

Ochil Tower School

Service name
Ochil Tower School

Service address
140 High Street

Auchterarder PH3 1AD

Type of care service
School Care Accommodation Service

Provider name
Ochil Tower School

Service number
CS2003009785

Date of inspection
28 Sep 2006

Type of inspection
Unannounced

Care Commission Office
Central East. Compass House, 11
Riverside Drive, Dundee. DD1 4NY.

Period since last inspection
30 January 2006

Introduction

Ochil Tower is an independent, non–denominational school, registered with the Care Commission since 1 April 2002 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, from time to time, is part of the programme of integrated inspections of special residential schools being undertaken jointly by HMIE and the Care Commission .

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 grounds 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.

Basis of Report

This report was written following an unannounced inspection which took place on 28 September 2006.

Information was obtained from the following sources:

Discussion with the four joint coordinators (registered managers for this service)

Informal discussion with coworkers and young people

Four files of coworkers working in this service and other staff

Sharing a festive meal with the whole community

Observation of coworkers interacting with children.

This service was inspected after receiving a Regulation Support Assessment (RSA) to determine what level of support was necessary. The RSA is an assessment undertaken by the Care Commission Officer which considers: complaints activity, changes in the provision of the service, nature of notifications made to the Care Commission by the service and action taken upon requirements.

This service was required to have a low level of support, resulting in an inspection based on the one of this year's inspection themes; the other themes will be followed up at the announced inspection.

The inspection themes was:

Safer Staff Recruitment

The Care Commission Officer took all of the above into account and reported on the inspection theme in the following National Care Standard for School Care Accommodation:

Standard 7 Management and Staffing

The inspection also took into account the Regulation of Care Act (Scotland) 2001 and the Scottish Statutory Instrument 2002/ 114.

Action taken on requirements in last Inspection Reports

There were no requirements made at or since the last inspection.

Comment on Self-Evaluation

Not applicable.

View of Service Users

On the day of the inspection, the school community was celebrating the annual festival of Michaelmas in its traditional manner. Young people were helping coworkers decorate the school hall with a traditional harvest display based on the school's produce – eggs, vegetables, apples and grapes as well as flowers and foliage. Tables were similarly welcoming with colourful hedgerow ornamentation. A simple meal of vegetable soup, apple cake and fruit followed, bringing together not only pupils but coworkers and their extended families. Readings and communal singing brought a sense of occasion to the meal. This was one of regular annual religious and cultural events which provided familiar reference points to pupils during the year, over and above Christmas and Easter. Some young people were able to contribute, fetching and carrying items from their individual houses, giving them a sense of belonging as well as learning about team-work, planning and coordination.

New pupils were quickly settling into the school, learning about different expectations in a fresh environment. In turn, their presence enable established pupils to take on new responsibilities as part of their ongoing skills and personal development. Pupils had already chosen a theme for their individual projects, based on interests such as horses, pop groups and the like; this focus facilitated their commitment to developing an interest as well as using other skills, such as accessing information on the internet.

As usual, young people who had been in the school some years were very comfortable in this setting, having a secure base from which to engage confidently with visitors. Coworkers who had been at the school for a few years were still enthusiastic and committed to their work, while new coworkers were beginning to get to know pupils as individuals, so young people always had responsive adults at hand as needed, whether for a group activity or for some one to one time.

View of Carers

Not applicable.

Regulations / Principles

National Care Standards

National Care Standard Number 7: School Care Accommodation Services – Management and Staffing

Strengths

Safer staff recruitment.

One joint coordinator had attended an initial awareness–raising day provided by Disclosure Scotland prior to its inception in April 2002. This illustrated the school's proactive approach to this important aspect of safeguarding the welfare of children. Most new adult members of the school community were volunteer coworkers from abroad, as there had been very few employed staff taken on since 2002. Files inspected indicated the following:

- > A system to check that coworkers were physically and mentally fit for the work, namely a self–certification statement from applicants, plus questions on any addictions or serious illness; additionally, a medical reference from a family doctor had to be provided
- > Two references, one from the last employer. For the majority of coworkers looking for work experience between school and higher education, this might be a headteacher or someone in charge of a church or youth group. Referees were sent a synopsis of the work of Ochil Tower School, including the role of a coworker, and a standard reference form covering personal attributes, ratings on factors such as honesty and reliability and a specific question about any concerns regarding the applicant's contact with children.
- > Provision of a police report from the country of origin
- > An application form covering education, qualifications, training and work experience, especially with children with special needs
- > Letters of appointment, including start date and position held.

Appointments were for up to 15 months in the first instance, though those coworkers who wished to remain could be reappointed. Coworkers from outside the European Community were obliged to evidence to the Immigration and Nationality Department that they were in education/training. The 4 year B A in Curative Education from Aberdeen University met this criterion. Ochil Tower School sponsored (including payment of fees) coworkers undertaking this and similar courses(Certificate, Diploma BA and Hons, all recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Further safeguards were as follows:

- > Originals as well as emailed or faxed copies of documentation were provided
- > Telephone and email contact, plus photographs
- > Translations of documentary evidence were supplemented by an existing coworkers group with a range of language skills in German, Italian, Russian, Brazilian etc
- > A network of contacts within most countries, whereby applicants could be interviewed or checked out informally
- > Young people from some countries eg Germany chose to come to Ochil Tower as an alternative to national service in the military; this alternative required them to undergo a 3 week assessment and induction at home to qualify
- > A one week induction at the start of the session in September before pupils started back at school. This prepared new coworkers through training in First Aid and a range of special needs, but also gave both parties an opportunity to assess the suitability of applicants for the tasks in an intensive, face to face, group setting.
- > All contracts included an 8 week assessment with daily or regular one to one discussion with an experienced coworker, followed by a formal review to confirm whether the coworker should continue or not. Not every year but from time to time, it was decided someone would not stay, although the reasons were not usually connected with safeguarding concerns.

Copies of Enhanced Disclosure Scotland (EDS)(for childcare) checks were destroyed in line with good practice, with a confidential record kept of only essential information. This would include any discussion with an applicant if any significant information resulted from such a check. Following a recent requirement of insurers, the school had a system in place for rechecking all people every 3 years and initiating EDS for those recruited prior to 2002.

Some coworkers were already required to register with SSSC and the school had arrangements for further registrations with that body.

Areas for Development

A procedure for rechecking registration with SSSC or any other professional body at a required frequency, similar to that already in place for DS, would ensure these checks are carried out systematically in future.

Enforcement

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

Other Information

None.

Requirements

None identified at this inspection.

Recommendations

None identified at this inspection.

Rachel Gillespie

Care Commission Officer