

Arbour Vale School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

Unique reference number for social care	SC370928
Unique reference number for education	110185
Inspection dates	22/09/2011
Inspector	Maire Atherton

School address	Arbour Vale School, Farnham Road, Farnham Royal, SLOUGH, SL2 3AE
Telephone number	01753515560
Email	
Headteacher	Mrs Debbie Richards

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

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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

Arbour Vale School is a maintained residential special school. It provides education for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, or have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The school's residential provision, Arbour Vale House, is purpose built and located within the school site. There is accommodation for 12 pupils. The stated aim of the residential provision is to work on specific objectives with pupils who have a diagnosis of ASD through education programmes and extended learning opportunities, through delivery of a 24-hour curriculum. There is close collaboration between parents/carers, residential staff and school staff to ensure consistency between environments. Overnight placements are from Monday evening to Friday morning inclusive. The residential provision was last inspected on 16 March 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	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of Arbour Vale House is outstanding. The school provides an exceptional boarding experience that significantly improves the quality of life both for residential pupils and their families. Staff work fruitfully with parents to successfully promote the personal growth and development of each child and young person. This is achieved through excellent relationships between staff and residential pupils in conjunction with careful and considered target setting and incentives.
- The provision for safeguarding residential pupils' welfare is outstanding. The procedures are robust and effectively implemented so that children and young people are cared for in a safe environment by people assessed as suitable.
- Staff focus effectively on the individual needs and wishes of children and young people and use this to inform the highly personalised and creative care planning and practice that leads to considerable personal achievements for each child and young person.
- The accommodation and the facilities available are of an extremely high standard and provide an environment designed to meet the needs of and develop residential pupils.
- The school's residential provision is extremely well organised and managed. There is a strong commitment to improvement and the one recommendation made in the last report has been met. There is a well-qualified and experienced staff team in post who are imaginative and skilled at working with the young people in their care.
- Parents are delighted with the positive impact the residential experience has had

on the lives of their children, themselves and their families. Parents describe staff as 'flexible and co-operative' and say 'I am one hundred percent sure of the staff, the facilities and the methods used'.

- All the national minimum standards are met. To further improve the school is asked to consider how they can increase the range of special diets they can cater for.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. One parent said 'My child has made progress in leaps and bounds, so much so that it leads me to hope for an independent future for him'.

The whole staff team maintain the children and young people at the centre of all they do. Residential pupils enjoy warm, positive and purposeful relationships with the staff team and with each other within their individual capabilities. One parent said 'My child is loved by staff, and is happy when she sees them'. Parents spoke in glowing terms about the progress they have seen their children make since they started weekly boarding at the school. They express the view that staff focus on the bigger picture and are building towards developing independence. Residential pupils learn personal care skills, for example, dressing independently and tooth brushing.

Staff know the individual likes and dislikes of the children and young people. They use this knowledge constructively to plan activities that children and young people enjoy being involved in, either as part of a group or more independently. Staff are very skilled in engaging residential pupils so that they make the most of their time in Arbour Vale House; for example moving a game of catch from between one member of staff and a young person to a larger game, with an acute awareness of when to move on again. This approach has enabled a young person to get used to sitting in a group and ultimately lead to him to fly on holiday with his family,.

Residential pupils enjoy a comprehensive, high quality range of activities both on and off site. In the house pupils enjoy the use of a sensory room, a games/crafts room and a computer room in addition to two lounges both equipped with audio visual equipment. The school facilities are also available for use outside school hours and include a hydrotherapy pool, dance studio, gym, sensory room and a soft play room. The staff team are imaginative in sourcing and training for off site activities and young people are supported in go-karting, archery, canoeing and bowling as well as trips out to cafes, the local shops and parks and woodlands. These achievements are celebrated and recorded in photos to share with parents.

The very wide range of activities shows staff's a huge commitment to equality of opportunity. For example one young person did not like anything on his head but loved to watch go-karting. Staff took a helmet home and encouraged and supported him to play with it and become familiar with it, until he could wear it and so was able to out in a go-kart. Another young person is now driving a solo go-kart as he enjoyed the twin go-kart experience so much. Art work by residential pupils is displayed on the walls around the house. Parents are confident that staff are aware of cultural and religious needs and address these fully, a sibling commented on the prayer room available in the school.

Staff are very knowledgeable about how each child and young person communicates. This includes accurately interpreting signs, gestures and sounds alongside more

formal methods to the evident satisfaction of the individual. Staff have taught assistants at local venues to use a picture exchange system to enable young people to place their own orders for food and drink. Parents are delighted that the children's behaviour has improved so much that they can now access the local community when at home at weekends.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the school's provision for residential pupils is outstanding. Parents describe the introductory process as 'fantastic' and 'a tailor made package that really settled my child in'. There is highly effective communication between parents, residential and academic staff that provides young people with consistent approaches that reflect their individual needs. Residential pupils benefit from the meticulous pastoral care given by the highly experienced staff team who know them extremely well and work with them on a one-to-one basis. This in-depth knowledge is reflected in the care planning and review process and is being incorporated into the new style care plans.

Parents and care staff work very effectively in partnership to promote the health of the young people. Residential pupils remain registered with their own doctors and dentists, and parents retain primary responsibility for meeting their child's routine health needs. Staff are observant and sensitive to changing moods and expressions of young people, offering comfort and appropriate medication within parameters outlined by parents. Staff are creative in their approaches to prepare young people for medical investigations and treatment so as to enable them to have their medical needs addressed comfortably and with the minimum of distress.

The school's central kitchen provides residential pupils with a varied and balanced diet but special diets are not fully catered for, for example those who require meat prepared in a particular way are not offered that choice and are restricted to the vegetarian option. This is a contractual issue outside the direct control of the school but regularly raised by them in management meetings. The very well-equipped kitchen enables staff to meet the requirements of those young people who have self-selective diets and some parents choose to bring in food for their children. The layout of the kitchen also enables children and young people to be appropriately involved in food preparation and other domestic tasks, thus supporting the development of their independence skills.

The accommodation is of exceptionally high standard and provides a safe and secure environment for pupils. All residential pupils have their own room, furnished and decorated in accordance with their needs and wishes. Maintenance issues are addressed promptly so that the accommodation looks as good as new. The spacious communal accommodation provides ample opportunities for personal development. For example, young people can choose to be alone or part of a group and move with ease between both. This also enables young people to invite friends for tea after school.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes outstanding provision to safeguard residential pupils' welfare. There is robust implementation of policies and procedures that relate to recruitment of staff. As a result only suitable people are appointed and this safeguards the welfare of the residential pupils.

The welfare for residential pupils is further safeguarded because staff are familiar with, and know how to implement child protection procedures. Safeguarding is underpinned by relevant training in child protection. The next scheduled child protection training session for staff will include a session on cyber bullying awareness, so as to support young people to access social media sites safely. The school actively and successfully promotes tolerance and understanding of difference in a multiracial and multicultural residential community with widely diverse needs. As a result children and young people are not subject to any form of discrimination. Staff demonstrate an excellent awareness of behaviour that could be interpreted as bullying. Staff vigilance reduces opportunities for such instances to occur and also effectively minimises opportunities for children to go missing.

Staff are highly skilled in the promotion of positive behaviour. Staff understand behaviour as a means of communication and work with pupils to help them find more acceptable ways to express emotions. Parents comment that the setting of targets and boundaries, which are reinforced consistently within a structured reward system, has 'transformed family life', 'my child acts more appropriately' and 'my child is learning how to control his behaviour'. The use of physical intervention and sanctions are infrequent. If they are used it is in accordance with the approved behaviour management method and by suitably trained staff.

Health and safety in the residential setting is exceptionally well promoted. The security arrangements provide restricted access both to the school site and the residential accommodation. The risk assessment process is embedded in the culture of the provision and is used to enable activities to take place. Written risk assessments, reviewed annually, are in place for the premises and for all activities undertaken by pupils, both on and off site. These risk assessments are thorough and are used to support pupils to enjoy a wide range of experiences, canoeing for example. The governing body oversees provision for health and safety and any matters relating to safety are addressed promptly by the on site facilities management team. This team is also responsible for fire safety and ensure that routine servicing, testing and drills take place and that the fire risk assessment is updated as required.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and organisation of the residential provision is outstanding. The aims of boarding are clearly stated for both parents and children. The aims are effectively translated into practice, in particular that of working in partnership with parents. Parents say 'we are working together to improve the lives of our children', sharing effective behaviour management methods for parents to use at home for example. Parents also say that communication is a considerable strength of the residential provision and that they are exceptionally well informed about their child's life when boarding. Parents know how to make a complaint and are confident that staff would take prompt action in response to any expression of dissatisfaction by a child whether verbal or behavioural.

The management of the residential provision is central to the running of the whole school. A parent said 'the head is responsive to the residential pupils and spends time with them at their request'. There is robust monitoring of the quality of the boarding provision by the head of care, the headteacher and the chair of governors through regular visits and reports to the governing body. This monitoring serves to quality assure and improve the care for residential pupils.

The well led, highly experienced, skilled and qualified staff team is successfully deployed to meet the assessed individual needs of each of the residential pupils. Parents say 'I trust the staff to care for my child, they know him really well and respect his sensitivities' and 'Staff are very good at understanding my child's needs'. The whole staff team work together on each shift providing excellent staffing ratios and a mix of gender, culture and ethnicity that reflect that of the young people. The daily routines and procedures are very well known to the residential pupils and staff alike, providing a pattern of individualised, consistent care that meets the needs of the young people living there. Children and young people are cared for by a staff team that is very well supported through regular, relevant and up-to-date training, formal and informal supervision, annual appraisals and staff meetings. New staff receive supervision fortnightly, thus meeting a recommendation made in the last inspection report.

Staff have an excellent understanding of the importance of maintaining accurate and comprehensive records and are familiar with the full range of required policies and procedures and confidently implement them.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- consider how the provision of special diets may be improved.

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 boarders

Inspection of Arbour Vale School

Thank you for spending time with me when I visited the school to find out what is like to live at Arbour Vale House.

I think the staff do a brilliant job in looking after you. The staff know what they need to do and they talk to your family so that you can all work together. You and the staff know each other really well and have fun. They help you to do things for yourself and take time to find exciting things to do like go-karting and archery.

The house is safe and has lots of space so that you can choose to be on your own or in a group.

I have asked the school to look at how to increase the choice of special diets.

I enjoyed visiting your house and wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely,

Maire Atherton