

# Cuckmere House School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Unique reference number for social care** SC050165  
**Unique reference number for education** 114696  
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**Inspector** Janet Hunnam

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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**

This residential special school is for boys aged between five and 16 years who have an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). The school is maintained by the local authority. It is part of a federation, which is a collaboration/formal partnership that includes one other residential BESD special school, a day BESD special school and a range of alternative provision provided by the local authority.

The school's residential provision is located in a separate building in a residential area of the town, approximately half a mile from the main school site. Up to 12 boys can stay overnight and they generally stay between one and three nights during the school week. There is an extended day provision for both primary and secondary pupils, enabling them to stay into the evening for activities and a meal before returning home.

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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/boardingschools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
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 residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils, irrespective of their need, benefit significantly in all aspects of their development from their experience in this caring and nurturing environment. Pupils develop their emotional, social and independence skills building confidence and self-esteem, which supports their learning within the school and their future life chances.
- Excellent relationships between pupils and staff help pupils make considerable progress in their social, emotional and educational development.
- A wide range of leisure activities provide opportunities for positive social experiences through which they build self-confidence, widen their interests and have fun. Residential pupils clearly enjoy their time in residence at the same time as learning new skills.
- Pupils receive care, education and support based on their individual needs with collaborative working across the school contributing to their progress. Liaison and communication with parents and carers result in effective partnerships attributable to the commitment of the staff team to work constantly for the welfare and development of pupils. Parents comment favourably on the progress pupils make, the positive effect this has on family life and how much pupils enjoy the residential experience.
- Pupils benefit from an extremely high standard of well-maintained accommodation, with rigorous attention to pupil's safety. All matters of health and safety are thoroughly addressed to protect pupils. Whilst detailed attention to minimising risk is given to pupils' participation in leisure activities this does not

limit their opportunities. Safeguarding is at the forefront of practice within the whole school and consequently pupils feel safe.

- The residential provision is successfully managed and the school continually strives for improvement through robust monitoring systems. Record keeping and monitoring has improved since the last inspection. All the national minimum standard are met.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding. Residential pupils fully enjoy their residential experience. They are comfortable in the company of care staff and relationships between them are of an exceptionally good quality and are relaxed, trusting and friendly. The highly experienced and committed care staff use their skills to help residential pupils to form and sustain confident and positive friendships with their peers.

Pupils feel it is like a second home and confirm they can approach any member of care staff for help or advice. They feel safe and at ease in the calm and secure residential environment. Parents consistently make comments such as, 'my son has thrived at the school' and 'my son is doing brilliantly.' They also say that the 'staff are very supportive', and that 'progress has been transferred to home'.

Pupils act appropriately and make significant progress in changing their behaviour as a result of the high expectations that staff set. They experience emotional security and develop social skills as a result of the effective identification of their individual needs and the level of supervision and support provided. Clear structure and consistent boundaries are in place allowing pupils to feel safe which helps to increase their self-esteem and confidence.

Pupils participate in a wide range of enjoyable and stimulating activities and experiences. They report that the activities are 'great' and the 'best thing' about the residential provision. Each pupil has an achievement folder with photographs of them taking part in activities. DVDs of activities and residential trips give parents and carers the opportunity of enjoying and celebrating these positive experiences and achievements. Through these activities residential pupils develop social competencies and confidence. They learn how to behave appropriately and get along with others.

An incentive scheme, individualised to support specific behavioural targets, rewards pupils for appropriate behaviour. Pupils are proud to show their 'credits' for good behaviour. Pupils are making considerable progress in these areas. Consequently, they improve relationships with their families and carers and are able to become accepted members of the wider community.

Developing practical life skills has a high priority within the residential provision. Younger pupils are expected to help care staff to prepare and cook meals and clear

the table at the end of the meal and this is part of the routine. As pupils get older, more emphasis is on developing a greater range of independence skills and they gain accreditation for these skills through a Life Skills and Independent Living award. This equips pupils for the transition to adulthood.

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

The quality of the residential provision and care is outstanding.

The induction process for pupils into the residential provision is extensive and highly successful. Younger pupils receive a gradual introduction to the residential setting. This gives them an opportunity to join in activities and meals and helps them settle in quickly. Through this process, and visits to their parents and carers, care staff become aware of their needs and are able to plan effectively for their admission.

A real strength of the residential provision is the commitment and dedication of the staff who place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their practice. There is excellent collaboration with school staff and this provides consistency for pupils. Care staff spend time in the school and school staff contribute to residential care plans. They identify specific requirements and strategies that residential care staff implement effectively to support pupils. Residential pupils have clear individual targets to work towards and these are effective in helping them develop their social skills and improve their behaviour.

The school gives a high priority to promoting the physical and emotional health needs of each pupil. Parents and carers retain overall responsibility for pupil's health needs though staff are committed to promoting a healthy lifestyle. Care plans identify the health needs of pupils and access to services, such as, the child and adolescent mental health service and the school nurse, are planned accordingly. Consequently, pupils' health needs are promoted to a high standard. Staff have training in first aid to protect pupils in case of an accident or emergency. There is a robust system for the administration of medication, which ensures pupils receive the correct medication important to their health.

A high standard of catering provides healthy, varied meals with vegetarian options and salads. Pupils confirm they enjoy the food. Residential pupils have a healthy snack after school and a nourishing evening meal, which they help prepare and cook, assisting them to develop skills which will be beneficial to them in adulthood. Pupils make suggestions relating to food through the school council and directly to staff in the residential provision. Residential staff ensure that each pupil's favourite meal is regularly on the evening menu. Ideas from the school council are implemented such as baguettes on the lunch time menu.

The quality of the residential provision is excellent. The accommodation is spacious, homely and furnished to a high standard. Pupils are able to personalise their bedrooms and benefit from communal areas large enough to enjoy a range of indoor

activities. In addition, pupils have access to a large garden and patio area for games and exercise. Daily attention and an on-going programme of improvement results in well-maintained accommodation. Pupils appreciate the high quality of their surroundings and daily living opportunities. These opportunities enable pupils to develop skills in relating socially to others, sharing with others and building positive, respectful relationships.

Pupils stay at the residential provision on a part-time basis and when they board they can maintain contact with their families by telephone. Staff have regular weekly contact with families to up-date the family on the pupil's progress. This close liaison ensures that staff and families have relevant information to meet the pupil's needs.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

Arrangements to safeguard residential pupils are outstanding. Safeguarding, protection and welfare of pupils is at the forefront of practice. Parents and staff confirm they have no concerns about the safety of pupils and pupils themselves, report that they feel safe. A parent commented that their son has a 'history of running away from a previous school but here he doesn't run off and feels very safe'. The highly skilled and motivated staff team fully understand their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils while at the same time providing them with positive opportunities to grow and develop.

Staff induction and regular training focuses on their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. Staff refer any concerns immediately to the designated child protection officer. The safety and welfare of pupils are protected through the prompt and effective sharing of this information with external agencies, such as, the local safeguarding board. Thorough vetting procedures for the recruitment of staff ensure that only suitable people work with pupils.

High staff ratios facilitate close supervision of pupils and keep them safe. Staff manage behaviour very well within an ethos of promoting and rewarding positive behaviour. Clear, consistent boundaries are in place, and pupils take responsibility and consequences for inappropriate behaviour. All staff receive training in safe hold techniques but the primary focus is on the use of de-escalation strategies. Staff have an excellent understanding of each pupil and their behaviour. They recognise triggers that may cause conflict and intervene at an early stage to diffuse potentially difficult situation. Physical restraint, within the residential setting, is rarely used and only as a last resort. This is attributed to the extremely positive relationships between staff and pupils, high expectations set by staff and their experience and skills in managing the behaviour of pupils.

Staff do not tolerate bullying and constantly reinforce the boundaries of acceptable behaviour to provide structure for social development. Effective procedures are in place when pupils leave the school without permission. These take into account the local police protocol in relation to such incidents. Staff identify such behaviour at an

individual level and clear strategies are in place to reduce such incidents and minimise risk. There have been no incidents of pupils being absent without authority from the residential provision since the last inspection. Staff liaise closely with the local police liaison officer and youth offending team in an attempt to keep pupils out of the criminal justice system.

Residential pupils live in a physically safe environment. The excellent management of health and safety within the whole school protects pupils, staff and visitors from the risk of harm. All the required safety measures and servicing of equipment occurs regularly, including the routine testing of fire safety equipment, fire drills and fire safety training for staff. Detailed health and safety audits and robust monitoring systems ensure the safety of pupils.

Off-site activities are planned well in advance by a designated educational visits co-ordinator and comprehensive assessments are rigorously completed to assess possible risks and protect pupils. This process does not limit pupils from taking part in challenging and stimulating activities but highlights a positive risk-aware approach.

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

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding. The experience, skills and knowledge of the head of school and head of care provides strong, effective leadership for the residential provision. Pupils receive a very high standard of care due to the insightful awareness of their needs and the support that is given to staff in meeting these..

The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out the aims of the residential provision and this, together with the information pack for parents and information for pupils, provides clear information about the services available. This information accurately reflects practice within the residential provision, which is a key aspect of the school's provision.

A commitment to continual improvement is evident through the school's self-evaluation and development plan. Record keeping, supervision and monitoring has improved since the last inspection. Plans include developing the activity and life skills programmes, feedback from pupils and views of stakeholders. The school has the recommended policies and records in place to support residential pupils, which are regularly reviewed. Through the implementation of these, staff are extremely successful in supporting residential pupils.

Residential staff are highly skilled, experienced and qualified to deliver care and support for pupils. A stable staff team works with dedication and delivers consistent care which is of an extremely high quality. High staffing levels provide excellent support and protection for residential pupils.

The views of pupils are valued. Residential pupils have representatives on the school



council who are active in putting forward suggestions and ideas which influence the running of the school, such as dealing with incidents of damage to school property through consequences and sanctions. Pupils complete surveys and questionnaires providing information on their view of the residential provision. Results are part of on-going monitoring of provision and influence the programme of activities and access to facilities for residential pupils.

Communication with parents and carers is a real strength of the setting. All parties work together in the best interests of residential pupils. All staff, including senior managers, make themselves available to speak to parents and carers and parents report 'excellent communication from staff' and 'staff are approachable'.

## **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.**



11/07/2012

Dear Residential Pupils

### **Inspection of Cuckmere House School**

It was good to visit you recently and thank you for being so friendly and talking to me.

I know you enjoy activities. I certainly enjoyed watching you windsurf. It looked really exciting and I am amazed at how good you are doing it. I also enjoyed my time with the younger pupils. It was a shame it rained and we couldn't have our barbeque outdoors, but it was still a lovely meal.

You get on very well with staff who take care of you and keep you safe. They know each of you as an individual and you are all making excellent progress. It is clear to me that staff want what is best for you so that you can do well in the future. Care staff work closely with school staff and communicate with your families to make sure you do well.

You stay in excellent accommodation with lots of space to do activities and relax. Staff make sure that it is very safe for you in the house.

Managers of the school are continually trying to improve the school and the residential experience so that you carry on enjoying it and benefitting from staying there.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Hunnam

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Janet Hunnam