total number. The majority of the behaviours were managed and resolved by “Time off/Loss of Choice”. The other main strategies were talking with an adult or contacting families by a telephone call or letter. No incidents in the residential setting required the need for a consequence or sanction to be put in place.

5. Physical Management Record

- 5.1. One physical intervention took place on the 28th September. It involved a residential male pupil (OT) who was in the school minibus on an evening activity. He became unsettled and was physically causing potential disruption and harm to other pupils. Two female members of staff who were sitting either side of him used a friendly hold by each holding one of his hands for approximately five minutes by which time he calmed down.
- 5.2. The physical intervention was reviewed and quality assured by the Head of Care on the 5th October. The Sleuth report was seen to be “coherent, appropriately detailed and accurate and the response proportionate and in line with BSP. Details of the context were clear and evidenced an historic difficulty on the part of the pupil in transitioning and in accessing evening activities via the minibus. The outcome of the QA was to limit temporarily his community activities to one evening, Monday, use distraction techniques on the bus and let him board last and

for him to be escorted by two members of staff. The BSP and his care plan were updated accordingly.

6. Bullying

6.1. No incident of bullying has been recorded since my last visit.

7. Staffing

7.1. The Head of Care post was made substantive in November. She is currently awaiting her contract but in the meantime she is reviewing her work schedule in light of her interim experience to enable her to address the current and future demands of the role post Ofsted's monitoring visit.

7.2. The school leadership and the residential team were pleased with the oral feedback following the monitoring visit and that the report recognised and endorsed the achievements of the last year. This has strengthened the confidence of the Head of Care and her team which bodes well for implementing the planning in place for the next stage. The school is in the process of preparing its third Residential Action Plan – Post November 2020 Ofsted. The targets have been established and the work is in progress. The school is also actively reviewing how it records and reviews the individual progress of the residential pupils. The paperwork is clear and comprehensive and will inform the intention to adopt in January an “Evidence for Learning” approach which would more clearly recognise the learning which takes place in the residential setting and across the school as a whole.

7.3. The Head has enrolled for the Board Schools' Association (BSA) “Diploma in Boarding Practice – Leadership” and the Head of Care is undertaking the Level 5 “Leadership and Management in Residential Care”.

7.4. The Head of Care has formed a link with the Wyre Forest School, a maintained day and residential special school in Worcestershire which currently has an Ofsted judgment of good. Regular contact has been established with the Head of Care there and a pattern of mutual sharing of good practice is in place.

7.5. There has been an adjustment in the residential staff structure. The role of Interim Head of Care which was created earlier in the year is currently no longer in place. The continuance of the role is being reviewed.

7.6. Despite the last year being a challenging one for the residential team given the 2019 Ofsted judgment, the pandemic and at times the inevitable illness and absence of staff, the provision has very successfully changed and developed. There is now in place a confident, strong, coherent team which has been very effectively complemented by school-based care assistants working one or two evenings a week in the provision. This has proved very successful and helped to develop further the working links between school and residential.

7.7. The Residential Sub-Committee is working well in providing effective monitoring and oversight and in the regular reporting to the Board of Governors. The support given to the Head of Care and the team by the Link Governor is valued and very much appreciated.

8. Children and Young People

- 8.1. The ten children and young people who returned to the residential provision in September have across the term settled well into the provision. One or two of the pupils who initially struggled to settle back to the pattern of weekly boarding, having been at home in the Summer Term, did settle quite quickly as a result of the effective liaison with families.
- 8.2. There are discussions taking place to consider the renaming of the residential provision. The pupils are excited about this possibility and are fully involved in the discussions and in suggesting possible names for each of the units.
- 8.3. Pupils have enjoyed the regular evening visits by the Head to the provision especially so when she joined the Halloween party. Pupils have embraced the necessary changes due to COVID and have enjoyed a range of activities including walks locally in the park and in the forest as well as Firework Night and a range of school-based activities.

9. Accommodation

- 9.1. The work on the flat roof has been completed but further issues have arisen. Fire compartmentalisation and the replacement of windows and drains now need urgent attention. This work is in hand.
- 9.2. A fire risk assessment of the school was carried out in September however the detail in the report relating to fire risks was deemed to be insufficient and a further risk assessment was sought from a different company. The Midland Fire Safety Solutions (MFSS) have carried out an assessment and action has and is being taken in areas requiring remedial work.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. The two recommendations made in the last report have been actioned. St John's School for the Deaf is happy for the Head of Care to liaise by phone or Zoom with their School Nurse over medication issues.
- 10.2. As a result of this visit it may assist the school and the residential provision to consider approaching the National Association of Non-Maintained and Independent Special Schools (NASS) to ask if the Head of Care might join the meetings which are held for Head of Care in residential special schools. Contact details were shared with the Head of Care. Given the school is actively creating its third Residential Action Plan in its commitment to improve further the provision it might assist the care team to review and discuss in a staff session the contents of a social care blog (March 2019 – copy attached) written by Helen Humphreys, HMI Social Care, who is Ofsted's specialist advisor for residential care. The school has made good progress over the last year in all of the seven areas focussed on in the blog and reviewing against the document might assist in detailing further aspects of the current action planning which is taking place.

David M Braybrook MA, FRSA
Consultant in SEND work 0-25 years
Independent Care Standards Visitor
23rd December 2020

What are the common features of the best residential special schools?

[Helen Humphreys](#), 14 March 2019 - [children's homes](#), [residential special schools](#), [social care professionals](#)

Residential special schools (RSSs) care for some of the most vulnerable children in our society. This includes those children with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Over the last year, we've been looking at outstanding RSSs to get a better understanding of what it is that they are doing so well. Unsurprisingly, many have similar features, which is what I want to talk about a bit more here.

We know that the right placement really can help children to thrive. The best RSSs have persistently high expectations for children and what they can achieve. They do not let complex needs or disabilities get in the way of children living the fullest life possible. They give children both a great education, along with specialist support that meets their individual needs.

RSSs generally do very well at inspection. We rate the vast majority as good or outstanding. But while the government sets national minimum standards for RSSs, the best schools routinely go above and beyond these.

Ofsted does not advocate particular kinds of practice or ways of doing things. After all, what works in one place is not necessarily going to work in another. You know your own provision! But here are some interesting examples of things that worked well that we came across in our review.

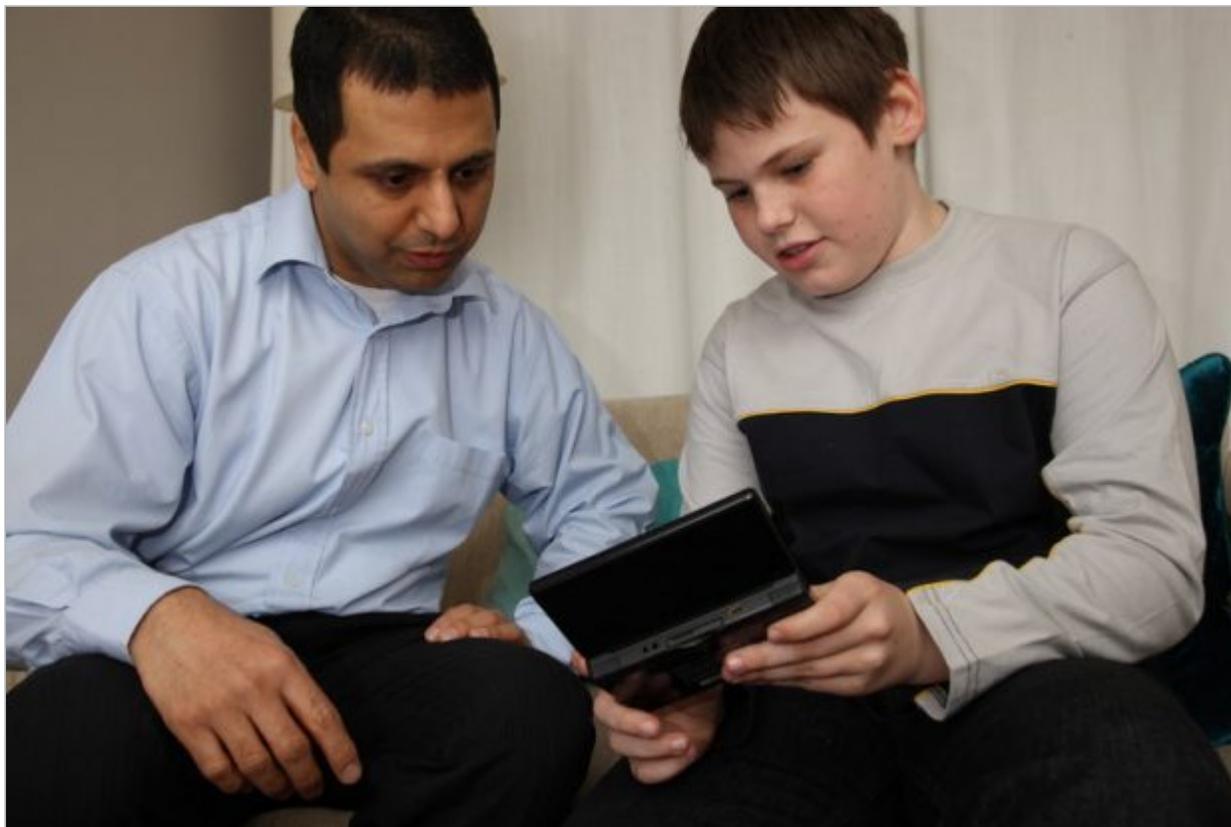
In this blog, I'll be talking specifically about our learning from social care inspections of RSS boarding, rather than of education provision.

Strong leadership and management

Strong leadership and management are common factors across all our social care inspections. They are, of course, crucial.

In the best schools, leaders and managers are deeply involved in the day-to-day running of the school. We saw examples of many leaders working on shift. Leaders see the residential support as an integrated part of the school, not an 'add on', giving

it equal precedence to education provision. Unsurprisingly, the best leaders also made sure that their staff were experienced, well trained and well supported.



Development of independence skills

Some RSSs are doing exceptional work to prepare children for life after school. The best schools not only equip children with the most basic of skills. They go the extra mile to prepare children for life outside of school, such as by giving them employability skills when appropriate.

Examples we saw of this include growing and selling vegetables, raising money for charities, and improving children's employability by helping them to practice social skills, like engaging in relevant conversations. One school even organised a small business enterprise scheme, which had funded a trip to Blackpool.

Thoughtful admission and transition

It's natural that moving away from home can be difficult and upsetting for both children and their families. Managing that transition well is important. The best RSSs do all that they can to make the process as smooth as possible, so that children make progress right from the start of their placement.

Careful planning that is individual to each child is vital, so that the transition happens at the child's pace. Some schools arrange summer activities for children who are due

to start school. This gives the children an opportunity to make friends and to meet staff before the new term starts.

Good relationships with parents

As you might expect, good relationships with parents are vital when it comes to achieving the best outcomes for children. Parents know their children best! This includes keeping them involved in the child's progress, helping them to manage their children's behaviour when they're at home and making sure parents' views are taken into account. Many parents told inspectors about the positive difference the school has made, with one saying that their child 'now has a future' through attending.

Access to interesting activities

We saw many schools building links with community organisations to widen the amount of interesting activities that they could offer to children. Access to a broad range of relevant and interesting activities helps children to gain valuable skills.

Some examples of activities on offer included the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, tickets to the Paralympics, visits to a residential care home to talk to the elderly residents, work experience opportunities and sporting activities like football courses. Children's experiences do not have to be limited (or boring!) just because they have special needs or disabilities.

Evidence and research-based practice

Our inspections also show that schools are making good use of nationally recognised research, as well as their own, to improve practice. One RSS had done some work into children's sleeping patterns to try to improve them. This means that children are not as tired or anxious, and are able to learn better at school. At another, children who eat a restrictive diet are encouraged to try new foods and exercise more. This improves their health and self-esteem.

Involving children

Involving children in decisions is an important feature of many of the best homes. They are invested in what happens, and feel valued and listened to. That includes being involved in planning activities, such as a 'student' council that helps make decisions across the whole school. In one RSS, children helped to develop a new school uniform, taking particular account of the sensory nature of the fabric to help those with sensory needs.



Is there room for improvement?

Providing consistent outstanding care in RSSs is demanding. As in any social care setting, leaders have to manage many challenges. These include juggling resources, employing and supporting staff with the relevant skills and experience, and maintaining consistently high standards.

RSS provision is, on the whole, very good. But these examples from the very best schools show just what is possible when RSSs go beyond the minimum standards expected. Children's physical and educational needs absolutely do not mean that they should miss out on fun, adventure, and learning skills that are genuinely going to help them live independently or get a job. So many schools are doing a great job of achieving all of this. Children's lives are enriched, and even changed for the better, as result.

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