

Helen Allison School

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

Inspection dates	16/09/2014 to 18/09/2014	
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	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The school has a dynamic and forward thinking multi-disciplinary senior leadership team. They have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision and clear plans for improvement, constructed around national standards and the Ofsted evaluation schedule. Communication with parents is exceptional and transition management is thorough, adaptable and extremely well organised.
- Children and young people are skilfully engaged in developing their own care plans. They are active in setting residential targets within their individual education plans. Graphic visual displays aid them engaging in monitoring their personal progress in meeting these targets. This improves their sense of ownership of their development, and increases personal empowerment. Progress is enhanced by close working between parents, specialist staff and the school.
- Residential staff are well trained, enthusiastic and highly skilled. With their support children and young people in residence show outstanding improvements in: academic attainment; social skills; life skills; communication; developing empathy; managing their own behaviour; and in reducing high risk behaviours.
- Behaviour management is outstanding with young people making impressive and sustained progress in all aspects of their behaviour. Work on behavioural targets is focussed by the outcomes from the detailed monitoring, analysis and review of all incidents and targets, provided by the speech and language and psychology departments.
- The residential setting is highly valued by the school and residential workers are integrated into the work of the school and the support services. Children and young people benefit from the tight working of the innovative Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language and Psychology departments with the residential workers.

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 school were notified of the inspection at 09:05 on 16 September 2014. At 13:00, the Social Care Regulatory Inspector met with the senior leadership team. During the inspection meetings occurred with: children and young people; residential staff; teachers; and those with responsibility for safeguarding, health and safety, catering, occupational therapy, speech and language, psychology, and administration of recruitment records. Telephone or e-mail contact was made with parents, social workers and the local safeguarding team. Relevant records were scrutinised including: point in time surveys; Parent View; medication; recruitment, supervision and training records; residential files; and all relevant policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Angus Mackay

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 72 students, 12 of whom are resident during the week. The school also operates a short break service for young people who attend the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Create a front sheet for the fire drill record showing all staff and young people who have completed an evacuation of the building.
- Display a poster with a picture of the Independent or Appointed Visitor advertising their role in support of children and young people.
- Ensure that all internal monitoring of standards is checked and actioned by the Head of Care or Principal with a particular focus on medical records.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for children and young people are outstanding.

Children and young people in the residential settings show improved academic attainment when compared with their peers in the school. Parents say they are amazed at the progress their children make when in residence.

Children and young people with previous difficulties in forming attachments or in dealing with social situations develop friendships with other young people. They show tracked progress in the development of a range of social and communication skills. One young person said, "I can now get on with others. I have three friends I spend time with. I have changed so much here." Some young people have friends come in from outside the residential setting aiding them in their developing social skills and understanding of, and empathy for, others. Children and young people are able to transfer this developing empathy for others and relationship development outside of the controlled environment of the school and residential setting. One parent said, "Before going there he would not talk and would not go out and mix with others. He now talks and will come out with us."

Children and young people address their difficulties in confidence and managing emotions in a variety of ways. The school and residential setting operate positive recognition and reward systems which develop and enhance young people's self-esteem and confidence. This is reinforced in all aspects of the programme with young people being afforded opportunities to have their efforts recognised and praised. Some young people have individual education plan targets addressing self-esteem, confidence, anger management and aspects of emotions. Their progress is evidenced in these regularly monitored individual education plans. One parent commented, "His confidence and self-esteem has improved with all of the success he has had in residence and school."

Children and young people broaden their often severely restricted diets trying new foods, drinks and food textures. They make significant improvements in their health and ability to join in family meals out. Many make excellent progress in developing social and life skills enabling them to sit with others at a table and to use cutlery.

Children and young people develop a sense of responsibility through their attendance at the school council, decision making in the residential setting and contributing to their own care and individual education plans. They gain skills in communicating their wishes and in making choices. They use a variety of means to communicate with staff and strongly influence the running of the residential setting including helping to select new staff. They successfully engage in their planning meetings using their preferred communication method to put across their comments. They communicate views on their care plans which are incorporated into them, either by themselves or by their keyworkers. They grow in confidence as they see that their contributions are valued and have a real impact on the home and their own programmes.

Children and young people enthusiastically join in a wide range of activities which: broaden their social contacts; improve coordination; and give them fun. They joined in a school camp this year continuing their school and residential programmes in a fun learning environment. One teacher said, "This was an excellent learning experience. They had a lot of support from each other and showed progress, confidence and improved self-esteem, out of their comfort zone." Children and young people also join in a range of charitable events. This aids their developing empathy for others and awareness of local, national and international issues. In these events they undertake

mentoring, with younger residents, aiding their leadership skills and improving social and communication skills.

Children and young people show measured improvement in their life skills. They help select individual education plans which include life skills they need to develop from brushing teeth to using public transport safely. One parent saying, "He has grown a lot there as a person and has developed independence skills. I get a DVD which shows him doing all of these different things, laying the table, loading the dishwasher, making his bed. The care is fantastic."

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision and the care are outstanding.

Transitions in the residential setting are always well thought through and excellently executed. The admissions procedure involves all of the departments and is a positive example of the holistic working model of the school. One parent described her experience, "The admissions process was very thorough. They went and observed him at his old school and then the Educational Psychologist went to his school and observed him. They discussed all of his needs with us and what we wanted them to achieve. The decisions on what to work on were joint decisions." Parents, children and young people feel engaged and empowered from their first contacts with the school and this lays the foundations for their positive working relationships. Movements between houses are similarly planned with the wishes and needs of the children and young people driving the process. Similarly leaving the school is excellently planned. The school ensures that plans for onward movement are made with the young people, their parents and the new setting. Comprehensive visual and written information supports this process enhancing the likelihood of successful transitions.

Children and young people like their accommodation and say that they can personalise their bedrooms and see them as their own space. Living accommodation is warm and homely. One parent said, "It is a home he has there, a real home!" Young people use the facilities in the homes to aid their personal development. Individual education plans include targets to be achieved in the residential setting including developing life skills. Children and young people take opportunities to develop leadership skills and aptitudes in the home influencing the running of the setting and the school. For example one member is voted onto the school council and is involved in meaningful discussion leading to changes in the resource.

Relationships with staff are excellent and the staff set the positive tone for the homes. Staff are skilled in their interactions with young people and display a highly enthusiastic approach to the work. They deal effectively and compassionately with difficult behaviour. Young people say, "I like chatting to staff. I like all of the staff. They are funny, happy all the time, kind, nice and friendly. They listen to me if I want to talk. If I am unhappy I would tell staff and they would always help me." Where young people have needs which the staff team are unfamiliar with or lack the necessary skills to meet they ensure they are appropriately prepared. This ensures that all children and young people's personal, cultural and religious needs are met.

Activities are planned with the children and young people. Staff remain flexible enough to deal with unexpected events and ensure the safety of the young people. Young people build on skills and interests from school and benefit from the cross working of residential staff in the school setting. Activities are highly varied and seek to build on other programmes operating for young people. So for instance all staff are trained by the Occupational Therapist to deliver part of the programme assisting them in calming and in developing various fine and gross motor skills.

Children and young people have individual health care plans which highlight all medical and health needs including any dietary needs linked to conditions, preferences, religion or culture.

Medication is carefully monitored, issued, disposed of and regularly checked. An error in the controlled drugs log was picked up in the monitoring process and safely recorded in the secondary recording system. However the error was not rectified in the controlled drugs book. The secondary recording system ensured that children and young people were safe and that the medication was appropriately disposed of.

Training from the Speech and Language Team aids staff in communicating effectively with pre verbal children and young people. The children and young people who are not yet using spoken language are taught to communicate initially through alternative and augmentative systems such as picture exchange systems (PECS) and by using the pragmatic organisation dynamic display (PODD) books. Staff work with the residents on developing independence skills with the use of pictorial guides. Staff also work on aiding children and young people in their social interactions and emotion recognition. Residents learn how to respond to people in differing social situations through this work.

All children and young people have an individual keyworker who coordinates the work with them. The home provides an independent person, known as the appointed visitor, to provide an additional but impartial support for children and young people. The person visits half termly but the service is not advertised within the residential settings. Reports provide evidence that children and young people do meet with the appointed visitor enhancing the safeguards for them.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Children and young people say they are safe in the residential setting and that there is no bullying. A typical comment from parents was, "My son is completely safe there, I have no fears with them looking after him." The staff implement safe care procedures including the implementation of a well-constructed anti bullying approach. Staff focus on teaching children and young people how to stay safe including supporting school programmes in the safe use of social media. Children and young people are empowered by this approach and talk enthusiastically about how this allows them to safely maintain friendships in their home communities.

All new staff are subject to a rigorous and excellently maintained recruitment system. The monitoring of recruitment practice and its application is exemplary. Young people are empowered and their personal self-worth improved by their meaningful involvement in selection panels. The safe care of children and young people is enhanced by this outstanding recruitment and selection process.

Behaviour management is excellent and benefits immensely from the analysis of incidents by the Speech and Language Therapists and the Psychology team. Files evidence the improvements in behaviour of children and young people and the setting of new target behaviours. Staff were seen to deal effectively with issues of harassment and sexualised behaviour supporting one another and the young people. All staff work to the same positive approach and have an excellent practical understanding of how to apply this, consequently there have been no restraints or missing persons from the residential setting.

Health and safety monitoring is positive with regular checking of all matters and effective monitoring of potential hazards. Site security is high but is capable of modification to allow children and young people differing levels of access and egress depending on their risk levels. Risk management is done in such a way as to ensure that it does not restrict activities and is rather a support to expanding young people's boundaries. One parent commenting, "We are very happy about the safety and security. Many of the children are escape artists extraordinaire. The school and the residences have been one step in front. They always have appropriate staffing levels for them outside the school and residence which doesn't preclude them being offered and doing a lot of outside activities." Staff were aware of what to do if young people went missing but

were not familiar with the home's policy. During the inspection this was circulated to all staff. The Principal constructed a quick reference flow chart, from the procedure, putting it in key locations in the residential setting and school. The residential setting and the school have a strong focus on teaching children and young people how to manage risks themselves and provide tracked progress through individual education plans of their success at gaining these capabilities. Vulnerable children and young people are kept safe by these measures.

All staff are trained in safeguarding and are skilled in its application ensuring highly appropriate engagement with children and young people. They receive regular updates in their training including talks from outside agencies on the hazards and protective factors in the use of social media. The safeguarding policy, from the National Autistic Society, contained some outmoded use of language which the Principal modified during the inspection and circulated changes to all staff. The speed of change to this and the national policy was commendable and ensured staff are aware of appropriate terminology to use when engaging with children and young people.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding.

The school has successfully addressed previous shortfalls in the service and made significant improvements to the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the residential provision. The Principal and Head of Care use the thorough independent visitor's reports, in setting stretching targets aimed at exceeding national minimum standards.

The residential provision is valued by the school and the Head of Care is an important member of the senior leadership team. The residential provision is included in the school improvement plan and is recognised as an invaluable resource for the school. In addition the Head of Care produces an evaluation of the functioning of the residential setting with a particular focus on achieving or exceeding all national minimum standards. This produces a highly detailed report which rigorously addresses all standards and sets challenging targets for the provision. The Speech and Language Therapists and the Psychology department review all incidents reported in the residential setting. They then provide feedback to improve interactions and refine programmes for individual children and young people. The Principal produces an annual report on the residential provision incorporating feedback from all of these sources and evaluating the effectiveness of the provision against the Ofsted evaluation schedule. This detailed and cohesive planning produces a realistic evaluation of the service and sets targets to aid the continued drive for excellence.

The school has developed a central data base for all formal and informal complaints. This information is used effectively, aiding the improvement of the service. Young people are confident in the complaints process saying they always get feedback and an explanation which is acceptable to them even when the outcome is not what they wanted. The residential setting has regular and planned contact with parents through: communication books; e- mails; telephone calls; and personal visits. Parents say, "The communication from the home is fantastic."

Records relating to health and safety checks of the houses are regular, detailed and well maintained. Fire drill records have been modified to show the names of all of those who have taken part. This allows staff to audit the records effectively and identify any children or staff who have not taken part in a fire drill. Although the information is now accessible it does not instantly evidence all staff and young people who have taken part in fire evacuation exercises.

Staff, including the Head of Care, receive regular supervision and appraisal which is monitored by the Principal. The home uses a sophisticated data base to aid in the monitoring of all staff development activity. Staff say the system is highly effective and ensures that they receive

appropriate refresher training where required. They say that the school is exceptional in the support it provides for their personal development and will positively consider any course or conference which will improve the delivery of care to the children and young people. The school enhances the skill base of the staff through additional in house training provided by the Occupational Therapist, and Speech and Language and Psychology Departments. Staff evidence the benefits of this training in their skilled interventions with the children and young people. Induction training is highly valued by the staff and leads to an appropriate level three qualification for all staff.

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	118993
Social care unique reference number	SC024066
DfE registration number	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.

Type of school	Independent Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	12
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	10 to 18
Headteacher	Susan Conway
Date of previous boarding inspection	16/09/2013
Telephone number	01474 814 878
Email address	Susan.Conway@nas.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

