

Ochil Tower School



Improving care in Scotland

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
15 January 2007

Type of inspection
Announced

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

Period since last inspection
29 September 2006

Inspection Report for Ochil Tower School

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 five houses and three 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.

Camphill's three aims and objectives are realised:

- 'in a form of community life which recognises the universality of the human spirit as an essential element in its formation and working. Expression is given to this in the celebration of festivals, concern for the environment and mutual care.
- in developing shared living situations which recognise the needs of individuals. The staff/client relationship is replaced by mutual relationships based on sharing daily life in all its manifold aspects, including preparation and sharing of meals, caring for the household and surroundings, creating social events and so on.
- in operating financially so that there is a flexible relationship between work and payment for work done'.

Basis of Report

This report was written following an announced inspection which took place on 15 and 16 January 2007. A lay assessor joining the Care Commission Officer contributed his unique perspective of the service, by focusing on the experience of people or families using the service. A lay assessor is a member of the public working in a voluntary capacity who knows about such services and may have used a similar one.

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Lay assessors receive basic training for their role and are supported by a voluntary agency, in this case Advocating Together based in Dundee.

Information was obtained from the following sources:

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

Attendance at a school assembly and pupil council meeting of older pupils

Informal discussion with coworkers and young people

Four pupil files

Observation of coworkers interacting with pupils and

Verbal and written feedback from two local authorities using the school.

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 this year's inspection themes; the other theme of safer staff recruitment was addressed at the unannounced inspection.

The inspection themes were:

Child protection

Restraint

Environment

Fire safety

Support Arrangements

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice)

Nutrition

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 3. Care and protection

Standard 5. Comfort, safety and security

Standard 6. Support arrangements

Standard 7. Management and staffing

Standard 11. Eating Well

Standard 18. Advocacy

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 Report

Not applicable.

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Comment on Self-Evaluation

The Self-evaluation, with a customary high level of presentation, focussed on details of the themes in particular. Comments highlighted the strengths of the service in relation to the National Care Standards as well as areas for development, indicating the school's commitment to self-evaluation and quality improvement.

Views of Service Users

The inspection took place the first day after the Christmas holidays. Everyone was refreshed, relaxed and in good humour, sharing news formally at assembly and informally. Pupils, as part of a large community, were pleased to hear about the arrival of several babies to current and former coworkers. As usual, more able pupils were very confident about making visitors welcome and expressing their views. Equally, they were responding positively to initiatives to increase their capacity to share in decision-making and improving the quality of life within the school. They had a strong sense of ownership of, and responsibility to, their community.

Views of Carers

In response to the school's notification of the inspection to parents, one phoned to say that she and a fellow parent thought the quality of care and education was excellent and they were highly delighted with their children's placement at Ochil Tower School. Introductions had gone well, with an opportunity to use the grounds over the summer to familiarise her child with the setting. A daily diary kept her well informed and the school phoned her promptly about any other matters. The first review had included all relevant parties and been a good experience. She felt positive about the future while her child was at the school.

Another parent wrote about how much support Ochil Tower had provided her son who attended the school from last August, from the earliest stage at what was an extremely difficult time. The school had made excellent use of professional links with his previous setting, using its expertise and facilitating his transition.

The child's progress had been remarkable and his current quality of life was incomparable with that before. She spoke positively about the whole environment, the wonderful grounds and physical activity outings, as well as the very homely accommodation.

She was particularly impressed by how quickly co-workers treated and spoke of him with dignity and a genuine concern for his welfare.

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He was very much included in everything and encouraged to take advantage of all the opportunities, within the wider community and environment of Auchterarder and its surrounding area. He had found an unexpected level of independence and the chance to socialise and forge relationships with his peers. The school had been very aware of the importance of introducing classwork again at a level and pace not overly challenging.

Communication between home and school has been excellent and the parents had been extremely heartened at how much the school valued parental input and respected their role.

National Care Standards

National Care Standard Number 3: School Care Accommodation Services - Care and Protection

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected. On this occasion the focus was on child protection and restraint.

Child Protection.

The school had a range of policy statement documents suitable for coworkers, placing agencies and parents, which included one relating to child protection and bullying. It also had a copy of Perth and Kinross Council's Area Child Protection Committee Child Protection Guidelines. A comprehensive record of action following a child protection allegation demonstrated aspects of good practice, as endorsed by the local authority concerned. These were: following recognised procedures; an initial risk assessment and action to safeguard pupils' immediate welfare; an initial inter-agency planning meeting; and post-investigation review involving critical self-reflection, with modification of risk management strategies. Another local authority referred to good collaborative work in discussion of safecaring issues. All new coworkers received training in child protection during their intensive induction week and as part of the one year Foundation Course in Curative Education and Social Therapy, the school child protection coordinator contributing to this.

The school's high adult: child ratios, ethos and structure, as outlined in its aims (see introduction) fostered a strong climate of trust in which even pupils with limited communication felt able to reveal any concerns in the knowledge they would be taken seriously. Coworkers placed great emphasis on risk assessments of individual pupils over and above safeguards such as single bedrooms, adult supervision and judicious use of mechanical devices like night-time alarms. They took their responsibility for keeping vulnerable pupils safe very seriously, while promoting more able pupils' own personal awareness, responsibility and self-confidence in protecting themselves. This partly reflected the reality that as adults they might be in an environment which did not always take account of their vulnerability or which misconstrued certain behaviours.

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Restraint.

The school had adopted the Non-violent Crisis Intervention Programme offered by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI), registered with BILD (British Institute for Learning Disability), as an appropriate model for pupils with additional support needs. The programme promoted the 'care, welfare, safety and security' of both adults and pupils, with physical restraint recommended only when other methods of intervention had been exhausted and when the individual presented a danger to him/herself or others. Giving pupils space to regain composure was often more successful. Together with the school's policy on violence and physical restraint, it was compatible with Holding Safely (2005), national practitioner guidance for physical restraint endorsed by the Scottish Executive. This included definitions; creating the right conditions through promotion of a positive culture with shared values, a child-centred approach and an understanding of behaviour; regular training; risk assessment and care planning; coworkers, pupils and managers learning from events; and systematic recording. Additionally, joint coordinators recognised the negative impact of physical intervention on all participants by ensuring senior coworkers, generally the ones to carry this out, were accessible so they might be summoned immediately when a scenario developed. Similarly, protection of property was usually sacrificed in favour of retaining the child's sense of trust and emotional well-being, especially for those with previous experience of restraint,

Areas for development:

The Self-evaluation indicated the intention to develop more collaborative work with other professionals in the field of child protection, such as clinical psychologists and therapists. Experience had also demonstrated the need to continue to reinforce to adult services the level of protection required to safeguard former pupils and others.

The Coordinator had attended a number of courses and conferences, locally and nationally, in the recent past to maintain her knowledge in this area. During the last two years, she has supported the priority of her fellow joint coordinators acquiring necessary qualifications. She now hoped to pursue further development opportunities related to her responsibilities.

The school was given a copy of the Care Commission's checklist for the contents of a child protection policy, which should be referenced at its next annual review, due shortly.

The School Policy Statement has a reference list of Acts and Guidance relevant to its work. It should consider making the specific legal guidance in Holding Safely more readily available for coworkers, especially joint coordinators as managers and trainers. Incident records should be cross-referenced to coworkers' supervision notes which cover debriefing of such incidents. Reference might also be made to the guidance document, 'Rights, risks and limits to freedom' published by Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland (2006) for various aspects of work with pupils with learning disabilities.

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National Care Standard Number 5: School Care Accommodation Services - Comfort, Safety and Security

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected. On this occasion the focus was on the environment (for research by Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care) and fire safety.

Environment

One of Ochil Tower School's strengths was its outstanding homely environment and the high quality of its fixtures, furniture and furnishings, especially in the newer houses. Again, this reflected the benefits of both the shared living arrangements whereby Ochil Tower is home for coworkers as well as for pupils during the week, and the recognised value of good quality provision in promoting children's development, evident in other aspects of Camphill life. Public areas were welcoming with plants, pictures, artefacts and seasonal displays, together with facilities for private meetings. All pupils were encouraged and supported to personalise their bedrooms, exemplified by the belongings of the 52 week pupil in his rooms in both the school and school flat. Due to the employment of a dedicated tradesman and frequent redecoration during holidays, there was no sign of outstanding repairs, despite inevitable damage arising from the behaviours of some pupils.

In promoting outdoor activities for fresh air and healthy exercise, the school grounds offered good open spaces as well as attractive, sturdy equipment for imaginative and adventurous play. Gardening and animal husbandry were an integral part of the school curriculum, not only to provide food but also for pleasure, some houses having their own domestic pets. Cycling, especially on organised trips further afield, was encouraged with appropriate repair and storage arrangements for recent acquisition of replacement bikes.

Fire safety.

The school had recently comprehensively revised its Fire policy to take account of the new Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and 'Practical Fire Safety Guidance for Care Homes' (December 2006 edition). Fire issues were kept under review, such as a new policy on lighters to monitor their whereabouts at all times. A joint coordinator, in discussion, was very knowledgeable about their contents. She recognised the need to take into account the individuality of various premises, open fires and regular use of candles at meal-times and festivals and the unique issues presented by individual pupils. Those with high dependency needs had an identified adult responsible for their safety during the day and at night-time. The school appreciated changing dependency needs were one of the factors necessitating regular review of fire risk assessments. Notices of the emergency action plan were on display throughout the school and drills were carried out every two months, including at night-time, as well as due to kitchen activity, as evidenced during the inspection. Most coworkers were resident, so regularly built on their instruction in evacuation and fire precautions at induction and termly at house meetings. Fire equipment was properly maintained and regularly inspected by accredited firms.

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Areas for development:

The pupil council demonstrated how pupils were consulted on their environment, in this case for spending some additional Scottish Executive money at short notice. Most was to be spent on the structural improvements (windows and kitchen) to the Coach House, now used by the senior class as an independent living base and class-room. Smaller projects included more class computers, equipment to enhance power-point presentations and show films, and resurfacing an area to create an alternative football pitch.

The school had a plan to systematically draw up a written fire risk assessment for each of its premises at the start of the term.

The school should keep a log of non-resident staff involved in fire drills to ensure they participate at least twice a year. Recorded drills should include off-site premises used by the school.

(See Recommendation 1.)

National Care Standard Number 6: School Care Accommodation Services - Support Arrangements (for those schools which provide specialist education and care)

Strengths

Care and education plans were combined, reflecting not only pupils' interconnected needs but also the multiplicity of roles of those providing curative education and the various opportunities to work on targets through daily life in Ochil Tower School. The detail of plans demonstrated how long-term goals were broken down into more manageable short-term targets to be developed in specific activities or 'programmes of study'. Plans were individualised and achievable. As well as more obvious educational aspects, the plans addressed other health and social needs such as personal hygiene, sharing, and creative and leisure pursuits. All pupils were involved in contributing to the plan to varying degrees, with older pupils setting their own goals and aspirations, often determined by personal interests, which motivated their involvement and achievement. One authority illustrated this through a pupil's acquisition of mathematical and reading skills driven by an interest in wind-surfing. Coworkers wrote a daily diary with pupils to reflect on events and significant thoughts and feelings, while a contact book facilitated communication with parents about progress.

Plans were developed from an initial one based on pre-admission information to one which was reviewed every six months, more frequently if required. School reviews involved family, the pupil to varying degrees and a range of professionals. Although many pupils were placed through education services, most had a social worker and many authorities arranged an independent chairperson through their own reviewing systems. Review minutes evidenced a very comprehensive assessment of progress and future tasks for various personnel to pursue. One authority spoke of good assessments and proactive liaison with community care staff contributing to transition arrangements to make the best use of scarce resources. Records of updated medical consultations indicated good liaison with professionals.

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Coworkers shared their knowledge and expertise - for example, in self-harm - throughout the school. The recent appointment of a speech and language therapist with a Camphill background was impacting positively on both pupils and coworkers. Prior to formal reviews, relevant coworkers met to review progress of the plan and to determine if any written risk assessments required to be modified or added, the latter being an ongoing process. Similarly, if a pupil or coworker changed houses, often as a trigger to further personal development, or a coworker left, detailed information on pupils was shared in writing or a meeting to ensure continuity of care.

A team manager for one authority which had placed several children at Ochil Tower School over the years considered it an exemplary service. Communication was excellent and agencies worked very well together. She commented that the school took reviews very seriously and addressed any presenting issues, such as child protection concerns, very responsively and responsibly. Ochil Tower School provided a measured balance between care and protection and enabling pupils to take sensible risks and develop some independence. Parents were said to be highly delighted with the quality of care provided for their children. Another authority referred to constructive relationships with social workers and parents, with recognition of respective contributions of keyworkers and parents.

Areas for development:

In the Self-evaluation, elaborated in discussion, the school referred to the need for continuous development of collaborative work between school, family and other professionals in relation to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The latter required a total commitment to working in partnership, which the school was fostering through, for example, making a copy of the Enquire guidance on Coordinated Support Plans available to all families. Additionally, the school hoped to extend its good communication established with other services, such as respite providers, for all pupils, as standard practice, by continuing its invitations.

Despite regular reviews, coworkers did not generally record on the plan the date of assessment and whether the target met success criteria and with what degree of support, despite these helpful criteria being explicit. Such records provide a useful self-evaluation tool for pupils and coworkers as well as assisting monitoring by managers. Similarly, not all risk assessments were systematically reviewed.

Pupil files followed a systematic and uniform layout, with a very useful information and contact sheet at the front listing family, key people and other agency professionals. However, the key coworker's name and the child's legal status, namely the legislation under which the child was placed at the school, should be added.

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

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected. On this occasion the focus was on Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice.

SSSC Codes of Practice

The School Policy Statement outlined each of these and explained the implications for the school as an employer, coworkers as social service workers and pupils in terms of their expectations of how they should be treated. Each Code had been appropriately cross-referenced to other parts of the Policy Statement, this being recommended good practice as a starting point to highlighting their significance.

All coworkers were given a copy of the SSSC Codes on arrival and their significance was explained during induction. Codes, along with National Care Standards, were referenced by coworkers in their assignments for training courses such as the BA in Curative Education. One house, in particular, focussed on one of the Codes, such as the right of pupils to take risks, in each of their weekly house meetings. Coworkers identified school scenarios as evidence, the school's strengths in this area and how coworkers might improve their practice. This very constructive model of learning helped their understanding and embedded the Codes in their daily work.

Areas for development:

None was identified at this inspection.

National Care Standard Number 11: School Care Accommodation Services - Eating Well

Strengths

Not all elements of this standard were inspected. On this occasion the focus was on nutrition.

Nutrition

Sitting down together as a whole house for main meals was an important aspect of the social and spiritual life of the school. Coworkers also recognised the health benefits of good quality food, choosing wholefood products, basic ingredients rather than processed or convenience foods and fresh produce, including meat, fruit and vegetables. They used organic produce from their own garden, where possible, and favoured local suppliers or health food specialists elsewhere. Use of Fair Trade products was part of the ethical dimension to food, reflecting an awareness of global environmental issues, values they shared with pupils.

Similarly, pupils learned about food through observation of the cook preparing lunch in Belvidere, through shopping with adults and through curricular gardening and baking, as well as the table.

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The fruit bowl, always available and now frequently an alternative to puddings, was especially popular for some after holidays. Pupils learned to make balanced choices at other meals from a wide selection. Pupils were encouraged to use community facilities to practise skills in a wider variety of contexts in preparation for life after Ochil Tower School. For example, a Chinese buffet challenged pupils to making reasonable choices about food and drink in a new situation. Those with limited tastes were accommodated while being encouraged to extend their range at their own pace. Some needed support to get enough nutrition while others fluctuated in weight between holidays and term-time.

There was a general appreciation of good nutrition among adults. Senior coworkers especially had acquired a good understanding of the meaning of food in terms of its emotional significance and the impact of earlier experiences or specific disorders, such as the autistic spectrum, and medical conditions like allergies. They conveyed this to new coworkers in training as part of a holistic understanding of individual children. Local authority review coordinators testified to a strong promotion of healthy lifestyles in diet, exercise and sleep routines.

Areas for development:

Issues in relation to food and nutrition needs of pupils were discussed during admission and recorded where applicable. Coordinators were familiar with the Scottish Executive's national guidance document, 'Hungry for Success - A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland'. They felt their own approach fully met its recommendations, though it is not yet enforceable in the independent sector. It is suggested that senior staff and the chef draw up clear management guidelines for food, fluid and nutrition which comply with best practice.

(See Recommendation 2,)

National Care Standard Number 18: School Care Accommodation Services - Advocacy

Strengths

The whole thrust of the school was to promote pupils' ability to advocate for themselves. This was demonstrated through pupils' participation in reviews and through the programme for independent living. The school's ethos valued people by listening to them and giving them a voice. The introduction of a pupil council for senior pupils in late 2006 was part of this process. It was still focussing on pupils learning the mechanics of discussion in a formal setting, initially with adult guidance or support, to be reduced over time. However, the school's main contribution was in giving pupils the confidence to express their views in a group setting, despite some having communication problems. For such pupils, it was important that coworkers, knowing them well, picked up clues to their distress or their aspirations and spoke up for them so their needs were met. Again, an increasing focus on developing pupils' communication skill through various aids and prompts extended their autonomy, with less reliance on direct carers.

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Equally, the school supported pupils whose local authorities sponsored Children's Rights Officers to visit them at school and represent their views as advocates to achieve specific objectives. Ochil Tower also welcomed the inclusion in inspections of a lay assessor representing a self-advocacy organisation.

Areas for development:

The school should familiarise itself with the local advocacy organisation for Perth and Kinross. Independent Advocacy provides a service on a crisis or ongoing basis for people over 16 who are unable to represent themselves and may have a learning disability or other problems and also supports collective/self advocacy groups for adults with a learning disability.

Enforcement

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

Other Information

Report from David Hill, Lay Assessor.

I visited Ochil towers over a year ago and was interested to see if there were any changes and hear what pupils had to say.

I first visited a new home, being built last year and now being used. The house parents were a young couple with a young family. The atmosphere was very relaxed, homely and friendly with lots of space for people to live and work in.

I sat in on the school's third pupil council. The council appointed a chair person and minute taker for each meeting. There was a member of staff helping the meeting but it was hoped that the pupils would begin to run this council themselves. As an incentive, pupils had told there would be a big party to celebrate. This meeting was very well run and everyone had a chance to speak, say what they thought and be listened to.

The council was told that the school had received £70,000 from the Scottish Executive and they discussed some ideas as to how this money would be spent. Any suggestions that were put forward were listened to and discussed fairly and agreement reached as to what was best for the money to be spent on.

I noticed how much the pupils I had met in 2005 had changed. They were more confident in themselves, able to express their views well, very enthusiastic and seemed very happy.

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Comparing this visit with my last one I felt that pupils were taking responsibility, being very aware of themselves and others, more mature, like brothers and sisters in a family. If a pupil was feeling a little down for whatever reason their fellow pupils, particularly the more senior ones, would help make sure they were all right. One pupil talked about how she felt everyone tries to help others and be kind.

As before I felt that everyone's voice was heard and listened to and the overall atmosphere was very good.

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.

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.

1. The school should keep a log of non-resident staff involved in fire drills to ensure they participate at least twice a year. Recorded drills should include off-site premises used by the school.

National Care Standards, Standard 5 comfort, safety and security

2. The school should draw up clear management guidelines for food, fluid and nutrition which comply with best practice.

National Care Standards, Standard 11 Eating well.

This report was written by Rachel Gillespie, Care Commission Officer,
19/01/2007

