

Southfield School

Southfields Special School, Gipsy Lane, WOKINGHAM, Berkshire, RG40 2HR

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| Inspection dates | 05/11/2013 to 07/11/2013 | |
| 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

- The school is going from strength to strength with residential pupils' holistic needs being given priority at all times. This extends to effective outreach work with pupils and their families.
- Equality and diversity is at the heart of the school with topical debates and projects increasing pupils' awareness of differences, social expectations and self-awareness.
- Residential pupils and staff are led and supported by a very experienced senior management team with robust management systems in place. The headteacher's vision for creating a culture of engaging with pupils and their emotional well-being is well embedded, evolving in practice and making a difference to pupils' lives and outcomes.
- Residential pupils really enjoy their boarding experiences and speak glowingly about why they feel so safe at the school including their relationships with the staff team.
- The school meets all of the national minimum standards. The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is judged 'good' but there are many examples of 'outstanding' practices resulting in increased life chances and opportunities for pupils who board.

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 on the morning of the first day of the inspection. A range of interviews and discussions took place with: the headteacher, head of care, residential pupils, staff, a representative of the governing body and visiting professionals. A guided tour of the boarding and other facilities was undertaken and both boarding units were visited throughout the duration of the inspection. Time was also spent observing and interacting with residential pupils including meal times. A broad selection of records and documentation were inspected prior to and during the inspection.

Inspection team

Gavin Thomas

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Southfield School is a secondary co-educational maintained school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years, who have experienced behavioural and emotional difficulties. It accommodates up to 69 pupils at any one time, 16 of whom may be resident in the residential provision. Currently, all boys are on roll. The residential accommodation is provided within an area of the main school site. Southfield School is situated in a residential area, near to Wokingham town centre. The residential provision was last inspected in October 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the recording of controlled drugs to include details of the reducing stock.
- Consider relevant training for staff who supervise their peers.
- Consider formalising an induction criteria for staff employed by the school who cover vacant shifts in the residential provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Pupils are thriving and doing exceedingly well as a result of their residential experiences. Residential pupils value the benefits of boarding because this is a time when they enjoy a vast array of activities both on site and in the community such as swimming. Boarding is a time when pupils embrace opportunities for developing their skills and for some, it is a time when they feel 'safe' and can relax and enjoy the company of their peers and staff. Pupils say 'We love it here.' When asked why, pupils say it is because of the staff team who go out of their way to help them (pupils) to do well. Pupils also say they enjoy the school facilities they have access to after classroom hours such as the gym and games room. One pupil said 'I wish I could board seven days a week.'

Residential pupils' views are taken very seriously and as a result, they have a voice in how the provision operates and what it provides. For example, additional resources for outdoor pursuits such as bicycles have been purchased through recommendations made by the 'residential council'. Regular meetings with pupils during residential times not only give them an opportunity to discuss practical matters but also to explore and discuss emotional well-being. The emphasis now placed on emotional well-being not only addresses matters in relation to pupils' behaviours but helps build and restore relationships between staff and pupils and pupil to pupil. In doing so, this approach takes into consideration pupils' holistic needs and helps prepare them for their experiences and circumstances away from the school which they may encounter.

Excellent work is undertaken in addressing pupils' health and emotional needs. Staff are very observant and act quickly on any noticeable changes regarding pupils' welfare and behaviours. The strong links forged between the school and health professionals, ensure that all aspects of health including mental, emotional and physical are all addressed within reasonable timescales. Documentation supporting these arrangements and outcomes are of a very high standard and scrutinised by management for ensuring that pupils' needs are constantly being reviewed and met.

Residential pupils benefit immensely from the personalised support they receive in preparation for independence and further education. The varying types of support are tailored according to individual pupil's needs, abilities and circumstances. Residential pupils acquire a variety of skills and opportunities through their participation in domestic tasks, independent travel, engaging in community-based projects and amenities, and personal care. Whole-school assemblies provide a sound base for increasing pupils knowledge and awareness about life events, diversity and everyday challenges. The innovative approach towards pupils' engagement in these activities creates a stimulus in helping pupils identify with themselves and those around them. In turn, pupils are better prepared and equipped for the reality of forming relationships, challenges and dilemmas when they move on. Staff are forward thinking about pupils' success after they have moved on and are currently developing the independence program to include even more in-depth work with older pupils such as opening bank accounts, interviewing skills and enhanced safety awareness.

The residential provision is a 'life-line' for pupils. The overwhelming majority of pupils go on to achieve and do exceedingly well in their adult lives. The residential provision has a very positive impact on pupils' lives because of the high numbers of former pupils who visit or contact the school to reflect on their experiences. Pupils and their families benefit immensely from the outreach work undertaken by residential staff during school holidays including sporting and recreational activities with pupils and home visits at other times. Reports indicate the value of these visits and what it means in practice for improving outcomes for pupils.

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

Residential pupils enjoy an exceedingly good quality of care. Pupils are offered all types of support; structured and unstructured, and this helps pupils through some very challenging situations and emotions at times. A well-established keyworker system is in place and the staff are diverse in their approach towards engaging with residential pupils. Key worker meetings are well documented and meeting with pupils take place at times and venues which are not too rigid and routine. This helps pupils build trust with the staff who in turn act on any concerns and welfare matters arising.

The residential accommodation is maintained to an exceptionally high standard. Repairs and renewals are on-going and communication between staff and the maintenance team ensures that all jobs are usually undertaken within reasonable timescales. Pupils say they really like the boarding facilities and some of these comments include: the comfort of the beds, the opportunity to 'chill', the games room, and use of the bikes. The vast majority of pupils spoken to say the food is 'great' offering lots of choice, and good-sized portions. Meal times are well supervised and this contributes towards parts of the day which are sociable and a good opportunity for pupils and staff to engage in light-hearted conversations. Proactive steps are in place for ensuring that pupils are actively involved in the quality of their care. This includes pupils' participation in surveys such as a 'food' survey and daily discussions about activities and evening programs. These processes are indicative of the emphasis placed on listening to residential pupils.

Residential pupils are very aware of the procedures involved if they are feeling unwell or unable to remain at the school if they too sick. The school does not employ a nurse. However, a community nurse and therapist appointed by the school visits pupils regularly, providing an abundance of guidance and support to pupils, staff and where necessary families. Extensive work is undertaken in educating pupils about holistic health and welfare matters. These subject matters are approached with openness and transparency including substance use, sexual health, and diversity. The work pupils undertook on differences within society such as homosexuality for instance highlights the school's commitment towards ensuring that pupils are better prepared for their own quality of life and that of others; particularly their understanding of differences and diversity in the wider community. Similarly, work on the realities of safer sex is tackled with pupils in ways in which they can relate this learning to potential circumstances away from the school. Robust systems are in place for ensuring that pupils health needs are documented and carefully monitored including the health arrangements and provisions for looked after children. Stringent processes are in place for ensuring that medications are kept safe with limited access and all medications administered or returned to a pharmacy for disposal are well documented. The current procedures for the administration and recording of controlled drugs are consistent and clearly documented. However, the recording method does not include details of the reducing stock. This does not have a direct impact on residential pupils' quality of care but would clearly enhance levels of accountability.

Residential pupils care plans including those for looked after children, are personalised and reviewed regularly. Staff are very involved in residential pupils' reviews and pupils are also given the opportunity of commenting on their targets. One visiting professional expressed their satisfaction with the way in which the residential provision supported a pupil's needs. This included staffs' attitude towards the pupil's agreed care plan, effective communication often driven by staff and ways in which the pupil is supported through a number of challenging situations often influenced by external factors.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Residential pupils say very confidently that they are and feel safe the school. The deployment of

staff maximises pupils' safety and this includes the interim arrangements for covering vacant shifts with staff who are familiar with the pupils and their needs. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are extremely effective in practice with senior management always going the 'extra mile' in helping resolve safeguarding matters swiftly and with minimum disruption to pupils' lives. The head of care who is also the school's designated safeguarding officer keeps abreast of current practice by keeping up to date with training and refresher courses relevant to his role. Equally, all staff are refreshed on safeguarding practices mainly during inset days and subsequent in-house training sessions. Staff are very aware of the school's safeguarding procedures and demonstrate that these procedures are implemented appropriately during boarding times.

A whole-school approach towards anti-bullying and safety is diverse and wide ranging including homophobia, racism and cyber bullying. For example, pupils are encouraged and supported to take part in anti-bullying projects facilitated at the school by external agencies, school assemblies and group discussions; this is also promoted through anti bullying surveys. As a result, action plans are drawn up in response to matters raised by pupils. The results of the most recent surveys indicate that pupils do not experience or report any form of bullying or anti-social behaviours during boarding times.

Behavioural management and discipline is at the forefront of practice across the school. The school has a preferred method of physical intervention which is only used as a very last resort. Alternate forms of negotiation and prevention strategies are used to help pupils through difficult situations. Since the last inspection, only one incident of physical restraint was used to prevent a situation escalating during boarding times. All forms of intervention are clearly recorded and monitored by the senior management team including governors during their routine visits. Strong work relationships are forged between the school and external professionals including the Local Authority Designated Officer. As a result, safety and welfare matters requiring external input and direction are managed efficiently and without delay.

The school's approach to behaviour management is changing with more emphasis now placed on emotional well-being and restorative approaches in helping pupils work through their emotions. This change is evolving and is one of the headteacher's visions for promoting pupils' emotional growth, and understanding their holistic needs as opposed to treating their behaviours. While this new concept is still work in progress, there are noticeable differences in pupil's general well-being as a result of this culture change with less sanctions being imposed and a reduction in physical restraints. A very successful rewards system is in place and pupils aspire to this system which gives them a sense of ownership and recognition for their actions. Pupils grow in confidence, self-esteem and self-worth as a direct result of the relationships they have with staff and how staff help them work through behaviours and the reasons for these behaviours.

Pupils are supported by staff who are subject to robust vetting and screening processes. No new staff have been appointed to the residential provision since the last inspection. However, significant work has been undertaken since the last inspection to develop existing recruitment processes in place. This system is now more stringent and the extent of vetting and scrutiny of completed applications deters unsuitable persons from attempting to gain access to vulnerable young people through the recruitment process.

All pupils, staff and visitors are protected through very robust health and safety systems. All routine safety checks are up to date and additional checks undertaken in recent times include a water safety survey and an asbestos survey. Where necessary, action has been taken to address any recommendations as a result of these surveys. Fire safety procedures are taken very seriously with fire drills occurring frequently. Scenarios are used for fire safety drills to keep staff abreast of all eventualities. Fire drills involving residential pupils occur at different times of the day for orientation and awareness purposes. Residential pupils confirm that they are very

involved in fire drills and also confirm that fire drills take place for the benefit of new boarders. Staff have completed relevant health and safety training including: first aid, fire safety, food hygiene and other specialist training relevant to designated roles. Risk management strategies are wide ranging, taking into account whole school safety arrangements and those pertaining to individual pupils, particularly for off-site activities and independent time.

Pupils are encouraged to take risks; this is achieved through careful planning and monitoring. However, the senior management team are extremely vigilant of high risk areas or times of the day when pupils are likely to require different levels of support and intervention. This vigilance provides a strong basis for strengthening a safety network for pupils while giving them the freedom to make informed choices which are safe and reasonable. For example, there are no recent incidents involving pupils being missing from care. However, at times when pupils take themselves off, needing time away from others, all incidents are documented and recorded indicating how these situations are managed and assessed.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The headteacher took up post in January 2013; the head of care is suitably qualified and both the headteacher and head of care have a wealth of experience and expertise between them. The leadership and management team are strong and committed to supporting pupils in achieving the best possible outcomes during their residential experiences. This is indicative of: the direct relationships established with pupils and staff, the linkage between education and residential, management's visibility and involvement during boarding times and the robustness of management systems in place which are focused and child centred. The headteacher has a clear vision for empowering learning and life skills with pupils through emotional literacy and restorative approaches. This vision is clearly linked to the core aims and objectives of the school, set out in the Statement of Purpose and the residential guide for pupils and parents which is to engage, inspire and equip young people. These concepts and practices are evidence based with noticeable changes in the calmness and culture of the school. Work is well underway in generating this whole-school approach consistently. Residential staff are embracing these different ways of working and are being skilled up to apply the underpinning theory with pupils as and when required.

Residential pupils are supported by a very small but dedicated and reliable staff team. Staff speak very passionately about their work with the pupils and the support they receive from the management team. Staffing structures are effective and include: four staff on duty during boarding times, two sleeping-in staff, management availability during the evenings and an on-call system during the night. The deployment of staff ensures consistency and continuity of care at all times. Staff handovers are undertaken daily and this involves communication with staff from the education remit. The school does not employ external agency staff and where necessary, learning support staff cover vacant shifts. These arrangements strengthen continuity of care and residential pupils speak very positively about class-based staff supporting them during residential times. These members of staff are very familiar with the ethos of the school and boarding principles. These arrangements are for exceptional circumstances only and residential staff do support their peers with adequate supervision and guidance. However, a formal or written induction regarding this 'dual' role is not in place. This does not impact on residential pupils in any way or the performance of the team but lacks clarity as to what is communicated and agreed with staff when undertaking duties in a different remit of the school.

A school training and development programme is in place and monitored by the headteacher. Staff confirm that training opportunities are wide ranging, ongoing and relevant to their roles, keeping staff updated and abreast of current practice regarding their work with the pupils. All staff have achieved the relevant National Vocational Qualifications at Level 3 with opportunities to go onto studying at Degree level. Staff are in regular dialogue with management while formal

supervisions and appraisals take place at the required intervals. Senior staff are given opportunities to supervise their peers and although in-house support is given, supervisors have not undertaken any formal training. Staff did comment however, that they find the supervision and appraisal systems useful and constructive.

The robustness of internal monitoring systems clearly demonstrates how practice is scrutinised for quality and outcomes. The vast majority of pupils are 'visual' learners; however, expectations are in place that all required records are kept up to date and maintained to a high standard. The school's self-evaluation plan, the staffs' development plan and the head of care's annual report all outline areas for progress and development which are centred on staff development and outcomes for residential pupils. Management reviews are indicative of individual pupil's success and outstanding achievements as a result of their residential experiences. The management team are non-complacent however and are forward thinking in driving up standards and further reviewing more innovative ways of working and engaging with pupils.

All records relating to residential pupils including placement plans, review reports and keyworker meetings give a good overview of pupils' progress, achievement and attainment. The senior management team are extremely supportive of staff when there are known matters regarding pupil's abilities in working towards or meeting their identified targets. Confidential records are stored appropriately and there are clear indicators of records being monitored and countersigned by the management team.

The governing body has a strong presence in the school including the residential provision. Elected members of the governing body undertake unannounced visits of the residential provision. These visits are conducted at times when pupils and staff are present. This enables pupils and staff to meet with the representing governor, giving their views and opinions of the residential provision. These views along with other findings are all summarised into reports which are widely available in the school. Reports for these visits are detailed, taking into account the required areas to be covered during these visits.

Policies and procedures required by the school are in place and subject to regular review. A number of these policies are also accessible via the school's website. Policies and procedures are ratified by the governing body and the most recent include: the running away and missing from home and care procedures and a stand-alone policy on cyber bullying.

The three areas for further improving practice identified at the last inspection are met. A more robust system is now in place for the recruitment and vetting of new staff. This includes the scrutiny of any discrepancies identified in the application and references prior to a member of staff starting work. All residential pupils now have direct access to details of an independent adult; these details are vividly displayed in the boarding houses. All placement plans are regularly reviewed and up to date for the existing group of residential pupils. These reviews also include pupils views and opinions.

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

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| Unique reference number | 110191 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC011332 |
| DfE registration number | 872/7033 |

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.

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| Type of school | Maintained |
| Number of boarders on roll | 9 |
| Gender of boarders | Boys |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 16 |
| Headteacher | Mr Dominic Geraghty |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 01/10/2012 |
| Telephone number | 0118 9771293 |
| Email address | admin@southfield.wokingham.sch.uk |

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