

Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firle Road, SEAFORD, East Sussex, BN25 2JB

Inspection dates	10/02/2014 to 12/02/2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- This school provides residential pupils with outstanding outcomes and an exceptional quality of care. Opportunities for residential pupils to develop personally and socially are extensive, and engagement is excellent.
- Residential pupils are extremely positive about their boarding experience. Parental feedback is highly complimentary of the care within the residential provision.
- Safeguarding arrangements within the residential provision are good. Residential pupils say they feel safe.
- Diversity is well-celebrated within the residential provision and throughout the school as a whole.
- Areas for improvement identified relate to: the quality and consistency of sanctions records, and missing from school incident records; one aspect of recruitment practice is compromised by a lack of written risk assessment around DBS checks; ensuring feedback from residential pupils is captured in external monitoring visits; and keeping the security / external door locking practice under review.

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 inspector was on site by the early afternoon. All the residential accommodation areas were inspected. Both formal and informal discussions were held with residential pupils during mealtimes, evening activities and a planned feedback session. Meetings took place with the head teacher, heads of care, chair of governors, student and family co-ordinator, a placing social worker and residential care staff. Telephone feedback was obtained from parents as there were no responses to Parent View. Documents 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

This is a residential special school maintained by a local authority. It provides education, care and accommodation for boys, with an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, between the ages of 9 and 18. There are currently 31 weekly boarders.

All the accommodation is based on the school site, which is located within the town of Seaford. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure that the major sanction record consistently records the reasons why a sanction is imposed, any residential pupils views and the effectiveness of that sanction, and that the missing from school records consistently and clearly record actions taken by staff and the post-incident debrief with the residential pupil.
- complete a written risk assessment for any member of staff who commences work while a DBS check is 'in progress' or where an applicant has not yet shared their DBS with the school, ensuring this identifies risks associated with their individual job role.
- ensure residential pupils views and feedback is reflected in standard 20 monitoring visit reports.
- keep under review the practice of locking external doors (for which some children have fobs to enable egress) to ensure need for security does not become overly restrictive.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding.

Relationships between the residential pupils are extremely positive. Parents speak exceedingly favourably about the impact the residential provision has had on the lives of their sons. Comments from parents include 'my boy is completely happy at this school, and that makes me happy'; 'my son failed at previous schools'; and 'my son is more mature and has a better attitude since boarding'.

Residential pupils are exceptionally positive about their residential experience. Comments from pupils include 'I am more smiley since being here', and 'I like coming to school and sleeping over. I have made new friends and have tried lots of different activities'. Some residential pupils reflect that they are calmer since coming to the school and their behaviour has improved. Some pupils say their reading and maths has improved since boarding. This benefits their personal, social and educational development.

One parent comments about the substantial impact of the residential activity programme, 'The school has made such a difference to my son's life. He is more confident, previously he was very withdrawn and now he is more sociable'.

Residential pupils significantly influence the running of the school. There are a wide variety of student led forums including the 'anti-bullying' group. Comments from residential pupils include 'through being part of the student council I am more confident at speaking in larger groups', and 'I enjoy being part of the food committee and seeing things get changed like the choices of food and desserts'. Student council members talk proudly of their recent successful application for an external grant for outdoor play equipment. Packed lunches were also varied as a direct result of food committee feedback. This demonstrates to residential pupils that their views are important and listened to.

Residential pupils benefit from exceptionally effective arrangements to support them into adulthood. The post-16 accommodation block offers residential pupils a safe, structured environment which allows them to take reasonable risks, such as independent travel. Some residential pupils attend local colleges and work experience. Comments from residential pupils include 'I really enjoy travelling to college and having that responsibility. I am learning to cook better and budget my cash. Staff are always around to help me if I need it'. This provides them with exemplary support into adult life.

Younger pupils have 'personal life skills plans' which are highly individualised to their age and understanding. These are regularly reviewed for effectiveness. These plans, alongside varied fun activities such as 'baking club,' support residential pupils to build essential everyday living skills. This benefits them now and in their future.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding.

Induction and transition processes are sensitively and intricately planned in a child-friendly manner. They involve the young person, their family, education staff, care staff and the school's student and family co-ordinator. Together they plan and effectively follow tailor-made transitions. Prior to coming, new residential pupils receive personalised letters from the school to welcome and introduce them to school and boarding life. On arrival, residential pupils receive a welcome

gift. This includes a cuddly toy, toiletries, personalised induction guide, and their own set of bedding. This careful and thoughtful process lessens anxiety for new pupils and promotes a notably positive start within the school.

Residential staff work effectively with education staff to implement a 24 hour curriculum. Boarding staff support residential pupils with their reading goals and objectives on a daily basis. 'Privilege meetings' take place fortnightly. These involve the residential pupil, care and education staff. They provide regular opportunity for focused discussion and review of a pupil's personal goals and targets. This actively involves each pupil in the review of their unique social and educational goals and celebrates progress made.

Residential pupils benefit from enthusiastic staff who successfully engage pupils in wide-ranging activities. Activities available on the school site include football, table tennis, growing vegetables, art club and cookery sessions. Residential pupil groups such as 'film club' meet and then write movie reviews for others to read. The extensive grounds offer varied opportunities to explore, play and relax. Off-site trips are frequent. These include swimming, kite flying, beach trips and shopping. Planned trips to local activity centres for evening events also take place. Some pupils attend local army cadet groups. Residential pupils say they particularly enjoy open-air activities such as outdoor cooking and den making in the warmer months. This provides residential pupils with exceedingly good opportunities to try new activities and extend their talents.

The quality of the catering arrangements is excellent. The school holds the 'healthy schools' award. Residential pupils all speak positively of the food. Individual choices and preferences are extremely well-catered for. Themed meal nights such as Chinese New Year and American Independence Day provide a creative way of learning about different cultures.

Residential pupil's individual health needs are identified and fully met. Systems in place for the administration and recording of medication are safe and effective. Residential pupils have opportunity to see a local doctor who visits the school on a weekly basis. Some residential pupils have benefited from accessing local specialist dental services for longer-term treatment. School counsellors offer residential pupils emotional support and advice. This ensures residential pupils' physical, mental and emotional well-being is effectively promoted.

The residential accommodation is of an excellent standard and well maintained. Photo boards around the living groups capture memories of recent events and activities. Residential pupils say they like their bedrooms. They personalise their own space and report their belongings are safe. Residential pupils confirm they regularly keep in contact with their family and those important to them. This maintains attachments while residential pupils are away from home.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The safeguarding arrangements within the residential provision are good.

Residential pupils spoken to say they feel safe in the school. Pupils spoken to do not identify bullying as an issue. There is an annual anti-bullying week. This raises awareness around the whole school about bullying. Results of an annual bullying survey are reviewed by the anti-bullying committee, suitably supported by staff. Parents feel the safety of their sons is given a high priority in the school. Matters of safeguarding and child protection are referred to external professionals promptly and appropriately. This protects residential pupils.

Processes for the recruitment of new staff follow safer recruitment guidance. However, some staff have commenced work while a DBS check was 'in progress'. For another staff member, it is unclear from records when they presented their personal DBS check to the school for review. However, there are no formal written risk assessments evaluating supervision required for each

staff member's unique role and their access to pupils while checks were in progress or not yet seen. This compromises the recruitment practice.

The school is currently working towards 'gold status' of Team Teach which is the school's preferred physical intervention strategy. All staff receive regular training in de-escalation and positive handling techniques. Residential pupils engage well with rewards systems. On occasions, sanctions are applied within residential time and recorded within a central log. However, the consistency and quality of this record is mixed. Some sanctions do not state the reason why they were imposed, and the views of pupils is not captured. The log also does not record how effective the sanction was. This compromises the head of care's ability to monitor sanctions and to review their success.

There have been some recent incidents when residential pupils have been reported missing from school. Staff took appropriate action to safeguard pupils. However, the quality of record keeping around each incident is inconsistent. Information regarding the actions taken by staff, and post-incident de-briefs with pupils is recorded across multiple documents. This makes it difficult for the head of care to effectively monitor staff practice and ensure procedures are consistently followed.

Health and safety routines in the school are good. Regular testing and maintenance takes place of equipment. Records are detailed and up-to-date. Fire drills take place regularly in residential time. This ensures that residential pupils know what to do in case of an emergency.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision is good.

The residential provision meets the aims and objectives as described within the statement of principles and practice. The residential staff team are a very knowledgeable and stable workforce. 17 out of the 18 staff members hold the Diploma level 3 qualification, with five staff members also holding higher level childcare certificates. Regular training opportunities keep staff up-to-date in safe caring skills such as fire safety, food hygiene and medication. This ensures residential pupils are cared for by highly trained and experienced staff. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal. Staff knowledge of policy and procedures is good. This creates an orderly and safe residential environment.

The standard of record keeping is generally good. Shortfalls identified relate specifically to sanctions and missing from school records. Residential pupils' individual diaries and files comprehensively capture their experiences and activities through photographs, certificates of achievement and mementos. This provides residential pupils with good quality records of their time and progress made at the residential provision.

Parents confirm that communication arrangements are very good. One parent comments 'At another school, I only got told about problems my boy was involved in, now I hear regular positive feedback, and so does he'. Weekly telephone calls and 'positive postcards' sent home keep families and carers in touch with progress and successes. The school also facilitates drop-in sessions in Tower Hamlets for parents to attend and meet with senior staff. This supports parents keeping up-to-date with their son's development and achievements.

There has only been one complaint since the last inspection. This was suitably investigated. Residential pupils know how to complain. They use the 'suggestions book' to put forward views and opinions about school life. Pupil committee members also feedback views and opinions to the regular formal consultation groups.

External monitoring visits take place within the timescales set out in the national minimum

standards. The independent visitor spends time talking to residential pupils and scrutinising relevant documents. The reports are suitably challenging with regard to the standard of written records. Some records have improved in quality, but other documents, such as sanctions, have not. The independent visitor reports do not include a summary of observations or feedback given to the visitor by residential pupils. This does not support the head of care, in driving forward improvement within the boarding provision.

Staff no longer use protected titles such as 'social worker', unless they hold the relevant qualification and are registered with a professional body. New staff job titles now in use include 'houseparent' and 'care support worker'. This now avoids confusion around a member of staff's professional status.

The school has reviewed access for residential pupils to and from the accommodation blocks. A new system is in place which reflects residential pupils' age and understanding and allows most pupils a reasonable level of free movement. Older residential pupils hold their own fobs, or have access to communal fobs, which allow reasonable access to and from the blocks. However, younger residential pupils' movements remain restricted. They cannot freely leave the accommodation area or accommodation block without staff facilitating it. This practice should remain under review including the consideration of greater dissemination of fobs.

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	100986
Social care unique reference number	SC050152
DfE registration number	211/7084

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	Maintained residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	31
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	9 to 18
Headteacher	Mr Gerry Crook
Date of previous boarding inspection	24/09/2012
Telephone number	01323 893138
Email address	admin@bowdenhouse.towerhamlets.sch.uk

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