

# Alfriston School

Alfriston School, Penn Road, Knotty Green, BEACONSFIELD, Buckinghamshire, HP9 2TS

**Inspection dates** 05/03/2013 to 07/03/2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>3</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Good	2
Residential pupils' safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Adequate	3

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is adequate because

- Boarders make exceptional personal progress and outline proudly the things the achievements they have made as a result of boarding. These achievements include improved self-care skills, doing household tasks well and the confidence to use public transport or attend interviews. Boarders talk enthusiastically about the positive and significant progress they have made since boarding. One said 'It's like my home here'. Parents are effusive about the positive impact the residential experience has had on the lives of their children, themselves and their families. One said 'This is how all boarding provision should work'. A parent commented 'The boarding experience has made it easier for her to adapt to change so we can surprise her with a new activity.'
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is adequate. The minor weaknesses in this area are attributable to the absence of several key personnel with direct responsibility for health and safety arrangements.
- The day-to-day management of boarding is of a good standard. Boarders benefit from warm relationships with committed members of staff who provide clear boundaries.
- A key area for development is the fuller development of monitoring, self assessment and evaluation of the boarding provision to secure well planned and implemented improvements.
- Other areas for further improvement relate to more precise and consistent recording and updates to risk assessments.

### Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

## Information about this inspection

The head teacher was given four hours notice of the inspection. Inspectors were given a guided tour of the accommodation by boarders. Inspectors spoke with all boarders through shared meals, accompanying them and staff on activities both on and off site and socialising in the common room. Meetings were held with parents, the head teacher, the deputy heads, the head of care, the residential staff team, the health and safety officer, the counsellor, the occupational therapist, the chef and the Chair of Governors. A sample of records and policies were scrutinised.

## Inspection team

Maire Atherton	Lead social care inspector
Jennie Christopher	Social care inspector

# Full report

## Information about this school

The school is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield. It received academy status in March 2012, with a sports specialism since 2009.

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 121 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, accessed from the main boarding accommodation. The extensive school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings.

The academy's residential provision was last inspected in June 2011.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the medical information held on each boarder.
- Review the use of language in physical intervention records to enable thorough monitoring and evaluation.
- Update environmental and fire risk assessments and ensure that routine checks continue in the absence of key staff.
- Ensure that recruitment policies and procedures are fully applied to staff moving into residential provision from education.
- Ensure that the staff induction covers the areas outlined in the Children's Workforce Development Council standards.
- Evidence strong and accurate reviews and self-evaluation procedures leading to well planned and implemented improvements to include the development of independent visitors reports to ensure they monitor the matters required and demonstrate how they contribute to the improvement of the residential provision.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Boarders make exceptional progress in developing confidence, self-esteem and improvements in social functioning as a direct result of the time spent in the residential provision. Boarders themselves recognise their progress, with one boarder telling her parents 'I think I've become a social animal', a very new experience for them and their daughter as she has begun to invite friends home. Another boarder said 'I've got more confident. It's amazing.' Boarders are proud of the personal care skills they have acquired and continue to develop, with packing their own overnight bag ready for boarding a particular favourite.

Boarders have a high degree of empathy and tolerance for one another. They are quick to offer mutual help, support and encouragement where they identify a need. Senior boarders do not have formal responsibilities but demonstrate a keen sense of community spirit and feel that they lead by example. Laughter and fun are key components of the boarding experience. One boarder said 'We have fun.' Another said 'It's like my home here.' Parents say 'It's like a second family, everyone here is kind and understanding.'

Boarders make significant strides in managing their own behaviour and are proud of the progress they have made. An ex-boarder commented 'It really helped me be good and grow up, staff are lovely. They really listened and helped sort things out.' Boarders learn about positive and negative consequences for behaviour. A parent was proud to report 'She has started to think for herself and is recognising consequences.' Another observed that 'Boarding was fundamental to her personal development.'

Boarders really enjoy the activities which take place in the wider community, with youth club a popular choice for the majority. Boarders also enjoyed the trip to the Paralympics and recent competitions in rowing and swimming. The planned trip to Finland is keenly anticipated by those due to go.

The size of both the staff team and the boarding group provides ample opportunity for the development and maintenance of warm and constructive relationships between them. Boarders feel they are listened to, their day to day preferences are met and they can have a say about what happens in boarding, 'I can talk to anyone' is a common refrain of boarders.

All boarders benefit from exceptional transition planning and execution and so have a good understanding of what the next steps are for them as individuals. Boarders are supported to develop relevant life skills and build confidence around daily living tasks, which helps prepare them for adulthood. For example trips to bowling start as a trip on the school minibus, then a staff supported trip using public transport building up to using public transport without staff and meeting the larger group at the venue. One parent proudly spoke of a telephone call received from his daughter who was by enjoying the independence of buying a cup of tea in a café by herself, having caught the bus from college. He attributed this directly to the preparation that she benefited from as a boarder at Alfriston.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Good

The quality of care provided to boarders is good. Boarders benefit from excellent day-to-day care and support. The experienced staff team, which includes academic staff, provide the boarders with opportunities for interactions with both male and female staff across a wide age range. A deputy head and the head of care work closely together providing a firm foundation for effective communication between residential and academic staff. This is enhanced by the head of care's

attendance at the weekly academic pastoral group meetings. Boarders' education is further supported by the homework club. One boarders said 'Homework time is like talking to Mum time.'

The induction to boarding reflects the individual needs of each boarder. One parent was particularly complimentary about the induction programme tailored specifically for her daughter. She said 'We spent a long time planning how the boarding was going to happen and worked through the situation as a team. It could not have been better.' The boarding team are also skilled at accommodating emergency admissions to boarding to support families in times of difficulty. This flexible approach ensures that girls get the support they need to access boarding successfully.

There is a range of documentation in place to support the delivery of care to boarders. This includes individual boarding plans, which link to the individual education plans, and individual behaviour plans. These are regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with boarders and their parents to ensure that they remain relevant. A parent said 'We can see the changes that boarding is making for our daughter.' Staff have a good understanding of the range of health needs of the boarders and are supported in their work by relevant training. Boarders' additional needs are effectively supported and promoted by access to a counsellor, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and an educational psychologist. The newly appointed health and welfare officer is in the process of updating the health plan for each boarder linked with their annual reviews. Boarders live at the school for three nights per week therefore remain registered with their home GP and specialists. Staff communicate regularly with parents but updated information is not always reflected in the full range of records maintained or confirmed by a letter from the GP. Thus the records do not cross reference fully in every case, potentially leading to a lack of clarity for staff in the provision of healthcare support to boarders. There is a bound book for the recording of controlled medication, as recommended at the last inspection.

Boarders participate in a range of recreational activities in school, in the local community and further afield. One boarder talked excitedly about the planned exchange visit to Finland and was looking forward to meeting again the friends she had made when they visited here in the summer. A parent commented 'The extra curricular activities broaden skills outside school.'. Another said 'She enjoys going bowling, swimming and youth club. She has surprised herself.'

Boarders overwhelmingly say that they enjoy the food and talk to the chef directly to tell him what they like and do not like. The quality of the catering arrangements is of a high standard and provides boarders with a varied and balanced diet. Individual and specialist diets are also well catered for. Some boarders have the opportunity to plan, shop for and prepare a meal once a week. They say they really enjoy being able to do this and feel 'It is helping us get ready for more independence.'

Boarders and parents confirm that they can contact their families in private. There can be a queue to use the one pay phone, as noted in the last report. Staff have purchased a mobile phone for incoming calls in an attempt to address this issue and are considering other options.

The accommodation is of a good standard. Boarders have their own screened space in dormitories, providing some privacy. There is one communal room and the staff have created additional seating areas in the dormitories and corridor to provide more options for boarders in response to comments made in a boarders questionnaire. Some school facilities, such as the ICT suite, are also available to boarders with staff support.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

## **Adequate**

The academy makes adequate provision to safeguard boarders. Staff are trained in safeguarding

and the academy child protection policies. They know what action to take in the event of any concerns or allegations and work effectively to ensure that any potential or safeguarding concerns are referred promptly. This practice ensures that boarders are protected from harm.

Boarders say they feel safe in school and demonstrate this in the quality of their interactions with each other and with staff. Boarders are very caring of each other and confidently approach and talk to all staff. The staff are knowledgeable about and effectively implement the relevant policies and procedures to ensure that boarders continue to feel safe. Messages about bullying are conveyed unambiguously by the information on display in boarding. Boarders do not see bullying as an issue and say that staff 'sort small things out quickly'. No boarders have gone missing. Staff know what to do should this happen, in accordance with academy policy.

Boarders benefit from a consistent staff team promoting positive behaviour. This approach brings about change that benefits the boarders in social situations and improves the quality of life at home. There are robust systems in place for training staff in the approved behaviour management method used in the academy. Physical intervention is rarely used. The language used in describing these infrequent incidents is imprecise and open to interpretation. Thus not enabling the consistent evaluation of the effectiveness of such measures. In response to a recommendation in the last report a new format for the recording of serious sanctions has been introduced, alongside the systems that were already in place. Staff have been trained in the use of a new computerised system that will enable clear monitoring and evaluation of consequences. A parent said a strength of boarding was the way in which boarders are enabled 'to understand consequences for their behaviour which they can then apply at home.'

The transition period between the departure and appointment of staff in key health and safety roles, combined with the planned absence of another member of staff has led to some gaps in routine checks; for example the weekly fire check, and updates to policies and risk assessments.

The recruitment of new staff is robust, with clear adherence to the recruitment policies and procedures. The same level of scrutiny is not applied to staff moving from education into the residential provision; for example an application form for the role was not completed.

### **Leadership and management of the residential provision Adequate**

The management and organisation of the residential provision is adequate. The boarding aims are clearly stated in the written information available and reflected in practice. All boarders are familiar and comfortable with the daily routines, which staff run smoothly to meet boarders' need for consistency.

The appropriately qualified and experienced head of care provides strong leadership to a small staff team. Thus ensuring consistent practice that provides an environment in which parents say 'boarders flourish'. Regular and effective supervision underpinned by training equips staff for their role in residential provision. Since the last inspection training has included behaviour management strategies, autism and mental health matters. While there is an induction programme in place, there has been no work to ensure that this covers the areas outlined in the Children's Workforce Development Council standards for induction. Staff are sufficient in number, and hold or are registered for appropriate childcare qualifications. Every member of the senior management team participates in boarding. There is a robust on-call system in place so that additional support for boarders is available when required.

Boarders' individual and diverse needs are well identified and met. A parent said 'I know my daughter's targets and so does she.. Their progress is measured through the assessment levels achieved. The attainment of these effectively promotes increasing self care and independence skills, working towards semi-independence in the flat where appropriate. A parent commented 'I

would never have imagined how much progress she has made through boarding.' Staff have a clear commitment to equality of opportunity; for example providing the support required to access community activities.

There are systems for the routine management monitoring required. However there is no evidence of assessment or evaluation of the matters being monitored. For example members of the governing body visit as required but the report of the visit does not in every case cover the matters outlined in the standard, nor is a consistent report format used. It is unclear how these reports lead to improvements in the residential provision. The residential provision development plan is out of date and there is limited evidence to indicate how management have monitored progress against the plan. The residential provision is not given a separate section in the head teacher's self-evaluation and there is no written plan for strategic development, although the head and governors can outline their long-term aims to increase boarding provision.

There have been no formal complaints. Parents report that communication with boarding staff is good, one reported feeling like 'part of a team with boarding staff'. They describe staff as accessible and feel that they address any concerns promptly, making use of the complaints procedure unnecessary. Staff are adept at interpreting behaviour as an expression of dissatisfaction and take the action necessary to address boarders' concerns.

There is a boarder representative on the school council and an annual exit poll of boarders. The head of care can outline the action taken in response to boarders' comments but there is no formal action plan developed as a result.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137934
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC023097
<b>DfE registration number</b>	825/7003

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Girls
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to 18
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jinna Male
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	28/06/2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 673740

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