

Valence School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

Unique reference number for social care	SC041791
Unique reference number for education	119032
Inspection dates	05/03/2012 to 07/03/2012
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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

Valence school is a maintained residential special school. There are 41 day students, girls and boys, aged between 4 and nineteen. The school has 48 residential places for students aged between ten and nineteen. Residential students live in a series of six bungalows and a larger residential living unit, both situated close to the main school building within the grounds of the school.

The school caters for students with physical disabilities and/or complex medical needs. It is situated on the outskirts of Westerham in Kent in a rural setting. The last inspection of the residential provision was in January 2011.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
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.

- Residential pupils receive consistently good quality care in this school which ensures that their needs are extremely well met. As a result of this residential pupils are happy and thrive in a progressive and supportive environment.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. As a result, residential pupils feel safe and are safe. Their parents feel confident that their children are well cared for in a safe environment by competent and caring staff.
- There is a 'can do' approach to residential pupil's care which furthers promotion of full community inclusion and participation.
- Residential pupils benefit from living in very high quality boarding facilities. As a result they enjoy the boarding experience and are able to live as independently as possible.
- A high priority is placed on health promotion including excellent on-site medical facilities and expertise. As a result residential pupils' health needs are well met and they enjoy healthy and fulfilling lifestyles.
- There is strong organisation of boarding and clear lines of accountability. This results in residential pupils being cared for by skilled and confident staff. Communication between staff and parents is excellent and this helps parents to feel fully involved in the care of their children.
- The excellent multi-disciplinary approach to residential pupil's care across education, health and social care staff ensures that there is a strong and consistent approach to meeting needs. As a result, residential pupils make good progress in all areas of their lives.

- Residential pupils enjoy being at the school. There are clear processes for communication with individual residential pupils and staff are confident and competent in understanding communication needs. As a result, residential pupils feel listened to and valued and know that their views contribute to the running of the school.
- There is a shortfall in relation to ensuring that there are clear written guidelines in place for people living in school premises. There is another minor weakness in relation to the provision of confidentiality to those residential pupils who use the school's counselling service, however the school is already addressing this. However, the overall impact on residential pupils because of these shortfalls is minimal. The school has mainly strengths and no significant weakness.
- Good progress has been made since the last inspection in addressing two recommendations set regarding the recruitment of volunteers and monitoring systems for staff recruitment. Tightened arrangements for recruitment checks and the monitoring of these are now in place. This has resulted in stronger protection for residential pupils as these checks help to ensure that only those who are suitable to work in the school do so.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Residential pupils are enabled to thrive and develop in an environment where they are fully valued. Their individual personalities and strengths are nurtured and they are supported to reach their full potential. This ensures that they make excellent progress in all areas of their lives. For example, some residential pupils live in boarding bungalows independently with minimal input from staff. With the help of adaptations, they are able to manage many daily living tasks independently. Also, residential pupils play a full decision making role in all aspects of school life. As a result of this, they are happy, skilled, independent and confident.

Residential pupils make outstanding progress as a result of their residential experience. They enjoy an inclusive boarding community which promotes exceptionally strong relationships between staff and pupils in the school. They enjoy full social lives and make friendships. Residential pupils support one another and are relaxed, confident and happy. Residential facilities go along way to offering domestic homely environments. As a result of this residential pupils like being at the school and enjoy boarding.

Residential pupils are able to communicate their views about the boarding experience and have a strong influence on the way the school is run. For example, they have a say in how and when the school is decorated. They choose the menus and the social leisure programmes. They also play an active role in staff selection and recruitment. Staff are proactive in managing difficulties in communication and support residential pupils to communicate with a range of adaptations. As a result, residential pupils

feel valued and listened to. They have a strong sense of their own value and self worth, feel empowered and develop responsibility. For example, some residential pupils are confident in managing their own medication and others live with minimal support from staff. As a result, they have a highly positive experience of boarding. A parent said, 'It is clear that each student receives good individual attention'.

Residential pupils are supported to reach their potential. They access an excellent range of social opportunities ranging from gliding to watching television. They have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the boarding community, including making a significant contribution to the running of the school. This ensures that they are confident and well equipped for next stages of their lives. A parent said, 'My son is encouraged to develop as much independence as he is capable of'. Residential pupils benefit from excellent all-round care as there is a strong multi-disciplinary approach from school staff. This helps them to make exceptional progress in relation to their health, education and social development.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential provision is good. Residential pupils receive strong pastoral care and support. There are good resources to support residential pupils' academic, health and social progress. Strong multi-disciplinary work between staff ensures that there is a focused and consistent approach to care. A parent said, 'We are massively impressed with the social care and boarding arrangements'. There are good arrangements for inductions and transitions which help residential pupils to move in and on in a positive way. Tea visits, overnight stays and evenings out are used as a way of helping them get used to boarding. Residential pupils are well equipped with skills for independence during their time in boarding and this helps them to move on confidently. Care planning is well focused, individualised and meaningful to staff, parents and residential pupils.

There are generally excellent arrangements for the promotion of residential pupils' health and well-being. On-site services include: physiotherapy, occupational therapy, a nursing team, dentistry, alternative and augmentative communication support, and speech and language therapy. Parents say that it is a huge support to have all of these services in one place. One said, 'The nurses at Valence are happy to organise any hospital appointments that my son needs'. As a result, residential pupils receive health care that meets their complex health needs. Additionally, the amount of school time missed to attend medical appointments is minimal. There are good facilities for residential pupils who are sick, which allows them to receive health care in a relaxed and comfortable environment.

The confidentiality of residential pupils when receiving counselling is not fully upheld as the current room used for counselling can be viewed into from a public corridor. This arrangement does not encourage the appropriate use of this service. However, this is a temporary arrangement and the school is in the process of making this area more private. In other areas there are good arrangements for ensuring that

residential pupil's confidentiality is safeguarded. Furthermore, residential pupils value having access to a counsellor. This helps to ensure that the school is effective in promoting the emotional and psychological health of young people.

Residential pupils live in good quality boarding facilities which are suitably adapted to promote the independence of residential pupils. There are electronically height adjustable kitchen units, sinks and ovens which ensure accessibility for some wheelchair users. Lighting, blinds and televisions can be controlled from beds with remote controls. Hoists and large areas of space help promote residential pupil's mobility. Residential pupils have access to the internet and computer equipment and are able to maintain contact with their family members. This promotes that welfare.

Health and fitness has a strong focus in the school. Residential pupils enjoy taking part in the 'food for life' group which enables them to grow, learn about and eat their own vegetables. They also have access to high quality sports facilities. They enjoy healthy and nutritious meals and are involved in the planning of menus, and depending on their abilities, shopping and cooking. This ensures that they enjoy meal times. Accessible facilities for preparing drinks and snacks are available as would be found in a domestic household. Residential pupils receive appropriate assistance to eat as required in a way which promotes dignity and choice. Good provision is made for the laundering of residential pupils' clothing and bedding. There are facilities for keeping residential pupils' possessions safe and personal items are made available for purchase. The school has a positive approach to these areas and supports residential pupils to gain independence skills in relation to this. For example, some residential pupils are responsible for undertaking their own laundry and some run a school tuck shop.

There are good opportunities for personal development which supports residential pupils to develop confidence. Most residential pupils are wheelchair users and the school has made excellent efforts to ensure that leisure activities are accessible, both within the school and community. For example, risk assessments are carried out on a wide range of activities in order to plan access to these. This has resulted in residential pupils regularly enjoying attendance at local youth clubs, libraries and restaurants. Additionally, residential pupils have enjoyed gliding, power chair football and made trips to the London Eye without staff. Appropriate support such as transport, personal and medical support, physical and communication support and the support to facilitate friendships has enabled participation of residential pupils in ordinary leisure activities.

Residential pupils' safety

Residential pupils' safety is good. They are safe and protected from harm. Residential pupils say they feel safe and know how to make a complaint. One residential pupil said, 'There are forms to complete if you are unhappy about anything'. High priority is given to safety and this promotes residential pupil's welfare. For example, risk assessments have been made regarding the premises and grounds and this helps to

reduce risks and keep residential pupils' safe. Good arrangements for fire safety protect them from harm. There are clear policies and procedures in relation to fire safety and regular fire alarm and equipment tests. Residential pupils and staff understand how to keep safe in the event of a fire as there are regular fire drills during the day and evening and staff training in fire safety. These measures promote safety for all in the school.

There is a clear and consistent approach to behaviour management which helps to ensure that residential pupils develop positive behaviour. Staff treat residential pupils with dignity and respect and this results in positive behaviour and positive relationships. Incidents of bullying are rare and staff handle bullying appropriately. Physical restraint is not used in this school and residential pupils do not go missing regularly. There are good arrangements for child protection which safeguards residential pupils. This includes training for staff in child protection. As a result there is an open and honest environment where staff are confident about reporting any problems or issues and residential pupils are kept safe.

A small number of people live on the school site as family members of staff members. There is no written agreement between the school and these individuals which specifies the terms of their accommodation. This arrangement does not fully comply with national minimum standard 14 and does not offer full protection to residential pupils. The school operates safe recruitment for vetting staff and volunteers in line with Department for Education Safeguarding Children guidance. This includes obtaining a Criminal Records Bureau check for any adult working within the school. Monitoring systems have been put in place to ensure suitable arrangements for safe staff recruitment. This helps to keep young people safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

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The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. This is an extremely well managed school with effective residential provision. A strong multi-disciplinary approach ensures that residential pupils receive the nursing, therapeutic and personal care they need. As a result they thrive and make good progress in all areas of their lives. A clear statement of principles and practice is available to residential pupils, parents and other stakeholders and this helps them to understand the ethos and philosophy of the school and know what to expect. Strong leadership throughout the school supports staff to carry out their jobs. This ensures that residential pupils are well cared for by competent and confident staff. There are clear quality assurance systems and a strong focus on development and improvement. This includes regular monitoring visits by independent visitors and school governors to monitor issues such as risk assessments, child protection issues, and complaints and staff recruitment. These measures help to ensure that residential pupils benefit from high quality care.

The school has a positive approach to learning and developing. Two

recommendations made as the last inspection; regarding the need to improve the staff and volunteer recruitment processes have been met.

There is a positive approach to staff training. One staff member said of training, 'If you need it you get it'. Consequently, staff clearly understand their roles and this keeps residential pupils safe and promotes their welfare. There are good arrangements for staff supervision which means that staff develop their skills and competencies to care well for residential pupils. Staffing levels are sufficient and reflect the needs of the residential pupils. Many of the staff team have worked at the school for many years and this promotes continuity and positive relationships.

Equal opportunities are strongly valued in this school and this means that residential pupils do not experience inappropriate discrimination. There are excellent arrangements for listening to residential pupils and for making good use of their views to improve the experience of boarding. For example, there is an effective student council that allows residential pupils to influence decisions made about life in all areas of the school. Residential pupils meet regularly with key workers and have access to outside support agencies and advocacy. As a result, they feel listened to and know that they are valued. Their strong involvement in the running of the school also ensures that they have excellent opportunities for developing skills for independence.

There is a positive approach to complaints and clear and effective measures for handling them. Staff talk to residential pupils about their rights in relation to complaints. This ensures that they know how to complain and feel confident that concerns will be addressed effectively. Governors monitor all complaints and this helps to ensure that there is a robust and open procedure for dealing with complaints. Records keeping arrangements are good and this ensures that there is a record of residential pupil's progress and history. Good arrangements for the review of this means that residential pupil's changing needs are met.

National minimum standards

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

- There is a written agreement between the school and any person over 16 not employed by the school but living in the same premises as children (for example, members of staff households). This specifies the terms of their accommodation, guidance on contact with children, their responsibilities to supervise their visitors, and notice that accommodation may cease to be provided if there is evidence that they are unsuitable to have regular contact with children. They must be required to notify an unrelated designated senior member of staff if they are charged with, or convicted of, any offence. (NMS 14.3)

What should the school do to improve further?

- Improve the arrangements for confidentiality when residential pupils receive counselling.

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.



05/03/2012

Dear students,

Inspection of Valence School

Thank you for welcoming me into your school and for your cooperation during my inspection.

I found that the residential provision in your school is good, with lots of outstanding features. Your parents told me that they are happy with the school. They said that you make huge progress with independence skills, that boarding is fantastic and that the nurses are happy to organise hospital appointments that you need. I also found these things when inspecting the school.

I found that staff value and respect you and strive for you to make good progress in all areas of your lives. There are really good medical and health care facilities so that you have most of your health needs met at school, without having to miss many classes. I also found that you are able to get some help with your emotional needs as there is a school counsellor and staff tell you how to contact outside agencies like Action for Children. Staff think that it is important that you have a say in the day to day running of the school. They make lots of opportunities for you to do this. For example, the student council is a really good place for you to say how you would like the school to run. There are many things that you can do both in, and out with the school which ensures that you enjoy your social and leisure time. Staff try to make sure that you can access the same activities as people who don't have a disability. This means that you have fun and develop good skills for independence.

Staff thinks it is important that you are kept safe and do things like fire drills and checks on new staff members to keep you safe. The school could be better at making sure that when you go for counselling, you can do this in private without other's knowing and making sure that all those who live in the school grounds have a contact.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Thackrah

