

Alfriston School

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

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| Inspection dates | 15/12/2014 to 17/12/2014 | |
| Overall effectiveness | Good | 2 |
| Outcomes for residential pupils | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of residential provision and care | Outstanding | 1 |
| Residential pupils' safety | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management of the residential provision | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Extremely positive, sensitive and nurturing relationships with committed staff enable boarders to trust adults who care for them. Boarders benefit from the support and guidance of staff. Staff work together effectively to meet boarders' holistic needs.
- Boarders flourish in an environment where staff recognise and value their individual strengths and unique qualities. Boarders make excellent progress and significant development in their social skills, independence skills, confidence and self-esteem. The residential provision is an integral part of the school and central in advancing boarders' academic, personal, social and emotional development.
- Safeguarding practices in general are good. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, know each boarder extremely well and protect them in relation to their specific vulnerabilities whilst ensuring they have opportunities to develop appropriate life skills. Shortfalls in relation to recording sanctions and recording discussions with staff following physical intervention do not impinge on the welfare of boarders. Neither does the shortfall identified in relation to clarifying that procedures for staff to follow if a boarder leaves the site without permission are in accordance with local police protocols.
- Boarders benefit from strong, dedicated leadership and management and a committed staff team. The residential provision is continually evolving to meet boarders' needs with a developing focus on supporting parents and carers.
- Boarders are extremely positive about their boarding experience. They report enthusiastically about the support they receive from staff, the activities on offer and how boarding 'is like a family'. Parents are highly complimentary of the residential provision, acknowledging the impact the experience is having on boarders' progress and development.

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 school was given four hours notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the head teacher, head of care, residential staff, health and safety coordinator, site manager, chef, chair of governors, link governor, HR officer, health and welfare officer and boarders. Two evenings were spent in the residential accommodation observing staff and boarders' interactions and activities. The inspector joined boarders for three meals.

Inspection team

Janet Hunnam

Lead 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 School 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 137 pupils of which 17 are boarders residing for three nights during each week, from Monday to Wednesday. 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure that the absent without permission policy is formally shared with local police and that it clearly states that procedures are compatible with local police protocols
- ensure that discussions with staff following an incident involving physical intervention are clearly documented in the record of the incident.
- ensure that all sanctions are recorded with full details in the bound book

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Boarders thrive within a nurturing and supportive environment where they develop their confidence and self-esteem. They enjoy exceptionally good quality relationships with staff and enjoy being in the company of staff who respond to them with warmth and good humour. Consequently, boarders listen to staff and accept the support staff offer, enabling them to make significant progress in relation to their starting points. Boarders are very positive about their boarding experiences with comments such as 'it's like my second home'; 'it's fun'; 'it's like a family'. Parents are also extremely complimentary about the residential provision, and the progress their children make. A parent commented positively on how their child's developing skills are transferring to their home environment and how the child is now 'doing things for herself at home'. A parent commented that they are 'so glad they found the school'. Another commented that boarding has made 'a huge improvement' in their child's 'social interaction with peers and confidence in interacting with others'. Boarders were seen helping and supporting each other, thus developing empathy and consideration for others. Boarders behave very well, learning to manage any difficulties with support from staff.

Boarders enjoy a wide range of enriching experiences enabling them to participate in leisure pursuits and follow their personal interests both on-site and in the local community. Bowling and a local youth club are popular community activities with boarders, allowing them to develop their self-confidence and social engagement. A parent commented that their child is 'now enjoying activities when previously activities were very hard for her'.

Boarders flourish in a setting where they are valued as individuals and where their views are appreciated. They are confident in approaching all staff and are able to put forward their views and voice any concerns individually and informally. Boarders clearly appreciate the informal interaction with staff, which bolsters their self-esteem and sense of appreciation. A boarders' forum is held half-termly where boarders request day-to-day items and put forward suggestions for activities to improve their boarding experience.

Boarders benefit from having their physical and emotional health promoted to an excellent standard. They have their medical needs met and receive support from specialist health professionals where needed to support their psychological well-being.

There is a strong focus on developing daily living and independence skills at a level and pace that takes into account the individual abilities of boarders. Parents report significant improvement in boarders' personal care skills and that they are doing more for themselves at home. Boarders receive comprehensive support and guidance during periods of transition reducing their levels of anxiety and preparing them for the next stage. A boarder commented that 'staff help with independence' and 'help us do things for ourselves'.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Excellent support by an experienced and committed staff team provides nurturing, sensitive and highly individualised care. A parent reported that 'staff are very supportive' and another stated that boarding for her daughter has been 'fantastic'. Staff ensure induction for new boarders is tailored to their needs with a gradual introduction, so that boarders feel comfortable and happy in the residential environment. Education and care staff work closely together and communicate effectively ensuring boarders receive continuity and a consistent approach.

Staff know boarders extremely well. Individual boarding plans link boarders' specific needs to

targets in their individual education plans. Clear strategies guide staff in supporting boarders to achieve their targets and positive outcomes. Boarders, their parents and carers are involved in this process. Staff closely and regularly monitor boarders' progress using a baseline assessment. Findings from this monitoring enable staff to identify specific areas where boarders require more support and highlight achievements to boarders and their families.

Arrangements to meet health needs ensure boarders receive appropriate support. Staff receive training to administer medication safely and to administer first aid. The system for the administration of medication is robust. The school's health and welfare officer ensures comprehensive health plans are in place for boarders with specific medical needs. Boarding staff monitor and implement these plans effectively.

The well-being of boarders has a high priority focusing on providing emotional and psychological support. Boarders have access to a school counsellor and innovative cognitive behavioural therapy designed to meet their specific needs in relation to their learning difficulties. The head of care has established excellent links with the child and adolescent mental health service resulting in prompt referrals when boarders require external specialist interventions to meet their mental health needs. A team of therapists provide additional support for boarders such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. This wide range of individual support for boarders' health needs, together with the advice and guidance available to staff, promotes positive outcomes.

Boarders are enthusiastic about the activities offered. They engage in a wide range of leisure pursuits both on-site and in the local community. One boarder stated 'there is always something to do which we like'. They are encouraged to pursue their individual interests and participate in group activities, which enrich their social experiences and develop their social interaction skills. Boarders are benefitting from the superb new swimming pool on site, learning to swim, be confident in the water and have fun.

Boarders enjoy the food on offer, which is healthy and varied. Boarders describe the food as 'delicious', 'yummy', 'tasty' and 'scrumptious'. Special dietary needs are catered for when necessary, as are specific cultural preferences. Meals are well-ordered, sociable occasions with boarders enjoying each other's company and being helpful and considerate.

Boarders live in spacious, comfortable accommodation, which has recently been refurbished to a high standard. Boarders have been involved in choosing colour schemes and the environment is bright and modern. Boarders have access to quiet areas where they can relax away from the main common room. They have opportunities to personalise their bed space, giving them a sense of belonging and self-identity.

Boarders report they can contact their families easily allowing them to settle into boarding routines. Parents comment that communication with staff is excellent. Staff contact parents and carers promptly if any concerns arise.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The arrangements in place to ensure residential pupils receive safe care and are protected from harm are good. Boarders report they feel safe 'because the staff make us feel safe' and because 'it's like a family'. Parents confirm that they have no concerns regarding boarders' safety.

Safeguarding boarders is a priority. Recruitment processes are robust ensuring that only adults who have been checked as being suitable to work with children are employed. Clear policies and procedures reflect the vulnerabilities of boarders and these, together with up-to-date training, fully support staff to implement effective safeguarding practices. All staff receive appropriate

safeguarding training and know the procedure for reporting any concerns. The school's head teacher is the designated child protection officer and monitors all concerns reported from staff, effectively liaising with local safeguarding agencies when necessary. Staff are confident in their safeguarding role and alert in recognising causes for concern and taking proper action to protect boarders.

There have been no allegations made against staff but procedures are in place to manage any concerns, including prompt referral to the local authority designated officer. There have been no incidents of boarders leaving the residential provision without permission. Close levels of supervision ensure staff know the whereabouts of boarders at all times. Due to the vulnerability of the boarders, staff would immediately report them to the police as missing if they left the site. Although a policy is in place to safeguard boarders if they do leave the school without permission, the policy has not been formally shared with the police and therefore does not confirm that the procedures are compatible with local police protocols.

Boarders report that bullying is not a problem as 'staff sort it out straight away'. On-line safety is addressed through the school curriculum and is reinforced by boarding staff. Specific training for staff in relation to child sexual exploitation is booked for early in the forthcoming term. Boarders are comfortable and relaxed in the company of staff and are open in their communication with staff. They confidently share any worries or concerns and staff are very responsive in allaying their anxieties and apprehensions.

Promoting positive behaviour is a clear strength of the residential provision. Expectations of appropriate behaviour are clear and consistent providing boarders with a supportive and safe environment. The positive, trusting relationships between boarders and staff underpin boarders' safety and allow them to accept the support staff offer. Consequently, the standard of behaviour is excellent. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are infrequent. Staff receive training to manage behaviour and are highly skilled at diffusing and de-escalating potentially difficult situations. Physical intervention is rare and is appropriately recorded. Discussions within staff meetings and supervision are used to inform future strategies in relation to managing challenging behaviour. However, such discussion is not clearly recorded within the formal record of the incident. Staff use consequences for inappropriate behaviour fittingly and in general, they are suitably recorded. However, two sanctions have not been recorded with the required amount of detail to enable managers to monitor the use of this measure effectively. Individual behaviour plans are in place for boarders where necessary outlining specific strategies for staff to protect the welfare and safety of boarders.

Safety of the residential provision is monitored effectively. A range of health and safety checks and fire checks are carried out regularly, including fire drills for boarders. Risk assessments have recently been reviewed and up-dated and all health and safety policies are currently being reviewed. These comprehensive systems help to protect boarders and staff.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. Managers share a common understanding of the ethos of the school, which they communicate effectively to boarders, staff and parents. Led by a committed and experienced head of care, the residential staff team provide boarders with support that enables them to make significant progress, which impacts positively on their learning. Senior managers work closely together to ensure the residential provision is fully integrated into the school and is central in advancing boarders' academic, personal, social and emotional development.

Well-trained staff continually strive to enhance the welfare of boarders. Boarders benefit from clear well-established structures, routines and boundaries, which contribute to them feeling safe.

Staff know the boarders and their families very well, enabling them to provide highly individualised support and guidance. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisals. Communication and information sharing amongst staff is excellent, resulting in prompt intervention to support boarders and ensuring consistent, high standards of care.

The head of care and the head teacher regularly monitor the residential provision, ensuring the service continues to provide high standards of care and opportunities for boarders to develop and make progress. Monitoring visits by two governors take place half-termly. They consider key records, meet boarders and assess the environment. Their report further underpins the monitoring and evaluation of the provision to maintain high standards. A thorough self-evaluation has been undertaken of the boarding provision resulting in a development plan to maintain and improve the boarding provision. The service is continually developing to meet boarders' and their parents' needs. An example is the 'Supporting Families' course led by the head of care and the health and welfare officer. A group of parents and carers meet, with involvement of their children, to foster a greater understanding of their difficulties and the impact on family relationships. Managers have remedied shortfalls identified at the previous inspection, demonstrating their commitment to continually improving the residential provision.

There have been no complaints since the last inspection. Parents report that communication with staff is excellent and that staff are available to discuss any matter concerning the boarder. Consequently, matters are resolved promptly without resort to the formal complaints procedure. Boarders are confident in approaching staff knowing that their concerns will be dealt with promptly. A boarders forum provides opportunities for boarders to put forward their views, suggestion and requests and these views are discussed at senior managers meetings and decisions communicated to boarders. Such consultation processes allow boarders to gain confidence and self-esteem knowing their views are appreciated.

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

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| Unique reference number | 137934 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC023097 |
| DfE registration number | 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.

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| Type of school | |
| Number of boarders on roll | 17 |
| Gender of boarders | Girls |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 18 |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jinna Male |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 11/07/2013 |
| Telephone number | 01494 673740 |
| Email address | jmale@bucksgfl.org.uk |

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