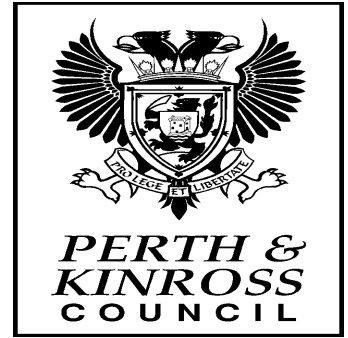


Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968

# Unannounced Inspection Report 2001

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



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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	29 March 2001
Inspection Officer	Rachel Gillespie

Issued	16/05/201
Amended	
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## FOREWORD

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 29 March 2001. It should be viewed as both a supplement and update to the 2000 Annual Inspection Report and be read in conjunction with it.

## INTRODUCTION

Although Ochil Tower School was able to meet the condition of its registration that all its accommodation should be reduced to twin-bedded or single rooms, with the completion of a fifth house, Sycamore House, in August 2000, it has always been the intention to upgrade accommodation in some of its other houses as well. Additionally, there is increasing recognition that many of the children and young people require or benefit from a bedroom of their own. With this in mind, the school proposes to create more single rooms by partitioning two double rooms in Belvidere this summer, as well as improving toilet and shower facilities. Renovations to the Coach House and ancillary buildings will follow in 2002, this staggered approach minimising the disruption to the young people.

Another aspect of the development plan has been to respond to the growing demand for places from local authorities; currently the school is seeking approval from the Registration Unit and the Scottish Executive Education Department for an increase in the school roll from the present 29 residential and 6 day pupils to 30 and 10 respectively, albeit there is no plan to actually enrol to these levels in the near future, as the young people appear to be more demanding and many more need single rooms, phenomena reflected elsewhere in the residential childcare scene.

Finally, Ochil Tower is exploring the possibility of providing an additional facility of an independent living unit for individuals over 16 years to spend between one and three months practising daily living skills and experiencing the advantages and disadvantages of living on ones own, with the safety net of a co-worker always available to provide guidance and support. Such a service would not only assist the assessment of professionals planning care for individuals approaching adulthood in the future, but would also enable the young person to consider alternatives for living arrangements from a more informed perspective.

## OVERALL IMPRESSION GAINED DURING INSPECTION

Although this was officially an unannounced inspection, the timing of the visit was not entirely unexpected for the school, as they were aware that the inspection year' ends in March, leaving little room for any uncertainty. The Inspection Officer was accompanied by a student social worker, on placement with the Unit, whose primary focus was to learn about the inspection process and to get a sense of how the philosophy of Camphill underpins and shapes the care provided to the children and young people; some of her observations have been incorporated into this report.

The Inspection Officer and her colleague were welcomed by Mrs Hilary Ruprecht, one of the Joint Co-ordinators, who arranged for the required documentation to be inspected. Meanwhile, she was accompanying a child to a swimming lesson, the afternoon session being the third part of the school day when the pupils are grouped not according to age or ability, as for the first and second respectively, but in line with individual needs, with the work being of a more practical and artistic nature. Her professional training and background in both curative education and social work, linked to the flexibility of placement provision at Ochil Tower - ranging from day-school to weekly boarding through to providing a home-base in exceptional cases - exemplifies the ability of the school to meet the additional needs of those small number of children from complex family situations where individual nurturing and stability of relationships are required.

The Inspection Officer entered into some discussion with Mr Ueli Ruprecht about the professional concerns in relation to a relatively young child having his home base within a residential setting, whilst appreciating it would be detrimental to venture upon another family placement in the near future, following two such disruptions. Mr Ruprecht confirmed that the child had been allocated his own bedroom, in line with the requirement for children placed on a 52-week basis, as laid down in the Standards and Guidance of the Registering Authority. It is also clear that Ochil Tower is better placed to provide some semblance of family life than other residential schools, not only in the provision of its accommodation, which resembles that of large family homes, where all aspects of daily living are carried out by the occupants rather than being centralised or undertaken by ancillary staff, but also by the fact that the carers themselves have their own home on the same premises, often alongside their own families. There is continuity of care, with no shift patterns, although the adults each need time to themselves during weekends and school holidays to recharge their batteries after a relentless succession of activities and commitments during the school week.

The school's flexibility towards providing respite care at weekends for those children and families who need it, on a regular or intermittent basis, also guarantees that any child resident at weekends is not singled out or isolated from peer company, but is involved in a wide variety of activities, individual and group, which an average family would struggle to provide. While many co-workers only spend about a year at the school, the core group comprises a very solid stable unit, so that the child receives consistency and continuity from carers who can support each other, preventing any one person from being overloaded by the demands of caring. Additionally, for some former pupils, as for co-workers, there is the possibility of making a lifetime commitment to the Camphill

community, with links retained through holiday visits even when the new residence is located elsewhere, this pattern resembling that of a nuclear family.

The Inspection Officer spent some time with Mr Ruprecht reviewing the Implementation Plan arising from the Annual Inspection Report; he indicated that information technology had been used for recording formats etc. so as to standardise practice throughout the five houses of the school. Apart from discussing the implications of the development plans, he brought the Inspection Officer up-to-date on progress of placement difficulties for particular pupils<sup>1</sup> exemplifying the school's willingness to negotiate with parents on arrangements which will best meet the needs of the individual child. However, he acknowledged that sometimes other factors may result in the parents or child being unable to make the commitment to working together in partnership with the school, which is a prerequisite for any successful outcome. The school's commitment to partnership is also demonstrated by their initiating discussions with Auchterarder High School, to access the latter's teaching resources to enable one or two individuals of greater academic potential to sit Standard Grades. A reciprocal arrangement has been agreed whereby Ochil Tower can offer some High School pupils with learning disabilities its expertise in the social skills area or the educational and therapeutic use of drama, arts and crafts to express feelings and ideas. In all cases, the respective schools have recognised the importance of undertaking 'a risk assessment and of ongoing consultation.

The inspector joined some of the children and adults for tea. The main meal, lunch, is still prepared centrally by the cook who is now also a houseparent at Elmtree, for distribution to the houses. Each house makes its arrangements, shopping and cooking, for tea, so this may reflect the tastes of the occupants - an apple sponge with custard made from scratch rather than a packet being on offer in one house on the day of the inspection - or include the remains of lunch, but usually comprises a selection of crispbreads cheeses, fillings and spreads, encouraging the children to be more independent in making choices. In line with the school's self-sufficiency in respect of home-grown organic vegetables, many foods are purchased from whole-food outlets, with a conscious avoidance of additives, which might be detrimental to the health of the children.

A simple blessing starts and ends each meal. The atmosphere reflects that prevalent throughout the day, 'unrushed, gentle and calming'; the children taking their cue from the adults who appear relaxed and confident in their approach. The student social worker noted their subtle use of eye contact or gentle holding of a hand to communicate with the children about the acceptability of certain behaviours, as well as using explanation to enable a child to appreciate the needs of others. Values such as the right to receive respect and to make choices were evident, and one child demonstrated his understanding of the selective use of language to convey the tone of communication, namely 'like' rather than 'want'. The extent of conversation at meals varies according to level of verbal ability of the children to some degree; however, even those who initially appear quiet or even subdued soon respond to any overtures and quickly enter into the spirit of any banter, enjoying the fun of a little gentle teasing, with no inhibitions about expressing their thoughts and feelings, though co-workers would step in to protect the interests of any other party.

After tea there is a spurt of domestic activity, with the more able children and young people helping to clear the table and do the dishes. During a brief tour of several of the houses, it was also evident that this is the time when floors get swept and mopped by co-workers, there being no sign of differentiated rank or gender when it comes to domestic chores, which are a mutual responsibility in the absence of dedicated paid staff. Apart

from preserving the homely atmosphere, these arrangements give the right message, where actions speak louder than words, to children and young people about the responsibility of everyone to make a contribution irrespective of age, gender, ability or status.

The absence of television as a focal point enables the community to participate in a whole range of leisure activities. For example, tea was delayed in two houses until everyone had returned from swimming. Archery was introduced last year and is increasingly popular, with facilities made available indoors so it can be pursued throughout the year. Most evenings each house will come together for some communal cultural exchange; in the Coach House this takes the form of a reading from a favourite storybook, on this occasion *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, where the familiarity of the tale and the attraction of illustrative photographs enable everyone to participate. Similarly, even those with limited ability can identify some parts of popular hymns and songs and join in. House pets, a dog and a guinea-pig, are also included in this gathering, which, for some who are younger or need their sleep, brings the day to an end on a calming and spiritual note. The Inspection Officer observed medication being administered to several children by their house parent, who is currently undertaking studies leading to the award of a Diploma in Nursing specialising in learning disabilities. Standard practices and procedures were followed: for instance, those benefiting from a drink were offered one automatically.

Another evening activity is to arrange for those children who need assistance to phone their families, a means of keeping parents involved with the day to day events in their children's lives and reducing the anxiety and possible confusion of separation for those children who are relatively young to be away from home. E- mails similarly facilitate those co-workers who come from abroad to maintain contact with their families, more efficient and at little cost relative to phone calls, and so lessen any homesickness. Likewise, the Internet allows them to keep up to date with current affairs in their own countries, although Ochil Tower always has newspapers available.

Elsewhere, people were busy, listening to music on their personal sound systems in typical teenage manner, taking a walk or chatting to friends, co-workers and visitors. Several adults were to be found in the Three Kings' Hall, rehearsing a short play of J.B. Priestley, most participating as part of an ongoing self-directed social programme but two using this as part of their assessment during training in Curative Education, under the auspices of the Camphill Rudolf Steiner School in Aberdeen. Not only do the adults benefit from the fun and camaraderie of performing together, but the children who choose to observe rehearsals find great amusement in watching co-workers act 'out of character from their usual selves - a noisy brawl between two of the house mothers was the star attraction for them! This is only a small part of the live entertainment the children and young people are exposed to, the school being a frequent venue for travelling theatre companies and performers. At a previous event, the Inspection Officer was impressed by the attentiveness of children in the audience, whom one would not normally expect to have the necessary levels of concentration to be so well-behaved in such a setting and who obviously derived considerable pleasure and spiritual stimulation from material which is often beyond their total understanding.

Following this brief respite, the co-workers would be returning to their more routine duties, such as settling children down for the night, before completing paperwork or attending a routine house-meeting.

## REVIEW OF ISSUES REQUIRING ACTION FROM THE LAST INSPECTION

Sanctions and violent incidents must be recorded in line with the specifications laid down in the Standards and Guidance, following agreement on what incidents merit such definitions.

The new proformas comply with the requirements specified and are to be kept in a folder in each house. They also include a useful checklist of people such as parents, social worker and other professionals who may require to be informed.

Any concerns which may have child protection implications should be reported to the relevant social work authorities at the first opportunity, and also to the Registration and Inspection Unit.

This has been noted and existing guidelines in the School Policy Statement are to be followed in each case.

A sequential medical history must be completed in respect of each child.

A tabular proforma to facilitate recording of ongoing treatment, complementary to existing medical records, was shown to the Inspection Officer; she was advised that this was to be introduced very shortly.

The school requires to continue to develop its care plans, focussing on the identification of short-term targets, in co-operation with parents and children where possible.

A new tabular format, developed from the established Camphill integrated Education and Care Plan, facilitates the specification of short-term targets, including details of strategies to meet the targets, timescales, roles and resource implications. A similar format provides for evaluation and review of these targets. This structure will be implemented progressively and will be evaluated at the next Annual Inspection.

Supervision minutes, as part of the staff file, must be kept in a secure place.

The Inspection Officer was advised that a separate folder is to be established for each co-worker to guarantee confidentiality. The Inspection Officer was shown a recording format, which included a standard agenda, comprising physical care of pupils, curative approach, personal development working with colleagues and looking to the future; it was suggested that training needs should also be specified.

Minutes of all school meetings should follow established procedure and be a comprehensible and accurate record of the content.

In order to achieve consistency across the houses and to minimise the administrative burden, a proforma for agenda and minutes has been established.

The requirements made in respect of recording, as outlined in the Annual Inspection Report, should be adhered to.

A new section has been added to the School Policy Statement, detailing the requirement and format of all aspects of recording. Sample forms, such as standardised daily logs, are also included.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE FROM LAST INSPECTION**

Consideration should be given to establishing a forum for children and young people to meet to discuss issues on a more formal basis from time to time. A formal minute should be taken by an adult or, preferably, a young person with assistance where required.

This will be implemented in the classroom for pupils over 12 years of age during the summer term. The Inspection Officer noted that one of the seventeen year old young men sometimes attends the house meetings. When there are any relevant agenda items, this being a preparation for when he moves on to an adult community in the summer.

Suggestions with respect to recording, made throughout the Annual Inspection Report, should be given consideration.

Overall responsibility for ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of all recording procedures, including those newly introduced, has been assigned to Mr Ruprecht; a comprehensive assessment of recording mechanisms will form part of the next Annual Inspection.

Anyone who would like a copy of this report should apply to the Registration and Inspection Unit, 3-5 High Street, Perth. Telephone 01738 476 830.

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