

# Alfriston School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Maire Atherton
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<b>Nominated person</b>	Jinna Male
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	19/11/2009

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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**

Alfriston is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties in the age range 11-18 years. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. There are 120 pupils of which 20 are weekly boarders residing for three nights from Monday to Thursday. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The boarding accommodation is situated on the first floor of the main school building. Older girls can experience semi-independent living in a small flat. The school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings. The school is maintained by Buckinghamshire County Council and is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The school continues to exceed the key national minimum standards for residential special schools. There is a strong culture of continuing improvement, led by an enthusiastic and committed headteacher. All senior managers and staff contribute to, and are proactive in, driving the constant improvements. Staff also feel valued and work well together, with few moving on. Young people receive individual care that builds, develops and maintains a range of personal skills using a range of activities. As a result, young people say they love boarding at this school and describe it as 'amazing', 'the best thing' and, 'five star'.

Two minor recommendations have been made, both of which relate to records.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were two recommendations made in the last report and both have been addressed. The school nurse has taken steps to obtain professional clinical support and is seeking further advice from the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The children's guide has been updated; the use of photographs to accompany simple language has made it accessible to more boarders.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health and well being is managed and promoted highly effectively. The boarders have wide ranging health needs and these are clearly identified in the

individual health care plans. These identify the health and medical needs of boarders and how these are to be met within the school by the school nurse, the residential staff team and any additional professional support required, for example, occupational therapist input. There are detailed policies and procedures in place, underpinned by relevant training and implemented in practice by the staff team. This ensures that young people get the medicine and any intervention they need when they need it. The recording of controlled drugs is not in a bound book as recommended by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society guidance. Boarders' routine health checks remain the responsibility of parents but the school nurse provides support where this is an identified need.

All boarders agree or strongly agree that they are well looked after when they are ill. They also say that they are given lots of information about what they can do to keep themselves fit and well, and give examples of this, such as the variety of physical activities that they enjoy. Young people also say that they enjoy the food. Their suggestions for menus are listened to and they see these suggestions appear in the dining hall.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Staying Safe =

Staff are extremely proactive in the effective promotion of safeguarding of boarders. Young people are given lots of information and support to think about how they can safeguard themselves, for example, by being aware of the limitations of the dormitories to provide privacy when getting dressed. There is one pay phone and boarders say that sometimes there is a queue to use it. A recent boarders' exit poll had highlighted this as an area for improvement and the residential staff team are in the process exploring options to address this. Staff support boarders to develop self care skills, and where intimate care is required this is in accordance with individual plans and guidance.

A real strength of the school is the relationships that exist between the boarders and the staff. This means that boarders are confident in their interactions with staff and know that staff will listen to them. This open communication means that issues are addressed as they arise; there have been no formal complaints or unauthorised absence since the last inspection. No boarder reported bullying as an issue. These positive relationships form the basis of behaviour management. Staff are trained to use an accredited framework with a clear emphasis on promoting positive behaviour with physical intervention strategies included. Young people are knowledgeable about the rules and the consequences of breaking them. There are robust systems in place for recording behaviour management issues, but not all consequences are recorded as sanctions. Physical intervention is used rarely, with one since the last inspection.

Regular training ensures that the staff team are very well versed in child protection and they demonstrate an excellent understanding of thresholds for reporting

concerns appropriately, combined with genuine concern to promote the welfare of the young people in their care. There is a similarly thorough approach to recruitment to ensure that boarders are cared for by staff who have been subject to a range of checks.

There are robust health and safety systems in place; including updated risk assessments, regular equipment checks and servicing and a prompt response to repairs, which ensure that boarders are provided with safe, comfortable and well maintained accommodation.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The residential team and the boarders themselves are knowledgeable about their individual education and the complementary boarding targets. Staff support the education of boarders through good links with teaching staff; supporting homework; learning through activities and developing life skills and independence.

There is a regular programme of planned activities enjoyed by the boarders both on and offsite. There are links with the local community that promote inclusion and the development of social skills. The venues are carefully chosen to provide a variety of experiences that reflect the range of needs and abilities of the young people. This gives sociable and fun opportunities for personal development. Boarders appreciate the independence scheme that enables them to work towards reduced levels of supervision. These incremental levels are based on the individual skills and understanding of each young person, not simply their age. Parents comment, 'Boarding is making a positive impact on our daughter's social development', and 'Boarding has been an invaluable experience and we wish that the provision was larger so that more girls had the chance to learn independence and social skills'.

Boarders benefit from exceptional individual support delivered by close working between the residential staff, the school nurse and pastoral input from teaching staff. Boarders say that there is always someone they can talk to if they want. Boarders also have direct access to an independent counsellor who visits the school one day a week. Additional needs are supported by access to speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and an educational psychologist.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Staff support boarders to make a significant contribution to decision making, both in their day to day plans and in the way boarding is run; for example, through representation on the school council and completion of a boarders' exit poll. As a result, boarders feel their opinions are heard and valued and see their suggestions implemented in activities and décor.

A careful and thorough admission process includes a trial period as part of the information gathering process. All parties contribute to the aims and objectives of the boarding placement, and these are reviewed to determine that boarding remains the right choice for each individual. The assessment process is under review and there are plans to tie it in with education assessment and the monitoring of progress.

Families and carers say they have good relationships with staff at the school. Boarders are able to maintain contact with their families whilst they are at school. There are social events, such as the boarding open evening, set up to encourage families to participate in, and contribute to, individual plans and the development of boarding. Parents and boarders report high levels of satisfaction with the boarding provision, expressions of this include 'Our daughter is always happy in boarding', and 'It's five star and I love it'.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is comfortable, well furnished and decorated. The standard of cleanliness is very good throughout and maintenance issues are addressed promptly by the caretaker. Boarders like their dormitories and look forward to experiencing the semi-independent living in the flat.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The headteacher provides strong leadership and management, with a focus on continual improvement. There are effective lines of communication between the management team, all of whom participate in boarding provision. The staff work as a cohesive team and are very consistent in their approach to caring for boarders, providing a secure basis for individual growth and development. Staff communication, in records and staff meetings for example, maintains a focus on the boarders. Staff are very well supported by regular training and formal supervision and informal support is readily available. The headteacher undertakes monitoring of boarding, and representatives of the governing body and the local authority also visit to monitor the service and report to the headteacher and governors' meetings. The number of staff deployed in boarding is sufficient to provide boarders with opportunities for one to one where this is desirable or necessary and is supported by a robust on-call system.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The culture of inclusion is evident throughout boarding life. Each boarder is valued as an individual and they demonstrate the impact of this by their positive responses to each other; their behaviour and interactions reflect how they value each other. Boarders with complex needs are enabled to fully participate in school life. Religious and cultural differences

are celebrated and social events are arranged with other schools and in the community so that the boarders have opportunities to socialise with boys.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Compliance with national minimum standards**

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure an appropriate written record of all medication. In particular, the recording of controlled drugs in a bound book (NMS 14.20)
- record all sanctions fully. For example, review the systems for recording consequences for misbehaviour to ensure they are recorded as such. (NMS 10.9)