

Aberdeen City Music School School Care Accommodation Service

Halls of Residence
Riverview Drive
Dyce
Aberdeen
AB21 7NF

Telephone: 01224 214 130

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
20 January 2026

Service provided by:
Aberdeen City Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000349

Service no:
CS2005113855

About the service

Aberdeen City Music School (ACMS) boarding was purpose-built to provide a school care accommodation service to a maximum of 40 young people. The building is in close proximity to Dyce Academy where young people attend for education. Music tuition and practice is at the attached music school.

ACMS boarding state their aim 'to provide a caring, structured environment within which young people are encouraged and supported to become responsible citizens and to reach their full musical, educational and social potential, based on mutual respect for each other and the environment.'

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on the evenings of 14 and 15 January and mid-afternoon on 16 January 2026. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with young people living at the service
- spoke with family members
- spoke with staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- received feedback via MS questionnaires from 11 young people, 16 family members and all of the staff team.

Key messages

The music school offered exceptional opportunities for young people which were supported and encouraged by both school and boarding staff.

Young people experienced warm and nurturing relationships with the people who cared for them. They described a 'family feel' about ACMS

There was a positive focus on young people being aware of their rights and a compassionate approach towards each other.

A culture of warmth and kindness, alongside responsibility and hard work, was replicated across boarding and the music school itself.

Aberdeen City council could not provide a date for the repair of the lift (which had been unusable for 5 months). This does not comply with disability legislation which has specific requirements regarding access to buildings (including lift access).

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 rights and wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
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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 rights and wellbeing?

5 – Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good, which means the service demonstrated major strengths in supporting positive outcomes for young people.

Young people were kept safe. Staff knew young people individually, understood their needs and had practical systems in place to ensure they were safe. Young people said there were people in both boarding and/or school that they would talk to if they had concerns.

Staff had a good understanding of child protection/safeguarding procedures and what would concern them. They had all received appropriate training and always had the support of the senior team.

We observed encouraging, friendly and supportive interactions between the staff team and young people, and individual needs led support. Feedback we received complimented the kind, sensitive proactive approach. This resulted in young people living in a relaxed environment where they were well supported by the adults who cared for them.

A culture of warmth, alongside responsibility and hard work, was replicated across boarding and the music school itself. Expectations were clear and centred around respect and kindness, whilst acknowledging that structure and boundaries were important. There was a positive focus on young people being aware of their rights and a compassionate approach towards each other.

Young people all had support plans which gave details of key information, with some necessarily more detailed than others. Young people had varying views on the need for wellbeing webs and support plans, but overall understood these were supportive and about recognising achievement. Staff were keen to explore whether some time could be created so they could spend individual time with young people without extending the students already long and busy day.

Young people experienced warm and nurturing relationships with the people who cared for them. Parents were exceptionally positive about the accepting and encouraging approach of the team, and how they embraced and encouraged young people's individuality and talent.

It was heartwarming to see the students share their space so well and talk kindly and respectfully about each other. Many young people spoke about how much they enjoyed living alongside other young people who shared their passion and the 'family feel' about ACMS (school and boarding). Most parents also reflected this. The addition of wellbeing, art and percussion rooms gave students opportunity for 'down' time which promoted their mental wellbeing.

It was positive to see young people's views being heard and acted upon, generally, but also within the 'Banter Squad' (young people's meetings). This included when views might be 'at odds' to the views of the adults caring for them. Discussion was open and honest and with transparent decisions. A series of questionnaires were also helpful in ensuring opinions were shared and valued and used to direct the service going forward.

Young people were generally fairly positive about food. Consideration was being given to how the overall dining experience could offer a more homely feel, though this was currently limited to changes which could

be made within the dining hall. Any arrangement which allowed main meals to be within boarding would be a welcome break away from the lengthy school day and allow a more homely experience.

An electrical fire in September 2025 had led to some damage to the boarding house, and the lift being unusable. The damage had been repaired, however, the lift remained unusable with no agreed plan to repair or replace this. The boarding manager, Director of ACMS and the Inspector had raised with the Local Authority (Aberdeen City Council) who stated that they were 'unable to provide a date of replacement at this time'. Boarding accommodation was on four floors, therefore bedrooms and wellbeing rooms were inaccessible to students, future students or family members with mobility issues. This does not comply with disability legislation which has specific requirements regarding access to buildings (including lift access).

The music school offered exceptional opportunities for young people to be involved in events in the wider community. These opportunities were supported and encouraged by both school and boarding staff who were proud of the accomplishments of students who they saw grow in confidence as a result of their experiences. Young people themselves spoke of impressive opportunities they had to develop their talent and confidence.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

The accommodation should be maintained to a high standard, with appropriate arrangements in place for the replacement of goods and a rolling programme of redecoration. Issues in relation to the responsibility for this, and appropriate funding should be resolved.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I am able to access a range of good quality equipment and furnishings to meet my needs, wishes and choices' (HSCS 5.21); and

'I experience an environment that is well looked after with clean, tidy and well maintained premises, furnishings and equipment' (HSCS 5.22).

This area for improvement was made on 17 May 2019.

Action taken since then

No rolling programme or budget had yet been agreed (this area for improvement was made in 2019). The current boarding manager and Director of the Music school were actively trying to resolve this.

This area for improvement has not been met.

Previous area for improvement 2

Effective procedures should be developed for the management of critical incidents. These should include appropriate recording, safeguarding and assessment. Notification should be made to the Care Inspectorate as per guidance.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice' (HSCS 4.11); and

'My care and support is provided in a planned and safe way, including if there is an emergency or unplanned event' (HSCS 4.14).

This area for improvement was made on 17 May 2019.

Action taken since then

Appropriate action had been taken in relation to incidents, which had been notified to the Care Inspectorate as required.

This area for improvement has been met.

Previous area for improvement 3

The service should complete a self-assessment and use this information to develop an aspirational development plan. This should involve the whole team and young people (and any other relevant stakeholders).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 17 May 2019.

Action taken since then

This area for improvement had been fully met.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
7.1 Children and young people are safe, feel loved and get the most out of life	5 - Very Good

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