

Alfriston School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Clare Davies
Type of Inspection	Key

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Head / Principal	
Date of last inspection	11 December 2007

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Alfriston is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties in the age range 11-18 years. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. There are 105 pupils of which 20 are weekly boarders residing for three nights from Monday to Thursday. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The boarding accommodation is situated on the first floor of the main school building. Older girls can experience semi-independent living in a small flat. The school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings.

The school is maintained by Buckinghamshire County Council and is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield.

Summary

This short notice inspection judged that all the key national minimum standards are met and a significant number have been exceeded. The boarding provision provides an outstanding service for pupils, developing their social skills, confidence and independence. The skills and dedication of the staff provide varied opportunities for pupils, and inclusion for those with complex health needs. There is strong culture of communication and collaboration with parents and professionals in children's services. Boarders feel happy and secure in the boarding environment. One boarder, expressing the sentiments of many others, commented, 'I love boarding and this school is the best. I think other children who have special needs or problems I think they should come here'.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the school has strengthened its recruitment procedures ensuring rigorous vetting of new staff is undertaken routinely.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Clear documentation and safe storage of medication ensures the school manages the health needs of boarders very well. Trained staff manage complex medical needs, supported by sound policies and procedures. Parental wishes are established and consent sought for staff to administer medication and first aid.

Every boarder has an individual healthcare plan identifying their health and medical needs and how they are going to be met by the school. The medical support officer liaises with health professionals in the community and hospital consultants. Training is delivered by the experienced medical support officer and visiting professionals. Supportive relationships have developed with some parents and the medical officer attends medical appointments with them and their child at their request. Parents speak highly of the pastoral care given by the school and reported

that if their children become ill it is dealt with promptly and they are kept informed. This school takes a pro-active approach to meeting some complex needs to promote inclusion.

Health promotion is emphasised through the school curriculum, the residential unit, catering and the medical support officer. A counsellor visits regularly to provide additional emotional support. Through the curriculum and activities there are many opportunities for physical activity including mainstream and disabled sports tournaments with other schools. The school has achieved Healthy School status awarded by the local authority.

Boarders enjoy the food and feel they have sufficient choice. A boarder said 'If you don't like the tea just ask the chef to cook you something else'. The older pupils particularly enjoy the experience of staying in a flat where they shop and cook for themselves.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The privacy and dignity of boarders is promoted and emphasised in staff training from induction through to regular supervision and staff meetings. Policies on safe working practices support this area of work. The school has a complaints procedure for parents and pupils, this is accessible to boarders from the notice boards in the residential area. Parents report that they are contacted when difficulties arise and this partnership working reduces the need to access the formal complaints procedure. The safeguarding of boarders is given paramount importance and there are some very good systems in place to ensure that minor concerns are documented and passed to the headteacher. Regular meetings between classroom and boarding staff provide opportunities to discuss pupils and their pastoral care needs. Communication across the school is excellent and contributes effectively to the welfare and safety of pupils. The designated staff member for safeguarding is suitably trained and has good links with the local authority. Training is delivered to all staff, policies and procedures are clear and they support staff in responding appropriately to any child protection concern. Older boarders discuss travel, Internet and personal safety in the classroom and whilst boarding, trips out in the community permit them to exercise these skills with staff support nearby.

Simple school rules promote respect and kindness to others and any bullying is dealt with quickly. Boarders feel safe and secure in the knowledge that 'staff help sort it out'. When asked about bullying in the school a boarder said 'They (staff) go and tell them off and give them a warning red card'. Emphasis is placed on positive behaviour with merits and green cards awarded. Success and achievement is celebrated across the school and each boarder has educational and boarding targets. Any challenging behaviour is discussed amongst the staff team to identify triggers and strategies on how to respond and support individual pupils. Where appropriate, consultation occurs with an educational psychologist. Behaviour support plans are shared with boarders and progress charts used as incentives. There is a policy regarding any pupil that goes missing or leaves the site without permission though this has not occurred within the last year. Attendance is good and pupils are well behaved. The boarders identify themselves as a community within the school and offer practical and emotional support to each other.

Good attention is paid to health and safety matters supported by robust policies and comprehensive risk assessments. Fire safety systems are in place and boarders experience a regular practice of evacuating the building. There are safe policies for the use of transport and regular safety checks occur of gas and electrical appliances. Recruitment procedures have recently undergone a further review to become more robust. All appropriate checks are

undertaken for any new member of staff, the head teacher has completed training in safer recruitment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The residential provision supports the educational progress of boarders by working closely with teaching staff, promoting homework, encouraging and assisting with access to computers and providing a range of activities. Boarding staff incorporate relevant aspects of overall school targets for pupils into care plans and translate these well into aspects of life in boarding, for example in developing social skills and particular skills in self care and independent living. Boarding staff contribute fully to education reviews and work hard to recognise and celebrate boarders' progress in the residential unit alongside educational achievements.

Individual personal care comes in the form of pastoral support from teaching staff, the medical support officer and focused support from the residential staff. Pupils are very complimentary about the level of support they receive and indicate there is always someone they feel they can talk to if they need to. Outside of the immediate school staff team pupils also have direct access to an independent counsellor. More formal professional support is provided by access to speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and an educational psychologist. Many boarders recognise the individual support they receive, one boarder said, 'they help me learn different things and encourage me to talk to staff more'. When asked what is Alfriston School good at doing? a boarder said, 'they help me with my schoolwork, confidence and independence'.

Physical and more sedate activities are on offer within the school to accommodate the varied needs and interests of boarders. This is supplemented by regular off-site activities such as swimming, youth club, football, shopping and the cinema. Boarders and parents are particularly positive about this aspect of the residential provision, many would be socially isolated at home and miss out on the range of leisure activities that boarding has to offer. Links with the local community promote inclusion and help develop social skills as the boarders meet other people with staff support at hand. Life skills and independence are a large part of the curriculum that can be extended after school and into the community whilst being a boarder. Every boarder is encouraged to reach their potential and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other children and young people with support from staff. Boarders have embraced the independence scheme where they can work towards decreased levels of supervision. The incremental levels recognise individual skills and understanding of each pupil not simply their age.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are fully involved in making personal decisions through attendance at meetings about their progress and achievements. Representatives from the residential group take part in school council meetings where comments from pupils are taken seriously and suggestions made are positively received and acted on. As a result of pupils' suggestions the 'independence level' system is now in operation, other changes have involved choice in menus, activities and décor.

Boarders have clear plans, setting out what help they need and how the school will help them. Boarders and their parents are involved in the target setting and how they can be met. The school encourages and rewards pupils as they make progress.

The school has good relationships with boarders' families and carers. Boarders are able to maintain contact with their families whilst they are at school. Families are encouraged to become involved with activities at the school and be part of the plans to help their child. A new element to the school's website informs parents of news, events and some policies. Parents report that they are very satisfied with the boarding provision, expressed through comments such as, 'Exceptionally happy with boarding. It has helped our daughter develop independence and confidence. Great socially for her'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarding accommodation is in good decorative order providing a homely feel with comfortable furniture. The boarders state that they like the boarding area and the older girls particularly enjoy the experience of semi-independent living in a flat. Repairs and maintenance issues are promptly dealt with by the caretaker.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This school has a culture of inclusion and every pupil is valued for their individual contribution to the school community. The skills and expertise of the staff enable pupils with complex needs to participate in school life. Religious and cultural differences are celebrated and as an all female school arrangements are made to have social events and activities when boys will be present.

Leadership and management is strong and the communication is very effective across all disciplines of the school. Staff are committed and enthusiastic, supported by clear policies, procedures and a good training programme. The head of care has a strong presence in boarding and therefore available to pupils, parents and staff. Records and practice are well monitored and there is enthusiasm to develop the service for the benefit of the boarders and their families. There are clear supervision and appraisal formats in place, all but one member of residential staff has achieved NVQ level 3 award in Caring for Children and Young People. The head of care has achieved NVQ level 4 in care and is now working towards the management module. Representatives of the governing body and the local authority visit the residential unit to monitor the service and report to the headteacher.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):