

Ripplevale School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Address	Ripplevale School Chapel Lane Ripple Deal Kent CT14 8JG
Telephone number	01304 373866
Email	info@ripplevaleschool.co.uk
Registered person	Ted Schofield
Head of care	Ted Schofield
Head / Principal	
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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

Ripplevale School is a special needs day and residential school for boys. The school caters for a maximum of 60 boys in the seven to 16 years age range. It is situated in the village of Ripple, near to the coastal towns of Deal and Dover. Although placed in a rural setting, the pupils are enabled to access all the necessary community resources, including leisure facilities, through the school's transport provision. There are currently 15 boarders accommodated within the main building in well furnished and equipped bedrooms and they have access to three communal rooms for indoor leisure purposes. The school is set within its own grounds and has extensive hard court facilities for basketball and other games as well as a large playing field for football, rugby and cricket. The residential provision is managed by the Principal, head of care and a team of care staff. The school aims to 'enlarge a pupil's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding and thus his awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment'.

Summary

The inspection was an announced 'key' inspection. All the key National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools in the outcome areas Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution, Economic Wellbeing and Organisation were assessed on this occasion. The four recommendations made at the last inspection were found to have been met and only one recommendation is made as a result of this inspection. The boarding section of the school is organised and managed to a high standard and affords an equal standard of pastoral care to the resident pupils, having full regard for equality and diversity issues throughout the whole of its operation.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the Principal was asked to: provide complainants with an opportunity to register their views, on the complaint format, on how the complaint was handled; document more written evidence of pupils' individual achievements to support the record of their life skills learning; complete the 'action' section of the 1:1 report in order to stipulate how identified issues within the session will be addressed; and to ensure that all care staff receive and complete the appropriate level of National Vocational Qualification training.

Provision is now made for complainants to register their views on how their complaint was handled.

More evidence is now documented regarding pupils' individual achievements in order to support the record of their life skills learning. This will now provide more detailed information for pupils and staff.

The 'action' section of the 1:1 reports is now completed as appropriate to identify how identified issues will be addressed.

All staff have either completed or are undertaking the National Vocational Qualification at the appropriate level. This will enhance the school's staff training arrangements consistent with

the requirements of Standard 31 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school has full regard for health and medical matters concerning the pupils and ensures that these areas are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. Pupils enjoy healthy and nutritious meals which are of excellent quality and allow for choice including any special or preferential diets.

The school has a range of healthcare related policies and procedures which give staff clear guidance and instructions and are accessible. A local doctor visits the school fortnightly. Pupils have detailed healthcare and medical histories which include photographs of individual pupils in order to reduce the likelihood of errors being made when administering medication. Pupils' healthcare and medical needs are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. Health related information is also held on pupils' referral forms. Signed parental consent forms for medical and emergency treatment are available. The school doctor's notes on individual pupils list visit dates and record consultation details. Pupils' medication administration records show clear and consistent recording and evidence no gaps in recording. Medication is securely held in the school surgery and a separate secure cabinet is used for controlled drugs. Controlled drugs are recorded in a book specifically for that purpose, which is signed by two staff following dispensing. Old or discarded medication is returned to parents or taken to the pharmacy for disposal and a record is kept of the disposal date. The school surgery is organised and maintained to a very good standard. Staff are trained in first aid and medication administration which is linked to their National Vocational Qualification course training. Pupils are taught about aspects of healthy living via the school's curriculum and this is reinforced by care staff in boarding time. Pupils engage in a range of active pastimes and exercise which keeps them fit, healthy and helps develop their physical coordination. A smoking cessation programme is provided for pupils. Pupils said that the school looks after their health needs and they have quick access to healthcare and medical services when required.

The school's menu provides for a healthy, nutritious and balanced diet. In addition to hot dishes a salad bar is available daily and any special medical, religious, cultural or vegetarian diets are catered for. The meals provided are of excellent quality, plentiful and well presented. Pupils and staff confirm the consistently high quality catering arrangements. Mealtimes are a well ordered social occasion with good levels of interaction and communication evident. Provisions are safely and correctly stored and refrigerator and freezer temperatures are taken and recorded. Staff attend food hygiene training and a positive food hygiene inspection report from the local Environmental Health Department is available.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school takes the protection of pupils seriously and has full regard for creating and maintaining a safe environment where pupils feel secure, valued and respond very positively to the behaviour management systems employed.

The school has a policy regarding privacy and confidentiality and a further statement regarding intimate care. Confidential records are securely held in locked drawers and cabinets within

locked offices. There is a telephone for pupils use which they may use without reference to staff, though most pupils have cell phones. Pupils have keys to their bedroom doors which are kept locked and where they can keep secure any valued and treasured possessions. Toilet and bathing facilities afford good privacy and space is available where pupils can receive appropriate visitors in private. Pupils have appropriate degrees of autonomy and privacy consistent with their age, level of development and agreed risk assessments. Pupils confirm in discussion that staff treat them with dignity and respect their privacy.

The school has a detailed complaints procedure and a simplified version is also available for the pupils which lists the contact details of individuals and agencies should parents or pupils wish to complain externally to the school. Information on complaints is also listed in the Pupil's Guide. The school also has a staff whistle-blowing policy. The complaints procedure is reinforced to staff periodically at staff inset training days. The school's complaint book shows that any complaint is taken seriously, investigated thoroughly and lists action taken and an outcome. Pupils said in discussion that they have no complaints or concerns about the staff, school and service they receive. All are very complimentary about the boarding experience provided, a number of pupils saying "it's the best school I have ever been to."

The school's child protection policy and procedure is available and staff also have access to the Kent Council Multi Agency Safeguarding procedures. The school currently has two Child Protection Liaison Officers (CPLOs) both of whom have received the Kent County Council Multi Agency Safeguarding training. All staff receive child protection training, and refresher training in this area is held annually. The school Principal said there are no current or ongoing child protection issues at the school and in the event such matters are diligently recorded and appropriate notifications made. Pupils are taught aspects of personal safety via the school's curriculum and such areas are reinforced by care staff in boarding time. Pupils also receive information and talks regarding their personal safety from external individuals such as drugs counsellors. Pupils receive close supervision without this being intrusive and pupils are clear via discussion that staff have full regard for their protection and wellbeing, adding they feel safe and secure in the school's care.

The school has a comprehensive policy and procedure regarding bullying which covers areas such as: emotional, physical, sexual, homophobic, verbal and cyber aspects of bullying and intimidation. Staff are alert to any such issues and challenge such behaviour immediately. Any incidents of bullying are clearly recorded and investigated and bullying related issues are closely monitored via tables and graphs. Whilst some pupils' questionnaires mention historical incidents of bullying, all also state that staff act quickly to address such conduct and during discussion bullying was not raised as an issue. No incidents of bullying or intimidating behaviour are evident. Pupils relate and interact well with each other, showing thoughtfulness and consideration. The school's arrangements in this area create and maintain a homely, friendly and supportive atmosphere which helps reduce the likelihood of bullying occurring or becoming a significant issue.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding pupils who become absent without authority. Attendance records show that absconding is not an issue in the school and the sound pastoral inputs into pupils' welfare and the caring and accepting atmosphere at the school help keep any unauthorised absences to a minimum.

The school has detailed behaviour management policies and procedures and follows the 'Team Teach' programme of behaviour management which is a recognised and approved system of behaviour management in residential special schools and children's residential settings. All staff are trained in behaviour management. There are also two qualified 'Team Teach' trainers on the current staff team. The school's sanctions book shows that issues are clearly recorded, are minimum in use and that only permitted sanctions are used. Restraint records also evidence clear recording and such episodes appear necessary and appropriate in the circumstances described in the record. The school operates a credit slip and achievement card system which acts as a token economy and positive reinforcement system. However, positive standards of behaviour are mostly maintained via excellent working and professional relationships between staff and pupils. There is continuous and spontaneous interaction and engagement by staff, coupled with banter and humour in their approach. Pupils respond positively to staff requests and instructions. A calm, caring and accepting atmosphere prevails where pupils feel wanted and valued and are clearly encouraged to achieve acceptable standards of behaviour. Pupils said that the standard of discipline is fair and proportionate with some attending anger management sessions. No significant issues are evident regarding behaviour management and control and the school achieves and maintains commendable standards in this area.

The school has a health and safety policy and the health and safety 'law' poster is prominently displayed. The school has recently appointed a new external health and safety consultant who is reviewing all of the school's health and safety arrangements, including the wide range of generic risk assessments currently held. The school also has a health and safety committee who monitor such arrangements periodically. There is a current written fire risk assessment and fire evacuation drills occur on a regular basis. Fire alarm tests also occur; however, these are not held consistently on a weekly basis. Fire procedures and instruction notices are displayed. All care staff have received fire awareness training and are scheduled for refresher training in this area in April 2009. There is current servicing of the fire protection system and equipment checks. Current utility safety test certificates regarding gas, mains electricity and portable electrical appliances are held. Hot water temperatures are taken and recorded. Standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high throughout the boarding areas and no safety hazards are evident in the areas of the premises accessed. The school takes active steps to keep pupils, staff and visitors safe from the inherent risks of fire and other potential safety hazards.

The school has a staff recruitment policy and procedure and three staff have attended 'safeguarding in recruitment' training. No new care staff have been appointed since the last inspection where the school's recruitment and vetting procedures have proved as sound. Therefore the existing staff personnel files are not revisited on this occasion. The school's arrangements in this area help ensure that only suitable staff are employed to look after the pupils.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The boarding section has a clear and commendable regard for pupils' education and learning, with a particular emphasis on equality and diversity, and ensures that these areas are monitored and reviewed as appropriate. There is a clear commitment to developing pupils' independence and life skills and affording the opportunity for work experience and college attendance.

Individual education plans are held in pupils' files which evidence close and regular monitoring and review. There is diligent liaison between teaching staff and care staff, with care staff having daily involvement in pupils' lessons and learning activities, working alongside teaching staff. Lessons and learning periods evidence pupils being attentive and interested in subjects being taught, with teaching and care staff facilitating very good standards of discipline and learning opportunities for pupils. There is a range of pupils' educational and work achievements demonstrated throughout the school and short but meaningful poems created and written by pupils on display. Such poems clearly express issues which are close to pupils' hearts and thoughts. There is emphasis on equality and diversity regarding pupils' education and learning with the school's ethics room holding and displaying a very wide range of information, knowledge and learning on world religions, cultures, traditions and lifestyles. The contents of the ethics room include pictures, posters, books, ornaments, artwork and icons. Staff spoke with knowledge and authority in this area and pupils confirm that staff stimulate their awareness in this and other equality and diversity areas. There is a wide range of active and sedentary pastimes available, cooking and life skills, visits to youth clubs and community work including attending to the graves in the village 'Burma Star' War Memorial cemetery. The school also has connections with a professional football club and can use the club's facilities for training purposes and attend matches. All of Years 10 and 11 have work experience placements. Some older pupils also attend college from the school.

Pupils are provided with excellent support from their key workers and other staff. Comprehensive written care plans are in place which evidence monitoring and review. Pupils also have written risk assessments and key workers also prepare comprehensive weekly reports on all boarding pupils. Support and guidance is also available from external specialists as appropriate, such as a psychotherapist, drug counsellor and smoking cessation sessions. There is an active social and life skills programme and pupils may choose from a comprehensive skills choice list. Pupils said that they are closely supported by staff and that they appreciate and value their contribution and inputs into the overall care package afforded them.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school proactively seeks pupils' views and opinions and affords them choice in day to day matters that affect them. The admissions criteria and process is sound and helps to ensure that only suitably matched pupils are admitted to the school where they can achieve and benefit from the education and boarding experience.

The school provides a range of forums where pupils can communicate their views, opinions and exercise choice. Such forums include one to one consultation, pupil house meetings and via the school council. Pupils are openly given praise for their contribution in the minutes of house and school council meetings. In addition the school seeks the view of pupils and parents via questionnaires. Pupils attend their review meetings and can make a verbal and written contribution if they wish to do so. Pupils said that staff don't only listen to their opinions but also act upon them. A Local Authority Provision and Evaluation Officer present on the day of the inspection said that the school encourages and facilitates pupils' full involvement and inclusion in day to day matters that concern them and in their future care plans.

The school has a clear referral and admissions criteria and process that enables the school to work effectively with individual pupils. The process includes a written referral formal meetings

and an interview and a six week residential assessment period prior to permanent residency. The admissions process also includes substantial input from the school's Family Liaison Officer, other relevant professionals as appropriate, and parents.

Pupils have individual assessments prior to admission and Statements of Special Educational Needs are available which evidence monitoring and review. Written care plans cover a range of areas and these are monitored via the key worker's weekly reports which evidence equal content encompassing all relevant areas. Pupils confirm knowledge of their future plans and are in agreement with them. Most looking forward to work experience and independence training prior to transition. Clear transition plans are held regarding appropriate pupils. Local employers also complete a feedback form on each pupil. Such forms evidence very positive comments regarding the pupils' integration into the work setting, their conduct at work and their conscientiousness and ability.

Any contact that pupils have with their parents and significant others is clearly recorded and private space is available where pupils may receive appropriate visitors.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Pupils wear their own clothing out of school hours and are well presented in age/fashion appropriate clothes. They have access to personal requisites which are kept in their bedrooms. Stationery is provided, though most pupils use email facilities. Parents supply pupils' pocket money which is held in safekeeping for them by staff and can be drawn out at appropriate times.

Older pupils have comprehensive transition plans which help with any planned move to alternative placements, college or return home.

The communal areas are decorated and furnished to a good standard and are well maintained by staff and pupils. Communal areas are homely and comfortable and provide adequate space for the pupils, who appear settled and at ease in their environment. There are a range of fixtures and fittings and pictures that depict positive images of ethnic cultures and scenes, along with more traditional representations. Pupils' bedrooms are decorated and furnished to an equal standard and are personalised to varying degrees. Bedding and linen is provided and is of good quality. Toilet and bathing facilities are refurbished to a high standard and afford dignity and privacy. The school has large grounds and has provision for a wide range of outdoor activities. Pupils said they are "happy" with the standard of accommodation provided and enjoy the boarding and communal experience. Standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high in the boarding areas and no safety hazards are evident in the areas of the premises accessed.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding, with much evidence of staff awareness and commitment in this area, particularly regarding the arrangements in the school's ethics room, where an abundance of information and learning material is available and communicated to pupils by knowledgeable and committed staff. The boarding section of the school is organised and managed to a high standard and affords an equal standard of care to the resident pupils.

The overall management and practice arrangements ensure the school achieves its aims and objectives.

The school has an attractive and informative prospectus which covers the junior school, senior school and residential provision. There are detailed handbooks for pupils and parents which cover a wide range of areas. The prospectus and both handbooks are reviewed annually. The content of the prospectus and both handbooks give a clear and accurate account of the service and facilities provided. Pupils said they are given sufficient information about the school prior to and at admission.

The boarding section of the school is adequately staffed by day and night and has a mixed gender team. The staff duty roster is available and gives a clear account of staff on duty and duty times worked. The senior staff have substantial experience of working with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Whilst the remainder of the team have varied experience, they work in a professional and competent manner, providing a high standard of pastoral care to the pupils. Currently one member of staff holds the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 4 and five hold the NVQ at level 3. Two other staff are due to complete the level 3 course in the near future. There is a very good level of communication between the staff team, with boarding team meetings held weekly. Full team meetings including teaching staff are held each half term. Individual staff supervision is held once per week and staff confirm their satisfaction of supervision content and frequency. Staff training is active with a range of courses attended in the last year, including training in equal opportunities and equality and diversity. Staff also confirm the school's training arrangements and are very supportive of the school's management and ethos. Staff also confirm that the school has full regard for equality and diversity issues and that no discriminatory attitudes or practices exist within the service. Staff have a development plan and receive performance appraisals annually, the next appraisals scheduled for April 2009.

Three senior staff monitor the conduct of the school and scrutinise appropriate records and activities. Standard 33 (half termly visits) are undertaken and reports on the visits evidence a sound and effective internal quality assurance system. The school also uses pupil and parent questionnaires to assist in the quality assurance process. The questionnaires evidence positive comments about the school. In addition to the above systems the school undertakes an audit of the five outcome areas for pupils covering Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Economic Wellbeing. The school also conducts a 'disability access' audit. The school has a development plan covering the period from 2008 to 2010, which includes targets, actions, timescales, financial estimates and expected completion dates. The school has a current liability insurance certificate.

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 that fire alarm tests are held on a more frequent basis. (NMS 26)