

Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, WESTERHAM, Kent, TN16 1QN

Inspection dates	04/03/2013 to 06/03/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
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

- Staff empower students to plan and implement their own recreational activities. Students are only able to take part in these diverse life enhancing activities with the support of the well-resourced staff team. Students say that they enjoy being in control of their own planning and not being restricted by their disability. They use the opportunities to increase their confidence, plan for independence and develop friendships and relationships.
- Relationships between students and between students and staff are excellent. Students describe staff as nice or kind and say they can have a laugh together. Safeguarding of children is excellently applied to ensure students' care and safety needs are met. Staff encourage students to move away from dependency on them to a situation where they have to plan their own personal care and only receive the assistance they request and in the manner they request it. This approach is applied across all disciplines in the school and gives students tremendous support in preparing for adult independence.
- Students are excellently engaged in the running of their residential accommodation, the overall school, care planning and in staff selection and appointment. Staff use these engagements skilfully to provide students constant opportunities to avoid being restricted by their disability and to gain control over their environment and life decisions. Staff recruitment is used imaginatively to aid students build up skills in identifying suitable staff as carers when they leave the safe supports of the school.
- Health care is superb and enables students to actively enjoy the activities, education and life skills programmes on offer. Students learn how to make decisions about their own health and how to access medical services preparing them for independence.
- The whole staff team share a commitment and passion for wanting to make a difference to their students. Parents say that the staff are very good, very understanding and patient. One parent said that in a short time his child had made incredible progress becoming more open and less withdrawn. 'He has changed completely he is totally

different he has gone from a boy to an adult.' Staff and students respect each other's differences and all students cultural and religious needs are respected and met.

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 headteacher was contacted by telephone on the morning of the inspection. The conversation was confirmed by email prior to the commencement of inspection. The inspection occurred over three days and included two evenings spent in the school. Inspection activity included: a tour of the school with students, meals, activities and interviews with students, interviews with key staff, parents and governors, attendance at meetings, observations of activities and social time, and scrutiny of policies, procedures, staff and student files. Detailed feedback was provided to the senior management team, with direct reference to the inspection evaluation schedule and national minimum standards.

Inspection team

Angus Mackay

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Valence school is a maintained residential special school. The school has 52 residential places for students aged between 11 and 19. Residential students live in six bungalows and a larger residential living unit, all 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. The last inspection of the residential provision was in March 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the presentation and quality of care plans for ensuring that these are more accessible to students.
- Unify the countering bullying policy to ensure it is easily located and more accessible to staff, students and significant others.
- The school has made good progress and now meets all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students feel safe in the school and have excellent relationships with staff and with each other. One student said, 'Staff are always there for students and we are there for them. If we disagree we can each apologise to each other.' Relationships were observed to be excellent with heart-warming levels of support offered between students. Students ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to express their views and on numerous occasions were observed showing extraordinary levels of patience and understanding towards each other.

Relations between staff and students are excellent with friendly banter passing between them, regardless of the communication difficulties the student may have. Staff constantly encourage students to progress socially and to manage their own personal difficulties. Examples were seen of staff encouraging students to resolve differences with others without staff intervention. Students grow in confidence and develop empathy and understanding for others in this manner.

There is a fantastic range of activities available for students to stretch and to entertain them. Staff encourage students to participate in challenging activities and competitive events with all of the attendant ups and downs. Students use these experiences as part of their growth and drive to achieve their potential and maintain their fitness.

Students take on a range of responsibilities within the school and feel that they make a significant difference to its operation and development. Students were observed in the school council and take their responsibilities seriously. One student said, 'We ask for things to make students and staff safe. We change menus and make suggestions about new meals.' In the residential setting students learn how to make decisions in their own lives. One student saying, 'I want to have a say on decisions in my life and they let me.' Another student outlined how they learn to ask for help and to organise their own lives. 'This school is good for our needs and independence. We learn a lot by booking our own trips. I get loads of support. I get the support I want in the way I want it.' Students bloom in this environment and learn how to make decisions about their own and others care and to be considerate to others.

The school has an outstanding health care resource which works closely with students, their parents, teachers and residential staff to aid students in addressing their total health care needs. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for as much of their own health care as possible. Some students arrange their own medical appointments at the local General Practitioner's and attend these unaccompanied or with the level of support they request. Students are encouraged to self-administer medication wherever possible and to be responsible for asking for assistance when required improving their developing self-esteem and control over their lives.

Students enjoy the residential experience and gave examples of how it helps them manage their disabilities and move towards independence and the transition from the school and its supports. Examples included the planning of trips, the forming of friendships and development of relationships. Students displayed an extraordinary level of planning including risk assessment and resource allocation. Students say they are well prepared for the next move and have the level of support needed to make this successful. Students evidenced tremendous confidence and an awareness of how to safely engage in the wider community. Staff are skilled at reminding students about their responsibilities to choose, organise and plan their own lives. Students were observed to be doing things for themselves and for others receiving only the assistance they specified. Students grow substantially in independence, confidence and personal responsibility through this process.

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

The quality of residential provision and care is good. The residential facilities are excellent and purpose designed to meet the needs of students. All living accommodation is very well maintained, spacious and incorporates features and equipment to aid the drive towards independence for students. Students are very positive about the residential experience which they consider as paramount to them achieving their full potential and help them to enjoy full, active and independent lives. Students said, 'We enjoy boarding and it prepares us for life. It encourages us to be self-sufficient and practice making decisions and organise things.'

Arrangements for health care are excellent and students benefit from the superbly resourced onsite health care team. The health care team strive to support students to take control of as much of their own health care as they can. The onsite health care team is wide ranging and through excellent cross discipline working, ensures that medical issues do not overly disrupt the educational and social development of the students. The therapeutic services are integrated into the health care team and make excellent use of the superb facilities in the school promoting students health and their ability to access education and social development activities. Students' privacy is respected and changes since the last inspection ensure that confidentiality is appropriately protected.

Students are enthusiastic about the health and fitness programme within the school which is supported by health, residential, educational and catering services. They say that healthy eating is encouraged and they are able to discuss what this means in reality. Students say that they are involved in growing their own food and enjoy preparing meals from this produce. The school is involved in the healthy schools programme and the food for life programme. These programmes aid students in understanding where food comes from and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Menus are balanced and subject to checks to ensure meals are nutritious as well as meeting personal preferences, cultural requirements and any health issues. The catering manager receives feedback directly from students and via the school council and responds positively to this and advice from the speech and language team.

Students talk enthusiastically about the activities which they take part in during evenings and weekends. The students also talked about the inspiration they receive from the many visitors who come to share their life experiences with them. This includes athletes and authors with disabilities. A group of students said, 'These famous visitors inspire us and make us want to achieve more. They show us what we can achieve with hard work and we want to do that.' One student commented, 'It is amazing what we get to do here! Go to the Olympics, cinema trips, gliding, drama and youth clubs whatever we want to arrange.'

Students say they are aware of their care plans and can change them if they wish. Care plans contain excellent guidance to staff in relation to students' health and personal needs but are not organised in a way which makes it easy for students to engage in accessing information or recording their comments. Students value the opportunities to learn how to care for themselves and practice decision making in a safe environment. One young person said, 'In the evenings we learn things like how to use a dishwasher, washing machine, make a menu, go shopping and prepare a meal. You can have staff assistance but you have to ask for this and then direct staff to do what you need. We learn how to do these things at home as well.' Students display how much progress they make with staff support to take control of their own care and to manage decisions about their own lives.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Student's safety is good. Students are appropriately protected by staff application of robust child protection procedures and regular training for staff specific to the safe care of children with

disabilities. The school works closely with the Local Safeguarding Children Board in addressing any child protection issues and they confirm that the school reports any concerns or allegations speedily and that safeguarding their students remains a priority for staff.

Students are knowledgeable about who to speak to if they have difficulties and contacts external to the school which they can make if unhappy with how they are being cared for. Staff encourage students to use the complaints procedure to aid them in providing constantly improving care. Students say they feel safe and well cared for in the school by both staff but also by other students. Staff and students were observed showing respect, patience and understanding of others. Many students commented on the kindness of others and how they aid one another in all aspects of living together. Students live in a safe environment where they learn to care for themselves and others.

Risk assessments are comprehensive and excellently maintained. The risk assessments are positively used to enhance the life experiences of the students not to curtail them. This enables students' positive and enthusiastic involvement in the fantastic recreational, sporting and personal independence programmes. Monitoring of all health and safety issues is excellently managed ensuring that all checks occur when appropriate maintaining a safe well cared for environment for students.

Fire procedures and training are excellent and meet the specific needs and difficulties for the students in exiting buildings. Students are very knowledgeable about safety procedures and responses to fire drills. Students are instrumental in creating personalised risk assessments when planning their own trips out. Students' safety is further protected by the electronic access system. This restricts access for visitors but gives students control over their access to all areas apart from other students living areas.

Student's safety is enhanced by the comprehensive and rigorously applied staff recruitment and vetting procedures. Managers involve students in their recruitment of staff incorporating their comments in to the decision making process. Students confirm that their involvement is meaningful and that their views are fully listened to and appointments are in line with their choices. Staff are using recruitment creatively to teach students skills in identifying and appointing personal carers when they leave the school. This enhances their control over decisions about their future care.

The behaviour of students is almost universally positive and supported by positive incentive schemes. To ensure consistency in approach however the behaviour management programme and the countering bullying programmes need to be reviewed and updated to reflect the current practice and standards. Positive behaviour plans are in place and these incorporate permissible sanctions and guidance on interventions. However, the quality of these plans varies and is inconsistent. This does not impact on the on-going support that students receive on a day-to-day basis.

Bullying is rare and staff quickly address any instances using them to educate students and increase their levels of empathy and understanding where possible. The countering bullying policy and procedures are in place but currently, these are contained in a range of other policies and procedures. Students are able to describe the measures to protect them and understand why these measures are in place. For example students described in detail the excellent cyber bullying protection procedures and how these keep them safe.

Physical restraint is exceptionally rare and only trained staff are permitted to carry out these procedures. Following restraints there is a debriefing of both staff and students aiding understanding of these incidents and planning to minimise future occurrences. Behaviour management policies are in place and planned changes to guidance and training in relation to this

is contained in the development plan.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good with many outstanding features. Managers and staff have consistently high expectations for students and express a strong commitment to residential care and the benefits to students. Students and staff share a common understanding of the aims and ethos of the school and a strong commitment to the benefits of the residential experience.

The school has an accurate and insightful evaluation of its performance which it is looking to enhance with the use of the outcomes toolkit staff are piloting with a number of students. This provides evidence of students key involvement in self-development and provides tracked improvements against targets selected by the students and agreed in reviews and planning meetings.

Information from independent visitors and governors visits is detailed, well written and effectively used to drive forward improvement in the school. Throughout all of the settings there are clear accessible posters advertising the visits and encouraging students engagement in discussion. Reports are fully considered in the governors meetings. The senior staff are well supported by active and effective governors who are representative of the local community and provide excellent opportunities for parent involvement in decision making.

The staffing levels are good and staff are appropriately trained, experienced and well supervised to meet the needs of the students. The staffing ratios are essential in facilitating students move away from high dependency and crucial to their progression, development of self-help skills and confidence in the wider community. Decision making is appropriately devolved and key staff receive management training and senior support to ensure the ambitious residential programmes function smoothly and safely.

The school has all policies and procedures in place required to provide a high quality service to students. Some policies require review to ensure they accurately reflect the continuous improvements in practice or to unify different elements for ease of use. The structure and layout of care plans and visiting student plans require review to reflect the changing student group and improve the ease of access for students to record their comments. The personal care, health and educational needs of students are excellently detailed and provide staff with clear guidance on how to work with students to meet care and cultural needs.

The diversity and personal needs of students are clearly identified and staff and fellow students support them in meeting them ensuring there is no discrimination or insensitive treatment. Students are valued, listened to and are excellently and effectively involved in the running of the school. For example students confirm that the student council is listened to and does effect change to school policy and how resources are allocated. The council is excellently managed to facilitate the involvement of all students whatever their communication difficulties. Students and staff exhibited fantastic patience, understanding and support to each other in these meetings.

Since the last inspection there has been good improvement and the previous requirement and suggestion for improvement have been met enhancing the safe care of the students. The school has acted effectively and efficiently to address issues raised in the independent visitors reports.

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	119032
Social care unique reference number	SC041791
DfE registration number	886/7021

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	
Number of boarders on roll	52
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 18
Headteacher	Mr R Gooding
Date of previous boarding inspection	05/03/2012
Telephone number	01959 562156
Email address	swilkins@valence.kent.sch.uk

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