

Doucecroft School

Doucecroft School, Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex, CO6 3QL

Inspection dates	10/06/2013 to 12/06/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Good	2
Quality of residential provision and care	Good	2
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Residential students in this school benefit from good quality, well planned residential care that promotes individual progress across all aspects of their development.
- Robust safeguarding procedures, high staffing ratios, comprehensive behaviour management and good levels of staff training underpin student's safety and well-being.
- The school provides a safe and secure environment that meets the individual needs of the residential students.
- Staff throughout the school actively promote individual's rights and advocate on their behalf to ensure they receive equality of access to services, resources, experiences and opportunities.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision has significantly improved, providing support and direction for staff. New managers have identified and acted upon development opportunities that positively affect outcomes for students.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

The inspection of the residential provision, covering three boarding houses on the main site and the post 16 provision at Kelvedon, took place within three hours of notice given to the school. The inspection activities included meetings with; students, the residential care staff, the senior management team, the head teacher, the business administrator and the deputy chief executive. Observations of the premises, activities, meal times and residential routines formed part of the inspection. Information was gathered from documents, policies, records, monitoring reports and point in time surveys; there were no surveys available from Parent View.

Inspection team

Louisa Bayley

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Doucecroft is a co-educational, day and residential special school for children aged from 3 to 19 years with autistic spectrum conditions. The school, which is privately owned by Autism Anglia, is situated in a small village on the outskirts of Colchester with additional post 16 provision in Kelvedon. The boarding accommodation is located in three boarding houses on the main site and in the post 16 provision at Kelvedon. Residential care is provided four nights per week during term time for students aged from 11 to 19 years. There are 52 students on roll, with boarding provision for up to 42 boarders per night. The current number of boarders is 18 per night.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish a policy to define the arrangements for staff supervision and appraisal.
- Provide a choice of food at lunch times, making a healthy option main meal available and offering a variation of desserts rather than the same dessert every day.
- Improve the décor within the residential accommodation.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Outcomes for residential students are good. Students develop mutually respectful and trusting relationships with the well-established and consistent staff team. They learn to live with and accept each other's unique and complex characteristics as a result of the positive modelling from staff. They develop their understanding and awareness of behaving positively towards each other because of the clear expectations and boundaries in place.

Residential students make positive transitions into the residential provision, between boarding houses and on to external placements because of comprehensive transition planning. Staff, parents and external professionals contribute to the robust plans, which are highly individualised and student centred. Plans fully consider individual's likes and dislikes, religious and cultural needs, disabilities, dreams and aspirations to support their progress and minimise anxiety and distress.

Residential students benefit from good access to health care professionals and specialists. Occupational therapists and speech and language therapists work with individual students in the school, as defined in care and health care plans. Students access external health services as they need to, supported by staff and in close liaison with parents.

Residential students actively enjoy their time in school. A parent said: 'Our child is always happy to go to school on a Monday morning and would go in the school holidays if they could.' Students say they enjoy the opportunities they have to participate in a wide range of leisure experiences and activities. Older students say they particularly enjoy the residential trips, which are good fun and a chance to see another part of the country. Students take inspiration from staff and access opportunities such as running a half marathon.

Parents recognise the difference the school has made for their children. They say: 'He has made good progress in his education, socially and with independence skills. He takes part in a good range of activities; he can cook meals, do his laundry, and undertake daily routines' and 'I never thought I would see the day he could go shopping, clear plates away and wash them up or tidy his room.'

Students contribute their views on a daily basis, communicating their wishes, preferences and choices about meals, activities and daily life. They participate in boarding house meetings and complete evaluations, which serve to inform staff of likes and dislikes. This helps the staff to enhance the residential experience further. Each residential student contributes to communal living, taking on tasks such as helping to prepare meals. A parent said: 'Staff strike a good balance of supporting him and pushing him to achieve his potential and become more independent.'

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

The quality of care is good. Staff collate detailed information from parents and external professionals, prior to admission, to inform highly individualised care planning. The admissions process considers all aspects of individual's personal, social, educational and health needs. Parents say staff consult them and they feel central to their child's care, health and behaviour management plans. Staff support new residential students to prepare for their admission through pre-admission visits and supplying information in development and communication level appropriate formats. Staff carefully monitor residential student's progress, happiness and achievement, with regular reviews in the initial settling-in period. The majority of parents are very positive about the care their children receive within the residential provision. They say: 'I am

reassured that the staff really look after him very well' and 'I can't think of anything they can improve, they are brilliant.'

There are high quality links between the education and pastoral staff, promoting good knowledge of each individual between school and residence. The recent introduction of a key worker system has enhanced understanding of individual needs. Identified staff take responsibility for updating care plans, health plans and targets and liaising with education staff. Residential staff say this supports fuller understanding of academic as well as social development.

Staff promote a wide range of activities beyond the classroom. The facilities on the main site include a trampoline, play park, swimming pool, go-karts, outdoor play areas and an expanse of grounds that students can play in safely. Community based activities play an important part in the 24-hour curriculum, with youth club, shooting club, swimming and cycling featuring weekly. Students go shopping with staff on a weekly basis, preparing them for independence and encouraging their involvement in planning meals and buying ingredients.

There are safe and effective systems in place to promote residential student's health and well-being. Medication is safely stored, recorded and administered and staff complete regular medication audits. Key workers regularly review health plans and parents contribute to the plans to ensure all information is current. Staff review incidents regularly and identify possible triggers, including mental health and well-being or physical health. Where staff identify possible health issues, they explore them with parents and carers to seek the appropriate intervention. Staff complete personal care routines in a way that promotes privacy and dignity and takes account of individual's choices and preferences.

The residential accommodation meets the needs of the students, it is safe and secure and warm and provides ample space for communal living. Students can personalise their bedrooms as they wish and display their work and pictures in the lounge areas. Some of the décor appears dated and worn, detracting from the overall appearance of the accommodation.

Students actively contribute to menu planning for all of the meals within residential time. They are able to choose foods and meals they enjoy and are involved in meal preparation. The food served within residential time is good quality, well balanced and provides a varied and nutritious diet. However, there is a lack of choice of meals at lunch times. Students who are vegetarian and those who have special diets are catered for. Those who do not have special requirements have only one meal option and there is no healthy alternative on offer. The dessert is fruit and yoghurt every day, which does not provide any variety or encourage students to try different foods.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The safety of residential students is good. Staff recruited to work in the school undergo comprehensive checks to ensure their suitability to work with children. Staff verify visitor's identity prior to authorising access. A parent confirmed that residential staff ask him for identification when he visits if they have not met him before. The level of checks in place prevents unauthorised persons having access to children.

Good practice underpins the policies and procedures in place to protect children. Staff receive regular training in identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns. Designated child protection officers have clearly defined responsibilities and they effectively manage concerns. There is a good level of inter-agency working; designated staff share information, according to protocols, with the local and placing authorities. Securely stored records provide a comprehensive audit of concerns and subsequent action.

Students say they feel safe in school and that bullying is not an issue. A residential student said:

'Bullying isn't a problem here, but if it was, staff would stamp it out.' Parents say the school keeps their children safe. One parent said: 'They make sure he is safe and I trust them.'

There is a comprehensive missing child policy in place, which has reference to local and placing authority and police protocols. However, there have been no incidents of students being absent without authority.

The behaviour management team has ultimate responsibility for the monitoring, tracking and analysis of incidents in the school. Comprehensive management plans for each individual support staff to manage behaviour effectively, to recognise distress and to employ de-escalating strategies. Statistical analysis of incidents supports the identification of patterns and trends, enabling staff to mark progress and to review strategies where there is an increase in negative behaviours. All staff receive training in positive management of behaviour. The behaviour manager supports staff to reflect on incidents and identify learning points. Staff encourage students to reflect on negative behaviour, where possible, to help them make more positive choices in the future. Staff use approved physical restraint techniques only as a last resort, to prevent injury, harm or serious damage. Staff provide parents with a copy of incident and restraint records, to keep them updated with events that have taken place in school. Staff do not use sanctions in response to negative behaviour. Instead, they focus on rewarding positive behaviour. Incentive and reward charts are based around individual's levels of understanding, their interests and choices. An example of an incentive scheme for a student is the use of mileage tokens, rewarded for good behaviour at meal times. When he has accrued a certain number of miles, he is able to choose a trip out as a reward. This individual approach leads to successful behaviour modification with only low level prompts and reminders from staff.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good. There has been a significant improvement due to the appointment of a residential services manager. In the short time she has been in post, she has affected considerable positive change. Staff now receive regular supervision and appraisal, which was not previously in place. Ten staff have enrolled on and commenced a level three diploma, with a further six staff scheduled to commence in September 2013. Staff with relevant experience and training are effectively deployed, with ratios to safely meet the individual needs of the students.

The aims and ethos of the school are set out clearly and underpinned by regularly reviewed and consistently operated policies. A suggested improvement from the last inspection was to implement a supervision and appraisal policy. This has not been addressed, however, supervision and appraisal are now in place.

The residential manager has implemented a learning plan and has written a comprehensive development plan for the residential provision. Managers clearly plan and schedule training to ensure that staff acquire the knowledge and skills they need to support students effectively. Staff say they feel more supported in their roles. The senior management team has expanded, with wider representation from across the disciplines within the school. Residential staff reflect that the expansion of the team, coupled with more frequent meetings, has improved communication and is having a positive impact on the outcomes for residential students.

There are a number of effective systems in place to assess the impact of the residential provision on the students. Staff use the information to inform care planning, evidence progress and share the outcomes with parents and external professionals. The independent visitor spends time in each boarding house, on a half-termly basis, giving students the opportunity to talk to her and raise any issues. Independent monitoring visits take place half-termly to review and report on the quality of care. A recent report highlighted that the reporting format is not as effective as it could

be. The Residential Manager has responded and has implemented a new format. This demonstrates a commitment to utilise, and benefit from opportunities to improve and develop the provision.

The school continues to promote and celebrate diversity and advocate on behalf of all individuals to ensure they access the services and resources they need. Parents say: 'I think the school is excellent; they provide my son with very individualised care' and 'they are excellent at promoting his individual needs and they really recognise his individual characteristics.'

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	115426
Social care unique reference number	SC018010
DfE registration number	881/6032

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.

Type of school	Independent residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	18
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	3 to 19
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Jane Smart
Date of previous boarding inspection	05/12/2012
Telephone number	01206 771234
Email address	jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk

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