

# Summarised inspection findings

Starley Hall School

10 March 2020

## Key contextual information

Starley Hall School is an independent residential special school, owned and run by Starley Hall School Ltd., situated on the outskirts of Burntisland in Fife. The school provides care and education for children and young people aged from 10 to 18, who have a wide range of additional support needs. It is also registered to provide day education for a small number of children and young people. At the time of the inspection there were 11 children and young people on the school roll, who were all living in the on-site school care accommodation. The headteacher had recently retired and a new headteacher was in post.

### 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- The ethos of the school is very nurturing and warm, with a strong focus on improving young people's wellbeing. All staff work very effectively as a team, and demonstrate the school values consistently through their behaviour. This is very evident in the welcoming, affectionate and patient interactions between staff and young people. Very positive relationships and a supportive climate are supporting young people's readiness to learn. Education staff use creative and imaginative approaches to engage young people in learning. In almost all lessons, most young people engage well, are motivated to learn and enjoy success.
- Well-considered professional learning in nurture, trauma and attachment is giving all staff an enhanced understanding of young people's development and additional support needs. All staff set clear, consistent routines and boundaries, and are skilled at using de-escalation techniques when learners are anxious or distressed. They observe young people closely and make well-timed and sensitive interventions to help them to re-engage in learning. As a result, there is a calm and purposeful environment for learning at the school. As planned, all staff should continue to embed whole school nurturing approaches across care and education settings.
- Young people are respected and valued as unique individuals at Starley Hall. They enjoy having a say about their learning activities and influencing future learning. All teachers design learning experiences around personalisation and choice, and timetables are highly individualised to take into account learners' strengths and interests. Twice weekly afternoon activities include choices of sensory play, relaxation, massage and health and wellbeing activities. Young people also contribute effectively to the life of the school. The active 'Pupil Voice Group' meets weekly to suggest school improvements, such as the provision of a school library and re-introducing school uniform.
- Education staff have a sound knowledge of young people's learning needs and preferred learning styles. Teachers plan a variety of well-considered learning experiences, across the four contexts for learning. This includes one-to-one sessions, small group tasks, practical activities, as well as learning outdoors and in the community. This provides very good

opportunities for young people to learn and apply skills in new and unfamiliar contexts. Young people also enjoy planned opportunities to develop their skills through play and creative activities. In almost all lessons, teachers differentiate tasks and activities effectively. Most learners work well both independently and collaboratively with their peers.

- Most teachers share the purpose of learning well at the start of lessons. Almost all give clear instructions and explanations, and manage transitions throughout the school day very well. Visual timetables, prompts and signing are used very well by all education staff to support young people's understanding. The recently introduced breakfast clubs at the start of the day, are helping young people to prepare for the day ahead. They also provide planned opportunities to develop social and communication skills, and awareness of the wider world through discussing daily news.
- Staff use a wide range of digital technology confidently to enhance and enrich learners' experiences. Interactive whiteboards within each classroom are used very well. Learners have access to desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and many other innovative technology resources. This includes virtual reality headsets, coding equipment and a three-dimensional printer.
- Most teachers use a variety of formative assessment approaches well to inform planning. This includes good use of questioning to check for learners' understanding. Almost all staff use praise effectively to reinforce learning, and most teachers give relevant verbal and written feedback. Most learners have regular opportunities to undertake self-assessment, which includes the use of talking mats and task boards to review their learning. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to assessment. This includes more specific and measurable targets for literacy and numeracy to help learners understand what they need to do to improve. A few teachers have taken part in some moderation activities, including outwith the school, to support their understanding of standards. The headteacher should ensure that all teachers are confident in their understanding of standards within the broad general education (BGE).
- Teamwork and collaborative planning with all staff and partners are key strengths of the school. The progress of young people is reviewed and evaluated regularly through focus group meetings, which involve key staff from across care and education. All young people have a range of individual targets within a variety of plans, including individual (GIRFEC) action plans, 'My Goals' targets, as well as lesson plans. A new education planning format includes detailed personalised support strategies within the individual 'child at the centre' curriculum overviews. Teachers and teaching assistants forward plan together and set targets to support learners across all curricular areas. They use Interactive Learning Diaries to record observations and evidence of young people's learning and achievements. Once a term, this evidence is converted to 'Flip Books' which are well received at review meetings and by parents. Senior leaders should now review processes and paperwork to ensure plans are streamlined and manageable, and provide useful information to inform next stages in learning. As appropriate, staff should continue to develop simplified plans and targets which are more easily understood by young people.
- The school is developing its use of data to evidence progress in its helpful impact reports. Senior leaders are planning to organise data in a form that provides clear and meaningful messages about learners' progress overall. This includes an overview of literacy and numeracy in the BGE which will ensure that learners are challenged and supported when needed.

## 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with senior leaders and the director of services.

## 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Taking account of significant gaps in young people's learning prior to placement at the school and their complex additional support needs, most are making good progress. Data provided by the school shows that within the BGE, most young people are making good progress from placement in literacy and English. A few are making very good progress in aspects of literacy where they are now working within expected levels. In numeracy and mathematics, most young people are making good progress from their prior levels. Almost all are working within the first level, with a few working within early and the start of second level.

### Literacy and English

- Young people are developing and applying literacy skills across a range of subjects and contexts for learning. In school they follow instructions in practical subjects, and research and present information in a range of written and oral forms. In community-based activities they compose shopping lists, read timetables and menus, and engage with members of the public. At the lower stages, most young people can express choices and opinions well, with the support of pictures and symbols. At the middle and upper stages, they enjoy sharing their views on local and national issues at the breakfast club and in English and social studies. A few learners at the upper stages demonstrate a deeper understanding of words and their meanings through critical thinking activities and group discussions. Across the school, young people read and listen to a range of novels and texts which take account of their interests. They are developing their reading skills daily through reading books and listening to stories for enjoyment, during choosing time and visits the local library. Bedtime routines include books and stories to help young people settle. Teachers are improving learners' writing skills through phonics programmes and individual support. A few young people write their own stories and novels for pleasure at the weekly creative writing group. Teachers are aware of the need to develop further the school's approach to building progressively on young people's existing reading and writing skills. This includes writing for a range of purposes in real contexts.

### Numeracy and mathematics

- Most young people working at first level can solve addition and subtraction problems with three digit whole numbers. They demonstrate an understanding of fractions when sharing food items with others. Most can identify coins up to the value of £20 and explore different ways to make the same total. They are learning to apply this knowledge to pay for items in a shopping situation. Almost all recognise two-dimensional shapes and most recognise three-dimensional objects. A few learners are able to use tally marks to record items of food in a supermarket. Learners working at the early level are developing their ability to recognise numerals up to 20 and their understanding of number placement. They can count on in ones to demonstrate simple addition. They are developing their understanding of money, including recognition of coins up to £1 through real life contexts. Almost all are developing their understanding of time

sequences, days of the week and seasons through well-established daily routines. A few learners working at second level can calculate the duration of journeys which bridge several hours or parts of hours using both 12 and 24 hour notation. Teachers should ensure that young people continue to develop their confidence in numeracy and mathematics through more active and experiential learning, including real-life contexts.

### **Attainment over time**

- In the BGE, most learners are making good progress from prior levels of attainment in all curricular areas. Senior phase pathways are highly personalised to the needs, interests and abilities of learners. As a result, over the past three years, almost all young people at the senior phase achieved a wide range of National units and course awards in a broad variety of curricular areas. Commendably a few achieved exceptionally well, including Higher Awards and National 4 and 5 Qualifications. A significant number of young people at the secondary stages have achieved a range of awards which are developing skills for life and work. This includes Saltire, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Open University modules, and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards. The school is planning to develop further partnerships with local businesses so that all young people continue to experience the world of work.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievement**

- Through its well-organised senior phase pathways and very effective links with a range of local partners and businesses, almost all young people are developing skills for life and work very well. This includes links with the Community Council, Floral Action Burntisland, a residential care home and a ship builder. For example, young people are developing practical skills through making buddy benches for a primary school and building play equipment, such as a boat. They are developing their awareness of citizenship through planting bulbs, and making and distributing dog waste boxes within the local community. They also repair sculptures in the local community, all of which is much valued by local residents. As a result, young people are developing respect for others and the environment, as well as an awareness of the world of work, including health and safety. Almost all young people also take part in a variety of clubs and activities in the local community which is developing their confidence, resilience and ability to work with others. Through regular opportunities to have their say on a range of school matters, most young people are developing their ability to solve problems and make decisions.

### **Equity for all learners**

- All staff have a very good understanding of supporting young people to attain and achieve through nurturing and trauma-informed practices. A strong ethos of inclusion means that young people do not feel different as a result of additional support needs or the impact of adverse childhood experiences. Almost all achieve very well and experience success. As a result of this preparation, almost all young people who left the service over the past three years moved on successfully to college or work after leaving school, including Higher Education courses.
- The school has been very successful in encouraging attendance where other schools were unable to do so. No young person is excluded as a result of behaviour. Staff should continue to explore imaginative ways to encourage young people who are not attending school to re-engage with learning.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion - wellbeing

- A major strength of the school is its nurturing and therapeutic approaches which are improving the wellbeing of young people. A comprehensive transition programme ensures that all staff have a very good understanding of the holistic needs of young people and how to support their wellbeing. Very positive relationships, and high levels of unconditional positive regard towards young people, ensure that they feel safe, cared for and included. This is helping to re-engage young people with their learning, many of whom have had long periods of interrupted learning at previous education placements.
- The strong focus on emotional wellbeing is having a positive impact on young people's ability to recognise and manage difficult feelings. Well considered therapeutic approaches, such as massage and 'messy play', are improving their ability to relax and to self-regulate. Staff support young people very well to be kind towards others and to take responsibility for their own actions. This creates a calm and settled atmosphere around the school, which helps young people to feel comfortable and to engage in learning.
- New play equipment in the school grounds is encouraging young people to be active and outdoors. They are also learning to try new activities and sports in the community, which is developing their physical fitness. Young people are developing a good understanding of healthy eating and are trying new and unfamiliar foods. They are developing their understanding of how to stay safe online and to keep safe when out in the community or on the roads. As planned, staff should continue to support all young people to understand their plans and targets better, and to take responsibility for their wellbeing.

### Key question 1: How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

#### Quality indicator 1.1: Children and young people experience compassion, dignity and respect.

**Evaluation: Very good**

Young people received very affectionate and strongly nurturing care. The development of meaningful, rewarding relationships and high levels of continuity and security were central to all the service's work. Staff used a very respectful approach in their interactions with young people, promoting their dignity and privacy. They valued young people's diversity and recognised their individual worth. They were flexible and tolerant but provided appropriate boundaries. Young people had lots of opportunities for voicing their opinions. Staff made wide use of aids for those with additional communication needs and regularly used visual tools and social stories, to very good effect. The service had also enabled young people to have independent advocacy to enable their views to be heard when significant decisions were being made.

#### Quality indicator 1.2: Children and young people get the most out of life.

**Evaluation: Very good**

Staff used their knowledge of young people to ensure they had a wide variety of highly personalised and enjoyable activities and enabled them to exercise appropriate choice. Some young people also benefitted from small group activities or holidays with peers, when they were supported to develop interpersonal skills. Most young people were physically active and played outdoors regularly, including making use of the very good on-site facilities. Staff were extremely supportive of young people's relationship with families and siblings, which helped create a sense of belonging. They has also done some very impressive work with families to support young people's transition into the service.

Young people benefitted from individually tailored plans that enabled them to engage in learning to the best of their ability. This was supported by strong collaborative working relationships between care and education staff and an ethos of inclusion and nurture that emphasised young people's strengths. The service celebrated young people's successes and achievements.

Staff were aware of their responsibilities for child protection and training was provide to staff in all posts. Appropriate staffing levels and robust risk management processes and interdisciplinary working contributed to keeping young people safe.

#### Quality indicator 1.3: Children and young people's health and development benefit from the care and support they experience.

**Evaluation: Very good**

Well-trained, highly competent staff consistently implemented well-considered strategies and interventions that were strongly informed by their knowledge of young people's developmental levels and previous experiences. These included very sensitive management of distressed behaviour. A very impressive learning culture ensured that incidents were promptly reviewed to enable staff to adjust their approaches to meet individual need. The service had a demonstrable commitment to embedding therapeutic approaches into all aspects of young people's care, supporting continuous improvement with extensive training for staff. This had made a significant contribution to young people developing greater self-regulation and improving their self-esteem and confidence.

Significant emphasis was placed on young people experiencing very high-quality support to enable them to manage transitions throughout the day, as well as at times of loss or change in their lives. They benefitted from the security provided by flexible, nurturing routines, and good sleep patterns. Young people's physical and mental health needs were continuously promoted by staff who encouraged them to take an active interest in their own health. The support provided by the therapeutic team was a very successful and well-integrated part of the holistic approach to care and included complementary therapies which young people clearly valued. Staff often brought their dogs into work, and young people appreciated this valuable contact with animals. Medication was also managed safely to promote health and wellbeing.

Most of the feedback we received about food was very positive. Catering staff knew young people's preferences very well and they provided lots of choice and variety, encouraging young people to widen their tastes and learn about how to eat for better health. Fresh fruit, vegetables and salads were readily available, and meals were very attractively presented to stimulate the appetite.

### **Key question 5: How well is our care and support planned?**

#### **Quality indicator 5.1: Assessment and care planning reflects children and young people's needs and wishes.**

##### **Evaluation: Very good**

Young people benefitted from very impressive, structured assessment and personal planning systems that were informed by national guidance and good practice. These had some outstanding aspects. Development of comprehensive assessments was very ably led by the therapeutic services team, who provided specialist input where appropriate. The care team also made a full contribution based on their observations and knowledge of young people's strengths and preferences. The service used these assessments very effectively to inform the planning process. Planning documents were well-structured and strongly individualised. They had clearly defined goals and actions aimed at supporting young people to have positive outcomes and experiences and reach their potential. However, we considered that there was scope for more focussed use of timescales for at least some of the planned outcomes and actions. Regular reviews by each young person's 'focus group' of key staff ensured plans remained dynamic and responsive to changing needs and circumstances. We reviewed a range of additional written records and found these to be of a very high standard. There was one instance where the use of a brief period of seclusion should have been more clearly identified in incident records and subject to oversight by senior staff.

Young people were at the heart of their assessments and plans, and staff encouraged and enabled them to express their views. The service had also begun to implement new ways of involving them more in the planning process and were endeavouring to develop a more accessible format to sit alongside often complex professional documents. This had yet to be fully embedded but had the potential for allowing young people to recognise their voice more clearly. We offered some suggestions for further improvement.

## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.