

# Sidestrand Hall School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Stephen Halliley

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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**

Sidestrand Hall School is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council situated on the North Norfolk coast. The school has recently been re-designated as a complex needs school catering for children aged from 7 to 16 years.

Set in approximately 10 acres, the site is in a conservation area and includes woodland and gardens, which are used by the children in their environmental science studies and accredited courses.

There are currently 110 pupils on roll; a maximum of 19 can board for up to 4 nights from Monday to Friday. However, the majority of pupils board for two nights each week. The residential provision comprises three separate units, one for girls and two for boys, situated in the main school building. The school aims to provide a small group living experience in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment for those children where a specific need has been identified.

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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/typesofschoools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschoools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## 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.

- Young people receive very high quality care in a well-resourced provision which has had an extremely positive impact on their lives. Residential pupils make excellent progress in their personal and social development through learning and developing new skills, building emotional resilience and feeling safe. Academic improvement is also supported through cultural evenings linked to religious education, geography or personal, social and health education lessons and excellent support with a reading programme. A key strength of the service is the development and promotion of independence skills. This contributes massively to pupils developing feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.
- Health and safety and the safeguarding of pupils are given a very high priority. There are robust and detailed policies and procedures in place to support and inform staff and pupils feel safe when boarding. Staff have a very good knowledge of safeguarding procedures and regular training ensures this remains a high priority and focus for their work. Pupils' health and welfare are extremely well supported through: diet, a range of physical activities being offered, good medical procedures and practice, clear procedures for supporting pupils who are ill and very good links with external health professionals. This ensures pupils' physical, emotional and psychological needs are well met at all times.
- Leadership and management are very strong and there is a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of boarding. There is very hands-on management of boarding on a daily basis and the boarding provision is valued highly by the senior management team. Staff are very well committed to the role and provide an outstanding level of pastoral care and individual support. Pupils' views are actively sought at all times and are clear that they are listened to by staff who

have a genuine interest in their views and how these can be used to move the service forward. Pupils also say they feel safe in the school; they know the rules and know what staff expect of them in terms of their behaviour. This is clear in the fact there have been no major sanctions or restraints since the last inspection. This shows that behaviour management and pupils' ability to self-regulate their behaviour are areas to be celebrated. Parents have very good communication with residential staff and they are regularly consulted about the care of their child. Parents' comments about the residential care were unfailingly positive.

- Recommendations made at the last inspection have been met and there has been considerable improvement made in other areas. This includes: a major refurbishment and redecoration programme, the opening of a new residential unit and the improvement and strengthening of medical consent forms signed by parents.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding.

High levels of guidance and role-modelling by skilled staff help pupils make marked progress in their emotional and social development. Pupils have relaxed relationships with staff and respect and accept each other's differences. Staff have high expectations of pupils in terms of their capabilities and their involvement within the units. This results in pupils being actively involved in the residential community and feeling safe to express themselves. Social skills are highly developed and further supported by community activities including meals out. Emotional resilience, stability and maturity are seen by the open way the visitors are welcomed into the residential setting and positively engaged by pupils.

Developing self-care and life skills are two strengths of this service and young people are able to develop high levels of independence from their starting points. They learn skills such as: cooking, washing and ironing, menu planning, shopping, changing their beds, keeping rooms tidy and sewing. These skills are evidenced photographically which allows successes to be recognised and rewarded. Many of these skills are transferred into home life and provide a sound basis for pupils to move on in their lives and become much more independent.

Positive, socially acceptable behaviour normal in this setting and young people are respectful of each other's privacy and choice. Residential pupils know that their views are important and highly valued by staff. This results in them being actively involved in improving the residential provision, developing at their own pace and empowers them to take on roles and responsibilities in the units. The residential voice is also important to the school as a whole and there is a designated 'boarding representative' on the school council. Boarders appear very happy and say that they are. They take full advantage of activities being offered and this helps them develop

new skills or improve those they may already have.

Boarders' health is given a high priority and strong links with parents and health professionals helps support this. There is good practice in the administration and recording of medication, a varied and healthy diet is offered at every meal time and the range of physical activities offered in the evening further helps support a healthy lifestyle. The school has very close links with learning disability 'child and adolescent mental health service'. This ensures that any areas of emotional or psychological health which may require additional support can be readily addressed.

Close links with parents and social workers, where appropriate, supports the transition to independence. The skills developed in the school and the much improved levels of self-esteem and emotional maturity ensure pupils move on fully prepared for the next stage in their lives.

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

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding.

The residential provision and care provided to pupils are of the highest standard. Staff employed in the school are very experienced and knowledgeable and unfailingly place the well-being and needs of pupils at the core of their practice. New pupils are sensitively introduced to the boarding provision with a strong awareness of how change may impact on the already established group. The strong links between education and residential care support this transition as a clear handover of information helps highlight any concerns that the care staff may need to be aware of each day. These links also inform the pastoral care as pupils receive a 24 hour curriculum with residential experiences supporting academic learning. A specific strength of this is the weekly reading time. Pupils spend time with staff either reading to themselves, to staff or are supported with guided reading. The headteacher is clear that this is a key element to boarding pupils' reading levels steadily increasing.

Individual care plans, health plans, behaviour management plans and risk assessments are all current. These, together with 'All about me' booklets ensure that pupil's individual needs, unique characteristics and targets are well known by all staff. Pupils sign their case files and are involved as fully as possible in reviewing and planning their care.

Residential pupils are happy and relaxed with one pupil referring to school as the place where she feels safest. The boarding accommodation is spacious, airy, well decorated and well maintained. Bedrooms and lounges have also been redecorated. Pupils have been involved in choosing the colour schemes, wall paper and bedding for these rooms and have also helped staff with painting one lounge. One unit has not yet been redecorated though this is clearly highlighted in the development plan. The peeling paint in the corridor means this unit is not currently as well maintained

or homely as others. Bedrooms have been individualised to young people's tastes and all have lockable cabinets where pupils can keep valuables. Each of the units was being decorated for Christmas at the time of the inspection.

The main meal is taken at lunchtime in school; the kitchen has recently been refitted and has a 5 star hygiene award. Food is plentiful and varied and any special diets are well catered for with the catering manager having regular discussion with parents. Pupils compile the evening menus for their units and are actively involved in shopping and preparing meals. Two of the units have had new kitchens fitted and the third is planned. Pupils also undertake chores in the units including laying and clearing tables, washing and drying up and doing their laundry if necessary. This supports young people to be prepared for, and to develop skills they will need in life after leaving school.

Pupils' health needs are given a high priority and procedures for the administration and recording of medication are very strong. An extremely wide range of purposeful activities is offered to boarding pupils in the evenings. These include gym games, swimming, trips to town or the beach, cycling and shopping. In the units board games, computer games and lots of books are available. Staff also support young people with individual ideas such as the building of a 'bomb shelter' which was done on the first evening of the inspection. Activities are chosen by pupils and they are very eager to be involved. Off-site activities promote a sense of community awareness and belonging while games promote an understanding of teamwork, develop coordination and support young people in learning how to lose graciously.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The school gives a very high priority to ensuring the safety of boarding pupils. Staff practice is informed by the provision of clear, detailed and informative policies and procedures and safeguarding training which is updated annually. This ensures staff are competent, confident and knowledgeable about how to implement safeguarding procedures should they need to do so. The head of care is the designated safeguarding officer and he has a clear understanding of when safeguarding issues may need to be referred to outside agencies such as children's social care teams. This ensures that any safeguarding concerns around boarding pupils are swiftly and appropriately addressed.

The school operates very diligent recruitment procedures including checks on staff to ensure young people are not put at risk by adults who work with them. Senior staff and a number of Governors have undertaken 'Safer recruitment' training and the school ensures these procedures are followed. However, one recent appointment did not have all references verified as would be best practice. This did not impact on pupils safety due to the other checks carried out and the enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks undertaken. A clear policy on accompanying visitors to the site further

ensures young people are protected from the possibility of harm from adults when in school.

Residential pupils report that they feel very safe at school. They are readily able to identify numerous staff members they could approach if they had any concerns. Personal belongings can be kept safe in locked drawers in bedrooms and this safeguards young people's possessions when they are in residence. Young people have access to a wide range of activities and a full and varied 24 hour curriculum when they board at this school. Staff carry out thorough risk assessments to identify and reduce risk as fully as possible. This allows pupils to participate in challenging and exciting activities while taking managed risks appropriate to their age and understanding. Pupils develop an understanding of their own safety through 'stranger danger' sessions and road safety awareness which supports their access to the local community.

Young people do not go missing from this school. There are clear policies and procedures in place to support staff should this arise and this include reference to local authority protocols. This ensures that any young person who did go missing would be responded to in a rapid and orderly manner. Positive behaviour is promoted; this is extremely well role-modelled by staff and poor behaviour is appropriately and, if necessary, repeatedly challenged in a low key, non-confrontational manner. This helps ensure young people understand socially acceptable behaviour and has meant no major sanctions being given since the last inspection. There have been no restraints since the previous inspection though guidance on its possible use and recording is clear and unambiguous.

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

Leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding.

The aims, ethos and expectations of boarding are well known to all staff throughout the school and these are very clearly translated into practice. This awareness ensures that day pupils who may benefit from boarding are identified to the head of care at an early stage. Induction to boarding is tailored to meet the individual needs of the pupil and family while careful consideration is also given to the potential impact of new boarders on the established group.

Boarding is managed with efficiency, skill and with a very hands-on approach from the head of care. This ensures that links to the senior management team are highly developed and boarding is viewed as an integral part of the school's provision. A consistent, resourceful, established and well supported staff team ensure that routines and structures are maintained and that these are well known to boarding pupils. Staffing levels are such that individual pupil's needs can be met well and that there is a high level of supervision of pupils at all times. Staff receive regular supervision and a clear training programme ensures they are able to work with young people in a consistent, safe and professional manner. Annual appraisals



support the ongoing professional development of the staff team who have gained, or are currently studying for, professional qualifications. Staff report that managers are 'open, honest and available and will listen to our suggestions'.

The provision and impact on residential pupils is evaluated using both external and internal monitoring. This is used to drive improvements which include an enhanced activity planner to ensure all boarders have the opportunity to shop for the unit. There is also the new kitchens in two units, a series of strengthened medical consent forms and the development of a new residential provision due to come on line in the New Year. There is a clear development plan in place for ensuring the continuing improvement of the service the residential care provides and for further enhancing the decoration and furnishing of the units. As part of the monitoring, policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and many of these have been updated. There is some duplication of policies between residential care and education which may cause confusion for new staff. Also policies will need to be updated to include the new residential provision before it begins to work with boarders.

There have been no complaints received since the last inspection but the school makes a very strong point of ensuring pupils views are considered and acted upon. Within the units there is always choice given to pupils and they are fully involved in preparing menus, decorating the units and planning their daily activities. During the inspection a group of pupils went to choose the Christmas tree for one unit and they were then fully involved in its decoration.

Individual needs are fully recognised by staff. These inform care plans and daily living plans and young people are involved in this planning as much as possible. All boarding pupils are given the opportunity to be fully involved in all activities in the units and on trips in the community. This ensures all pupils benefit from experiencing new activities, develop their social skills and are not missing out due to staying at the school.

The residential staff have good communication with parents, placing authorities and other professionals. A key area is the development, by the head of care, of very close links with learning disability 'children and adolescent mental health' teams across the county. This ensures that young people's needs are fully met in all areas as their emotional and psychological well-being is given an equal priority with their physical health.

## **National minimum standards**

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

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

- consider linking all policies so one policy covers education and residential provision where possible.
- ensure all relevant policies are updated to include the new residential provision before it takes in boarders.
- ensure the high quality of decoration and maintenance in most units is replicated throughout all residential units.
- ensure all references are verified for new employees, not only those which are directly relevant to the job role

**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.**



06/12/2012

### **Inspection of Sidestrand Hall School**

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. It was good of you to spend time with me and to show me around the residential units. I was very impressed by the high standard of decoration in most areas and the new kitchens you have had fitted. The walls and ceilings in one corridor need to be painted to make the whole area very warm and inviting.

I found that you are very well looked after by a dedicated, knowledgeable and highly skilled staff team. Your safety and welfare are very important to them and this is shown as you say you feel safe in school. Your health needs are well met and staff make sure you have a wide range of activities to do in the evening. This helps you develop new skills and to learn new things. I was particularly impressed by the work you do to develop skills for independent living and it was very good to see that one of you was cooking in each of the three units in the evenings.

I found that the residential care provided to you is of the highest standard and that you make huge improvement in all areas of your lives as a result of staying here.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Halliley