

Furness School

Furness School, Rowhill Road, SWANLEY, Kent, BR8 7RP

Inspection dates	17/09/2014 to 19/09/2014	
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

- Boarders make significant progress and development in relation to their starting points in their social skills, behaviour, confidence and self-esteem. Their boarding experience has a positive impact on their learning and educational outcomes, improving their future life chances. Families recognise the progress boarders make and attribute the child's increase in confidence, self-esteem and improved behaviour to their boarding experience.
- Staff value the unique qualities of each boarder and understand the individual needs of boarders in their care. Strong, respectful and nurturing relationships between boarders and staff allow boarders to develop trust in staff enabling them to work together and focus on specific areas of difficulty to promote development.
- Boarders enjoy their boarding experience and report they feel safe. Robust, effective safeguarding practice protects boarders. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, know each boarder extremely well and protect them in relation to their specific vulnerabilities.
- Managers and staff are keen to drive forward improvement to provide boarders with optimal opportunities to achieve positive outcomes. Strong, effective leadership and management ensures high standards of care, with the needs of boarders central to practice. Improvements since the last inspection include strengthening systems for reporting and recording concerns with respect to the welfare of boarders as well as the procedures in the event a boarder leaves the site without permission. They have also introduced new initiatives to further support boarders in developing their independence skills in readiness for their transition from 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

The school was given four hours 'notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the head, head of care, deputy head, HR manager, the boarding staff team and boarders. Three meals were taken by the inspector with boarders and time spent observing evening activities. Other inspection activities included the observation of the boarder's daily meeting, and the scrutiny of school policies and records.

Inspection team

Janet Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Furness School is a Kent County Council maintained residential special school. It provides education, care and accommodation for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, aged between 11 and 16 years of age. The school is situated in semi-rural surroundings on the outskirts of Swanley, Kent. At the time of the inspection there were 30 pupils on roll, eight of whom occupy residential places.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- consider training senior boarding staff who hold management positions to achieve a relevant Level 5 Diploma qualification
- consider implementing safeguarding as a regular agenda item for staff individual supervision sessions.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Outcomes for boarders are good. Boarders thrive within a nurturing and supportive environment where they develop confidence, self-esteem and trust. They are developing socially and emotionally, showing significant improvement in their behaviour and these developments are having a positive impact on their learning and family relationships.

Boarders experience very positive relationships with staff and enjoy being in their company. Staff respond to them with warmth and good humour. Consequently, boarders trust staff and accept the support they offer, enabling them to make significant progress in relation to their starting points. Boarders report they can approach staff knowing staff will listen and importantly, that staff will respond to them. This develops their confidence and self-esteem knowing they are valued and respected. Boarders are developing constructive, tolerant peer relationships with an understanding of appropriate social skills. Parents and carers acknowledge this progress, reporting 'remarkable progress', 'significant change' and 'now he is an angel at home'.

Boarders are positive about their residential experience. They enjoy a range of enriching activities both on-site and in the local community. Some boarders pursue individual interests in the community such as judo and the local railway club. Staff encourage community activities to develop self-confidence and build a sense of identity, for example, through voluntary work with a youth group. Boarders report activities are 'great' and they can 'choose what they want to do', showing that staff consider their individual preferences.

Boarders succeed within a setting where they are valued as individuals and where adults appreciate their views. They each have a link worker who consults with them on an individual basis but boarders report they can approach any member of staff. Boarders clearly appreciate the informal interaction with staff, which bolsters their sense of appreciation. Staff meet daily with the group of boarders to plan evening activities, review their school day and allocate house chores. Termly meetings with boarders also provide a forum for staff to consult with boarders on such matters as menus, end of term trips and items for the house. Recently, the head of care has asked boarders for suggestions for a new name for the boarding house. The head of care also obtains feedback at various times from boarders through surveys. Such consultation demonstrates to boarders that their views are important and matter to staff, building their self-esteem.

Boarders benefit from having their physical and emotional health promoted to a high standard. They have their medical needs met and receive support from health specialists when needed. The psychological needs of boarders have a high priority. Staff support enable boarders to develop coping skills resulting in improvements to their behaviour and in their ability to focus in school leading to significant improvement in their educational outcomes.

As boarders approach their transition from the school, staff work with them on a transitional leaving programme, including individual agreements with boarders, enabling them to take more personal responsibility, develop their independence skills and plan effectively for the next stage. Boarders receive comprehensive support and guidance during periods of transition, reducing their anxieties about the future whilst sensitively supporting them to move into adulthood.

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

The quality of the residential provision is good. Excellent support by an experienced and committed staff team provides nurturing, sensitive and highly individualised care. This enables boarders to make significant progress in many aspects of their lives. Parents and carers report

that boarding has had a positive impact on their child's progress. A carer commented that they 'cannot speak highly enough of the school and boarding'. A parent stated that their child's link worker 'goes above and beyond and is very in tune with their child's needs'. A carer reported that they feel a real sense of working together with boarding staff, discussing issues and agreeing strategies to implement consistently in boarding and at home. This has been highly successful with carers noting 'a complete change in his behaviour'.

Staff tailor induction for new boarders to their specific needs to ensure they have the level of support to settle in successfully. Education and care staff work closely together and communicate effectively ensuring boarders receive continuity and consistency of approach.

Staff know the boarders extremely well. This is reflected in thorough and detailed care plans, which specifically identify boarders' needs with strategies to support their progress and development. Boarders are involved in their care planning process, working with staff to set their goals and targets and review their progress. Through this process, boarders are aware of their own development and staff support them to focus on areas of difficulty. Daily targets, with appropriate reward and recognition for boarders' achievements, prove successful in advancing boarders' behaviour. A parent commented that the improvement in their son's behaviour had resulted in a dramatic improvement on their family life, enabling them to go out as a family when previously this had not been possible due to their son's behaviour difficulties. Parents are involved in the care planning process through frequent communication with care staff, which parents and carers report as 'excellent'.

Routines in the boarding provision provide structure, which together with high expectations from staff result in excellent behaviour. Staff plan activities weekly, taking into account boarders wishes and individual preferences. Boarders have opportunities to pursue individual interests and experience activities to extend their social experiences and learn how to use their leisure time positively. Additional support for reading and spelling is a regular evening activity, allowing boarders additional opportunities to develop their skills to promote their education outcomes.

Arrangements to meet health needs ensure boarders receive appropriate support. Staff receive training to administer medication safely and the system for the administration of medication is robust. The emotional health of boarders has a high priority. Boarders have access to an on-site counsellor and staff work closely with external health professionals when necessary. Regular one-to-one sessions with their link worker allow staff to continuously monitor the emotional and psychological health of boarders and refer them for specialist support when required. Boarders enjoy healthy, nutritious food and contribute to menu planning for their evening meal in the boarding house. The school chef monitors the nutritious content of evening meals ensuring boarders' diet is healthy and well balanced. Boarders take meals together in small groups with staff who support them to develop appropriate social skills. Staff encourage boarders to lead an active lifestyle balancing physical pursuits for exercise with leisure activities appropriate to their age and interests.

Boarders live in spacious, high quality accommodation. The residential provision has recently been restructured and all boarders now reside in one house. Boarders of different ages are adapting to living together and the older boarders are supporting those younger to settle into the routines and expectations of boarding. Boarders have their own room with en-suite facilities Staff encourage boarders to personalise their rooms to develop a sense of belonging and self-identity. Boarders enjoy large communal areas for eating, relaxing and playing games and have access to pleasant outside space.

Boarders report they can contact their families easily. They have the use of their own mobile phones during the evenings and have access to a landline for contact if necessary, thus maintaining strong family relationships. Parents and carers report that communication with staff

is 'excellent' and staff frequently contact them to report on their child's achievements and positive experiences and not just to report negative incidents. This allows parents and carers to recognise and celebrate their child's achievements building confidence and self-esteem.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The arrangements in place to ensure boarders receive safe care and are protected from harm are good. Boarders report that in the main they feel safe because staff protect them. One younger boarder stated that they feel the older boarders occasionally bully them. Further exploration of this issue with boarders and staff revealed that this issue has been identified and is being addressed through work with older boarders on what they see as 'banter' but which younger boarders perceive as bullying. Staff are working with all boarders, individually and as a group, to extend their understanding of bullying and how others can interpret casual remarks. Parents and carers report they have no concerns regarding the safety of boarders. A recent exit survey of boarders showed all boarders strongly agreed that they were kept safe whilst boarding at the school.

The head of care has responsibility for all safeguarding matters in the school. He has strengthened the systems for reporting and recording concerns regarding the welfare of pupils. Weekly pastoral meetings consider any concerns and action implemented appropriately to protect pupils. Staff receive child protection training and know the procedures for reporting any concerns. Developments in these safeguarding systems have made procedures more robust with safeguarding having a high profile within the school and boarding to ensure the school is a safe place for boarders. The recruitment process to check that adults are suitable to work with children is robust.

Trusting relationships between staff and boarders are the foundation of promoting positive behaviour. Staff support boarders individually, taking into account their complex needs, to improve their behaviour. With appropriate positive reinforcement and high expectations, boarders are learning to make good decisions and are improving their behaviour. Individual risk assessments and positive handling plans identify boarders' specific vulnerabilities and strategies to manage challenging behaviour safely. Physical intervention within the boarding provision is extremely rare and there have been no recorded incidents of restraint since the last inspection. Staff rarely use sanctions and where they are used, are focused on boarders reflecting on and taking responsibility for their actions. Boarders rarely leave the site without permission but appropriate policies and protocols are in place to protect them if they are absent without permission. The head of care has strengthened these procedures since the last inspection. In the event of a boarder being absent without permission, managers designate a named member of staff to co-ordinate and record all action taken to locate the boarder and report them missing. This ensures prompt and effective action is taken to protect boarders in these circumstances.

The culture of safeguarding within the school encompasses educating pupils in relation to staying safe online. Pupils attended a day of workshops, films and activities at the beginning of the school year to raise their awareness of the danger and risks they may face when online. Raising parents' awareness is part of this approach with e safety booklets designed to support them in gaining knowledge and understanding and thus helping to protect pupils.

Health and safety checks are carried out regularly, including fire drills for boarders. Comprehensive systems are in place to protect boarders and staff and the security of the site is closely monitored.

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

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good. The experienced and committed head of care effectively leads the staff team in providing warm, nurturing care and positive experiences for boarders. During the recent restructuring of the boarding provision, the boarding staff team has reduced in numbers. However, there has been no impact on the high quality of care provided for boarders due to the team's dedication and professionalism. The boarding provision is integral to the school. Education staff acknowledge the vital contribution boarding makes to improving pupils' behaviour and learning by having routines and boundaries in place. The positive, consistent, supportive environment which boarding offers enables pupils to thrive and develop emotionally and socially with a consequent significant improvement in their learning.

In addition to the restructuring of the boarding provision, the school has changed its designated status from offering education and boarding to pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) to high functioning pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The school still has a number of pupils with BESD. Training for staff is focusing on ASD though staff are experienced in meeting the needs of this group of boarders. All staff have the required Level 3 qualification but senior boarding staff do not hold higher qualifications important to their role in managing boarding provision. Staff receive regular quality supervision and appraisal to support their practice.

The head of care places a high priority on monitoring the boarding provision, ensuring the service continues to provide opportunities for boarders to develop and make progress. Staff complete care operations checklists, which are overseen by the boarding house manager and monitored by the head of care who produces half-termly reports on the operation of the boarding provision. This monitoring and auditing of records allows for prompt identification of any shortfalls to maintain high standards. Monitoring visits by the independent visitor take place half-termly, with their detailed reports further underpinning the evaluation of the provision. Managers have acted upon recommendations made at the previous inspection and have implemented improvements to the policy and procedures for pupils who leave the school without permission and have reviewed the policy on sanctions.

The head of care compiles a detailed annual review of boarding provision, evaluating current provision and outlining future developments to promote positive outcomes for boarders. He is currently updating policies and procedures to take account of recent changes in the boarding provision and the designated status of the school. Boarding staff are developing the independent living skills programme for senior boarders, utilising the previous boarding house as a training resource. They will deliver 'Trailblazer', a specifically designed programme, to prepare boarders for life after school.

Managers and the staff team value the opinions of boarders. Boarders have opportunities to put forward their views through various channels. The trusting relationships between staff and boarders allow boarders to approach staff confidently with any concerns, which staff deal with informally. No complaints have been made since the last inspection. Staff meet with boarders as a group after school where they have the opportunity to raise any concerns. They hold formal house meetings termly to consult with boarders on menus, items they would like for the house, activities and other matters affecting their boarding experience. These forums allow boarders to develop self-esteem and confidence, knowing their opinions matter and staff take them into account. Additionally, boarders complete surveys to provide managers with feedback on specific matters to contribute to on-going development of the service.

Records held in the boarding provision are current, accurate and appropriate and are stored securely, ensuring the confidentiality of information.

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	119038
Social care unique reference number	SC041787
DfE registration number	886/7034

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	8
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Ms Jill Howson
Date of previous boarding inspection	04/02/2014
Telephone number	01322 662937

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