

Ripplevale School

Ripplevale School, Chapel Lane, Ripple, Deal, Kent, CT14 8JG

Inspection dates	09/07/2013 to 11/07/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Pupils make substantial improvements in their behaviour, when compared to their starting points. This personal progress is recognised by pupils, their parents and staff. Consequently, pupils make the most of every opportunity provided by the whole school, grow in confidence and self-esteem and progress in different aspects of their lives. Many pupils move on to alternative placements to further their education.
- Pupils benefit from living in accommodation that is maintained to a very high standard. They are cared for by enthusiastic and committed staff who know them extremely well. Staff consistently act in the best interests of all residential pupils, ensuring that individual needs are identified and met effectively.
- The protection and safety of pupils is given the highest priority resulting in pupils clearly describing a strong sense of security and well-being. Robust and effective responses to any form of bullying leads to pupils feeling confident and safe to express any concerns. Pupils respond positively to the approaches of staff in managing their behaviour. Restraints are rarely necessary and pupils consider sanctions to fair.
- Leaders and managers are purposefully driven by a motivation to constantly improve. Innovation is encouraged resulting in a positive and open attitude to change. All staff fully understand their individual remits and eagerly take appropriate personal responsibility for advancing the quality of service provided.
- The views of pupils are actively sought and significantly influence day-to-day activities and are considered in decisions that affect the running of the school. As a result pupils feel highly valued and develop strong allegiances to the school.

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

This inspection was conducted over three days by one inspector. Residential pupils contributed to the inspection through individual meetings and by completing surveys. Pupils conducted a tour of the premises, including all areas of the residential provision and the school facilities. Parents were spoken to by telephone. All members of the senior leadership team were interviewed, along with staff responsible for care, health and safety, catering and recruitment. The files of current and former residential pupils were examined. Care plans for these individuals were scrutinised. Records maintained by the school, including independent monitoring reports, were reviewed along with key policies.

Inspection team

David Putnam

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Ripplevale School is an independent special needs day and residential special school. It caters for a maximum of 60 boys from seven to 16 years of age who exhibit a range of emotional and social behavioural difficulties.

The residential provision is managed by the principal, team leader and a team of care staff. At the time of this inspection three boys were accommodated in one designated residential house on the main school site near Deal, Kent. Several boys had just officially left the school on completion of Year 11.

The residential provision was last inspected in November 2012. This inspection was combined with an inspection of the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure standards of fire safety are maintained and sustained between inspections, in particular ensure that fire doors are not wedged open
- develop creative ways to evidence the changes residential pupils make during their time in the school
- further develop the care team's appraisal and supervision systems to ensure individual growth and professional development.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. They flourish, making genuine and sustained improvement in managing their behaviour over time. Pupils recognise the changes they make and attribute these to their experience in the residential provision and the school as a whole. One pupil said that they felt accepted by the school after other schools had rejected them.

Parents consider that their children do much better in this school when compared with previous placements. One said, 'Ripplevale has accepted him and accepted his behaviour. He does push his luck, but they hold onto him.'

Excellent relationships exist between staff and pupils which directly benefit residential pupils. Pupils say, 'I feel comfortable here; I can talk to the staff and they will help me.' The progress pupils make is promoted through implicit links between the provision of education and care within the school. For example, pupils are able to acknowledge when they struggle in school with particular subjects. Care staff proactively intervene to secure additional tuition which helps pupils gain confidence and feel supported. Surveys confirm the positive feedback provided by pupils during the inspection about their enjoyment of the residential experience.

Parents recognise that behaviours improve at home as well as at school. Parents confidently say that the positive impact the school has leads to their families no longer requiring support from children's social services.

Pupils enjoy and benefit from an extensive range of activities in the school and the wider community. In some cases this fundamentally changes pupil's perception of themselves and their outlook on life. For example, pupils significantly improve their confidence and self-esteem when they learn to play musical instruments to a high standard and perform in front of an audience. Pupils develop skills through preparation for independence that is personally adapted to help them grow and reach their individual potential. They build confidence through this and are prepared to move on from the school to other suitable provision.

A value of participation and involvement is culturally embedded in the residential provision. As a result pupils confidently feel that their voice is listened to and acted upon. In addition to day-to-day decisions, pupils are able to influence change in how the school is run. For example, a recent decision to change when pupils return to the residential provision after weekends at home resulted from the requests of pupils. Pupils now return to school on Monday mornings rather than Sunday evenings. Parents say that this enables their children to spend more time at home and attend family functions.

Pupils are effectively encouraged to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. One said, 'I have to keep myself fit,' explaining that this was something they chose to do because they recognised the personal benefits.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. Parents describe the school using words such as 'perfect' and 'brilliant' and say that they, 'Cannot fault the school for anything.'

Exceptional pastoral arrangements exist. All care staff get to know individual pupils exceptionally well. This is augmented through an established link worker system which ensures pupils consistently have opportunities to discuss things that have gone well or share concerns.

Individual sessions are planned and targeted. Pupils value these opportunities to talk openly and freely discuss and explore personal views or beliefs. Some chose to share thoughts about their emerging sexuality in a safe and respected environment.

Stimulating leisure activities provide opportunities for pupils to have new experiences and develop new skills. As a result, their personal development is promoted. Pupils have the opportunity to represent the school and themselves at events with other schools or in the community. This builds their esteem.

Clear care plans are in place which purposefully address how individual behaviour is managed and highlight how personal care needs are met. Care plans link effectively to targets set by placing authorities and are amended regularly to reflect decisions made at review meetings with pupils, their parents and external professionals. Pupils agree individual targets with their link worker and are encouraged through receiving rewards when these are attained.

The quality of the residential provision, furnishings and facilities is excellent. Residential pupils enjoy living in accommodation which is warm, comfortable and pristinely maintained. No damage was observed during this inspection. Pupils have a choice of bedrooms and extensively personalise these to reflect their own personality and interests. Some rooms have en-suite shower and toilet facilities.

Food is nutritious and plentiful. Robust systems ensure that all dietary needs are identified and met to respect specific religious beliefs or protect against allergic reactions. Pupils say that they have significant influence upon the menu and that there is choice at every meal. Food hygiene standards have been given the highest rating by officials from the local council.

Healthcare arrangements are effective, not just within the school, but with external health professionals. Every pupil is registered with a local general practitioner on admission. While dental and optical care is generally managed at home, staff work closely with parents to identify potential difficulties and proactively address them to benefit pupils. Staff are sensitive to the needs of pupils. When appropriate, counselling is available to pupils to promote their emotional wellbeing and resilience. When necessary, staff engage with child and adolescent mental health services to meet specific identified needs.

Absolutely no weaknesses are identified that have a negative impact upon residential pupils. Instead, pupils thrive, making genuine progress as a result of the care they receive from a passionate and dedicated staff team. Most care staff have worked in the school for many years, providing a meaningful consistency of care for pupils. This continuity enables staff to anecdotally identify the development and progress pupils make in their lives. However, this information is not efficiently gathered or presented in ways that help pupils recognise the significant changes they make to encourage further development.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Outstanding safeguarding arrangements serve to protect pupils and staff. Pupils clearly state that they feel safe and comfortable in the residential provision and the school environment as a whole. Surveys reflect this, with all pupils who responded agreeing that they feel safe in their boarding house and that their personal possessions are safe. All residential pupils' bedrooms are locked by personalised electronic key fobs. Pupils are given the responsibility of safeguarding their own key, while staff retain an override facility. Lockable drawers provide additional security for personal belongings.

A dynamic culture of zero-tolerance to bullying spreads throughout the school and residential provision. This is supported by a clear policy which is fully understood and accepted by pupils and

staff alike. All pupils responding to surveys agree and most strongly agree that the school deals well with any cases of bullying. Pupils openly acknowledge the impact bullying can have from the perspective of being bullied and candidly recognise when they have bullied others. They are clear that as a result of new found insight they change their behaviour.

Pupils model an attitude of acceptance. Link worker sessions raise issues of difference and explore distinctive cultures and beliefs in ways that sensitively challenge pre-conceived or stereotypical views. Pupil's understanding is furthered through close links to lessons in school that address social education and citizenship.

The effectiveness of behaviour management is evidenced through the accounts of pupils who describe how their behaviour has changed over time. Some compare the frequency of restraints in their previous school to now. One said, 'I used to be restrained up to six times a day; I can't remember the last time it happened here, but it was probably about a year ago.'

Excellent training regarding restraint is provided and systematically updated to ensure best practice. Restraint is used extremely rarely in the residential unit. Records identified just one restraint since the last inspection. Sanctions are applied fairly and are chosen individually so that their effectiveness is maximised through the understanding and acceptance of pupils.

Recruitment and vetting procedures are extremely robust. The school's central record is an excellent and clear example that effective checks are carried out for all staff prior to commencing work with pupils. Checks are refreshed over time to ensure that information is kept up to date. Safeguarding training is given high priority for all staff from the outset. Awareness is promoted further through regular refresher training.

Assessment of risk is systematically and effectively addressed. All necessary checks are undertaken and maintenance tasks are completed efficiently. The safety of pupils is promoted through ensuring that checks, such as portable appliance testing, are always carried out by external contractors when pupils are not on site. However, through an innovative approach individual care staff are provided with training and equipment to undertake additional tests when pupils bring in their own electronic devices. This enables pupils to keep and use equipment that is important to them.

During this inspection one example was noted where a fire door was wedged open. Elsewhere, and in other ways, the standards necessary to meet the required regulations are maintained by the residential provision to safeguard pupils.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good. All required policies are in place, are understood and used effectively. The clarity of policies, procedures and routines ensures that all staff are aware of the expectations placed upon them. As a result, the residential provision runs extremely smoothly as an integral part of the school.

At the time of this inspection the numbers of boarders was lower than it had been earlier during the school year. This was because several year 11 pupils had left following their examinations. However, pupils remaining in the residential provision continued to benefit from staffing levels that remained unchanged. This ensures that pupils continue to receive an outstanding quality of service.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of performance, strengths and areas for improvement of the residential provision. Directors contribute to this through undertaking independent monitoring visits. Their reports are used to inform action plans and decision making.

Some improvements made since the last inspection are relatively new and need additional time to bed in before they can be considered to be fully established. However, a desire to constantly improve continues to be modelled by leaders, managers and senior staff. This positively impacts on the care provided to pupils.

Pupil's views are eagerly sought and seen by senior staff as important in developing the school. The leadership ensures there is a plan in place to identify areas for development. Significant re-investment is made into the fabric of the school buildings, in addition to the development of staff and services. For example extensive refurbishment of the residential provision was scheduled to take place over the summer break following this inspection. This will enhance the overall appearance, but will also add to the number of bedrooms being made en-suite.

The school has positive relationships with parents who say that communication from the school is good. Care staff commit to making a telephone call to each parent or carer every week to ensure they are kept informed. Clear processes also guarantee parents are informed of all incidents and developments.

Training for staff is excellent. Leaders and managers invest in the staff team and ensure that all attain the necessary minimum qualification. In addition a broad range of core training is augmented by specific and specialised training to address individual learning needs. For example awareness training takes place for staff, improving their understanding of different cultures and beliefs. Care staff are further supported through supervision. Leaders express a desire to increase the frequency of these meetings so that they more effectively inform the annual appraisals of staff performance.

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	118995
Social care unique reference number	SC023668
DfE registration number	886/6047

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	
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Mr Ted Schofield
Date of previous boarding inspection	13/11/2012
Telephone number	01304 373866
Email address	info@ripplevaleschool.co.uk

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