

Alfriston School

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

Inspection dates	09/11/2015 to 11/11/2015	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Boarders thoroughly enjoy their residential experience. They engage fully in the life of the residential community. Within a nurturing and very supportive environment, boarders appreciate the family-like atmosphere and see it as 'a second home' and where 'it's fun'.
- Boarders thrive and make significant progress from their starting points in their independence and social skills. Through extremely positive, responsive relationships with staff, they are developing self-confidence and self-esteem knowing they are valued as individuals. These trusting relationships enable them to accept the support staff offer and make excellent progress.
- Enthusiastic and committed staff know each boarder exceptionally well, understand their specific needs and implement successful strategies to promote positive outcomes. Comprehensive plans ensure staff provide consistent care. Staff are continuously thinking about how they can improve their care to support boarders' personal, social, emotional and academic development.
- Highly effective leadership and management ensures all boarders' needs are met and that the provision continues to improve to provide opportunities for boarders to maximise their potential and advance their future life chances.
- The safety of boarders is at the heart of all practice. Boarders feel safe knowing that staff protect them from harm. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. All staff understand their safeguarding role and implement appropriate action to protect the welfare of boarders.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that individual risk assessments for boarders clearly record the measures to reduce the risk of harm
- Ensure boarders are aware of the independent person, their role and how to contact them with any concerns.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the head teacher, head of care, head of well-being, residential staff, business director, site manager, catering manager, governor, human resources officer and boarders. Two evenings were spent in the residential accommodation observing staff and boarders' interactions, routines and activities. The inspector joined boarders for two meals. Policies, records and individual case files were examined. Information was gathered from Ofsted on-line surveys in relation to the views of boarders and staff. Two parents were spoken to by telephone.

Inspection team

Jan Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Alfriston School is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield. It received academy status in March 2012, with a sports specialism since 2009. It is a day and weekly boarding residential 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 145 pupils of which 20 are boarders residing for three nights during termtime, 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.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Boarders thoroughly enjoy their experience in the residential provision. They commented 'it's fun', 'I love it', scored it 10 out of 10 and could not think of anything to improve it apart from 'I'd like to board on a Saturday'. Within a nurturing and very supportive environment, boarders appreciate the family-like atmosphere which provides them with a sense of safety and security.

Boarders are making excellent progress. A parent commented that their child 'has blossomed at school and boarding' and has made 'amazing progress'. Boarders are demonstrating progress in self-care skills, behaving appropriately in social situations and developing organisational and time management skills. Importantly, they are widening their friendship groups and learning how to deal with conflict, overcome friendship difficulties and maintain peer relationships.

Individualised, consistent support enables boarders to have confidence in staff, accept the support they offer and enjoy each other's company. Boarders flourish in an environment where they are valued as individuals and where staff appreciate their views. A parent remarked 'it is the best school in the world'.

Strong and effective leadership and management and the commitment of the stable staff team ensure boarders' specific needs are met. Their welfare and well-being is at the heart of practice with all staff implementing strategies to promote their development and protect them from harm.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

All boarders have individual plans which identify their specific needs, targets are linked to their individual education plan and promote their development. Staff know each of the young people extremely well and continuously implement supportive, nurturing and sensitive strategies to foster positive outcomes. A parent commented that staff 'definitely meet her child's needs' and added that the head of care is 'like a second mummy' to her child.

Staff continuously review boarders' progress. The head of care is introducing a new assessment tool, comparing the boarder's ability to complete daily living tasks in the residential provision with their abilities at home. Based on detailed assessments by staff, parents and carers and a comparison of the results, staff have a more accurate evaluation of the targeted support each boarder requires to develop and use their independence skills both at school and at home.

Staff are exceptionally caring, patient and tolerant, building trusting relationships with boarders. Consequently, their anxiety levels reduce and they benefit from staff support in managing their day-to-day lives. Additional support is available to promote their emotional and psychological well-being from a school counsellor and innovative cognitive behaviour therapy programmes. The head of well-being has a pivotal role in promoting the physical and psychological health of boarders. Through close liaison with families and staff, she ensures they have specific health plans to meet their medical needs and they receive the specialist support necessary to address their emotional health. Effective liaison with external health specialists such as the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) enables boarders to receive appropriate support. Collaborative relationships throughout the school ensure all staff implement a consistent approach to supporting boarders throughout their day.

Staff organise structured evening activities with the aim of providing opportunities for boarders to relax and enjoy their leisure time whilst at the same time promoting their independence and social skills. Community experiences are an important aspect of helping them develop appropriate group skills and become more confident in managing social situations. Boarders enjoy their activities. One remarked that 'there are lots of good activities and things to do'. Off-site activities include swimming at a local leisure pool, supermarket shopping, bowling and raft building. On-site activities include computer club, gym, a dance project and informal, impromptu pampering sessions with staff helping boarders try different hair styles and paint their nails.

Boarders know their views and opinions are important and that staff listen. One commented 'we like talking to staff'. In addition to individual and informal interaction with staff, a half-termly boarders' forum allows them to propose additional items to improve their experience, suggest new activities and discuss changes in routines. Staff provide them with feedback, demonstrating that staff take their proposals seriously, thus developing their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Recently refurbished boarding accommodation is comfortable, bright and modern. The catering manager provides healthy, nutritious meals with provision for special dietary needs. A boarder described the food as 'yummy and the kitchen does a choice if we don't like something'.

Boarders, parents and carers report that arrangements for contact are effective.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Managers and staff are highly effective in protecting boarders and keeping them safe. A group of boarders all replied in unison 'yes' when asked if they feel safe in the residential provision, 'because staff look after us'. Boarders are very confident that they can approach any member of staff with their concerns. One boarder remarked 'staff listen and help you sort out any issue'. Although there is an independent visitor available for boarders to contact, they are unaware that there is a person, other than staff, they can talk to if they have concerns.

All staff are acutely aware of the vulnerability of boarders. They correctly focus on developing boarders' awareness of dangers they may face and how to keep themselves safe. Staff are confident in their safeguarding role and alert to any concerns. They are diligent in informing managers of such matters and there is a robust procedure for considering any issues affecting young people's welfare. The head teacher is the designated safeguarding lead and she has established effective links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board to implement appropriate action. Staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training that includes child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation.

Extremely positive relationships between boarders and staff underpin successful behaviour management strategies. Through thoughtful, sensitive and consistent support from staff, boarders develop a sense of safety, protection and trust enabling them to respond to the support staff offer. Staff have high expectations of boarders who respond well to the clear structure, routines and boundaries offered and develop an understanding of appropriate behaviour.

Staff receive training to manage incidents of challenging behaviour safely. They are highly skilled in responding to boarders' emotional needs in order to de-escalate potentially difficult situations. Behaviour plans clearly outline specific strategies and guidance for staff to provide effective support. Staff use physical intervention as a last resort and such measures are uncommon. Incidents are well-recorded and closely monitored by managers to ensure safe practice. Constructive discussion with the boarder and staff following the incident demonstrate a reflective approach enabling staff to adopt a 'lessons learned' approach to inform future strategies. A member of staff remarked that 'communication between the team is excellent and they are always discussing how they can meet boarders' emotional needs, understand their behaviour and implement strategies to effectively support them'. Risk assessments outline the risks associated with boarders but do not clearly record the measures to be taken to protect them.

Boarders acknowledge that they have disagreements at times with each other but there is no bullying. One spoke articulately about staff helping them deal with conflict among their peers. Staff are vigilant for any signs and say they 'nip any possible bullying before it becomes an issue'. Staff continuously support boarders in appropriate social interaction, assisting them in developing social skills, respect and tolerance of each other.

There have been no incidents of boarders leaving the premises without permission. An appropriate policy is in place to safeguard them if such an event occurs and this conforms to local police protocols.

Health and safety at the school has a high priority. Comprehensive systems for routine checks protect boarders. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied including regular fire drills. Robust recruitment processes safeguard boarders from unsuitable adults working with them.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Highly effective leadership and management of the residential provision ensures that staff work within an ethos where they treat all boarders as individuals and prepare them for adult life. Energetic and enthusiastic staff, led by a committed and experienced head of care, constantly strive through positive praise and encouragement to build boarders' confidence, self-esteem, independence and social skills. Boarders are making significant progress in these areas with a positive impact on their learning.

The head of care works collaboratively with the school's senior management team to support the boarding staff team in promoting boarders' positive outcomes. Managers are creative and innovative, continuously looking for opportunities to further develop the provision so that boarders flourish, achieve their goals and maximise their potential. Examples include the introduction of cognitive behaviour therapy and a new assessment tool.

The stable, well-trained staff team works closely with the head of care to implement individualised strategies for boarders. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal to improve their practice and identify specific training and development needs. In addition to these formal processes, the staff team continuously analyse boarders' progress to ensure they are providing effective support.

Working with families is a particular strength. A parent commented that the head of care 'is an excellent support for the family'. The head of care and the head of well-being liaise closely with parents and carers to ensure individual needs are identified and met. Parents report extremely positively on the benefits of their effective relationships with staff through 'excellent' contact with managers and an on-going dialogue to promote their child's progress. Consequently, there have been no complaints. One parent reported that the head of care attends external agency meetings with them and thus has an excellent understanding of the child's specific needs. Managers lead 'Supporting Families' courses for parents and carers to help them develop their understanding of their child's difficulties, the impact on family relationships and assist them in developing practical strategies to support their home life.

Regular monitoring by the head of care and the head teacher ensures the provision 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 resulting in recommendations for improvement when considered necessary. Changes to the organisation of the homework club as a result of their suggestion has improved the effectiveness of support for boarders during this time. A focused development plan demonstrates that leaders clearly recognise areas for improvement. The Head of care collaborates with those in a similar role in other schools to keep abreast of current developments in the sector. Points of improvement identified at the previous inspection

have been met.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

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.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	20
Gender of boarders	Girls
Age range of boarders	11 to18
Headteacher	Jinna Male
Date of previous boarding inspection	15/12/2014
Telephone number	01494 673740
Email address	jinna.male@alfristonschool.com

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