

Valence School

Inspection report for residential special school

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Valence school is situated off the A25 Westerham Road and is set within 40 acres of park and woodland in the Darenth Valley. The school caters for pupils aged between five and 19 years, as day and boarding pupils, (boarding can commence at age eight), who have physical disabilities and / or complex medical needs. Many pupils have additional special needs in respect of learning, communication and social - emotional development. Boarding accommodation comprises of four separate areas and due to its inadequacies, a planning application for a complete rebuild is currently underway. Boarders receive an holistic package of care from teaching, residential, nursing and therapy teams.

Summary

This announced inspection was conducted over two days. Time was spent touring the premises, interviewing key personnel, including boarders and scrutinising written records. Surveys completed by boarders, parents and other stakeholders have also been used to inform this report. Whilst the premises remains inadequate, the Kent County Council is in the process of submitting its planning application for a complete rebuild of residential provision. A process is also underway to increase staffing levels within the residential provision and this has already begun.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

An increase to residential staffing levels also coincides with improvements to the induction process for newly appointed residential staff. This effectively means that newcomers spend their first two weeks as completely supernumerary, allowing them the time to meet all school personnel and departments, before being considered as full time members of the team. The introduction of the post of Residential Education and Skills for Life Coordinator brings improved monitoring of this provision for boarders. The new toilet and changing block has drastically reduced the queues for all pupils requiring personal care at break times during the school day and the fixed screens on Jubilee Unit provide improved privacy.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is inadequate.

The primary health needs of boarders are being met. An orthopaedic surgeon and paediatric neurologist from Guy's Hospital hold necessary appointments at the school. This causes minimal disruption for individual pupils, their parents and the care team. Residential care staff follow specific guidance and instruction from professionals, such as physiotherapy exercises and eating programmes. In some cases there is no clear reference within care files as to specific dietary requirements. This is further exacerbated by the limited amount of dietetic input being received by the school. A dentist conducts a surgery once a fortnight, as does an optician. There are also visits from a chiropodist and community paediatrician. Pupils have access to a local GP, who visits on a weekly basis and they can choose to consult with a male or female doctor. Nursing and therapy input is provided through the local area Primary Care Trust (PCT). The overall amount of nursing input provided has reduced since the last inspection. Nursing input is provided from 7am until 9.30pm from Monday to Friday. There is currently a reliance upon

using agency nurses as there are not enough within the school in post. There is no separate administrative support for the nursing team and currently, no clear clinical line management structure. Nurses administer medication throughout the week, however there is no nursing provision whenever the school is open at weekends. At these times, residential care staff administer any necessary medication, although they have not received accredited external training to do so. Similarly, those nurses in post say they do not have the time available to teach the care staff or the boarders themselves to safely self administer their own medication. This restricts their independence. There is no formal structure or process for emergency on call nursing provision, however, the practice of those in post is that they ensure they are available and can be contacted. There is a clear health and medication policy and procedure in place and the residential care team is familiar with this. Care staff know the children well and take immediate appropriate action when a child is unwell. All individual epilepsy protocols have recently been updated and all residential care staff are familiar with these. A new Head of Health Care has recently been appointed and is due to commence imminently. This post is joint funded by the Local Education Authority and the Primary Care Trust. The post holder will line manage the entire therapy team and will be line managed herself by the Head Teacher. The school advised that her primary task will be to conduct a full review of the current inadequate provision. The catering team continues to consult with all pupils with regards the weekly menus. The main lunch time provision includes hot and cold, as well as vegetarian options. Both dining areas are functional, though lacking in terms of space and comfort. Student independence is restricted. Many students require physical assistance at mealtimes. Individual staff members provide this in a dignified manner, which meets individual needs. Despite time constraints and inadequate staffing levels, those staff members observed were enabling meal times to be a sociable and enjoyable occasion. Boarders say the lunchtime provision is better than the evening options. There remains a reliance upon processed foods, such as hamburgers, pizzas and pasta dishes. Those boarders in Jubilee Unit have a greater opportunity to prepare their own evening meals and therefore have greater control regarding choice.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Clearly written policies and procedures pertaining to privacy, confidentiality, child protection, complaints and anti - bullying are in place. Boarders' safety is effectively protected through staff working practices. The physical layout of the boarding provision does not lend itself to protecting privacy. This is somewhat compensated by the screens provided from the last inspection, which are used when assisting boarders to move across the corridor from their bedrooms to bathrooms, when they may be in a state of semi - undress. Boarders confirm staff always use these and they are very appreciative of this practice. Written records demonstrate that confidential information is sensitively handled and where necessary, appropriately shared. Boarders know how to complain and are confident with the school's processes. Written records show the policies and procedures are being implemented. Boarders say most of their issues or worries are dealt with quickly without needing to use the formal route. General observation shows staff actively encouraging boarders to self advocate and make appropriate challenges. All members of the school staff attend regular updated child protection training. The policy and procedure is clear and understood by teaching, care and ancillary staff. There is a clear link to the local safeguarding board and the Head Teacher and Head of Care retain an overall responsibility for all child protection matters. The staff disciplinary procedure places the welfare of the student above all else. Boarder questionnaires confirm they feel safe and well looked after by the care team. Many references are made with regards seeking help from staff if they

need to. Boarders confirm they understand the anti-bullying policy. Records of such incidents are clear and legible, showing appropriate action being taken. Boarders verbally confirm this is the case. Whilst a clear and detailed policy and procedure is in place with regards unauthorised absences, none have occurred since the last inspection. Attendance is robustly monitored. Notifications of significant events are made to appropriate designated external agents, including Ofsted. The school works in close partnership with parents and local authorities. Issues concerning the safety and welfare of boarders are communicated effectively and within the prescribed timescales. Relationships between staff and boarders are positive and respectful. Care staff implement appropriate sanctions when necessary and parents are aware and supportive of the methods used. Older boarders say the staff converse with, and treat them as adults. A new 'Health and Safety Coordinator' has been appointed. Generic risk assessments and routine health and safety checking is robust. The boarding accommodation however, remains inadequate and presents risks to boarders and staff. Although the site is secure from possible intrusion, the boarding accommodation is not designed to meet the needs of physically disabled youngsters. The kitchen, toilets and bathrooms of Lawn House are inaccessible to a number of wheelchair users and Jubilee Unit has a split floor, which necessitates the use of a ramp and lift. Such factors present risks of accidents occurring through boarders attempting to negotiate their way through small spaces and in addition, many are having to ask for physical assistance, which severely compromises independence. The lack of space throughout the boarding provision presents problems with the storage of necessary equipment. Staff are having to unnecessarily move and handle equipment due to the lack of space available. Sound and robust recruitment practices remain a strength of the school. Boarders are protected by a clear and thorough procedure which ensures prospective employees cannot commence with their post until every check has been satisfactorily received. Those staff personnel files randomly selected for this visit fully withstand close scrutiny and this is largely attributed to the actions of the Human Resources team.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Residential and teaching staff work collaboratively in terms of setting targets and preparing for review meetings. Care files hold clear educational details, therefore, care staff and key workers know what is happening within the classroom. There are opportunities throughout the school day for teaching and care staff to liaise and hand over pertinent information. Boarders are given the support they need to prepare in good time in the mornings, so they are ready for the school day ahead. They also benefit from being supported to complete homework. This may be through physical assistance where needed or by accessing school resources, such as books and computers. There is clear linked working between the two departments in terms of target setting and goal planning. Examples include linking maths topics from the classroom into budgeting practise within the boarding environment. A recent development is the creation of the 'Residential Education and Skills for Life Coordinator' post, which remains in its infancy. The post holder previously retained the positions of Personal, Health & Social Education (PHSE) Coordinator and Life Skills teacher, so she already acted as a link between the education and boarding teams. The post commenced in September and a term was spent observing and monitoring the 'Skills of Success' programme which has been in place for just over a year. This programme is in place for boarders and focuses upon all aspects of their leisure, social and independence needs. Records demonstrate they have time set aside every Monday to meet with key workers and use an electronic diary to plan their desired activities for the week ahead. Time is also spent reviewing the previous week, in order to determine what has and has not

been achieved. Boarders say they like being consulted about the things they want to do and records show many of the proposed and desired activities are happening. This is partly due to an increase in residential staffing levels since the last inspection, however, these remain overall as inadequate. All of the staff involved in the delivery of this programme work extremely hard to ensure that such activities are provided. A number of teachers provide lunch time and after school clubs and the care team work creatively to provide adequate supervision within the living areas, whilst off - site activities occur. There remain instances whereby some cannot happen due to being unable to provide enough staff cover and this is further compounded by a lack of staff able to drive the school's mini buses.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are actively encouraged to appropriately participate in the running of the school. The school council has a strong voice; members take their roles seriously and are effectively supported in an enabling way. Those staff assisting encourage the members to 'own' this forum on behalf of their peers, rather than be reliant on adult involvement. Council members are confident their views and issues are positively received by the Head Teacher; in addition, they say they receive information from him about ongoing plans and developments for the school. Effective communication systems are in place. A good number of boarders require individual support in order to communicate. This may be through the use of electronic equipment, signing, using symbols and pictorial aids. Some children need additional time and encouragement to speak. Direct observation of working practices shows that staff ensure each child receives the time and support they require. Relationships between boarders and their care givers are positive and respectful. There is much fun and laughter within the boarding areas and this is effectively balanced with appropriate boundary setting. Younger boarders say it is important to feel safe and looked after. They confirm this is the case. Older boarders say it is important to have your privacy respected and spend time alone with your friends. They also confirm this to be their experience of boarding at the school. Care files show that admissions into the school are planned and based upon sound assessment. This includes clear liaison with the child, parents and all involved external agencies. New boarders confirm they have been well prepared, with information and introductory visits. They like being allocated with a 'buddy' to ensure they settle in and get to know the school premises and routines. Care staff receive clear information about the needs of 'new' children and wherever possible, introductory visits are conducted in an attempt to ease this transition. Older boarders, preparing to leave school talk positively of the preparatory support they are receiving. One says she will miss the staff and friends made over the years, however, she feels ready to move on to new experiences. Care files hold information about ongoing assessment and review processes. This is used to maintain and update where necessary, individual care plans that detail how presenting needs will be met. Given current staffing levels, and in particular, the lack of administrative time available to the therapy team, this information is not always being kept completely up to date. Boarders enjoy various methods of maintaining contact with their own family members whilst staying at school. They are able to use telephones privately and a number have their own mobiles. Every boarder has their own school email address and computers are readily available to them within the boarding areas. Parents report good consistent use of the 'home - school' communication books, which travel to and from home and school with each boarder. There is a small amount of examples of dissatisfaction in terms of care staff responding to telephone calls from parents, however, the majority further state this is attributed to those staff being very busy with the children and not always having the time to speak immediately.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is inadequate.

Boarders are able to wear their own clothes outside of school time and can obtain any necessary personal items they may need. They all have their own lockable storage space for the safe keeping of treasured possessions, although the school does discourage bringing in large amounts of money or items of particular value. The boarding accommodation is wholly inadequate. It was not built or furnished with such profound physical disabilities in mind. A rolling programme of repair and refurbishment makes minor improvements, however the sum total does not meet the needs of those in residence. A new temporary toilet and changing room block has eased some of the difficulties with queuing at break - times and the screens placed within the corridors give improved privacy within the boarding accommodation. Lawn House remains inaccessible to a number of boarders in terms of its kitchen, toilets and bathrooms. Boarders say it is obvious to everyone when they are about to have personal care because the buildings do not ensure privacy. Although they confirm the staff do their best to assist, they state this aspect to be the worst part of being a boarder.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The school prospectus is kept under continual review and is made available to all interested parties. Written literature for pupils is presented in a child - friendly format and is further explained by staff where necessary. Whilst the aims and objectives are clear, actual service delivery is compromised due to inadequate premises and staffing levels. The residential care staff in post present as a dedicated, hard working team. They know the boarders well and advocate strongly on their behalf. Those in senior management positions use the limited resources available as creatively as they can in an attempt to maximise positive outcomes for boarders. The school is supported by an active board of governors. Staffing levels have begun to increase and newcomers enjoy the benefit of being supernumerary for their first two weeks. This factor is already showing an improvement in the turnover of newcomers. Those spoken with say they are being eased into the role and feel very supported by their peers and the senior management team. The Head Teacher currently sits on a sub - committee of the Kent County Council, charged with reviewing the staffing level allocation of its residential special schools. This forum is still to produce its final recommendations. Within the school, a review of the residential team structure is also underway and although this is an unsettling time for those in post, clear consultation processes are being followed. Existing staff are provided with ongoing training opportunities; 35 are currently completing the National Vocational Qualification Level 3 course and are given one hour per week as study time out of their working hours. The course is funded by the Provider, the Kent County Council. Within the school there are six Assessors and four Internal Verifiers in place. This ensures the candidates have a good support system available. Inset training continues to cover core 'whole school' topics and this ensures key areas, such as child protection continue to be revisited. Given the complex needs of the boarders, both individually and collectively, the breadth and scope of the training available to residential care staff is unsatisfactory. Whilst the residential team makes every effort to ensure individual staff supervision meetings occur regularly, written records show times where inadequate staffing levels and the presenting needs of boarders result in such meetings being cancelled. The Kent County Council has fully accepted the findings of previous inspections and has submitted plans to commit to a total rebuild of residential provision. The initial plan was rejected, due to a number of oppositional factors. To date, the KCC has appointed an independent body to respond

to those objections in an effort to see the work to commence early next year. Given the time, effort and funding already committed, it is clear the Provider fully intends to give its pupils the resources they require to meet their needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure a full review is conducted of the current inadequate nursing and therapy levels. (NMS 14).
- ensure residential care staff receive appropriate accredited medication administration training. (NMS14).
- review the quality of school meals, in particular, the evening provision. (NMS 15).
- ensure the planning application is prepared and presented, with contingency plans in place, should this be unsuccessful. (NMS 23).
- provide dietetic input that meets the needs of the school. (NMS 14).
- ensure care staff receive regular and ongoing formal supervision. (NMS 31).
- ensure care staff receive the scope and breadth of training commensurate with the needs of the boarders. (NMS 29).
- continue to effectively monitor residential care staffing levels. (NMS 28).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.