

Doucecroft School

Doucecroft School, Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex, CO6 3QL

Inspection dates	06/11/2014	
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

- Residential pupils thrive in an environment where their individual vulnerabilities and strengths are recognised. They are able to develop at their own pace and ability, with encouragement and support available whenever they need it.
- The safety of residential pupils is a priority at the school. The high staffing ratios in residential time helps protect pupils. Leaders and managers work well as a team and with other agencies to keep residential pupils safe.
- Managers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They continue to develop practice to improve outcomes for residential pupils within a nurturing environment. Managers promote equality of access and opportunity as a core value in the school.
- Family members are extremely complimentary regarding the quality of care provided. They trust the staff to care for and keep their children safe.
- Behaviour is well managed by staff who consistently maintain boundaries. Residential pupils make good progress and learn to manage situations they had previously found difficult.

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

Three hours notice was given prior to the start of the inspection. The inspection methodology included: observation of boarding routines and practice; scrutiny of school policies and records and Parent View surveys; discussions with parents and residential pupils and meetings with care staff and residential pupils.

Discussions took place with a range of staff responsible for leading, managing and organising residential care, these included residential staff, support staff and the head of education. A tour of the premises with residential pupils included the three residential homes onsite and outside areas area used by residential pupils.

Inspection team

Gwen Buckley

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Doucecroft is a co-educational, day and residential special school for children aged from 3 to 19 years with autistic spectrum conditions. The school, which is privately owned by Autism Anglia, is situated in a small village on the outskirts of Colchester with additional post 16 provision in Kelvedon (7 miles away). The boarding accommodation is located in three boarding houses on the main site. Residential care is provided for up to 294 nights per year currently for students aged 9 to 19 years. There is some respite provision available for day students. There are 50 students on roll, nine residential students. There is boarding for up to 26 boarders. The school was last inspected in June 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of restraint records to provide a clear picture of events and routinely include the views of those residential pupils able to voice an opinion.
- Review the practice of locking the front door to residential areas in line with present risk assessments.
- Consider how residential pupils can be helped to understand healthy eating and ensure the menu is nutritionally balanced.
- Ensure information on the website is kept up to date within reasonable timeframes.
- Improve the effectiveness of the external monitoring and reports to ensure they are robust and give a clear picture of the residential provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. Residential pupils enjoy their overall experience of living in the residential provision of the school and family members speak very positively about this. The positive experiences help residential pupils to learn and develop new social skills as well as to grow in confidence and develop their self-esteem. They receive sensitive care and support from staff who maintain boundaries. Strong and positive relationships between residential pupils and staff are evident. One residential pupil said: 'The best thing about being in residential is that I enjoy hanging around with friends and staff.' Comments made by parents regarding their children's progress included 'my son has a future now, he has made exceptional progress here' and 'this school has changed my son's life, he has shown he can achieve.'

The inclusive nature of the whole school community ensures that residential pupils partake in activities, education and social interactions in a safe nurturing environment. This has led to good, and for some remarkable, progress.

Behaviour is of a high standard. The atmosphere developed in the residential areas is one of acceptance of each other's behaviours and a respect for each other's differences.

Feedback from parents is unanimously positive. They say their children benefit from individualised experiences, which encourages their growth and confidence and enhances their life opportunities.

Residential pupils have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and to make their feelings known. A new student council has been set up, newly established weekly meetings with key workers as well as formal reviews are used to gain the views of residential pupils. Residential pupils are actively involved in their own care planning. Their views are able to influence the way they are cared on a daily basis and they have choices in menu planning and activities. For example, pupils influence which charities to raise money for and how these events run. Individual interests and ability are considered. Events planned include swimming and running and a 'onesie' day. Young people have access to an independent listener, providing them with further safeguards and opportunities to voice their views.

Residential pupils receive support and input from medical professionals where needed, for example from psychiatrists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. Residential pupils benefit from having their emotional and physical health promoted to a good standard. They are encouraged to live active and healthy lifestyles and have numerous opportunities to do so. There is limited information at meal times to help them to understand and make healthy option choices. However, all individual dietary preferences are catered for, whether these are based on religious, health, cultural or behavioural needs.

A good level of attention is given to preparing residential pupils for daily living and helping them prepare for what is coming next. The vast majority of the time communication effectively gives pupils a 'voice' and pictorial prompts helps them know what is expected or about to happen. Residential pupils all develop independence skills by undertaking daily chores around the school and in the residential areas. Family members say this improves children's home life as well.

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

The quality of residential provision and care are good. A committed team of residential staff provide nurturing support to residential pupils. Good levels of communication are maintained across the school, which ensures information is shared easily between education and residential staff.

Effective communication from the school staff ensures family members are aware of how their child is progressing at school. A family member said: 'I trust the staff to care for my child; they will contact me if there is anything I should know and they work with me over care planning.'

The school provides prospective residential pupils and their parents with good information about the level of care, support and services residential pupils can expect to receive. However, the information on the website is out of date and does not reflect the service provided. The induction programme for new residential pupils ensures that they receive the level of support they need. This helps them settle in successfully during what can be an anxious time. During this period, staff are conscientious in contacting parents in order to reassure them.

The school provides residential pupils with leisure activities that meet their complex needs, both within the school and in the wider community. There are specific plans in place where extra support is needed and these are reviewed regularly to ensure they are relevant and up to date. This enables staff to provide the support and supervision each pupil needs and nurtures and encourages their growth and development.

The school supports pupils and parents in accessing specialist professional help if that is needed, for example going to medical appointments. Medication is administered by trained staff and the records are well maintained. This promotes residential pupil's health, medical needs and wellbeing.

Residential accommodation is provided in three homes. Residential pupils have suitable communal space, together with bathing and toilet facilities, to meet their individual and collective needs. They personalise their individual bedroom spaces. The homes are maintained to a satisfactory standard, they are clean, tidy and comfortable. The school maintains a rolling programme of refurbishment and redecoration to improve the overall standard of accommodation. Noise reduction measures have taken place in the dining area and plans are in place to further improve the décor in the houses. However, the doors to residential homes are locked when the residential pupils are there and no risk assessment is in place to indicate why this is needed.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Residential pupils' safety is good. The school has effective systems to ensure that only adults considered appropriate to work with children are employed. These procedures are being reviewed and updated reflecting recent changes to government guidance.

Safeguarding is a priority within the school. Designated persons are in place to take the lead for child protection. All staff display a sound understanding of key policies and protocols. Staff are proactive in promoting and protecting the welfare of pupils and effectively implement the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. Practice is reviewed and amended if there are incidents. This reflective approach ensures that the staff awareness is heightened.

Bullying is taken seriously and residential pupils report that it is not a problem as 'staff sort it'. Residential pupils are seen to behave well and to respond to patient and clear staff direction. Specific individual management plans and strategies are put in place if they are needed, to support individual pupils. Residential pupils report that the rules are clear and that they are treated fairly. Sanctions are extremely rare with only one used in the last year.

Physical restraint is used in line with the school's guidance. A behaviour support team monitors incidents and helps staff to reflect. Staff develop individual management plans to support the residential pupils. However, the recording of restraints does not always give a clear picture of

what strategies were used to prevent the restraint. The views of residential pupils, or those observing the event and able to verbalise their opinion, are rarely recorded.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedure in place to use in the event that a pupil is missing or absent from the premises without permission. There have been no incidents to date, however, staff are aware of the procedures. Residential pupils say they feel safe and that they have a number of individuals they can speak to if they are worried about anything.

Fire precautions and fire equipment are checked and fire drills are held regularly. All residential pupils are aware of fire safety and evacuation procedures. Risk assessments are in place, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on-site and off-site activities. Strategies to manage risk and how to support young people are known and used. The school has comprehensive systems in place to ensure the safety of all pupils is maintained to a good standard.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the school are good. The ethos of the school promotes and nurtures a culture of mutual respect. Care practice demonstrates a clear determination to support young people to be the best they can be.

The head teacher is supported by a committed and experienced management team. Her direct leadership provides a robust oversight and a clear vision for the future of the school as a whole. The residential provision is an integral component of life at the school. This is not reflected within the information available on the school website.

All members of residential staff have appraisals and regular supervision; any issues identified are acted upon. They take part in training to ensure they have the skills and competencies they need to provide a good level of care.

Visits by one of the governors to the school usually take place on a half-termly basis. The scrutiny of practice and the quality of reports vary. Reports do not include comments made by residential pupils and visits often occur outside of residential time. As a result, a full picture of the experiences and views of residential pupils and staff are not known and practices and policies are not robustly monitored.

The whole staff team are acutely aware of the specific needs and behaviours, as well as vulnerabilities of all of the residential pupils. They work closely to ensure residential pupils feel valued and supported. Parents report as having excellent communication with the school. This is by regular telephone contact and weekly school to home reports.

Residential pupils and their parents are provided with appropriate information on how to complain, pupils have information in a format they understand. There have been no complaints received since the last inspection and parents say that staff are very proactive in addressing any issues they have.

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	115426
Social care unique reference number	SC018010
DfE registration number	881/6032

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	26
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	10 to 19
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Jane Smart
Date of previous boarding inspection	10/06/2013
Telephone number	01206 771234
Email address	jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk

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