

Ochil Tower School



Improving care in Scotland

Ochil Tower School

Service Name

Ochil Tower School

Service Address

140 High Street
Auchterarder
PH3 1AD

Service Type

School Care Accommodation Service

Service Provider

Ochil Tower School

Service Number

CS2003009785

Date of Inspection

30 January 2006

Type of Inspection

Announced

Period since last Inspection

8 September 2005

Care Commission Office

Central East
4th Floor, Nethergate Business Centre,
35 Yeaman Shore
Dundee DD1 4BU

Inspection Report of Ochil Tower School

Introduction

Ochil Tower is an independent, non-denominational school registered to provide 28 residential places for children and young people, aged between 5 and 18 years, with special educational needs. The school is also registered with the Scottish Executive and in February 2004 Ochil Tower was part of the programme of integrated inspections of special residential schools being undertaken jointly by HMIE and the Care Commission during 2003-4.

The 'curative education' approach, which combines social care, education and therapy, is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, adapted by Karl Konig, the founder of the Camphill movement, and is practised in a network of schools world-wide. Day to day management is the responsibility of 4 Joint Co-ordinators, who, together with other experienced and permanent coworkers whose home is the school, form the Core Group Members, with provision of care and education shared with a large number of other coworkers, many of whom come from other countries to spend a year or more at Ochil Tower. There is also a small number of paid staff, mostly ancillary workers.

The six houses and two school buildings are set in the grounds of the school which is located unobtrusively off the main street of Auchterarder, 14 miles west of Perth, enabling the school to be part of the local community, while also providing facilities for gardening and animal husbandry as well as for play activities, as part of the curriculum.

Those resident in Coach House had transferred to the new house, Rowan, after the October holiday. While the living space in Coach House was now used as a class room for one of the older groups of pupils, it also provided a base to give them an opportunity to practise their skills at independent living.

Basis of Report

Integrated generational inspections, involving both the Care Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and covering both residential and educational provision, take place from time to time. This inspection was one of the twice yearly inspections undertaken by the Care Commission, one of which must be unannounced.

This report was written following an announced visit, which took place on 30-31 January 2006.

Information was obtained from the following sources:

A Pre-inspection Return containing information about the service, and a Self-evaluation form, both documents provided by the service.

Discussion with three of the four joint coordinators, houseparents and other coworkers

Observation of how coworkers interacted with pupils

Discussion with, and observation of, pupils using the service

Examination of records, policies and procedures and

Inspection of premises and resources.

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The focus of the inspection was on the National Care Standards for School Care Accommodation

Standard 8: You as an individual

Standard 15: Supporting Communication

Standard 16: Leaving school

in conjunction with the Regulation of Care (Requirements as to Care Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/114).

Action taken on requirements in last Inspection Report

The school provided documents to the Care Commission showing that all safeguards have been satisfactorily completed prior to pupils moving into Rowan House and the school flat at 172a High Street, which is now used for weekends and holidays by the pupil who is accommodated 52 weeks a year.

Comment on Self-Evaluation

The service returned fully completed Self-evaluation on the day of the inspection, as agreed. The comments showed some very good understanding of the National Care Standards and provided a useful basis for further discussion during the inspection. Coworkers were clearly able to identify both strengths and areas for future development in the key standard areas.

Views of Service Users

Pupils continued to enjoy their time at school, being very much at ease with coworkers and their fellow pupils, as confirmed by the low rate of incidents, but also the scope to quickly communicate any concerns, by whatever means, due to the secure knowledge of an effective response. Older pupils especially welcomed opportunities for increased freedom, particularly in relation to independent living within the Coach House, seeing this as a mark of recognition and respect for their increasing maturity.

Views of Carers

The school advised parents and carers about the inspection and invited them to contact the Care Commission Officer to express their views on the quality of the service. Two responded, one indicating the family's delight at finding such a wonderful school for their young autistic son, who joined Ochil Tower in August. She commented on the school's keeping them fully informed on all issues, including those in relation to safety. The other spoke of having had a very good relationship with the school over a number of years, and she was optimistic that a current blip in communication would be resolved due to the goodwill on both sides.

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National Care Standards

National Care Standard Number 8: School Care Accommodation Services - You as an Individual

Strengths

Ochil Tower School regularly reviewed its admission form, completed by parents, to ensure it captured all relevant information on pupils so the school could best meet the child's individual needs. Information included likes and dislikes, especially in relation to activities and interests, as well as practical aspects of daily living. Hence, the one bedroom in all the houses which overlooked public car park access to Auchterarder was allocated to a pupil with a fascination for cars, while coworkers accommodated a pupil's liking for a shower after lunch. Their admission process itself was fluid, facilitating reciprocal visits between home, previous school and Ochil Tower, so family, other agencies and coworkers could exchange views and add to the background and assessment details in referral documentation. Nonetheless, coworkers designated as keyworkers for a new pupil often preferred to get acquainted with the person first, without any preconceptions, so any impact of the new setting - often positive where previous school experiences had affected behaviour and mood detrimentally - could be taken into account. Initial assessments led to well-constructed care and education plans outlining long and short-term targets whose progress was discussed informally at house meetings, and at six monthly formal reviews.

Pupils had an opportunity to experience the spiritual aspects of the Camphill movement which are based on Christian ideals, as demonstrated not only in 'the acceptance of the spiritual uniqueness of each human being, regardless of disability or religious or racial background', but in practical aspects of life, such as a blessing before and after meals, as part of the 'rhythms' helpfully structuring the day. Each house community also met in the evening to spend time together, singing songs, listening to a story etc. Again, the week started off with an all-school Monday assembly and finished with a Friday service. While the latter focussed on Christian worship, the former was interspersed with more secular aspects celebrating the seasons, popular folklore or inspirational characters from history and literature. The true story of Janusz Korczak, the war-time protector of Jewish children who called for a declaration of children's rights, was aptly chosen to set the agenda the week of the inspection. Likewise, the Christian calendar triggered annual festivals, such as dressing up and rehearsing for the procession at St. Martin, over and above the more common Christmas, Easter and harvest-time, while a strong focus on music and drama exposed children to a wide range of cultural experiences. Indeed, the school had updated its policy statement to reflect current society, with pupils 'encouraged to understand and appreciate other cultures and religions'. Apart from curricular input on other religions, such as acknowledging Diwali, the international background of coworkers, as well as of some pupils, provided many opportunities to become familiar with other cultures and faiths, as each brought their own traditions of celebration, through food, music and dance etc. Ochil Tower respected requests from parents and pupils to be excused from Christian rites or to access alternatives, such as being accompanied to the local Catholic church services or to spend Chinese New Year with one's family.

All pupils had their birthdays recognised three times during the day - at breakfast, in class and with their selected friends at a house party at night, in an age appropriate format of their choosing. Ochil Tower fully appreciated the significance of family to a child's sense of identity and self-worth. In particular, they had shown a strong and continuing commitment

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to renewing meaningful contact between a pupil and his family in a child-centred approach, advocating successfully in line with his wishes and interests. Senior pupils had been compiling biographies, using family photos and computers, to give them an awareness of themselves as an individual with a past and present, in order to look at their hopes for the future. Similarly, coworkers practised the principles of children's rights by encouraging pupils to express their views and took them into account in planning activities or promoting their leisure interests and aptitudes. Older pupils were undertaking wide-ranging projects, from films to car mechanics, while outdoor pursuits included simple walking, from strolls around the grounds to challenging 17 mile hikes, thus establishing a life-long love of the benefits of fresh air and exercise. One pupil had become extremely proficient at kiteflying, both on land and water, while another's artistic talent was recognised through a calendar.

Areas for development:

In the Self-evaluation, it was indicated that coworkers must be aware of the different social and cultural home background of pupils and support them in learning to adjust to this. The school also recognised that the physical resources and level of worker support, often one to one, sometimes contrasted with that at home, and that they needed to manage that tension, keeping family alongside while not undermining the aspirations of pupils and all concerned adults for them.

National Care Standard Number 15: School Care Accommodation Services - Supporting Communication

Strengths

As many pupils had needs on the autistic spectrum, they and others presented a wide range of communication difficulties to challenge the personal resources of coworkers, now operating within the framework of the new additional support for learning legislation. Critical sources of assessment information for helping communication in the early days included parents, the admission form and medical report but often recommendations from speech and language therapists (SALT). The latter's role was seen as fundamental by the school, which diligently pursued placing agencies for regular SALT input with varying degrees of success. While grateful for periodic access to SALT from some areas, they had benefited enormously from one authority providing a therapist for one day a week due to concentrated numbers of pupils. She not only worked alongside teachers in class and offered one to one sessions with pupils but also provided individual consultation and group training to coworkers (supplementing that of their induction), so knowledge could be shared with colleagues for the indirect benefit of all pupils. Her sharing meals and being seen as part of the community established the trust essential for pupils to engage with her, and assisted her own capacity to work with their challenging behaviour.

Use of specialist communication tools followed a very individualised approach, ranging from Makaton for signing (varying in use from one 'word' to fluent story-telling), to visual symbols of Boardmaker, the latter sometimes adapted for a more specific format such as battery-operated Go Talk with its auditory prompting and interactive buttons, to various forms of laminated communication passports, such as keyrings. The latter comprised both Boardmaker symbols and digital photographs of familiar faces or parts of Ochil Tower to help both pupil and coworker communicate about needs and wishes throughout the day. Equally it might be used to help communicate when moving on from school to a new setting. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), suited some children, 'posting' the symbol being purposefully more interactive. Coworkers were becoming increasingly

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skilled and imaginative, so one child had a pictorial timetable of moveable symbols in his room to help him independently understand the sequence of the day's events, as well as the time-frame of the week spent between home and school and so relieve his anxiety. Often such augmented communication triggered the pupil's appreciation of language and motivation to start pointing, sounding and verbalising. Coworkers were very conscious of the wider aspects of communication, such as non-verbal body language, including eye contact, to indicate feelings, as part of their wider understanding of the physical health manifestations as emotional reactions to stressful changes in their community. Equally they indicated that the social context was a critical factor in their interpretation of communication, so sometimes non-verbal pupils needed to use aids in the wider world, where people did not know them.

Very good adult:child ratios, and continuity of care in the absence of shift-working, enabled keyworkers to support pupils to communicate their feelings and views at important events such as reviews. However, more able pupils were also assisted through coworkers scribing their comments for the daily record, home-school diary, or Having Your Say form. Ready availability of computers facilitated user-friendly access to more visual sources of information, especially through 'cut and paste', which required less focus on reading or writing skills.

Areas for development:

In their Self-evaluation, the school recognised the ongoing challenge of communicating more complex concepts with pupils with such a variety of additional support needs. They were open to exploring all possible avenues of help, including training in experimental initiatives such as 'facilitated communication', a process by which a facilitator supports the hand or arm of a communicatively impaired person while using a keyboard or typing device.

So significant was the contribution of SALT to the overall quality of care and education that Ochil Tower School had now decided to extend its provision by employing its own specialist, albeit a scarce resource to locate.

National Care Standard Number 16: School Care Accommodation Services - Leaving School

Strengths

Although pupils generally did not move on until beyond the standard school-leaving age, when they were well on the road to adulthood, from their arrival the whole focus of the school was on maximising pupils' potential and independence through incremental steps. The wide range of ability determined this meant different things for different pupils, from basic self-care skills such as eating, through to caring for one's room and belongings, to more obvious independent living skills, like shopping, cooking and independent travel. Community living, with all coworkers, irrespective of role, status, background, age or gender, sharing household duties, facilitated natural opportunities for pupils to be involved in such practical responsibilities and negotiating relationships. Additionally, the school's own resources -kitchen garden, livestock, play equipment as well as grounds - in addition to access to community facilities locally and further afield, provided very good scope for acquisition of new skills and personal challenge outside home and classroom. Similarly, the school often moved from an adapted 5-14 curriculum to one more age appropriate,

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focussed on developing life skills through the pupil's own interests, while offering Access courses at level 1 and 2 in a broad range of relevant subjects.

The school had a good understanding of the legal framework of 'future needs' assessments and reviews for their pupils, and the need to ensure other key professionals adhered to responsibilities. Equally, they accurately recognised the difficulty of locating the best provision for pupils moving on from school, whether living in the family home or elsewhere, due to limited resources, which made forward planning very difficult. Regular reviews and weekly contact with parents helped the school to listen to their concerns as well as be aware of those of pupils. Coworkers were also sensitive to how individuals dealt with change, and planned accordingly.

In light of this, Ochil Tower had long ago wanted to contribute more to pupils' smooth transition from school. Replacement of Coach House with Rowan offered an opportunity to provide such an independent living experience, with its familiar facilities, the security of coworkers living upstairs, and adults to monitor unobtrusively through daytime use of the accommodation for class. This venture was a considered move, a practical developmental stage of a project by two joint coordinators undertaking a BA in Curative Education. This included a well-thought approach to risk taking and its positive application to the potential for personal development, using outward bound activities and use of public transport and local facilities as other aspects of independent living to master. Progression though staged support - accompanied, shadowed and independent, provided safeguards and reassurance to both pupils and coworker. Agreement of parents and other agencies, recording of monitoring, and decision-making responsibility at joint coordinator level only, gave further credibility to the project which three pupils had participated in positively for varying periods by the time of the inspection. The experience provided useful indicators of the pupil's abilities when planning their future but also gave pupils themselves a more realistic understanding of their coping skills and the benefits and challenges of living more independently.

Individual coworkers worked closely with family and other agencies to help pupils leave school. Currently, this involved a houseparent accompanying a pupil to visit her new group-living home, again using a staggered reduction of support, while being aware that sometimes prolonged introductions can be detrimental. Ochil Tower School was keen to know how pupils fared subsequently and welcomed pupils back to visit, one or two calling regularly.

Areas for development:

In the Self evaluation, Ochil Tower acknowledged that its structure and experience led to pupils achieving a high level of independence which could not always be replicated in other adult settings, leading to unrealistic expectations and disappointment for pupils and their families; dealing with this was an ongoing challenge for the school.

In order to best advocate full access to resources for those pupils who are also 'looked after and accommodated', the school should ensure it is aware of the powers and duties of local authorities in relation to such young people over 16 years - accommodation and financial assistance for education, training and maintenance to 21 years and beyond, under the Children(Scotland) Act 1995, later amended to include, from April 2004, the duty to carry out an assessment of needs and to hear representation from the young person.

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Enforcement

There has been no enforcement action taken against this service by the Care Commission in the last year.

Other Information

The Care Commission will process a variation of the conditions of registration to reflect the current provision of accommodation in the five houses, together with use of the Coach House and flat at 172a High Street.

Requirements

A requirement is a statement setting out an enforceable action required of a service provider in order that the service comply with current legislation, usually within a specific timescale.

There were none identified at this inspection.

Recommendations

A recommendation is a statement setting out proposed actions to be taken by the service provider aimed at improving the quality of service (based on good practice and professional judgement) but which would not be subject to enforcement action if not actioned.


There were none identified at this inspection.

This report was written by Rachel Gillespie, Care Commission Officer, 02 February 2006

Service Name Ochil Tower School
Service Provider Ochil Tower School
Location CENTRAL EAST REGION
Care Commission Officer Rachel Gillespie
Date of Inspection 30 January 2006

Action Plan

Requirements / Recommendations	Action Planned	Timescale (months/years)	Person Responsible
Requirements: None identified at this inspection			
Recommendations None identified at this inspection			

Name	Ueli Ruprecht		
Designation	Joint Co-ordinator		
Signature		Date	21 February 2006