

# Stone Bay School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Sophie Wood

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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**

Stone Bay School is situated in Broadstairs. It is a residential special school, maintained by Kent County Council.

The school provides specialised education for day and residential pupils aged 11 to 19 years who exhibit communication difficulties, moderate to severe learning difficulties, challenging behaviours and Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

The residential accommodation is divided into four separate units. Boys and girls are accommodated separately and 61 pupils are on the school roll.

The school was last inspected in February 2011.

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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	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
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 school's residential provision is good. Residential pupils enjoy their time in school and develop trusting, appropriate relationships with staff who value them. Equality and diversity is very well promoted and pupils develop a sense of pride in who they are.
- Outcomes for residential pupils are good. Individuals make very good progress from their starting points with particular regards to their personal and social development. Staff work collaboratively with other professionals and provide pupils with the care and support they need.
- Arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of residential pupils are outstanding. Robust recruitment procedures are effectively implemented. Pupils feel safe at school. Behaviour management processes are scrutinised and stringently monitored to ensure the continued safety and dignity of every pupil. All staff implement the school's child protection guidance and procedures diligently.
- Good arrangements ensure that residential pupils receive the medicines and treatments they need. External professional health referrals and appointments are sometimes difficult to secure and this can have a negative impact upon their emotional well being. The school is actively working on this shortfall.
- Residential pupils commend the quality of their meals. The food provided is of excellent quality. Pupils are encouraged and supported to enjoy healthy lifestyles which are complemented by a range of enjoyed physical activities.
- The quality of the residential accommodation is good. Residential pupils enjoy good privacy and are safe because of unobtrusive supervision. A rolling

programme of redecoration is improving the comfort and aesthetics of the living areas. The school recognises that kitchen areas could be further developed to increase pupils' opportunities to further develop their independent living skills.

- The leadership and management of the school are good. Robust monitoring and quality assurance processes have identified areas of weakness and appropriate action is being taken. Staff feel supported and are looking forward to implementing changes in a timely methodical manner.
- The school meets all of the national minimum standards and the previous recommendations have been met.
- The residential provision has many strengths and few areas in need of further development. The school's drive and determination to improve, in the very best interests of the pupils is a particular strength of the senior management team.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. Individuals make excellent progress from their starting points, because staff know them well and provide them with the support they need. Key workers strive to form appropriate and trusting relationships with pupils. This creates a nurturing culture which respects their very unique and individual needs. Pupils feel valued and are encouraged, through excellent role modelling, to respect the needs and individuality of others.

Parental comments about the provision include, 'staff show professionalism, patience and empathy' and they also talk of, 'transparency and such a caring attitude.' Residential pupils say, 'I like being with my friends', 'you have to try and help each other' and 'some of my friends don't mean to do the things they do'.

Pupils are empowered to influence decisions within the residential provision. They make realistic decisions about their environment and activities. They enjoy their time at school because after school activities are appropriate and meaningful.

Pupils' health needs are effectively promoted and supported. Senior staff members safely implement a clear and detailed health and medication policy and procedure. Pupils receive the medication they need and the care team receives ongoing relevant training.

There are occasions whereby delays are experienced in obtaining necessary external support, for example, in mental health and counselling services. The school recognises, but is not responsible for this shortfall, which can have a negative impact upon pupils' well being. Internal processes for coordinating and chasing such requests are currently being explored.

Residential pupils describe the food as 'yummy' and 'really lovely.' They are provided with healthy, nutritious food and special dietary requirements are effectively catered

for. Sensitive, consistent encouragement results in pupils developing the confidence to try new foods and begin to enjoy the social aspects of mealtimes with their peers.

Pupils practice and develop independence and self-help skills. They leave the school equipped with the means to continue to make good progress.

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

The quality of the residential provision is good. The school implements a thorough initial assessment procedure to determine whether it can meet the needs of a prospective pupil. Parents and carers are integral to this process. New residential pupils are welcomed into the community and great care and attention is paid to implementing the communication methods and resources needed by each individual. Residential pupils readily settle as a result and quickly reap the benefits of this holistic provision.

Care and teaching staff work collaboratively to ensure care and teaching skills are synchronised and meaningful. Liaison across all staff disciplines remains ongoing on a daily basis. Prescribed targets for residential pupils are not always fully captured within the written care planning process but improvements to current systems are being worked on. Residential pupils enjoy positive and appropriate relationships with their key workers. Many individual staff members have been with the school for a long time and have known individual pupils since their inception. This aspect is particularly valuable in terms of staff members getting to know and understand individual needs exceptionally well. They get the best from pupils because they inspire confidence and interaction.

Care plan formats and processes are viewed by the school as an ongoing and evolving piece of work. Senior staff across all levels evaluate and monitor the care planning process and are appropriately critical. Imminent plans in terms of redefining senior staff roles and responsibilities include the management and monitoring of care planning. Staff members have also asked for additional training with regards to the key worker role and understanding the sexual health needs of teenagers. Self-evaluation and the desire to improve upon their own practice is a key strength of the care team. This aspect drives improvement and positively impacts upon the quality of the care received by the pupils.

Residential pupils receive sound guidance and support in terms of their general health and well being. Arrangements for the safe storage, management and administration of medication are safe and robust. Senior staff retain key responsibilities and implement clear medication procedures diligently. There are occasions whereby specialist external appointments are delayed. Despite the best efforts of individual key workers, the current lack of a coordinated approach to monitoring such needs and liaising with external professional services presents a shortfall in this aspect of pupils' care. The school is acutely aware of this deficit and

is actively working through its own list of possible solutions, which includes additional staff recruitment.

A dedicated catering team provides meals of exceptionally good quality. Individual needs are exceptionally well provided for. Pupils are showered with praise for trying new foods and making progress with their eating skills. Staff recognise that mealtimes often present challenges for many pupils. Great care is taken to ensure that such times are relaxed, social occasions, within which individual pupils begin to feel comfortable. Any necessary support is subtly provided so as to preserve individual dignity. Pupils are encouraged to further develop their independence skills in terms of meal preparation and snacks within the residential provision. Some good opportunities are well used but the school recognises it has the resources to develop this aspect even further.

There is a rolling programme of upgrading and maintenance. Residential pupils are encouraged to personalise their own bedrooms, within which their treasured possessions are kept safe. There are good quality furnishings and fittings throughout the provision. Some communal living areas appear more homely than others, but this is being addressed through the ongoing refurbishment programme. Residential pupils are safe within the school due to excellent security precautions. Robust risk assessment processes are used effectively to restrict access to the residential accommodation, while not unnecessarily restricting pupils' freedom of movement within their home environment.

Parents and carers are highly valued members of the school community. Staff members view their key worker role as one which captures the whole family. This results in excellent levels of communication between the school and home. Residential pupils benefit from the mutual respect and partnership working which exists between the key adults in their lives. Staff are acutely aware of individual friendships within the school. Where residential pupils reside in separate living areas, evening activities and events are coordinated to ensure that important friendships are maintained.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The school's provision for ensuring the safety of its residential pupils is outstanding. Strong and robust recruitment procedures are implemented for all appointments. Candidates are effectively screened and do not have access to the residential provision or pupils until all checks and references are satisfactorily returned. Residential pupils are effectively looked after by a safe, stable staff team.

The headteacher is currently reviewing the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. The actual practice of the staff team remains current, relevant and up to date. Residential pupils are protected through the culture of protection which is implemented by staff across all disciplines. The local authority confirms the ongoing

receipt of referrals and consultations made by the school, in the best interests of safeguarding pupils. Individual staff members with specific safeguarding responsibilities receive the external training commensurate with their roles; this includes a school governor. All staff receive annual training updates and are familiar with how, and to whom to report concerns.

The care team demonstrates an acute understanding of the individual and group needs of the residential pupils. They have a perceptive and accurate understanding as to how specific behaviours may be perceived as aggressive or of a bullying nature. To this end, staff implement methods of working which provide effective safeguards for all of the pupils.

The school strikes an excellent balance between protecting pupils by direct action and equipping individuals with the skills they need to keep themselves safe. Given the varying degrees of learning needs which exist within the school, great emphasis is placed upon the safety and security of the premises. Procedures for pupils who go missing from school are explicitly clear and all staff understand them. Individual pupils are given opportunities to explore their surroundings within a safe environment. They can experiment with new activities and take appropriate risks. As a consequence, personal growth and development is actively encouraged and achieved.

The school implements guidance from external professional organisations effectively. Stringent monitoring systems examine instances and occurrences of challenging behaviours and how these are being managed. Such attention to detail and the excellent analysis of why pupils are behaving in specific ways, leads to the implementation of appropriate and meaningful behaviour management strategies. Results are showing steady reductions in incidents of challenging behaviours, because pupils are positively responding to the proactive approaches of the staff team.

Staff are very good at recognising that idiosyncratic behaviours of some individuals can have a negative impact upon others. To this end, great care is taken to consider individual and group needs when planning events, activities and group living arrangements within the residential provision. An excellent balance is struck in terms of teaching pupils to be tolerant and accepting, while supporting and protecting any anxieties or lack of understanding they may have about each other. This aspect is captured and managed well, with particular regards to incidents of behaviour which could be construed as bullying. Staff are very good at recognising that this may not be the intention, but could be the perception.

All staff receive training in the use of safe physical restraint techniques, but its actual use is rare. All such incidents are diligently recorded, scrutinised and monitored. Pupils and staff are protected. Staff members say, 'it is a complete last resort' and 'you must always question yourself if it could have been avoided.'



Residential pupils speak with enthusiasm and confidence when asked about their feelings of safety within the school. Their comments include, 'the staff always look after you', 'nobody can get in the school at night', 'you just tell someone if something has upset you', 'there are codes on the doors' and 'we always practice what to do in case there's a fire'.

Systems and processes with regards to health and safety matters are embedded and ingrained within the school's culture. Staff members across all disciplines make swift referrals to the maintenance department in order for risks and hazards to be minimised. Necessary precautions, such as fire systems, are covertly placed throughout the residential provision. Great care has been taken to ensure that safety comes first, while considering the desire to make the provision look as homely as possible for the residential pupils.

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

The management and leadership of the school is good. Recently, the school has strengthened the senior management team by appointing a new head teacher. The school is experiencing a period of review and change. This is being sensitively and methodically managed. Staff are accepting and welcoming of the next stage. There is a positive energy within the school. Staff are seizing the opportunity to review the provision and make suggestions for continued developments in the best interests of the pupils.

Staff continue to deliver the school's aims and objectives of structured, well-planned care, aimed at meeting the complex care needs of pupils with additional learning needs. Information and literature available for pupils, parents, carers and staff is being revised and updated; this includes the school's website.

School staff, residential pupils and their families all highly value the residential provision. High staffing levels reflect and support the needs of individual pupils. A high percentage of the care team has been in post for many years. Pupils' needs are well known and they enjoy the stability of the loving, respectful relationships that develop during their time at the school. Group and individual activities are structured, well planned and supported by trained and experienced staff.

The school provides its staff with regular, relevant training opportunities. Its workforce understands the complex care needs of the pupils. A review of individual and more global training needs is underway to ensure staff are enabled to have access to additional and specific pieces of training which will further enhance the quality of care they provide. Senior staff have all been placed on supervision training and a new format for supervision and appraisal is currently being piloted. Staff members are eager to add momentum to this drive and say, 'it's an exciting time' and 'better systems will provide better care for the pupils'.

Staff understand and work to the school's policies and procedures. Their

implementation and meaning is explored throughout new staff's induction periods and beyond. All of the required policies are in place but the school recognises the benefit of regular review. To this end, the governing body is currently ratifying updates.

Care planning systems and processes are in a similar position. Such records are comprehensive and securely held. Robust monitoring has identified some gaps and shortfalls in terms of their quality; hence a revised care plan package is currently being piloted.

The school is very good at recognising the individual needs of residential pupils, including their family circumstances and backgrounds. Initial assessment processes capture their unique circumstances and this leads to excellent communication systems being implemented for pupils and those involved in their lives. Numerous forums and systems throughout the school involve pupils in making realistic and meaningful decisions about their care and how the residential provision is run. Happy pupils talk of missing their families but counter this with comments including, 'I miss my family but I do enjoy it here' and 'it is good fun and the staff look after us'.

Excellent monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms include an active and interested governing body. Roles and responsibilities specifically concerned with the welfare and safeguarding of pupils are well defined. Recent and ongoing emphasis is being placed upon a thorough review of the senior staffing structure. Gaps and shortfalls have been identified. These are being managed through restructuring, additional training and recruitment.

Recommendations made from the previous inspection have been addressed. The school receives good support and critical analysis through the local authority Standard 20 visitor. This process drives improvement and focuses upon achieving the best possible outcomes for pupils.

## **National minimum standards**

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

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

- Continue to explore the ways in which the school can strengthen its liaison with external health professional agencies.
- Implement the proposed line management changes to ensure roles and responsibilities are clear and manageable.
- Ensure all of the policies, as listed under Appendix 1 of the Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards remain up to date and in line with current legislative guidance.

**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.**



28/02/2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Stone Bay School**

As you know Ofsted recently inspected the residential houses at your school. I met with a number of you and really enjoyed spending time in the different houses. You told me you feel very safe at school and you are very well cared for by the staff.

I also spent time interviewing different staff members and I looked at records and paperwork. I really enjoyed having meals with some of you and I was very impressed with the quality of the food.

I have found that your school is a very safe place and that you are looked after by experienced and caring staff. You enjoy caring relationships with people who do their very best to give you the support and help that you need. The staff understand that you sometimes have difficulties and they provide you with good guidance at such times.

I have asked the school to think of ways to give you more opportunities to practise and learn new independent living skills and to make sure your care plans are all up to date and of good quality. Some of you have difficulties with specialist health appointments and the school is working hard to try to improve this and reduce your waiting times. I have also asked for all of your living areas to be furnished and decorated to the same good standard as some are currently better than others.

Overall, I have found that your school provides you with good quality care and the help that you need. I was very impressed with the staff team and their commitment to making improvements for your benefit.

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting you all.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Wood