

Ripplevale School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

DfE registration number	886/6047
Unique reference number for social care	SC023668
Unique reference number for education	118995
Inspection dates	07/03/2012 to 12/03/2012
Inspector	Sophie Wood

School address	Ripplevale School, Chapel Lane, Ripple, Deal, Kent, CT14 8JG
Telephone number	01304 373866
Email	info@ripplevaleschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Ted Schofield

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk



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

Ripplevale School is an independent special needs day and residential special school. It caters for a maximum of 60 boys from seven to 16 years of age who exhibit a range of emotional and social behavioural difficulties.

The residential provision is managed by the principal, team leader and a team of care staff. Eight residential pupils are currently accommodated in one designated residential house.

The residential provision was last inspected in December 2010.

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

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

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 the school's boarding provision is outstanding. Happy boarders enjoy positive and appropriate relationships with an experienced, dedicated, well trained staff team.
- Equality and diversity is very well promoted. Boarders make excellent progress from their starting points because they are highly valued as unique individuals and develop confidence and self belief.
- Arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of boarders are excellent. Stringent recruitment procedures and the robust monitoring and supervision of visitors protects boarders from unsafe adults. Effective child protection procedures are understood and implemented by all.
- Collaborative working arrangements with health care agencies provides boarders with the guidance, advice and support they need. Excellent catering provision further enhances their continued good health.
- Superb accommodation is safe, secure and maintained in excellent decorative order. Boarders enjoy their freedom of movement within spacious surroundings, complemented by the privacy of their own personalised bedrooms.
- Boarders enjoy a wide range of meaningful and enjoyable activities. Their development of social skills is greatly enhanced through community participation.
- Effective behaviour management systems focus upon positive reinforcement. Boarders are given appropriate responsibilities and realistic expectations. They develop emotional intelligence and are given the skills they need to work out their own coping strategies.

- The leadership and management of the school is outstanding. Senior managers implement robust quality assurance systems which drive improvements for the benefit of the boarders.
- No recommendations were made from the previous inspection and none are made as a result of this visit. The boarding provision is a strength of the school and all of the national minimum standards are met or exceeded.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for boarders are outstanding. Individuals frequently join the school as vulnerable boys, lacking in confidence. They leave as capable young men who are eager to explore the next stage of their lives because they have developed a positive self-image and a hunger for independence.

Boarders thrive within a culture of acceptance and tolerance. They learn to feel good about themselves and are encouraged to be positively interested in the differences of others. Solid friendships develop and individuals say, 'we look after each other.' Established boarders take a very keen interest in newcomers. They are given appropriate responsibilities and staff have high expectations that they will be supportive and empathic. Parental comments include, 'his maturity and self-belief has soared.'

Happy boarders thoroughly enjoy their free time and the school's activity provision. They benefit from the clear structure of the after school timetable which allows for a realistic amount of flexibility and spontaneity. Staff members say, 'boredom can lead to mischief' and boarders say, 'there is always loads to do.' Excellent consultation processes encourage boarders to actively choose their own planned activities; many of which are community based and therefore provide opportunities for social interaction and growth. High staffing ratios provide boarders with the individual time they need with their key workers to explore their own personal and personal thoughts and needs.

Boarders enjoy excellent general health. Specific needs are comprehensively researched and effectively provided for. Boarders receive the medical input they need to stay healthy and they enjoy nutritious meals which fulfil growing teenage appetites. Comments from boarders include, 'the food is great', 'I am never hungry' and 'the staff always listen to our suggestions for the menu.' Excellent opportunities encourage boarders to be physically active; sporting activities are very popular. The school is equally concerned with boarders' emotional and mental well-being. Swift referrals to appropriate external professionals ensure boarders receive the additional support they need.

Boarders benefit tremendously from the enthusiastic support and encouragement they receive from the staff team. Opportunities to explore new experiences and to practise independence skills are plentiful and embedded into the daily boarding

routine. As their skills develop, so does their confidence. Comments from boarders include, 'I've become much more confident' and 'I'm looking forward to leaving but I will really miss this place.'

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. Staff across all disciplines work collaboratively in the best interests of the boarders. Effective communication systems ensure boarders' targets and goals are very well supported and tailored to meet individual needs. Boarders are provided with the resources and support they require to fulfil their academic potential within the boarding environment. Excellent resources are further complemented by the time and support delivered by dedicated key workers.

The boarding team is equally concerned with the boarders' own personal and social development needs. Comments from staff members include, 'happy children will perform better at school' and 'it's important to get the balance right.' Evening activities focus heavily upon personal and social development. Boarders are as richly rewarded for progress in these areas as they are for their academic achievements. The school is explicitly clear in its desire to provide a holistic education which values the social development of its pupils.

High staffing levels provide safe, unobtrusive supervision throughout boarding time. Boarders say they enjoy very positive relationships with their key workers and they also readily identify other staff members as adults they can go to in times of need or difficulty. The school enjoys a very low staff turnover but also benefits from the energy and enthusiasm exhibited by newer recruits. The entire school team is small when compared to other establishments. Parents and boarders are very positive about this aspect and refer to the cohesive, dedicated team as the school's biggest strength.

Individual boarders are very well known. Care planning arrangements effectively capture their unique needs and how these should be met. Boarders are confident that the staff team knows them well. They trust that staff act in their best interests and say, 'you might not agree with things they say and do at the time but you learn to appreciate things as you get older.' Senior staff demonstrate a keen desire to continue to improve systems and processes for the benefit of the boarders. To this end, new care planning formats are being developed and piloted to ensure optimum quality.

Boarders actively influence the nature and types of activities provided by the school. They enjoy group and individual activities which are provided within the school's grounds and also by accessing local community facilities. Boarders are appreciative of the school's provision. Comments include, 'we go out a lot but there's also plenty to do here.' The activity provision is linked to clear and explicit behavioural expectations. Boarders understand that they are required to complete specific tasks

before they can go on activities. The concept of earning rewards and having increasing responsibilities as they get older is positively reinforced by the staff team.

Boarders receive the guidance and support they need to maintain their good health. Comprehensive records detail important medical information, including specific health conditions, allergies and medical consent. Boarders are able to see their GP in private and also have access to dentistry and optical services when in school, should the need arise. Staff encourage boarders to make appropriate decisions about their own health and well-being. An educative approach towards the risks of smoking, alcohol and illegal substances is sensitively delivered and reinforced through individual key working. Sound advice concerning their emotional development, dealing with relationships and sexuality is sensitively provided in age appropriate styles and formats. Boarders are confident in asking for guidance and advice because they trust the competence of the staff team.

Boarders commend the school's catering provision. Qualified catering staff use locally sourced produce to provide healthy, nutritious meals. Boarders say there is always plenty of choice and they value the ongoing dialogue they have with the catering team in terms of menu planning. Special dietary requirements are catered for and the main kitchen is readily accessible to boarders who wish to practise their cookery skills in the evenings.

One dedicated boarding house provides homely, spacious accommodation within a safe, secure environment. Boarders take a real pride in their surroundings and help to keep communal areas, as well as their own bedrooms clean and tidy. Excellent bathroom facilities ensure good privacy; with a number of upgraded bedrooms being refurbished with en suite facilities. Boarders say, 'I love my room, it's warm, spacious and private.' Personal possessions are suitably protected and boarders personalise their bedrooms in accordance with their own tastes. All areas are cleaned, maintained and decorated to an excellent standard and boarders describe their environment as 'warm', 'homely' and 'brilliant.'

Staff across all disciplines are firm believers in working collaboratively with parents and carers. Excellent consultation systems are commended by family members who say that key workers and teachers maintain high levels of communication with them. Comments include, 'I am always in the loop' and 'good or bad, I get to hear it immediately.' Boarders say they sometimes feel homesick but counter this with comments including, 'you can contact home easily' and 'there is never a problem if I need to talk to mum.'

Residential pupils' safety

The arrangements for ensuring boarders are safe and protected from harm are outstanding. Excellent recruitment processes are applied for every staff position. Robust procedures exceed the prescribed guidance of external agencies because the school views the safety of all of its pupils as its top priority. A dynamic business

manager diligently monitors and oversees every staff appointment. Visitors and contractors are closely monitored and access to the boarding house is suitably restricted.

Boarders say they feel safe at school. They attribute this to excellent security systems but also because of the actions of the staff team. They describe the effective implementation of the school's procedures in respect of bullying and child protection as the key reasons for feeling happy and secure. Comments include, 'the staff here really look out for everybody', 'bullying wouldn't be tolerated' and 'staff are always checking out if you're okay.'

The culture that exists within the school promotes tolerance and acceptance. Staff are excellent role models and deal confidently with the individual and idiosyncratic behaviours which are sometimes exhibited. Boarders learn to adopt this approach with each other and instances of bullying and friendship issues are rare. Up-to-date guidance and training is in place with regards to the management of more challenging behaviours. However, the use of any form of physical intervention is extremely rare. Each boarder's individual triggers and difficulties are very well known. Staff members spot issues early and implement de escalation techniques swiftly with positive effects.

Staff throughout the school receive the training and guidance they need to promote the safety and welfare of the boarders. Internal safeguarding procedures are effectively implemented. Staff across all disciplines know what to report and to whom. The school's designated child protection coordinator has an established, positive relationship with the local authority. Referrals and consultations are swiftly made in the best interests of the boarders. Collaborative working with external professional agencies, including placing social workers provides additional safeguards.

Boarders say they have no need or desire to leave the school site without permission or consent. A healthy desire by the school to promote growth and development means boarders are encouraged to explore their wider community. This is achieved through promoting increased independence and allowing boarders to take reasonable risks and to make some mistakes. An excellent balance is struck in terms of appropriate protection alongside boarders learning how to keep themselves safe. Excellent links are maintained with the local police and staff understand the school's procedures to follow in the event of a boarder being missing.

Robust health and safety systems and processes serve to provide excellent protection for everyone in the school. The services of an external consultant are highly valued and well used. A systematic approach to generic risk assessments, the site and grounds, fire precautions, new builds and maintenance needs keeps everyone safe. All incidents and accidents, though rare, are well documented and scrutinised. Regular monitoring meetings ensure all areas under the auspices of health and safety are subject to ongoing review and improvement.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and leadership of the school are outstanding. Boarders are currently assisting with the further development of the school's website. They are very clear about the ethos, aims and objectives of the boarding provision and say, 'this place really helps you' and 'I looked at three schools, I'm so glad I chose here.' Parents are equally positive and say, 'the school delivers on its promises.'

A small senior management team is comprised of suitably experienced staff, who are effectively led by two dedicated directors. Lines of accountability are explicitly clear. All staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Reporting mechanisms are slick and manager's meetings are targeted and meaningful. Recent personnel changes include a new boarding team leader. A thorough induction and excellent support sees her already very well established and eager to implement new ideas aimed at creating further improvements.

This example captures the very ethos of the school. Fresh ideas, innovative practice and new ways of working are welcomed and explored. Stringent monitoring systems, implemented by the directors, critically analyse the education and boarding provision and seek to maintain the momentum of continued improvement. The views and needs of boarders and day pupils are integral to this process. Consultation with all stakeholders has led to recent developments which include the upgrading of the boarding house and a new sports hall. The school's independent visitor brings an added value to quality assurance monitoring from the boarders' perspective. Reports of such visits are rich in the comments and views expressed by the boarders and fed into senior manager's forums.

Boarders enjoy the benefits of high staffing levels. They are assured of receiving individual attention when they need it. They receive high quality care and support because the staff team is provided with the training and support it needs to be effective. The school strives to enable its boarders to achieve their aspirations and applies the same principles to its staff team. Individuals are encouraged to seek additional training opportunities and to take on new responsibilities. Staff are eager to provide the best possible service for the boarders. Boarding staff are competent, cohesive and highly valued by the senior management team.

Initial assessment processes effectively capture the individual and unique presenting needs of boarders and their families. The school seeks to determine that parents, carers and where applicable placing authorities, will work collaboratively with them from the very onset of a place being offered. Diversity is welcomed and boarders are actively encouraged to be proud of who they are and to respect those around them. Boarders say, 'we're all very different but it works.'

All care records are suitably stored. Confidentiality is assured and information is only shared with appropriate third parties. Robust monitoring identifies any shortfalls with

regards to the quality of records and systems are constantly being upgraded to ensure improvements continue. Parents and placing authorities say they receive the information they need in the formats and timescales they require. Boarders benefit tremendously because swift and accurate communication enables all parties involved in their care to work collaboratively and in their best interests.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

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.



07/03/2012

Dear boarders

Inspection of Ripplevale School

As you know, Ofsted recently conducted an inspection of your school's boarding provision. We spent time with a good number of you and visited your boarding house to see how it works. It was particularly useful to talk with some of you privately because you made some very helpful statements and comments.

You told us that you feel very safe at school. This is because the buildings and grounds are in good order, you practise fire drills and there is excellent security. You also said that the staff team make you feel safe because you trust them. You described the staff as 'strict when they need to be but also very caring.'

We could see that you have a busy and enjoyable time after school. There was a lot of fun and laughter in the evening. Meals were delicious and you said there is always plenty of food that you like.

We also looked at lots of records and interviewed many different members of staff. It was helpful to receive additional comments from parents and other professionals who work with the school. Everyone had very positive things to say.

We found that the school provides you with an excellent standard of care. We were very impressed that the staff team continues to look for things to improve and regularly asks you for your ideas.

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection. Your input and behaviour was extremely positive and a great help.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Wood