

# Alfriston School

Alfriston School, Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 2TS  
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special 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 residential special school for girls who have moderate learning difficulties, aged 11–18 years. The school can also help girls to who have emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. There are 150 pupils, of whom 20 access the residential provision for three nights during each week, from Monday to Wednesday. All young people have a statement of special educational needs. The residential 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 residential young people to enjoy during the evenings, and include a swimming pool and mini-gym.

**Inspection dates:** 21 to 23 November 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account**                      **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected                      good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers                      outstanding

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 16 January 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people who access the residential provision are at the centre of all practice, and thrive during their time at the school. Individualised plans ensure that young people's social, emotional and educational needs are met in a consistent manner. Young people make measurable progress in their social and independence skills as a direct result of accessing the residential provision.
- Young people say they feel safe in the residential provision. Staff have an excellent understanding of why young people may feel anxious or upset, and do all they can to teach them skills and approaches which reduce their anxiety. The school is not risk averse and young people are able to take risks commensurate with their skills and abilities. Staff will challenge young people to try new activities and learn new skills, without causing them distress.
- Disability is not a barrier to progress within the school. The residential provision is a caring and inclusive environment where all young people are able to make their views, ideas and feelings known. They are supported individually to ensure that they are heard, particularly in statutory reviews.
- The whole-school approach towards meeting the needs of young people is a particular strength. Joint working across therapy, residential and education staff ensures consistency in approach, but also collective input and approaches when new or concerning behaviours emerge.
- The head of care is an asset to the school. She is keen to continuously improve services and experiences for young people, and is supportive to the small team of experienced staff. The residential provision is warm and welcoming and staff clearly enjoy their roles.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Recruitment is sound and all checks are completed for all staff who work in the school. The independent visitor has a letter of assurance on file. She is head of care in a local residential special school that is not within the same local authority. It would be prudent to have the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) number and references held on site. Additionally, the office manager is yet to have safer recruitment training within the agreed timescales.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure a copy of the independent listener's references and DBS number are held within the school.
- Ensure staff training is completed within agreed time frames.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Young people thrive as a result of the individualised care the residential staff provide. Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's differences, skills and abilities. They are not afraid to stretch young people beyond their comfort zones, but do so while considering their vulnerabilities and physical and emotional difficulties. Young people who require extra support and attention are prioritised, but not to the detriment of those who are physically or emotionally more able. The staff and young people are a team and staff encourage young people to help those they share dormitories with.

Residential staff have formed extremely strong relationships with parents and carers, as well as with key professionals in the young people's lives. They remain in regular contact with social workers, health professionals and other external professionals as needed. Joint working within the school is seamless. This means that the residential provision is a genuine asset to young people's lives and learning experiences. Occupational health programmes and speech and language programmes are continued into residential time, with staff sharing responsibility in order to aid progress. Young people were seen to be learning how to tie shoelaces and mastering zips, with great perseverance and corresponding success.

Accessing the residential provision has provided many young people with the safe space they need to be able to relax and prepare for education the next day. In addition, they have support with homework while having the opportunity to improve their social skills and friendships. One young person said that they share a dormitory with 'their friends' and another said it was their 'second home'. Parents are equally as enthusiastic, with one saying that it was the 'best thing that has happened for my daughter' and another enthusing about how confident her daughter has become in social situations.

Young people make exceptional progress in most aspects of their lives, such as developing relationships and being able to undertake self-care and domestic tasks, but also in finer skills, such as reducing the number of times they carry out ritualistic routines and behaviours and increasing their confidence in using public transport or money. Young people are enabled to evaluate their own progress with staff through recognised assessment tools.

Young people are listened to and have the opportunity to share their views and ideas formally through residential meetings or ad hoc open discussion. Residential meeting minutes show responses to individual ideas and what action will be taken, including when it is not appropriate to make changes. Their views are also essential for statutory reviews of care and education, during which evidence of how they have shared their ideas on their successes and future goals is made available to all professionals involved.

Young people have access to services on site to improve their emotional well-being, including the well-being team, a counsellor and a psychology student. This has proved to be invaluable. Young people benefit greatly from having the time and space to explore how they are feeling. Specialist staff provide them with tools and strategies for coping with their concerns and worries, including with friendships, transitions and anxiety. These approaches are shared with residential staff to ensure that there is a consistent approach, and that support is available across the school. When necessary referrals are made to external agencies to gain specialist input for a young person, the head of well-being has extensive links in the community to support this.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Young people's actions and demeanour show that they feel safe in the residential area. Young people were seen approaching staff with their worries from home or the school day, and talking through how they felt. Young people's risks and vulnerabilities are clearly identified and understood by those who care for them. The staff are not risk averse and young people are afforded the opportunity to be as independent as possible. The whole-school approach to meeting young people's needs means that all staff in the school know how to respond, should a young person display new behaviours or anxiety and distress. Staff are confident in their roles and young people feel safe and secure as a result.

Staff training is regular and robust. All staff are confident about what to do if they are concerned for a young person's safety or well-being. The head of care is trained in recognising domestic violence, which has been of great use when supporting young people and their parents. Procedures within the school mean that all staff are able to share any changes in behaviour, discussions, or observations they make with the designated safeguarding lead or their deputy in their absence. Responses are swift, and clearly documented. These include referrals to partner agencies such as children's services and health specialists. Senior leaders will continue to follow up referrals if they do not feel there has been a suitable response.

Behaviour is very well managed and staff are extremely skilled in de-escalation and reconciliation. Plans are detailed, and identify how to communicate with and support young people who are upset, distressed or displaying unwanted behaviours. Joint working with the well-being team ensures that plans and responses are consistent and take into account the young person's understanding. There have been no restraints in the residential provision in the period since the last inspection. Joint approaches across the school mean that young people are provided with creative ways of managing their concerns through visual prompts, such as posters they have made or cue cards. Young people can see the head of care during the school day if they have struggled in lessons or with friendships. She always makes time for them and they are afforded the space in the residential area to calm down and relax before returning to lessons, or to work there if they feel they are unable to be with

their peers.

Issues that arise outside of school are responded to with the same rigour as those that come up during the school day. Staff were seen to support young people who had been in disagreements with friends; they responded appropriately to these situations, including changing dormitories where necessary. Young people say that they feel safe in the school, and that any issues of bullying are dealt with. They also recognise that they need to learn how to manage issues within their friendship groups as a skill for later life.

Recruitment is robust in the main, but the office manager had not had safer recruitment training by July 2017 as the post-inspection action plan suggests. The independent visitor has a letter of assurance on file. She is head of care in a local residential special school that is not within the same local authority. No DBS number or references are held on this site. However, this is not deemed to have a discernible impact on the welfare of residential students.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The residential provision is positive, and has a warm and welcoming air. Staff clearly enjoy their roles and want to be there. The head of care is extremely committed to her role, and is continuously seeking to improve the quality of experiences for young people through networking with the heads of care for similar schools, and regularly evaluating the service against the national minimum standards and the latest Ofsted evaluation schedule. She leads by example and all staff have extremely high aspirations for all of the young people they care for.

Young people are central to the planning and running of the residential provision. Their needs are the priority and their views are deemed essential for improving the service provided. Plans for young people are robust. They detail actions and goals, including the young people's views. Joint working across the school results in consistency, but also results in a high degree of scrutiny of young people's progress, no matter how small. The head of care is in the process of amalgamating plans into 'all about me' booklets, to hold information more succinctly in one place.

Leaders and managers in the residential provision and the wider school are constantly sourcing external research to improve the outcomes for young people. Psychology students use their time in the school to complete studies for their dissertations and others within the wider staff team produce original research, in addition to disseminating what they have learned through specific training and seminars.

Innovative approaches are used within the school and the residential provision, with leaders continuously seeking new ways to support, educate and stimulate young people. Leaders are involved in external groups so that they can learn and share positive practice from others who work in similar educational establishments. The use

of psychology students plays a key role in formulating new plans and approaches to support and care. Approaches used within the residential provision and the school are worthy of dissemination to other similar services. Senior staff, specifically the head of care and the head of well-being, regularly attend specific forums to share their practice with other schools.

Staff benefit from regular, challenging supervision. The notes from this refer to goals agreed in appraisal, but also to the young people for whom the staff are key workers. Newly appointed staff have a thorough induction period, with fortnightly supervision. The most recently appointed member of staff said that she felt well supported and welcomed into the team.

Governors provide a high level of scrutiny of all parts of the school, with a specific governor responsible for the residential provision and safeguarding. They visit half-termly in pairs, and ensure that there is always a female governor available. Reports are well structured and constructively critical. The governors follow up any concerns noted during their visits, in addition to sharing their views with the governing body and senior leadership team. The head of care produces a detailed review of the residential provisions, and was observed presenting this thorough analysis to governors during inspection.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC023097

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Jinna Male

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01494 673 740

**Email address:** jinna.male@alfristonschool.com

## **Inspector**

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector



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