

# Appleford School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Jennifer Reed

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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.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Appleford School is an independent, co-educational residential special school for children aged from 7 to 14 years of age, who have dyslexia and associated learning difficulties. The school has a Christian character and close links with its local church. The school is inclusive of children of other faiths. Pupils may be referred from local authorities or private sources.

The school offers the options of full boarding, weekly boarding and day provision. The residential provision comprises of two boarding houses which are located on the school site. They provide separate accommodation for boys and girls. The school is located on the edge of Salisbury Plain in the village of Shrewton, Wiltshire.

At the time of this inspection there were 64 pupils on roll; 50 boys and 14 girls. The school currently provides residential accommodation for 44 pupils; 31 boys and 11 girls. The residential provision was last inspected on 8 December 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>good</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
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 good. Residential pupils benefit from their positive experience of boarding which provides them with a stimulating environment where they are supported within a clear structure and known boundaries.
- Regular monitoring and the review of senior management functions has contributed to the establishment of clear lines of delegation, accountability and reporting. This provides the proprietor with robust oversight of the school's operation. Leadership and management of the boarding houses is strong and the residential provision is efficiently run and well organised.
- Residential pupils are ably looked after by a competent and well qualified staff team. The staff are committed to providing a high standard of care which promotes children's welfare and supports their development. Staff have a good understanding of each child's specific needs and abilities. Care practice ensures each residential pupil receives appropriate support, guidance and opportunities so they develop to their full potential.
- Residential pupils enjoy boarding and they have fun with their peers. They can choose to take part in a range of activities which helps build their confidence and self-esteem while developing their social skills and abilities. Inclusion is promoted in all aspects of school life and staff ensure every pupil has equal opportunity.
- The vigilance of the staff, and the excellent health and safety standards maintained by the school, keeps pupils safe. The safety of pupils is a paramount consideration within the school in all areas of its operation. Systems have been reviewed and refined to support sound safeguarding practice.

- The stability of the staff group and the continuity of care helps residential pupils to establish positive relationships with staff members. The children are comfortable and at ease with adults whom they know and trust; this supports them in participating and interacting fully in boarding life.
- The well-integrated staff working arrangements across the whole school provides residential pupils with a coherent and holistic approach to meeting their individual needs and supporting their learning and development.
- The school has fully addressed the seven recommendations for improvement made at the previous inspection. This has resulted in improvements in the accommodation, in the completion of specific documentation and the provision of further staff training.
- The school has not met one national minimum standard.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Most are happy and enjoy living in the schools' residential provision. The stable staff team and continuity of care supports them to make strong relationships. They are comfortable and at ease in their accommodation and benefit from excellent individualised support and encouragement from staff; this helps them to learn and develop new skills. Residential pupils' views are summarised by comments such as: 'this is a brilliant school and I like being here;' and, 'this school is just right for me and now I feel good inside;' and, 'I love boarding and tuck!' They particularly enjoy the healthy, tasty and well-presented meals provided in the recently built, well-designed dining room. This pleasant environment, alongside staff guidance has had a positive impact on promoting the development of residential pupils' social skills.

Residential pupils also enjoy participation in the various activities which appeal to a diverse group of children of different ages with a range of abilities. For example, attending the local scout, cub and guide organisations where residential pupils have the opportunity to make friendships outside of the school, or going to the school disco to spend time with their peers. Many of the activities help them to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle. Innovative opportunities, for example, 'Science Day' and involvement in drama productions, support learning and achieving while having fun. Such interactions help residential pupils to increase their self-esteem and confidence while learning to live harmoniously with others who may be very different to themselves.

Residential pupils take an active part in the development of boarding practice. Staff consider their views and where appropriate, suggestions are implemented. For example, one child said, 'we have chosen what colour we painted our common room; some girls wanted blue or green and others wanted purple, but purple won.' Residential pupils learn to develop patience and tolerance as staff support them in trying out new things within a safe environment. Their achievements are recognised

and celebrated and staff provide excellent support and guidance to help them to successfully manage their behaviour and difficulties. Residential pupils feel respected and valued and they are beginning to develop age-appropriate independent living skills. They benefit from leadership opportunities, such as house prefects and head of house, which help to develop a sense of responsibility and self-worth.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the residential provision and the care for residential pupils is good. Staff look after residential pupils well, providing a level of individual care which is sensitively delivered to meet each child's unique needs. Most residential pupils enjoy their boarding experience. One parent summarised this aspect by saying, 'they are a complex group of children to look after and yet the atmosphere is always one of positive and productive order and good humour.' Prospective residential pupils and their parents receive sufficient information to tell them about how the school operates and what they can expect. The induction programme for new residential pupils is thoughtfully considered and staff make sure each new child receives the level of support they need to settle in successfully. One residential pupil had just arrived at the school and moved into the residential provision; they said, 'I am really new and I like Appleford already.'

Staff keep in close contact with parents to keep them informed of their child's progress and well-being. Residential pupils are able to contact their parents and friends on a regular basis. Parents are generally satisfied with the standard of care given to their children. One parent said, 'the boys are well guided, cared for and listened to and their routines help them mature and care for themselves and one another.' The school has good healthcare arrangements that promote residential pupils' welfare. This includes good access to specialist therapists and to external health agencies. The administration of medication is sound and medicines are securely stored, ensuring residential pupils are kept safe. Staff are vigilant in monitoring well-being and look after unwell children with kindness. Meals are well cooked and provide a nutritious and balanced diet to promote good health.

The school offers residential pupils a good range of enjoyable extra-curricular leisure activities, both within the school and in the community. Furthermore, there are varying opportunities within the school's structure to develop their leadership and inter-personal skills. Relationships between residential pupils and staff are excellent and most children feel very comfortable discussing most things with their residential staff. The school's complaint system is effective in dealing with formal complaints and the school provides information about how residential pupils can contact outside help lines and the school's independent listeners should they wish to discuss any concern. However, this does not include details of how to contact the Children's Rights Director.

The residential provision provides boarding accommodation of a generally good standard. The school has a rolling programme of refurbishment to improve the

standard. There have been improvements in the boys' furnishings and décor and the girls' common room has been redecorated. Some showers in both houses have been refurbished, however, residential pupils reported that three showers did not provide sufficient privacy. The school successfully rectified this problem during the inspection. Currently, the common rooms in both houses are used during school hours for individual therapy sessions. This means that residential pupils do not have the sole use of their common rooms and personal items, ongoing games, Lego and jigsaws need to be put away each night.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The safety of residential pupils is good. The school has good arrangements in place for keeping residential pupils safe and protected from harm. Children's safety and well-being has high priority within the school. Staff have regular training and follow a clear policy for child protection that they understand and implement so that residential pupils are kept safe. Following an identified shortfall in practice, the school has reviewed and refined safeguarding reporting practices to provide more corporate responsibility and increased management involvement in the monitoring of safeguarding issues. This practice increases the protection of residential pupils and further promotes their welfare. Furthermore, a complaints' panel provides the headteacher with additional oversight of satisfactory resolution of concerns from parents and children.

The assigned child protection coordinator for the school has completed the required training to fulfil this safeguarding role. The coordinator liaises appropriately with key agencies to ensure that residential pupils are protected and staff know how to share concerns for safeguarding purposes. Staff complete detailed records about welfare, behaviour and significant events that enable the school to map individual progress and highlight any emerging patterns or themes. This valuable information helps staff to identify how best to care and support each residential pupil to help them achieve and learn to their full potential while keeping them safe.

Staff deal with bullying issues between children promptly and effectively. The residential pupils know that such behaviour is not acceptable within the boarding houses and they trust staff sufficiently to alert them to such behaviour when it occurs. The school's mobile phone policy minimises the risk of cyber-bullying. The collaborative working practice between the residential and teaching staff brings a holistic approach to behaviour management that protects individual pupils.

The school promotes and rewards positive behaviour. Residential pupils receive recognition and attend award ceremonies for their good behaviour and achievements. Conversely, staff help them to recognise unacceptable behaviour. Staff are sensitive to individual levels of understanding in behaviour management issues and find effective ways to help children make changes to their behaviour. For example, the technique employed of 'holding the ball' works well in common room meetings, when residential pupils recognise that they must be silent and only the

person holding the ball can speak. De-escalation techniques are effectively based on established good relationships, and physical restraints are rarely used in boarding time. Staff record sanctions or restraints in detail; however, the duration of one restraint had not been entered in the dedicated record. The head of care corrected this error during the inspection.

The school operates safe recruitment processes and rigorously undertakes the recruitment and selection of new staff to make sure only suitable persons are employed to work with residential pupils. Health and safety checks, maintenance and fire safety are completed to an outstanding standard to ensure staff and residential pupils reside in a safe environment.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. Robust oversight by the proprietor brings strong benefits. Furthermore, boarding at the school is an integral component of school life. The school undertakes effective monitoring that highlights areas for improvement and development. The school strives for continual improvement, taking appropriate action to make changes to practice when any shortfall arises; this promotes residential pupils' welfare. For example, the school has made changes to the review of complaints and safeguarding reporting which increases the protection of pupils. The school takes account of residential pupils' views to inform development and has satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made at the previous Ofsted inspection.

The head of care is suitably qualified and experienced and she effectively leads a competent residential staff team who are committed to delivering good care. Staff, parents and residential pupils have great respect for the head of care who is readily available to offer advice, guidance and support to staff members. However, not all staff benefit from regular formal supervision sessions to discuss their work. Staff have a range of relevant qualifications and receive regular training to increase their knowledge and skills. The school maintains a sufficient level of staffing to meet the needs of residential pupils.

The inclusive ethos of the school impacts on all aspects of the school's operation and staff take account of the diverse needs of residential pupils in the implementation of boarding practice. Staff are committed to providing sound care and the recent development of individual care plans helps each residential pupil to achieve and develop. However, the school has not involved parent and residential pupils in the formulation of these written placement plans. Nevertheless, communication and collaborative working between the residential provision and parents is excellent. Staff inform parents about their child's progress and about any significant event that may occur. Parents said, 'they are fantastic house-parents and we cannot thank them enough;' and, 'staff are well informed and caring.'

The school provides a comprehensive range of policies that provide detailed

information to staff about how best to look after residential pupils. Staff adhere to and implement this guidance. The school database system and written records ensure that the school maintains accurate records of residential pupils' progress and history which contribute to planning appropriate support and care for individual children.

## **National minimum standards**

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (NMS 21.1)

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- Provide pupils with information about how they may contact the Children's Rights Director in case of problems or distress.
- Undertake supervision with staff at least once every half-term.
- Review the suitability of undertaking pupils' therapy sessions in the boarding house common rooms.

**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.**



15/03/2012

Dear residential pupils

### **Inspection of Appleford School**

I really enjoyed meeting you when I came to your school in March and I would like to thank you all for talking with me and helping me with the inspection.

I have judged that your school is a good residential school.

You live in comfortable accommodation and most of you say that you are happy and that you enjoy living in your boarding houses.

You also enjoy your meals. They are very well cooked and tasty. Meals are served in your new dining room, which gives you lots of space and light and is a very nice place to eat your food.

You are able to keep in contact with your families while you are living at school and boarding helps you to make friendships with other children. You are learning how to be kind to each other and get on well with other people who may be quite different to you and your family.

You are able to take part in a range of activities that you enjoy, for example, going to scouts, cubs and guides in the village, swimming, football, and playing or spending time in the school grounds and in the boarding houses. I also saw that you have a lot of fun taking part in your drama productions and using 'Science Day' for solving a crime.

Most importantly, you are each developing new skills and abilities. The staff check how you are doing and find ways to help you make good progress.

The staff know you all very well and they work hard to make sure that you are kept safe and looked after properly. When you are unwell, staff take good care of you.

Your staff do an excellent job and you appreciate the help and support they give you. The staff complete professional training and they are well qualified to take care of you.

I have only asked staff to improve four minor things to make boarding life even better!

I do hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Appleford School.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Reed