

# Helen Allison School

Helen Allison School, Longfield Road, Meopham, GRAVESEND, Kent, DA13 0EW

## Inspection dates

16/09/2013 to 18/09/2013

## Overall effectiveness

**Good** **2**

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 good because

- The residential provision provides residential pupils with outstanding outcomes and an exemplary quality of care.
- Previously exceptional leadership and management of the residential provision have not been sustained. Leadership and management arrangements are good.
- Opportunities for residential pupils to develop personally and socially are extensive, and engagement is excellent.
- Residential pupils' feedback demonstrates they enjoy their boarding experience and are overwhelmingly positive about the residential staff team.
- Diversity is well-celebrated within the residential provision, and throughout the school as a whole.

### 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 announced in the morning, and the social care inspector arrived at the school during the afternoon of the same day. All residential houses and flats were fully inspected. Residential pupils' feedback was obtained via Ofsted surveys completed during the inspection, through evening activities and three shared mealtimes and in general discussions. Staff, senior residential staff, school multi-disciplinary staff, Local Area Designated Officer (LADO), and parents' feedback was sought either in person, through surveys or over the telephone. Records and policies relating to the safety and welfare of residential pupils were sampled and scrutinised.

## Inspection team

Anna Williams

Lead social care inspector

# Full report

## Information about this school

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society and moved to its present site in Meopham in 1991. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders aged 5 to 19 years of age.

The school is situated on the edge of the village in a semi-rural area. The residential provision is situated, several miles away from the school building, just outside Gravesend. The residential provision comprises two houses and two flats. Currently, one of the houses and the two flats are used for weekly boarders.

At the time of this inspection the school had 69 students, 8 of whom are resident during the week. The school also operates a short break service for young people who do not attend the school.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that staff supervision, including the supervision the Head of Care receives, is consistently recorded in individual staff files.
- Collate action taken in response to residential pupils' complaints and feedback in a central school record.
- Include individual residential pupils' names in fire evacuation records.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding.

Residential pupils make significant progress in relation to their starting points when joining the boarding house. They make exceptional progress in building and maintaining appropriate peer friendships. One residential pupil said, 'I have friends at the house'. Residential pupils are very positive about the school and their boarding stays. The whole residential experience successfully supports each young person's personal progress and development.

Residential pupils make superb progress in managing a variety of behaviours. Some develop their own understanding of anxiety and use techniques learnt to manage it. This has a hugely positive impact on their lives. Residential pupils all share the boarding space fairly. They respect, and learn to take turns in sharing, communal areas and activities. Charity events such as 'comic relief' include residential pupils. This is an excellent way of raising their awareness of those in need around the world.

Some residential pupils successfully try new foods or drinks. This means they now have a more varied and balanced diet. This has a substantial impact on their health and well-being. Some residential pupils make exceedingly good progress with self-care skills, including for example using individual cutlery at meal-times.

Residential pupils all use their individual communication systems effectively to make their views known and heard. Some residential pupils have made significant progress in making positive choices. Consequently, feedback from residential pupils strongly influences the running of the boarding provision. House meetings, choice boards, key worker sessions and residential annual review feedback forms all offer opportunities for residential pupils to actively participate in the organisation of the boarding provision. The fact that their input has led to changes in: resources such as films and games available in the houses; activity choices; menu ideas; and decoration of the building; demonstrates to residential pupils that their views are valued and listened to.

Residential pupils all engage well in learning life skills. They share daily household tasks, and work together appropriately to assist with laying tables and loading dishwashers. This also includes some residential pupils learning for the first time how to prepare food safely. Other residential pupils spend time in the community undertaking tasks such as selecting and then purchasing items from a shopping list. One parent said, 'there has been a definite positive change in my child's independence skills', and 'my child's self-confidence in the community has risen considerably'. The boarding experience has positively enhanced the self-belief of many residential pupils. This impacts on outcomes for these young people across all areas of their lives. Overall, this provides residential pupils with highly effective preparation for adulthood and future placements.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding.

Transition and induction arrangements for new residential pupils are sensitively tailored to meet the needs of each individual child. Planned visits to, and activities in, the boarding house lead to overnight stays. New residents are encouraged to choose colours and furnishings for their bedrooms. This assists new young people in settling into their new weekly base, and builds relationships with residential staff. Equally, existing residential pupils are well-prepared for change and new arrivals. One parent said, 'I would rate the transition twenty out of ten! It could

not have been planned any better.' This well-designed process supports successful transitions and inductions into the houses.

Residential pupils value the warm relationships they build with care staff. Comments from residential pupils include, 'staff are nice' and 'staff help me'. Staff use creative communication methods to ensure each individual is involved in the planning and review of their care plan and social targets. The key worker system ensures that individual residential pupils' unique needs are carefully met during their stays. Comments from parents include, 'communication with my child's key worker is fantastic' and 'I cannot praise my child's key worker highly enough'.

Residential teams of staff work across the school and the boarding houses. This provides strong and effective links between school staff and residential care staff. These very strong connections are effective in promoting the 24-hour curriculum and have a positive impact on outcomes for all residential pupils.

Although parents and carers retain primary responsibility for health matters, residential pupils receive excellent support while they are boarding. Arrangements for storing, administering and recording medication are clear and effective. Where required, staff work in close partnership with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. In-house occupational therapy offers residential pupils direct support with for example individually designed specialist equipment or sensory needs. This ensures the physical, emotional and mental health needs of residential pupils are identified and fully met.

Residential pupils give overwhelmingly positive feedback on the wide-ranging choices of leisure activities. Events are carefully planned with residential pupils. Recent activities have included youth club, cyclopark, football, meals out and ice skating. Residential pupils are also supported and encouraged to develop their individual talents through after-school activities, such as taekwondo lessons. Care staff enthusiastically promote all activities and trips. This proactive approach succeeds in encouraging residential pupils to engage and benefit from all the experiences on offer. Residential pupils take part in charity events to raise money for others. This provides chances to learn about and help other people. Individual records capture through words and photographs what each residential pupil has achieved during each week.

The arrangements for catering are outstanding. Staff consult residential pupils about menus on a weekly basis. Individual dietary needs are identified and fully met. Comments from residential pupils include, 'the food is yummy' and 'I like breakfast and dinner'.

Residential pupils maintain contact with family and those significant to them via telephone, email and letter. This ensures that residential pupils are able to maintain appropriate attachments with those people who are important to them.

Residential pupils benefit from outstanding accommodation which is homely and well-maintained. Since the last inspection, new bathrooms across all the houses have further enhanced the environment. Facilities and resources available to residential pupils strongly support the 24-hour curriculum and further learning opportunities. The houses are located near local transport routes and local shops. This promotes young people's positive engagement with the nearby community. Outside space within the gardens and grounds offers residential pupils areas in which to relax, exercise and play. The flexible accommodation provides space for young people to study, play and learn life skills.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

## **Outstanding**

Safeguarding arrangements within the residential provision are outstanding.

Residential pupils all report they feel happy and safe within the boarding provision. Bullying is not identified as an issue. Risk assessments comprehensively detail the action staff should take to keep a residential pupil safe. These are reviewed regularly, and always after any significant event. No residential pupil has been reported missing from the boarding provision since the last inspection. Residential staff demonstrate excellent awareness of safeguarding practices and procedures. Staff knowledge of child protection is refreshed at appropriate intervals. If safeguarding concerns are raised the Head of Care liaises appropriately with external professionals. This protects residential pupils.

Recruitment procedures are outstanding. Prospective candidates are subject to rigorous vetting and checks. Files sampled demonstrate close attention to detail and clearly show how safe recruitment decisions are made. This safeguards residential pupils from the risk of unsuitable people working with them.

Positive behaviour is openly celebrated within the residential provision. No sanction has been applied within the boarding houses since the last inspection. Staff successfully support residential pupils with individualised behaviour support strategies. These strategies are developed and regularly reviewed through an inter-departmental approach, led by the psychology team. Very effective analysis and monitoring of incidents and restraints takes place. This creates a dynamic and highly personalised approach, which is responsive to the young person's current circumstances and needs. Consequently, this leads to a low number of physical interventions being used within the residential provision.

Health and safety routines within the houses are excellent. Fire drills take place within 'residential time'. This ensures residential pupils know what to do in case of fire or emergency. The houses are very well-maintained and provide a safe environment for residential pupils to stay in.

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

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good.

There is a clear and detailed Statement of Purpose which outlines the overall principles of the boarding provision. On admission, residential pupils are given information about the boarding experience in a format that is accessible to each young person.

Staff are provided with good quality induction, training, direction and support. They are supported to undertake national qualifications and make good use of development opportunities. The impact of this is evident in the level of skill they exhibit in directly supporting young people. Regular team meetings and inter-departmental reviews are held which enable staff to reflect on their work with residential pupils. Staff feel very well-supported by all the senior leadership team. Staff speak highly of the Head of Care and value his 'hands on' approach. Informal supervision and guidance is offered on a daily basis. However, formal individual staff supervisions is not consistently recorded in staff files. This includes the Head of Care. This makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of supervision provided, track individual staff progress or identify individual development needs. The school implemented a new performance management system in September 2013. This will assist the senior leadership team in recording and monitoring staff supervision in the future.

The residential provision is a highly valued part of the whole school. Monitoring visits take place in line with minimum standards. Residential pupils' views are sought and records scrutinised. These visits feed into residential self-evaluation systems. However, this self-evaluation has not been wholly effective in maintaining the previously exceptional standard of residential leadership and management. Through this inspection, shortfalls have been identified in aspects of record-keeping. These were not highlighted through in-house self-evaluation. The impact on residential

pupils of these recording deficits is low.

Feedback and complaints from parents or carers are logged and appropriate action taken. The senior leadership team reflects on all feedback and focuses on learning from it to further improve outcomes for all students. The inspector was aware of one complaint received recently. This is currently being investigated by the school. Residential pupils who make comments or complaints about the boarding experience are listened to. Prompt and appropriate action is taken to address any issues they raise. However, there is no central record of feedback from residential pupils across the different accommodation areas. This compromises the ability to look for patterns, and share further, any learning from residential pupils' feedback or comments.

Records relating to health and safety checks of the houses are generally very well detailed. However, records of fire drills undertaken do not consistently record the names of those residential pupils who were present. This makes it difficult to audit the records effectively in order to ensure that all residential pupils take part in drills on a regular basis.

Overall, records relating to residential pupils are stored securely and contribute to an understanding of their time at the school. They capture residential pupils' views and feelings, comments and emotions, about their boarding experience and provide a good record of the positive impact the residential time has on the lives of pupils who board. Policies and procedures are in place and are consistently followed. This provides an orderly and safe environment.

Progress in implementing the school development plan is good. This included a positive focus on e-safety for residential pupils. It also encouraged further participation of residential pupils in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, resulting in awards being successfully achieved. The school is currently consulting on a new-style development plan for 2013 onwards. Key themes include behaviour and safety, achievement, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It includes clearly identified aims and objectives which focus on ensuring that for residential pupils continue to be outstanding.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118993
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC024066
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6046

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Independent Residential Special School
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	8
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	5 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susan Conway
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	19/07/2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01474 814 878

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