

Alfriston School

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

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| Inspection dates | 16/01/2017 to 18/01/2017 | |
| The overall experiences and progress of children and young people | Good | 2 |
| The quality of care and support | Good | 2 |
| How well children and young people are protected | Good | 2 |
| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Boarders are making good progress across a range of developmental areas, some of which is exceptional, particularly their ability to understand and to communicate feelings, which leads to better management of strong emotions.
- Boarders are very positive about their experience of being in the residential provision and they see that it has helped them to become more confident and capable young people.
- The boarding staff are very well trained in safeguarding and managing challenging behaviours and they have built strong relationships with boarders and their families. The staff have confidence in their own and their colleagues' knowledge and skills, ensuring that they are very effective in the promotion of pupils' welfare.
- The school provides excellent facilities for learning and recreational activities, including those outside of normal school hours.
- Boarders are afforded plenty of opportunities to voice their wishes and feelings, on which staff act whenever possible.
- The school has good links with external agencies, with which they liaise well to ensure that pupils' physical and mental health is maintained, their emotional well-being is promoted and they are safeguarded.
- Leaders and managers are alert to the developing needs of boarders and ensure that staff are equipped with the training, understanding and support to meet them.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the logs of sanctions and the use of reasonable force include the date when the record is made, in order to evidence that it has been made within 24 hours of the incident occurring.
- Ensure that the logs of sanctions and the use of reasonable force include the date on which children have been given the opportunity to discuss incidents with a relevant adult and a reason given if children decline to have their views recorded.
- Ensure that staff members take the opportunity to explain to pupils the reason for actions that they take when assisting them to learn independence skills, so that young people understand when they might need to do the same.
- Ensure that the leaflet provided for young people to help them to understand how to make a complaint complies with the complaints policy and gives information about how to obtain the help of an advocate.
- Ensure that the reports of governors' monitoring visits give an explicit evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and of whether they are safeguarded, and that they are dated to evidence that they are provided within two weeks of the visit being undertaken.
- Ensure that the condition of the boarding facilities is consistently maintained so that any deficiency that detracts from the homely atmosphere of the accommodation is addressed in a timely manner.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. The inspector met with boarders, the school council, headteacher, head of care, head of well-being, residential staff, site manager, governors, administration officer and office manager. Two evenings were spent in the residential accommodation observing staff's and boarders' interactions, routines and activities. The inspector joined boarders for two meals and observed meetings between residential staff and a pastoral meeting of the school. Policies, logs and individual case files were examined. Information was gathered from Ofsted on-line surveys, and parents were spoken to by telephone or in person. The views of other professionals involved in the care of children who board were sought by telephone.

Inspection team

Chris Peel

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, and has had a sports specialism since 2009. Alfriston School is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls who have moderate learning difficulties and who are 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 147 pupils, of whom 17 are boarders residing for three nights during each week, from Monday to Wednesday. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. 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 extensive school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings, and include a swimming pool and mini-gym.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

All boarders spoken to commented on how much they appreciate the opportunity of being in the residential provision. All could say how they thought boarding had helped them, particularly in increasing their confidence - expressing their wishes and feelings better and being more able to make friends – and developing their independence skills, such as personal care and looking after their environment.

Some of this progress is remarkable. Examples include increasing empathy: one girl who had been hit by another was able to understand that personal circumstances meant that her peer was feeling stressed so she offered to speak to her to offer sympathy. Another pupil was able to express how emotions feel like a firework going off. She was then able to draw a firework when she felt like this and now writes down the names of the emotions. This provides her with more control over her feelings and allows staff to know her emotional state and so react appropriately.

Parents and professionals agree that boarders are making progress; examples given included: 'choosing clothes and dressing herself'; 'buying things for herself'; 'improved listening'; and 'being much more social in a non-family environment'.

Some pupils experience difficulties and pressures in their own families, and boarding is a place where they have some respite from this, and their daily lives are more structured. Staff provide boarders with support for their education, by encouraging school attendance and, through a successful homework club, support the completion of homework and promote wider learning.

The boarders enjoy the range of activities available to them; favourites range from doing jigsaw puzzles to working out in the school's mini-gym. Other activities observed during the inspection included: aqua-aerobics, which provided a fun physical exercise, and a shopping trip in which pupils were helped to work out what they could buy with the money available to them, to think about which snack might be the healthiest and to make their own purchases.

The quality of care and support

Good

The school provides plenty of opportunities for pupils to express their views, including the school council and a residents' meeting. Members of the council, including a boarding representative, gave examples of things that they have been able to influence, such as obtaining a new play equipment box and the repair of benches.

All boarding pupils think that they can approach any member of staff for guidance and support. This helps to justify the school's policy of not having a key-worker system, but allowing children to choose whom they speak to. Individual staff do, however, have the responsibility to attend particular pupils' meetings and to keep documentation up to date. One pupil described boarding staff as 'fantastic'.

Pupils referred for the residential provision are sensitively helped to make the move; the head of care makes a home visit to explain what can be expected and leaves written information. The child then makes visits, only staying overnight when they feel

comfortable doing so. Although much of the application process is out of the hands of the school, explanations of how it works have not always been helpful: one parent expressed frustration with the lack of information about progress or the sharing of assessments on which decisions are based.

Placement plans, consisting of relevant targets from education, health and care plans, are in place for each pupil, as are individual risk assessments and health plans. One parent said he had 'spent quite a bit time helping to put them together', but none of the placement plans sampled had been signed by a parent and some by no one at all.

Staff regularly review boarders' progress and adjust targets as necessary, in line with improvements made. An assessment tool, which gathers information about the boarder's ability to complete daily living tasks in the residential provision and at home, identifies skills that pupils demonstrate in one setting and not the other. The intention is to devise strategies that will enable the transfer of ability from boarding to home and vice versa.

The head of welfare has developed an innovative approach to help pupils to identify and manage feelings, which is based on cognitive behavioural approaches. This is helping pupils to think about their emotions and to consider strategies to manage them. It is proving to be a highly effective approach for boarding pupils.

Older boarders have the opportunity to live in a semi-independence flat if they demonstrate the capacity to benefit from the additional responsibility and learning afforded by it. Staff assist boarders in the flat to prepare meals, shop and clean, but they do much without oversight. Current residents relish this facility, although previously not all have been able to maintain levels of competency acquired in the main provision without the supervision provided there.

The school undoubtedly assists many pupils to increase their independence skills, but if this is to be maximised then opportunities to help them to understand why and how things are done need to be taken. During the inspection, a staff member made a decision that food needed to be cooked for longer than instructions on the packet suggested, but did not explain how she arrived at this decision or how pupils might judge whether similar food was safely cooked themselves.

Almost the entire boarding premises have undergone recent refurbishment that enhances the enjoyment of boarders' stays; they were consulted on the colour schemes used. A conspicuous exception to this otherwise high standard of accommodation is the only bathroom not to have been renovated, due to plans for building work that will remodel the entire area. This has become an unattractive room with 'blown' paintwork and a potentially dangerous broken bath panel. The site manager swiftly replaced the panel during the inspection. Managers and governors believe that the damage had only recently been sustained as it had not been noted in site inspections, although the unsightly windowsills had.

Boarders take their meals in the school's canteen, and the great majority enjoy the food there. The chef consults pupils about menus through the school council. The food's standard agency has awarded the kitchen five stars for food hygiene.

Several pupils take medication on a regular basis, and boarding staff liaise well with the head of welfare over the administration of prescribed and 'over the counter' medicines to ensure continuity throughout the day in school and boarding. This avoids the potential, for example, to give paracetamol in both settings, within the recommended time period

for one dose. Staff keep meticulous records of administration.

Controlled medication is stored in a locked cabinet in which there are locked cash boxes for each boarder's medicine. However, the keys to those boxes were kept in the cabinet alongside them, negating the reason for having this level of security. The arrangement was improved during the inspection. The fire door to the duty room in which medication is kept was propped open at the start of the inspection.

Staffing levels provide sufficient care and supervision to boarders; adults known to the boarders from elsewhere in the school cover any absences. Two members of staff sleep in on the nights when pupils are in the boarding provision.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Pupils believe that they are safe while living in the boarding provision. They reported that, although there are occasions when they fall out, there is no sustained bullying, and staff in boarding are effective at diffusing incidents. In comparison, they have experienced some bullying in the school day, although it is no longer occurring. Members of the school council thought that the practice of most teachers to tell pupils to sort things out themselves made matters worse.

Pupils are aware of a newly appointed independent person for them to speak to, but, when spoken to during the inspection, were not sure how they could contact her and did not think that they would. However, the visitor comes in at least once a term, and did so during the inspection, so that the children get to know her better, and this facilitates communication. A notice is displayed that gives her contact details.

Examination of recruitment records showed that safer recruitment checks were not conducted when the independent person was appointed and that there were additional omissions in other files. These include not recording the verification of all references, not obtaining a copy of a professional qualification and not having a written agreement with an adult living on site who is not employed by the school. The latter two shortfalls were rectified during the inspection. There is no indication that any pupil has been exposed to an actual risk because of these omissions. However, there is a lack of effective monitoring of recruitment procedures, meaning that measures to protect children have not been consistently applied.

A recently appointed site manager has put together robust processes and records for maintaining the property. He ensures that all necessary monitoring procedures are in place and that any remedial work is carried out. He had been unaware of the need to have a five-year electrical installation check, but was able to produce a current certificate. Logs of fire evacuation drills do not include the time of day when they occur, so they can readily be seen to have taken place within boarding hours and at different times. They do, however, appear in minutes of health and safety meetings.

A fire blanket in the kitchen of the independence flat had not been re-fixed to a wall, following the refurbishment, but left on the floor, resulting in it not being easily accessible in the event of an emergency.

Staff are very aware that pupils who attend the school, and particularly those who board, are among the groups who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

There are clear procedures for staff to follow if they have worries about any child. These are effective in ensuring that informed decisions are made about the steps to be taken in response to concerns. Strong relationships with children and parents mean that, on more than one occasion, school staff are the first people they tell about problems that they are experiencing. The school has good relationships with children's services and cooperates well with the service to support families, particularly those who have children subject to child in need plans.

The school has robust safeguarding policies that underpin this sound practice. Staff also seek to ensure that pupils are aware of the steps to take to keep safe on line. This includes an initiative involving the school council undertaking a questionnaire with peers to gather information about knowledge and experience, which they will use to disseminate advice. The school has also brought in a charity that specialises in combating child sexual exploitation to work with pupils. The school has an e-safety policy that describes the phenomenon of cyberbullying, but the bullying policy itself does not give any guidance to staff or indicate where they may find more information.

Boarders have not absconded from the school, so other training in safeguarding matters, such as child sexual exploitation, and in managing challenging behaviour has taken priority over dealing with missing episodes. However, staff are aware of the action that they should take should such a situation arise.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The staff team is led by an experienced head of care, who is keen to develop both her own skills and those of her staff to better meet the needs of boarders. She has identified training needs and sourced a course to meet them, so that the team is equipped with the knowledge to deal confidently with issues that have emerged over recent months. The head of care has also coordinated a network of the heads of care of similar establishments to share experiences and good practice.

The school has established good links with other agencies, particularly the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, for training purposes and advice, and the child and adolescent mental health service and school nursing service to provide support, advice and care of pupils' physical and emotional health needs.

Other staff in the school work collaboratively with their colleagues in the boarding provision, and regular meetings ensure that they have close liaison so that pupils benefit from adults sharing a common understanding of their circumstances and a consistent approach to their care.

The head of care provides supervision for boarding staff, normally every half term, although those due in the second half of the autumn term have been missed for the past two years. An effective way of delivering formal support to staff in the busy run up to Christmas has yet to be found. The minutes of sessions do not record reflective supervision practice, but this is very evident in the notes made of debriefs following the implementation of reasonable force. These demonstrate that managers and staff are committed to finding the most effective way to help pupils to manage their behaviour and keep safe.

Some records of sanctions and the use of reasonable force lack detail about antecedents

and occasionally about the incident that resulted in a measure of control, for example, referring to 'pushing the boundaries' rather than specifying the behaviour. This makes it difficult to identify patterns and trends unless the reader of the logs is personally aware of what happened. The date on which the record was made and when pupils and staff are spoken to are not recorded in the log, so it is not possible to identify whether timescales specified in the national minimum standards (NMS) have been adhered to. Staff frequently record the views of pupils about sanctions and physical interventions (often signed by the child), showing that they have the opportunity to learn from the incidents. Sometimes this section is left blank with no explanation. The headteacher monitors every incident, providing a good oversight of the practice in the boarding facility.

School governors take an active interest in boarding provision and make regular visits, most of which are unannounced. They speak to staff, review records and speak to pupils informally when the opportunity arises. Their reports record observations and comments, but do not explicitly evaluate the effectiveness of care or whether they believe that children are appropriately safeguarded. The reports state the date of the governor's visit but not the date on which they are written, so it is not possible to evidence whether reports are provided within the timescales set out in the NMS.

The head of care has produced an assessment of compliance with the NMS, which has gone to governors, but an annual review of the operation and resourcing of the welfare provision of boarding pupils had not been written. As a result of this being raised in the inspection, the headteacher produced a thorough and well-evaluated review in preparation for a forthcoming governors' meeting.

The school has an appropriate complaints policy, although it does not specifically address complaints made by pupils. No complaints have been received about boarding, but a parent said that he had decided not to make one, as he was concerned about the potential impact on his daughter. The school has a leaflet about how to complain, but the brief section for pupils does not comply with the policy, specifically by not giving information about what children can do if they are not satisfied with a response. In addition, it does not explain the role that an advocate may play in assisting them to make a complaint or how to contact an advocacy service should they wish to.

The head of care and boarding staff promote excellent relationships between themselves and families, including regular contact through telephone calls and emails, attending relevant meetings and running a parenting course to help parents and carers to learn strategies that they can use at home to manage behaviour and to promote their children's development.

A development plan is in place that has assisted the head of care to make improvements to the running of boarding. This includes addressing the points of improvement made at the last inspection. She has selected a new independent person, whom the children knew from a previous role, and who has the skills and experience to be able to relate to them. Individual risk assessments identify strategies to reduce hazards and are being further developed to have a scoring system that quantifies the level of risk before and after strategies are put in place.

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 exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact that 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 that children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress. |

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 | Residential special school |
| Number of boarders on roll | 17 |
| Gender of boarders | Girls |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 18 |
| Headteacher | Jinna Male |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 09/11/2015 |
| Telephone number | 01494 673740 |
| Email address | jinna.male@alfristonschool.com |

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