

# Potterspurvy Lodge School

Potterspurvy Lodge, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 7LL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Potterspurvy Lodge School is an independent residential special school for 49 young people aged eight to 19 years. The school offers termly and weekly boarding, as well as day provision.

The school is situated in south Northamptonshire and caters for children with autistic spectrum disorders, complex needs and challenging behaviour.

**Inspection dates:** 13 to 15 March 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.

**Date of previous inspection:** 13 September 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is inadequate because:

- There are wide-ranging and systemic failures at this school. The staff team, including a number of new and inexperienced staff, has not been prepared properly to meet the complex and challenging needs of the young people admitted to the residential provision.
- The number of staff on each shift is regularly insufficient to provide safe care.
- Young people have been involved in significant incidents that could have resulted in serious injuries.
- Safeguarding practice is poor because the designated safeguarding lead knew that a member of staff was not suitable to work with children, but allowed them to continue working at the residential provision. Furthermore, the designated safeguarding lead did not provide clear and detailed information to safeguarding agencies about an incident of sexting. Records of safeguarding concerns are poor.
- Supervision of young people, particularly those likely to run away, is poor. On one occasion, staff were not aware that a young person had gone missing.
- Young people have potentially unrestricted access to the internet because parents provide young people with their own wi-fi. Online access is not monitored effectively by staff.
- Staff do not take the necessary steps to protect young people who self-harm.
- Risk assessments and risk management plans lack detail or are missing, and are not implemented in practice.
- Fire systems and health and safety systems do not effectively promote the safety of young people.
- Communication between care staff, academic staff, managers and the therapy team is poor. This has meant that young people have become upset and agitated.
- Staff do not feel well supported by managers.
- Managers have carried out illegal practices, such as instructing staff to supply cigarettes and vaping fluid to a minor. Having removed an illegal substance from a member of staff, the home did not report the matter to police, and stored the substance on site. Staff have allowed young people to watch age-inappropriate DVDs.
- Leaders do not have a good understanding of the quality of the residential provision. Their self-evaluation is overly positive, which demonstrates poor insight.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Transition planning for some young people is very good.
- Young people benefit from having pets at the residential provision.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- Ensure that the school makes all reasonable efforts to obtain all necessary information about a child's health, education and care needs, prior attainment and achievements prior to (or in an emergency, at the time of) admission. (NMS 2.4)
- Ensure that the school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured. (NMS 6.2)
- Ensure that the school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. (NMS 6.3)
- Ensure that the school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 20058. (NMS 7.1)
- Ensure that there are suitable risk assessments for any activities which may put children at risk of harm. (NMS 10.2)
- Ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school (NMS 11.1)
- Ensure that staff working within the school know and implement the school's policy, and where relevant the local authority's policy, in relation to children going missing and their role in implementing that policy. (NMS 12.8)
- Ensure that there is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. (NMS 13.2)
- Ensure that there is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school. (NMS 15.1)
- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. This specifically refers to the lack of detail in planning documentation, lack of dates on planning documentation and lack of archiving. (NMS 21.1)

## Recommendations

- Continue to challenge poor established practice so that routines are based on the needs of individual children and young people. (Linked to NMS 21.1)
- Consider providing staff with further training about sexually harmful behaviours and online safety. (Linked to NMS 15.1)
- Ensure information on the school's website is clear and accurate. This specifically refers to the offer of a full therapeutic service. (Linked to NMS 1.1)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate**

There are wide-ranging and systemic failures at this school. Young people have been involved in significant incidents that could have resulted in serious injuries. Safeguarding procedures are not followed properly, which has put young people at risk of harm.

The school has admitted young people who display very complex and challenging behaviours but does not have enough staff to meet their needs. In addition, the staff who are available do not have the necessary skills or experience to safely care for these young people. A large number of staff are still in their probation period.

Young people are frustrated by the lack of staff. They give examples of activities being cancelled. One young person talked about being left alone in a residential flat with a handheld transceiver (walkie-talkie) in case he needed help. Young people say that they find it difficult to form relationships with some staff, especially agency workers, because they do not stay for long. However, they like most of the staff team.

Despite the fact that some children have a history of dangerous behaviours, initial risk assessments take too long to complete. This means that staff have to manage difficult situations and take young people on trips without access to important information. This puts young people and staff at risk of harm.

Outdated strategies are used to encourage young people into school. For example, the electricity supply to the sockets is switched off in a young person's room during the school day. This particular strategy is ineffective, as the young person has electronic devices that use batteries.

The team of therapists and mental health professionals is no longer functioning because these staff are not currently at work. Young people and parents feel frustrated by the lack of a therapeutic team. Young people say that they had valued the therapeutic support and had got on really well with members of the team. They

also say that that they were not told that the psychiatrist was leaving until he had already left. This left some of them feeling anxious.

Young people enjoy a range of activities that include walks in the local area, board games, sports and cinema. However, young people say that some activities are cancelled due to lack of staff.

The support of staff in the residential provision has enabled some children to make academic progress. For example, a new admission made some progress after a short period of time. He says that he feels safe and is working hard towards his GCSEs. Furthermore, he has made friends.

Young people accept difference. For example, young people who see themselves as transgender do not feel discriminated against.

Staff are committed to developing good relationships with young people. Most parents feel that communication with residential staff is good.

Houses are small and homely. Bedrooms are personalised. Young people say that they like their bedrooms. Young people benefit, therapeutically, from keeping small pets and are encouraged to care for them. This gives them a sense of security and responsibility.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: inadequate**

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who is also the executive headteacher, has not provided to the appropriate safeguarding agencies clear and detailed information about a disclosure made by a young person. The disclosure involved another child who is not at the school. The lack of information meant that quick and appropriate action was not taken to prevent further harm to either child.

Staff do not help to keep safe young people who self-harm. Staff found razor blades in the room of a young person who displays self-harming behaviour, yet did not remove them immediately. The razor blades were not removed until later the following day. Staff did not identify this as an immediate hazard.

A member of staff employed through an agency to work in the residential provision brought an illegal substance into the school. The substance was removed from him, but he was allowed to continue to work directly with young people. After two days he divulged to a young person that he had been caught with illegal substances at the school. If the DSL had taken immediate and appropriate action with this member of staff, the young person would not have been put in this position. The police have not been contacted for advice about the safe disposal of the illegal substance. Although it is illegal for the school to hold this substance, it has been stored in a safe at the school.

A number of serious incidents have occurred. These include a young person climbing

a fence to sit on a construction digger and young people taking keys from a night-care worker and entering the main school building and classrooms. These demonstrate that staff are not equipped to provide consistently safe care.

Parents provide their child with their own wi-fi. This gives young people potentially unrestricted access to the internet. This is not monitored well by staff.

Young people who go missing are not protected. A young person went missing on three occasions over one weekend, despite one-to-one staffing. This young person was at serious risk of harm during this time because he was agitated and anxious and voiced suicidal ideations. On one occasion, despite instructions to monitor the young person carefully and follow him if he left the site, staff did not know that he had gone missing until they were contacted by a parent.

Risk assessments lack detail or are not recorded. For example, young people take a regular walk to a local quarry even though there is a risk assessment indicating that young people should not go to the quarry due to risk of drowning and falling rocks. Similarly, there is no risk assessment for a young person who keeps tools in his bedroom. This young person is at high risk of throwing things, and was seen throwing a pair of scissors during the inspection. The lack of good-quality guidance for staff puts both staff and young people at risk.

Other risk assessments are not implemented. For example, a young person has a skateboard. He does not have any protective equipment at the school. His risk assessment states that he should wear protective equipment when skateboarding. Another young person, who is new to the residential provision and has no risk management plan at all, was also seen using the skateboard. This demonstrates that staff do not recognise or minimise potential risk.

Risk management plans do not provide clear guidance for staff to follow. Because risk management plans are neither dated nor archived when reviewed, young people often have several versions of the same plan in their file. This is confusing for staff, as they do not know which is the correct plan to follow. These basic errors undermine the risk-management systems.

Staff use electrical equipment that is not appropriately tested and, therefore, may not be safe to use.

Fire safety procedures do not protect young people. Fire drills have taken place at night and young people have refused to evacuate. No follow-up action has been taken to ensure that children evacuate safely and in a timely manner. In some areas, fire safety equipment is either not present or is kept in a locked office. This means that staff do not have quick access to this equipment.

Staff have bought electronic cigarettes and vaping fluid for a young person who is under age. Staff were following instruction from managers and felt that it would help to alleviate the young person's anxiety and help him to stop smoking. However, it is illegal for adults to supply minors with smoking materials.

Young people are watching films that are inappropriate for their age. This is not supporting their emotional well-being.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate**

Managers do not have a good insight into the weaknesses of the residential provision. This is despite clear operational indicators such as incidents, complaints and staffing levels.

The therapy team is depleted because staff have left or are on sick leave. However, the school's website still states that these therapists are part of the offer when young people come to this school. This is misleading and should be rectified. There has been a breakdown in communication between the clinical lead and the executive headteacher. This has led to young people not being informed about a key member of the therapeutic team leaving. Young people became anxious and upset when they found out after he had already left the school.

Poor communication between academic and care staff means that young people are left agitated and upset. For example, care staff were not told about a young person who had gone missing from the school until they phoned the school to establish her whereabouts. In another case, care staff believed that a young person was on a school trip and would not be returning until 7pm. He returned from school at the normal time to find care staff having a meeting in his lounge. This upset him.

Some staff have low morale. They are concerned about the turnover of staff, poor staffing levels, the number of agency staff used and the admission process for young people. Some staff feel unsupported by managers. Staff are trying to do their best for the young people, but struggle due to the low numbers of staff and being poorly equipped to manage the challenges that the young people present. For example, a member of staff worked an afternoon shift. Night staff cover was not found, so the member of staff was asked to work the night shift. She did this and then, as no one came to relieve her in the morning, she also worked the morning shift. Such excessive work hours impact significantly on the quality of care that the staff are able to provide.

Staff receive a good induction into the residential provision. They have access to online and face-to-face training. However, staff have not received any training on the subject of sexually harmful behaviours and have only undertaken a basic package about online safety.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and

young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC012962

**headteacher/teacher in charge:**

**type of school:** residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01908 542912

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## **Inspector(s)**

Joanne Vyas, social care inspector (lead)

Philip Morris, social care inspector



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