

Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968

Unannounced Inspection Report 2000

Registration and Inspection Unit
3-5 High Street
Perth
PH1 5JS



Establishment	Ochil Tower School
Owner(s)	The Management of Ochil Tower School
Manager	Annika Cheney, Marcus Cheney, Margaret Snellgrove, Neil Snellgrove, Hilary Ruprecht and Ueli Ruprecht
Registered for	29
Category of Residents	Children and young people aged between 6 and 18 years of age with moderate or severe learning disabilities
Date of Inspection	13 March 2000
Inspection Officer	Rachel Gillespie

Issued	11/05/2000
Amended	
Accepted	

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FORWARD

Perth and Kinross Council, as Registering and Inspecting Authority, is required to undertake two inspections to residential establishments per year. One of these should be unannounced.

This Report is based on an unannounced visit made to Ochil Tower School on 13 March 2000. It should be viewed as both a supplement and update to the 1999 Annual Inspection Report and be read in conjunction with it.

INTRODUCTION

The inspection took place within 2 months of the Annual Inspection; as the school had only just received the report of this Inspection, there had been no opportunity to circulate it and receive comments.

The Inspection Officer was advised that one of the Joint Co-ordinators, David Riddell, is to move to Edinburgh, and it is proposed to appoint in his place Neil and Margaret Snellgrove, who came to Ochil Tower last summer from a Camphill Community in Northern Ireland. They are both qualified teachers and experienced house parents who are looking forward to moving from the Priory to Sycamore House in the summer. Additionally, the first of 5 new pupils to be admitted to the school over the next month was being helped to settle in, this being a time when considerable time and attention from adults is required to make a full assessment of the young person's individual needs.

OVERALL IMPRESSION GAINED DURING INSPECTION

The Inspection Officer was welcomed by Mr Ueli Ruprecht, a Joint Co-ordinator, who takes the role of general representative of the school and is responsible for administration. Some general discussion followed about the feedback from parents and other agencies on the care offered by Ochil Tower School in relation to the Annual Inspection, as this had not been available at the time; as usual, Mr Ruprecht expressed a willingness to look at opportunities to improve the service arising from points raised, although for the most part the response was very favorable. He indicated that the school would circulate a copy of the Report to all parents and agencies as a matter of course¹ but additionally he intended that it be made available on the school's website.

The Inspection Officer was then shown round the new residential building, Sycamore House, which¹ though still an obvious building site, is at the stage of decoration and internal fittings. Designed by Camphill's own architects, it has many characteristic European features, whilst externally blending in with its locality. It has already been 'blessed' by the whole school as part of one of its traditional ceremonies and its gradual creation is attracting considerable interest from the young people.

Elmtree was chosen by the Officer as the venue for sharing supper with the young people, 2 girls and 2 boys, and their 3 co-workers. The meal took the form of a selection of crispbreads, cheese, fillings and jams. in addition to the remains of lunch, followed by a cold sweet. It was a leisurely meal, with considerable participation from the more verbal members, those with autistic features

tending to be quieter. All the children and young people were encouraged to make their own selection and this aspect of choice characterised other aspects of the evening.

On arrival, the Inspector had noted some of the young people in the grounds walking or riding tricycles in the company of co-workers. One had chosen to have her bath and get into her pyjamas before supper and now another was being assisted by a co-worker to prepare for bed. Everyone helped to clear the supper table and those assigned to dry dishes and lay the breakfast table fell into role quite happily. One girl was assisted in counting out cutlery as part of her numerical skills, while another young man enjoyed the opportunity to engage adults in conversations, in the absence of peer interaction from his current house group. Staff are aware of the varying needs of the young people and take these into consideration, along with the young people's own views, when deciding which house the young people should stay in. Unnecessary moves are avoided but the change in the school roll and the addition of Sycamore House offer scope for new groupings.

Two young people then showed the Inspection Officer their respective bedrooms, both shared. The bedrooms were warm and comfortably furnished: it was observed that there were only a few personal effects - favourite cuddly toys, books and some pictures, but the Officer was advised that toys are kept in a separate storage area and that many of the children and young people preferred not to personalise their rooms, keeping the majority of their belongings in their family house.

At 7pm, everyone assembled in the living room to spend time together. The lighting was reduced and candles lit, creating an atmosphere conducive to settling down for the night. Several activities followed, which the young people could opt in or out of as they chose, but all were facilitated to make suggestions and selections. Hence the session started with several communal songs, continued with a game of passing round a 'pretend' object from a Treasure Box, aimed at encouraging self-expression and imagination, and ended with a well loved action song. A brief blessing and the blowing out of the four candles signalled the time for three young people to collect their cocoa and depart for bed and story reading from a co-worker, while the fifteen year old stayed behind to reflect on his day and time in Ochil Tower with the Houseparent and the Inspection Officer. He had recently heard that his two year stay at Ochil Tower was to be extended for a further two years and was delighted with this news, albeit he enjoys being with his family and, like many others, moves between two very different environments and regimes, home and school.

As the Inspection Officer was leaving, most of the young people had retreated to bed, although some were joining the co-workers and others at 9pm to listen to an outside speaker from the Camphill movement give one of his talks, this time on Goethe and music.

REVIEW OF ISSUES REQUIRING ACTION

At the time of this visit the School had not had an opportunity to consider the Annual Inspection Report and formulate a Plan of Action in response to it. However, it is anticipated that the Officer will be kept up to date with progress as part of ongoing contact in relation to the additional registration of the accommodation at Sycamore House. Neil and Margaret Snellgrove will also require to undertake 'fit person' assessments prior to appointment as joint 'managers' of the school.

Although the Officer is aware that some young people have a good supply of their own books, toys and games in their rooms and others may choose not to bring them to school, the ages or the specific needs of the children and young people are such that the school itself should make available a varied and updated stock of appropriate reading materials and toys to suit all tastes and ages, for those times when they need to be able to occupy themselves without adult attention. The encouragement of outdoor pursuits is very positive, and the school's policy regarding the absence of television and computer games is accepted, but reading and play/craft materials

promote the ability of the young person to develop a degree of personal autonomy and acquire enjoyable 'hobbies' which can be fulfilling in adult life, especially if opportunities for social interaction are more limited.

Anyone who would like a copy of this report should apply to the Registration and Inspection Unit, Social Work Services, Rosslyn House, 32 Glasgow Road, Perth. Telephone 01738 476830.

The dynamics of residential childcare establishments are complex and continually evolving and this report must be viewed in this context. The failure to mention any specific aspect of the establishment's functioning should not therefore be taken to imply it was assessed and approved. Owners and Managers are reminded, however, of their obligation to comply with all the standards as detailed in the Standards and Guidance for the Registration and Inspection of Children's Residential Units and Residential Schools