

Summarised inspection findings

Huntercombe Hospital School, Uphall

18 December 2018

Key contextual information

Huntercombe Hospital School is an independent special school based in Uphall. The school caters for young people with a range of additional support needs predominantly as a result of mental health issues and eating disorders.

The primary purpose of Huntercombe Hospital School is to support young people with their medical needs. The hospital school is in place to ensure young people do not miss out on education.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The school's proprietor, The Huntercombe Group, has a clear vision for young people placed in their care which centres around 'nurturing the world one person at a time'. The school has its own mission statement in place and a handbook which has values and aims threaded through it. However, the vision, values and aims of the school are not explicit enough to be fully understood by the school community. Senior managers and teachers need to work with the school community to establish a shared vision, values and aims for the school. This will help provide a stronger purpose for the work of the school and a clearer direction for continuous school improvement.
- Led by the effective headteacher, all education staff at Huntercombe Hospital School have a child-centred approach to all aspects of school life. This results in an ethos and culture which places young people's needs at the heart of everything that takes place at the school. Staff are committed to supporting young people to engage with their learning and achieve a wide range of qualifications. This includes General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced levels (A levels) for young people placed in the school from England. The school now needs to build on this commitment by focussing more collegiate discussions on whole-school development. These discussions need to have a greater focus on all four contexts of learning rather than just programmes and courses.
- Young people contribute to school life through weekly patient forum meetings which, in recent times, has helped arrange a 'School Prom' and contributed towards choosing school trips. Young people also offer their views via review meetings, discussions with their link teacher and annual questionnaires. However, there is scope for young people to have a stronger voice on whole school improvement. The school now needs to further identify and develop creative ways to gather the views of young people. The school also needs to introduce ways to allow parents and partner agencies to contribute more fully towards school improvement.

- Commendably, the school improvement plan (SIP) reflects strongly the priorities within the National Improvement Framework with particular emphasis on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy and closing the deprivation related attainment gap. Teaching staff are leading on many aspects of school improvement including literacy and numeracy. The headteacher, with the support of staff, now needs to monitor progress with school improvement priorities in a more focussed and systematic way to ensure they are leading to improved outcomes for young people. The gathering of such intelligence and data would also provide valuable evidence to influence future school improvement planning.
- Although the SIP features national priorities, it does not yet take enough account of the unique context of the school. Staff should reflect on current practice and identify improvement priorities which are specific to the needs of young people placed at the school. For example, young people would benefit from improvement priorities which place greater emphasis on curricular development across the four contexts of learning rather than solely on programmes and courses.
- The headteacher and all education staff greatly benefit from access to a wide range of individual and collective career-long professional learning opportunities including post-graduate certificates in education. The headteacher is looking outwardly by building links with senior managers of similar independent special schools. She should now continue with plans to visit other schools to share practice and provide opportunities for moderation activities to be introduced.
- There is a need for the success criteria of any future school improvement priority to be explicitly focused on impacting positively upon outcomes for young people. These are currently based predominantly on improving the school's systems and processes. There is some evidence of recent school priorities having a positive impact on young people. For example young people are attaining a very good range of qualifications following the introduction of additional courses and programmes. Teachers are also highly skilled at supporting young people to feel safe and provide an environment which minimises anxiety. Young people spoke very highly of the support they received to sit their exams.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

Learning and engagement

- Teaching staff are very aware of the needs of learners and provide support in a sensitive and responsive manner. The learning environment is enhanced through a calm and consistent approach during lessons. As a result, learners are able to fully engage with learning. The positive relationships between learners and staff helps to sustain engagement with learning and has a positive impact on learners' motivation. Young people and parents spoke very highly of the support provided. When young people are in class, they are highly engaged and motivated. However, despite this positive profile, young people would benefit from more time in education. Staff across education and care should take creative and imaginative steps to ensure that young people participate more in learning.
- Young people are supported by highly skilled, motivated staff. Staff have high expectations within the classroom setting. Lessons are designed to engage young people and are set at an appropriate pace to ensure that young people remain interested and on task. Young people are being challenged and are gaining certification at levels appropriate to their stage and ability. Staff expectations are reflected positively in the qualifications attained in National Qualification courses and examinations from awarding bodies in England. Staff should now take steps to build on their success in formal certification by recognising the wider achievements of young people in a more structured manner by developing a cohesive programme to recognise all of the skills, talents and interests of the young people.
- Young people are articulate and speak positively about their experience in school and commented that staff are approachable, friendly and helpful. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to lead their own learning. Staff should consider how to develop further the role of the pupil voice and how this could be used to improve the contribution which learners make to Huntercombe.

Quality of teaching

- Teachers effectively use a range of Assessment for Learning strategies to provide organised, structured learning activities including independent tasks and a mix of active and desk-based activities. Technology is used appropriately to enhance learning and support young people to grasp new concepts and deepen understanding. Staff are always sensitive to the needs of learners and monitor progress throughout the lesson to intervene when barriers to learning are becoming evident. Staff consistently use praise, encouragement and humour to engage, motivate and support learners.
- Teachers make skilful use of questioning in the classroom. This is well embedded into lessons and supports learners to develop critical thinking skills and aids understanding of teaching points. Teachers use formative feedback to evaluate progress and to ensure that young

people reflect on their learning. Learners are becoming more focused on skills and how these skills can be applied across the curriculum. However, young people are not always clear of next steps and would benefit from support to clarify their personal strengths and areas for development.

- Teachers consistently use learning intentions and success criteria to support teaching and learning. This clarifies teaching points, ensures points are taught at an appropriate pace and sets a clear expectation of young people. As a result, young people are well prepared for the learning activities which they will experience. Staff could further develop the use of plenaries at the end of lessons to review learning and progress against success criteria. The school should now consider how a robust quality assurance programme could be developed to further improve on their good practice.

Effective use of assessment

- Learners benefit from a robust induction process which is detailed in Huntercombe's admission protocol. The educational and wellbeing needs of young people are assessed to ensure that learners are able to access the curriculum when appropriate. Young people benefit from collaboration between education and healthcare to identify gaps in learning, literacy and numeracy levels. This ensures that teachers are able to prepare a curriculum to meet the needs of young people. Staff should consider how information on the wider skills and attributes of young people can be used to support engagement in the early stages of induction into Huntercombe.
- The progress of young people is regularly assessed and a new system is in place to improve tracking and monitoring. The new system enables staff to update curricular progress and wellbeing information in relation to education and this contributes to the detailed reports that parents receive every six weeks. As a result, young people are making good progress and working at appropriate levels, and courses and programmes are suited to the needs of young people. Commendably, staff have undertaken professional learning to improve knowledge of a range of National Qualifications and GCSE subjects to broaden their knowledge of assessment. In particular, one member of staff has become a marker at National 5 level for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). There is scope for more collaborative working with local schools and education authorities to further develop understanding of standards and curricular developments.

Planning, tracking and monitoring

- Teachers collaborate efficiently with home schools to enable effective joint planning in relation to young people's subjects. The curriculum of the home school is delivered in parallel by staff at Huntercombe and ensures that young people benefit in any transition back to their home school. Staff should consider how to ensure that young people are receiving the same time for each subject when compared to their home school.
- Teachers regularly plan using appropriate timescales and this is evident in plans and procedures across the school. Staff should continue to develop their use of the new data management system to provide quality data on learners' progress and achievements over time. Young people will benefit as staff will be increasingly able to identify when progress has been limited and to plan for effective interventions. Staff are beginning to plan for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Young people reported that they had discussions about skills in literacy and numeracy and in other curricular areas. This could be further formalised by providing a clearer focus on expected impact for young people at the planning stage.

Governance

- The Head of Education is responsible for the governance of the school and is committed to improvement and providing help and support to the school. He works in close partnership with the headteacher, receiving regular detailed reports of the work of the school and engaging in professional dialogue on young people's progress, staffing and school resources. The Head of Education should now provide more support and challenge on school improvement and the impact of change in terms of young people's outcomes.

Targeted support

- See choice QI below.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The education staff promote a climate where young people feel safe and secure within the classrooms. Young people in school surveys commented that there is an 'encouraging environment' in the school with friendly teachers who are eager to talk and provide support. Classrooms provide a rich learning context through the use of helpful curricular wall displays. All teachers are highly attuned to the complex needs of the young people. These are important factors in helping young people with interrupted school re-engage with learning to achieve positive outcomes.
- Nurturing, positive relationships between staff and young people is an important feature of the school's approach to promoting wellbeing for all. This results in teachers modelling positive behaviours through respectful interactions. Young people value their appointed key teacher who knows them and their families well and helps them to plan and make progress in their learning.
- The long established teaching staff feel valued and supported as members of the education team. The team provide continuity and security to a cohort of young people on mainly short-term placements. They engage regularly in relevant professional learning including mental health to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and competencies to support young people with complex additional support needs. Partner agencies are positive about the way staff engage with them to promote young people's wellbeing. These programmes include the Woodland Volunteer Trust working in partnership with Scotland's Rural College Oatridge Campus to clear the grounds of the school and plan attractive pathways with the young people to promote their wellbeing and physical activity.
- Young people starting to attend the school are inducted gradually on reduced timetables, planned between healthcare and education. Teachers are regular visitors to the wards to encourage young people to attend school. Young people are all on personalised timetables within the restrictions of the curriculum offered by the school. Young people are achieving well but would benefit from more time in education. The school needs to revisit the length of the school week and ensure the curriculum continues to offer more progressive programmes in areas such as expressive arts, physical activity, modern language, technology and skills for work.
- Commendably, young people benefit from teaching staff actively cultivating effective links with their previous educational placements to ensure curricular progression builds on prior learning and current tasks are closely aligned. This helps to reduce anxieties for young people planning to return to their home school.

- All young people attending the school have personalised learning plans for the curriculum agreed after planning with healthcare, parents, home school and education. The plans serve more as descriptions of accredited courses than planning for areas of the curriculum to be individualised to meet the needs of the learner. The use of long- and short-term curricular targets would help the school to monitor the progress and attainment of young people more closely. The school should review with the home school if the young person meets the requirement of a coordinated support plan (Scotland only).
- Young people are offered a weekly session in personal health and social education. The classes offer a range of balanced topics taking into account the unique context of the school. They are currently exploring how to demystify the concept of perfectionism. The classes are not always well attended with a few young people commenting that they do not value the course as it's not accredited.
- Young people contribute and share their views on education through the patients forum and regular class surveys. They would benefit from more opportunities to engage with teachers directly on how to improve the school.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- From the evidence presented by the school, young people studying English can listen, talk read and write well relevant to the purpose, audience and context of their course work. However, peer discussions are hindered by the low numbers in each class. They understand, analyse and evaluate texts very well including Scottish poetry to get the gist and effect on any audience. A strong feature of the school is personal/reflective writing which focuses on the young people's thoughts, feelings and reactions to past experiences. Closer collaborative working between healthcare and education would provide more opportunities to promote literacy across the centre.
- Young people are making good progress overall in their mathematical knowledge and attainment in mathematics is strong. Young people are working within appropriate levels towards qualifications in mathematics and follow planned programmes relevant to their ability. Teachers are developing approaches to make numerical concepts more visual. This will benefit learners and will help to support explanations of key mathematical concepts, critical thinking and will deepen understanding of numeracy. Planning for numeracy across the curriculum is in place and staff have a shared understanding of the overarching strategy.

Attainment over time

- In recent years, according to the school's own data, most young people gained a range of National Qualifications, GCSEs and A levels. Most young people achieved very good results with a few achieving outstanding results. Staff have been very successful in supporting young people to overcome any anxieties they have about sitting exams and help them perform to a high level. However, there remains scope for young people to achieve further. The school now needs to revisit the length of the school week and enhance the curriculum to enable young people to build on this positive profile and raise their attainment and achievement further.
- According to their own figures, the school has been successful in improving levels of attendance for most young people, many of whom have well-established patterns of non-attendance at previous educational placements. As recognised by the school, there is still a need to further improve school attendance and young people's engagement with their learning.

Achievements

- Young people are given a few opportunities to develop their skills for life and work, and participate in personal achievement activities. These include sporting activities such as swimming and yoga. Young people also have opportunities to participate in occasional music and art groups. A few young people have just started an ASDAN short course. However, there is considerable scope for the school to provide more opportunities for young people to achieve

and build skills for life and work. Teachers should also seek accreditation for young people's achievements for example through SQA personal achievement awards.

Equity

- Staff know and treat children and young people as individuals. They are dedicated to meeting their needs and overcoming any barriers to success. The school should continue to identify flexible learning pathways for young people to provide equitable opportunities. This will help ensure that no young person is disadvantaged due to their personal healthcare circumstances.

Choice of QI: 2.4 Personalised support

- Universal support
- Targeted support
- Removal of barriers to learning

- Staff at the school have an understanding of the legislative framework and requirements and provide good quality targeted support for young people. They work in close partnership with each other and with young people and their families, together with partner agencies, to plan and deliver targeted support. Barriers to learning are identified and useful support strategies are shared with staff.
- The school has effective systems for gathering both educational and background information about young people upon placement. The school works well with young people's home schools to ensure that young people are working towards appropriate qualifications and are provided with sufficient challenge. Staff gain a clear understanding of the holistic needs of each young person, plan appropriate learning tasks and adopt effective strategies and interventions to minimise stress and anxiety.
- Each young person has a link teacher within the school who they meet at the induction stage and then on a regular basis to review their learning and plan next steps. This leads to positive relationships where young people feel valued and included. Teachers should continue to develop the link teacher role to ensure that 'learners conversations' cover all aspects of education and provide young people with more opportunities to voice their opinion on school life and potential areas for improvement.
- All young people have an Individualised Learning Plan. However, these plans generally only provide information on academic progress. Teachers need to develop these documents to ensure they are more personalised and provide valuable information on supportive strategies to help each young person to engage purposefully with their learning.
- The school has a comprehensive range of specialist partners who provide valuable support to young people. This support includes a number of therapeutic inputs including mindfulness and dialectical behaviour therapy. The school should consider how these therapies can potentially be linked to the health and wellbeing curriculum, personal achievement and approaches to targeted support within the school.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.