

Ashley School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

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, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

The Ashley School is a maintained residential special school for 125 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. 31 of these pupils reside at the school for between one and four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for pupils with complex moderate learning difficulties who have associated behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. The school provides a highly valuable residential experience which has a significant impact on the lives of residential pupils. This helps residential pupils make excellent progress in all areas of their development. They grow in confidence and independence and experience many opportunities to help them develop and realise their full potential.
- There are outstanding procedures for safeguarding residential pupils which are established, effective and central to the school.
- The school cares extremely well for residential pupils' health and provides a healthy nourishing diet.
- The accommodation is comfortable clean and homely however, there are development plans to improve the quality of the houses.
- The residential houses are managed with efficiency and run extremely well. The communication between the residential staff and the school staff regarding the minor repairs and maintenance does not work well. The school has taken steps to improve this.
- There is a continued focus on improvement and there have been significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Residential pupils, parents, staff and placing authorities are highly positive about the residential provision and the quality of care.

Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. They relish the time spent 'in-house' at the residential provision. Inclusive group activities are geared to the majority of the residential pupils and changed weekly. Evenings and activities are anticipated with enthusiasm and excitement by all. Activities are highly inclusive; all residential pupils are given tailored support to enable full participation. Displays of recent activities, celebrations and events promote discussion and recollection of happy times enjoyed together. Holidays and trips away include options to ensure that individual pupils are able to choose activities they find enjoyable. This has contributed towards developing residential pupils' confidence and self-esteem while building memories of residential school life. This inclusive approach is consistent in all areas, ball games are managed to give all pupils a fair share of play and the chance to contribute to the game. Residential pupils fully endorse this showing respect and consideration for each other. They treat one another with care and understanding and apologise after minor disagreements. Overall behaviour is exceptionally good and meal times are a pleasure to take part in. Residential pupils help with meal and snack times, both spontaneously and on a rota basis. These roles are carried out with care and attention and make a helpful contribution to the domestic routines of the house.

Residential pupils have developed strong trusting relationships with staff. This is based on mutual respect and endorsed by the established continuity of the staff team. Residential pupils genuinely appreciate staff and truly benefit from their support, empathy and humour. They acknowledge these in tactile ways, verbally and through the many cards, pictures and thank you notes in the office and displayed around the walls.

The views of residential pupils are highly valued and central to decisions about the provision. For example, they are involved in staff selection at interview stage and their views are respected. Food is tailored towards residential pupils' preferences; they can provide lists of favourite foods for the catering manager and feedback is welcomed. Daily house meetings give all residential pupils the chance to talk about their day and make any wishes known. Staff plan activities with residential pupils and as a result a wide variety of events are available. These include contestant talent shows, making animation films and cooking pizzas. Developing abilities such as cooking, washing and helping with chores promotes residential pupils independence and builds skills that they will require in adult life. Short measurable, personal targets also encourage independence. Targets include managing fastenings, shoes, personal hygiene and keeping belongings tidy. They are carefully tailored for each individual and set out in a colourful picture format.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. The individual well-being of residential pupils is central to practice. Staff designated to support the pastoral and overall welfare of each pupil do so with skill and sensitivity. Key to this process is the representation of residential pupil's views. The welfare communication systems between care staff and academic staff are highly effective. The flexible and holistic approach supports their academic and personal development exceptionally well. This provides emotional security and stability for residential pupils who may experience changes and difficulties in their home lives.

Residential pupils are introduced to overnight stays gradually. Link evenings provide time in the residential provision until mid-evening when they are collected by parents and carers. Leisure activities provided after school are fun and inviting. They provide a wide and stimulating range of new experiences. Outdoor activities are promoted very well and there are recognised schemes that residential pupils can access. These outdoor pursuits also help residential pupils build leadership and team skills. Older pupils return regularly to help young peers and provide active role models that younger pupils can identify with.

The residential pupils enjoy tasty home cooked foods that meet all their dietary requirements and individual health needs. Superb communication between care staff and catering staff mean that meals are flexible and accommodate the evening routines of the houses. Food is collected by residential pupils and thoroughly enjoyed around the dining table. Fruit and vegetable are always on offer and actively encouraged. Staff provide good healthy role models and enjoy healthy meal options at the table. The food is presented extremely well and looks appetising and appealing. Residential pupils eat enthusiastically and report that food is always good. Comments during meal times include 'this is my favourite' and 'I love all the food'.

Concise care plans set out each residential pupils' care and their views are central to the development of their care plans. These are well-focused and give clear targets for staff to follow and outline what is expected in school. This ensures that adults in residence, school, home and outside professionals are working toward agreed goals. Social workers consistently report that residential pupils benefit highly in all areas of their lives from the experience of staying in-house. They report that friendships groups in residence and individual support from staff have been of great benefit. Reports from social workers also state that the staff go above and beyond their roles to promote the best possible outcomes for residential pupils. Parents also report that they can easily contact the staff who care for their children and that the residential experience helps their child's progress and development. Staff offer outreach and support in the home in line with the strategies and tactics that care staff have found to be successful. This consistent approach benefits and supports each individual pupil.

The health needs of residential pupils are managed with care and precision by designated staff. The storage of medication works very well and there are efficient systems for the safe and timely administration. The school has several designated

health professionals who regularly work in school. These include a school nurse, diabetic nurse and paediatrician. This brings together specialism's and ensures that all those involved with the health care of residential pupils understand their health care plan and implement any updated changes.

The purpose built accommodation comprises two detached houses on a large site. These are kept clean, warm and comfortable. Despite needing redecoration, staff have made every effort to promote a colourful and welcoming atmosphere. Communal living areas are homely and cosy. There are plenty of bathrooms and shower rooms on both the ground and first floors of each house. Sleeping areas have been divided to provide each residential pupil with a separate area. They are each given keys for lockers for their possessions and enjoy the novelty of collecting these. Staff have worked hard on displays that provide reference to all pupils. These include their birthdays, activities and quick reference telephone dialling codes. All these are colourful and well presented in pictorial formats or picture time lines. Young residential pupils use these to explain the routine of the evening and what will happen next. This promotes their independence and helps them feel secure. Residential pupils are given support to keep in touch every evening in a comfortable and private area. Times of calls are carefully planned to ensure that they do not coincide with bedtimes.

Residential pupils' safety

The safety of residential pupils is outstanding. The procedures for recruitment and selection of staff are very well established and supported by a designated human resources department. The physical environment is safe and secure, houses are locked and visitors are monitored and chaperoned. These systems work well to ensure pupils' safety. Health and safety checks are all up to date and meet requirements. Residential pupils taking part in an unplanned fire drill do so calmly and quickly; despite being in the middle of a meal time and waiting on the playground for some time.

Residential pupils rarely go missing from the school. However, clear risk assessments are drawn up by staff that identify and code the risk. This reduces the likelihood of pupils going missing by alerting staff to possible triggers. Clear records include a chronology of events and all written procedures are compatible with the Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols as determined in the revised national minimum standards. Staff are empathic and understanding looking beyond incidents and events to fully understand reactions and reasons for these.

There are strong child protection procedures implemented well by experienced designated staff. They work exceptionally well with a wide range of other professionals and services to monitor residential pupils' safety and welfare. Highly established procedures are implemented regularly by staff. This has resulted in residential pupils reporting that they feel safe and secure. Feedback from a range of professionals working alongside school staff is high complimentary. Social workers report that for some children the school is their 'safe place'.

Sanctions are very rarely used. There is a culture of exceptionally good behaviour and clear maintenance of boundaries. Staff focus on positive reinforcement and use incentives and awards to recognise and encourage efforts. Physical restraint has not been used in the last 18 months. While residential pupils can endure difficulties regarding their feelings and emotions, staff are adept at de-escalation techniques. There are no instances of bullying and minor disagreements are immediately monitored by vigilant staff. The general management of behaviour is superb and as resulted in a respectful and safe culture.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. Clear aims about the residential provision are agreed and shared with all parties connected with the provision. These are implemented effectively in practice and integrated well with the school. The residential provision is managed efficiently by a head of care who is currently working shifts to provide care while also managing the provision. While this dual role has competing demands, efforts to recruit the right calibre of staff have been unsuccessful. This demonstrates the extent in which the school takes account of views of residential pupils and the high expectation of competency and skill they require from staff. The unified care staff team work extremely well to provide supervision and care to residential pupils. They are supervised well by the head of care and receive training within the school in order to support their roles.

The team is diverse in gender, race and age providing a varied range of good adult role models that all pupils can identify with. Staff bring specialisms and skills to the residential provision. The routines and systems within the residential provision run very well while allowing flexibility and spontaneity to enhance residential pupils' in-house experiences. Staff know residential pupils exceptionally well and ensure that all systems and interactions take account of their individual needs and unique characteristics.

There has been realistic evaluation of the overall quality of the provision and the senior management team fully recognise the areas for improvement. These are focussed on the standard of accommodation of which some parts have been updated since the last inspection. Upgrades include new showers, water temperature monitoring, some new windows and internal fire doors. While these improve safety, the fabric of the building is in need of refurbishment. In addition there are some minor superficial repairs to the first floor walls and floors that have not been monitored effectively. Links between the senior management team and the care staff are not working with regard to these minor repairs. There has been a long standing request for improvement to the décor and the school has been unable to utilise the county maintenance contract or access the funds for improvement. This has left staff at all levels unclear about when improvements will be implemented. The school has very recently been awarded academy status and this will give them the autonomy to make decisions about their budget.

There is a transparent and well-advertised complaints procedure. Residential pupils explain this during the inspection. Forms are child friendly and most issues are raised in daily house meetings. All residential pupils' views are valued and staff prioritise equal of opportunity for residential pupils in all areas. Their individual needs and barriers to inclusion in extra curricular trips and outings are assessed and never prevent pupils accessing a full range of activities. Care plans are comprehensive and detail the unique and diverse backgrounds of residential pupils. These are stored securely in the house office. Other records are stored according to confidentiality with escalating security.

Overall, the residential provision community is at the heart of the school and run by a

committed and enthusiastic staff team who observe first hand the valuable contribution residence makes to pupils' lives.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- improve the quality of accommodation and décor in both houses.
- ensure that the system for reporting minor house repairs and maintenance is effective.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22/09/2011

Dear pupils

Inspection of Ashley School

As you will know I recently visited your school to carry out an inspection. I spent time in the residential houses and spoke to many of you and the staff who look after you during your in-house time. Some of you also filled in our questionnaire, as did your parents or carers, and this was very helpful.

I saw that Miss Weekes and the care staff work very hard to help you develop your confidence and independence. There are plenty of activities for you to enjoy and you have lots of fun in your houses. I was very impressed by your good manners and by the way you look after one another.

The residential houses have a friendly atmosphere where you can have fun, relax and make friends they are clean and homely. However, the houses need to be refurbished, and we note that this is the next priority for the school. We have asked the school to attend to some matters, including providing better arrangements for the minor repairs.

The residential staff look after you very well, and the food is tasty and nourishing. I found that the activities were enjoyable and well planned and I could see by the photos on display that there are a wide and exciting range for you to choose from.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdra Keating