

# Balnacraig School

## School Care Accommodation Service

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**Type of inspection:**

Unannounced

**Completed on:**

16 July 2019

**Service provided by:**

Balnacraig School

**Service provider number:**

SP2010011127

**Service no:**

CS2010272007

## About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information about all care services is available on our website at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

This service was previously registered with the Care Commission and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

Balnacraig School provides school care accommodation for up to 16 children and young people. It is an independent residential school for young people with complex support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The provider is a private company limited by guarantee, administered by a board of directors. The school also provides day places for some young people. This is not part of the registered care service. The same provider has a registered care home service in Perth and Kinross.

Balnacraig School comprises the following:

The main residential school, which is a two-storey Victorian building located in a residential area close to Perth city centre. The building has an adjoining purpose-built accommodation for nine pupils, with en-suite bedrooms and communal spaces.

Am Bruach, which is a detached house located in the school grounds. This house has communal space and en-suite accommodation for up to two young people.

Eden House, which is a detached cottage located near Blairgowrie, Perthshire with accommodation for up to two young people.

South Inchmichael Cottage, which is a detached cottage located in Errol, Perthshire with accommodation for up to three young people.

The stated purpose of Balnacraig School is to make positive, meaningful changes in the lives of young people. Balnacraig aims to achieve this through the nurture of individuals and by seeking to develop a caring and confident community. Balnacraig seeks to provide a range of quality learning and care experiences to keep people safe and protected, improve health and wellbeing, raise standards of attainment and achievement and empower young people to be active and responsible citizens.

At the time of our inspection, there were eight young people living across the registered service.

## What people told us

We were delighted to meet all eight of the young people living in the service. We had a fuller discussion with seven of them. Some of their comments included:

"I am hoping to live here for a long time".

"It has made me more mature and I have grown up. I have a small group of pals and I get lots of time with my family. I think the boundaries they put in place helped. I wasn't used to being given boundaries".

"It was the last chance for me when I moved here and I used to be really out of control. I used to tell people I would be on the dole but now I want a job and a future. It has been a complete change".

"I was much happier living in the smaller house. If I moved to one of those I wouldn't feel as low".

"Staff look after me well and I do lots of activities. I go out and help in the local community".

"Sadly, the staff keep me safe. They are annoying sometimes but in a funny way". The manager is really good".

All of the young people we spoke to believed they were well looked after. Despite not enjoying the boundaries they could reflect that the staff and managers needed to do this for their safety and protection. We heard that the staff and managers spent a lot of time with young people and care and support was individually tailored to each individual.

The young people were very willing to engage with the inspection and wanted their voices heard. They told us that advocacy was encouraged, and they had all met the allocated worker from Who Cares? Scotland.

Some young people were of the view that the larger main building did not feel like a family home and reflected that the smaller houses were ideal. Managers were aware of this and it was clear they communicated regularly with the young people.

We observed meals being prepared across the houses and were very pleased to see young people taking an active role in healthy eating and mealtimes. Young people told us that the food was good and that they were encouraged to eat healthily.

Overall, we heard that the young people had strong relationships with staff and with each other and there appeared to be a family feel to the environments which was heartening to observe.

## From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	not assessed
How good is our staffing?	not assessed
How good is our setting?	not assessed
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

We found that the young people living in Balnacraig experienced a high level of compassion, dignity and respect. We observed meaningful and trusting relationships between young people, staff and managers. Lots of effort was made to try and understand young people's journeys in order to support them better. Furthermore, the service worked closely with families to build effective relationships and, where possible, promote positive parenting.

We found that young people were central to the direction and focus of the organisation. We completed the inspection at a time of strategic change and could observe that the views and needs of young people was central to the decision making. Managers talked in detail about improving the service and regularly tried to capture the views of young people.

During our inspection, there was lots of activity, including the annual highland games. We observed staff, managers and young people having fun together. Alongside this, we reviewed the involvement of young people in their care and support and were heartened to see how much effort went into engaging them in this process. Where young people were disengaged, lots of work was attempted to help them to re-engage.

At the forefront of Balnacraig's work is empowerment. The young people have full access to information about them and how to raise any issues. Within each young person's care plan we found a clear section on their rights. We found that staff were quick to champion the views and needs of young people.

We reviewed Balnacraig's child protection policies, processes and procedures and found that they effectively kept the young people safe from harm, abuse and exploitation. Where the service was no longer able to keep young people safe, they quickly notified the local authority and supported any moves. We were told by external partners that transitions both in and out of the service were handled with a great deal of care and young people who moved on continued to have contact with Balnacraig staff.

Throughout our inspection, we were delighted to see young people engaged in positive activities. This was particularly present in the smaller premises of Eden House and South Inchmichael Cottage. When visiting, we observed warm and caring environments that functioned like a family home. The young people had a range of activities including connecting with friends and, for one young person, having their best friend for a sleepover. Holidays during the summer were commonplace and tailored to each young person's wishes.

Despite challenges for some young people attending school, we found most of the young people attended education. For some young people, they had significantly improved their attendance and attainment since moving to Balnacraig. The service is aware that the environment presents some challenges to academic attainment and we discussed these in full during the inspection. When young people achieved, this was celebrated, and they were encouraged to be aspirational. One young person told us that they had reset their life ambitions as a result of living in Balnacraig.

Balnacraig has a therapeutic culture and we found this rooted in the model of care. Lots of information was gained as part of their ongoing assessment of young people. We found a strength in relation to supporting young people's mental health and a significant desire to advocate for young people when they couldn't access the right services. The staff had regular development sessions on trauma informed practice and benefitted from the ongoing consultation of an external psychologist. When incidents occurred, young people were appropriately safely held, and staff told us there was lots of emphasis placed on de-brief, both with them and the young people.

## Areas for improvement

1. We were very impressed with the ongoing commitment to improvement and the desire of managers and staff to develop the organisation. During our inspection, we identified that the outcomes for young people across the three care and support environments differed. Where we have identified areas of excellence, the service should encourage staff to adopt this model. This will support consistently positive outcomes.
2. There is a strong culture of training and development. We found that more could be done during staff induction and quality assurance to work directly with them to promote best practice and embed the model of care. The service agreed to consider how this could be achieved and what further staff training may be required.
3. We identified that Balnacraig is working hard to expand its network of connections with local and national partners. We have encouraged them to continue this work to ensure that they continue to create opportunities for young people in relation to support, employment and alternative education opportunities. Furthermore, we have agreed to connect Balnacraig with like-minded organisations to support learning and development.

## How good is our leadership?

This key question was not assessed.

## How good is our staff team?

This key question was not assessed.

## How good is our setting?

This key question was not assessed.

## How well is our care and support planned? **5 - Very Good**

Balnacraig has developed excellent systems and processes for assessing, reviewing and analysing young people's progress. The care plans for each young person are consistently completed to a high standard and we were impressed by the tracking of monthly goals which were created in conjunction with the young person. Staff appeared committed to the process, which resulted in key time discussions linking with the identified goals. It was clear that all the young people we tracked had achieved significant outcomes since arriving in Balnacraig.

For all the young people, staff relationships were of core importance to them. We heard about the ability of these key relationships to encourage activity. As a result of building trust with staff, we found examples where young people were reflecting on their behaviour and entering restorative conversations. Boundaries and structures were clearly highlighted in young people's plans and fully discussed with them, which we believe aided understanding and implementation. Where there was disagreement, the staff and managers were open to compromise and negotiation.

We inspected this service at the beginning of the summer holidays and observed fun and exciting daily plans for each young person. Group activities were encouraged to support peer development, but time was also set aside for one to one trips with key staff members. The young people spoke enthusiastically about spending quality time with staff.

We considered that a significant effort was made to regularly gather young people's views, but this was of particular significance prior to reviews and hearings. The impact of this was young people approached meetings with clarity about what they wanted to achieve, and the service advocated on their behalf. The joint work taking place with Who Cares? Scotland further affirmed our impression of empowering young people.

A further strength of Balnacraig's planning was the recording of information. A thorough chronology was found in each young person's file which detailed their journey in Balnacraig. We considered that this created a reflective tool for young people to review during their time in Balnacraig or after they had left. Furthermore, this allowed the staff to analyse patterns of behaviour and support young people more effectively.

We concluded that the service was committed to analysing and understanding young people's actions in order to plan their support better.

## Areas for improvement

1. We were delighted to hear that work is under way with all staff to write information to the young people as a story instead of about them. For example, within the chronology and daily logs. We believe this will support future reading and have encouraged the service managers to embed this practice over the coming year.
2. The service has fully embedded quality assurance and audit systems. These have been implemented over time and are thoroughly utilised. Going forward, we would like to see the quality assurance practice expand to working more directly with staff teams and young people to improve consistency and ensure their voices are a core component of service development. Balnacraig had helpfully completed a self-evaluation but we believe this could be expanded to include all stakeholder views.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

**Detailed evaluations**

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Children and young people experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children and young people get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children and young people's health benefits from their care and support they experience	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects children and young people's needs and wishes	5 - Very Good

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