

# Ash Field Academy

Ash Field School, Broad Avenue, LEICESTER, LE5 4PY

## Inspection dates

03/03/2015 to 05/03/2015

## 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

- This is a calm, relaxed and safe residential special school that places a very high priority on pupils' enjoyment and wellbeing in a highly supportive and nurturing environment.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very strong across all areas of residential life: rigorous whole-school systems keep pupils safe. A local authority has praised the school's contribution to child protection.
- Leadership and management of the residential service is securely integrated in all aspects of school governance. Systems for quality assurance by the governing body and the headteacher demonstrate a continual and creative drive for improvement.
- Pupils really enjoy their experience. One said, 'resi is awesome.' Parents are wholly satisfied and confident with the arrangements for their children's care and education. Parents see the school as a partner in caring for their child.
- Minimum standards are met and exceeded. The residential provision retains the well-established history of outstanding judgements over four years and matches the school's outstanding educational provision.

### 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

Ofsted carried out this inspection with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of residential practice over two evenings; a tour of residence by two pupils; formal group meetings with pupils, as well as informal discussion during shared meals and activities; meetings and discussions with boarding staff; contact with the statutory safeguarding authority to gather their views; and scrutiny of a wide range of documentation. There was no Parent View information but there were staff and pupil responses to Ofsted's point in time surveys.

## Inspection team

Christy Wannop

Lead social care inspector

Louise Whittle

Social care inspector

# Full report

## Information about this school

This is an academy residential special school with 126 pupils. There are currently 38 boys and girls using the residential service for between two and four nights a week. A few pupils have an extended school day until after tea and activities, and then go home. Up to 16 pupils were in residence during the inspection.

Pupils have a wide range of academic abilities, and have a learning, physical and associated sensory disability, or medical need. Approximately half of pupils are from a minority ethnic background and speak English as another language.

The school has a ground floor residential wing within the main school. Up to 18 pupils can sleep in nine bedrooms. The school serves Leicester City, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2014.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop plans for the small steps that staff take to help pupils develop emotional wellbeing, social skills and for those with complex sensory and learning needs: consider a clear link to the aims of pupils' care plans and the content of the regular reviews of residential achievement reported to parents each term.
- Consider how to use existing space to provide more personalisation, choice and opportunities for independence in smaller friendship groups. For example at mealtimes or in the evenings in the flat, or in the 6th form common room, until the lodge is complete.
- Consider how the school can reflect the outcomes of pupil consultations and suggestions to them.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. They have a rich social experience and build important friendships in a safe, relaxed, and supportive setting. Pupils, their parents, and staff want the residential experience to be fun, and it is. Pupils clearly love staying and gain tremendous social benefits to develop ordinary friendships outside school. One pupil said 'like staying here, I have fun and chill with my friends'. A professional working with the school said: 'The students have told me about the activities that they undertake and enjoy and also about the opportunities that they have for strengthening their social networks away from the classroom.'

Pupils accept each other regardless of race, religion, and sexuality and show an awareness of each other's needs and a willingness to help. A parent said: 'Kids have so much respect for each other.' Relationships with staff are exceptionally warm and trusting. One pupil said, 'staff are really kind, they are awesome'.

The right to be included and have equality of opportunity is unquestionably at the forefront of their experience. Regardless of sensory or physical impairment, pupils have an active school life: they go swimming regularly and achieve awards; go horse-riding; take up archery and have singing lessons. They take part in business enterprise schemes; they grow flowers for the school; they go out and about and conduct environmental disability assessments at other schools. Evening sensory sessions take place for pupils who have the most complex needs. Pupils, who do not use speech, expressed their enjoyment, during a sensory session, with their body language. They go on activity holidays and to holiday camps and relish experiences that they would not otherwise have. Their confidence grows.

Communication is good. Pupils approach staff members with requests and ideas. All get help to make their views known. Speech and language therapists advise about preferred communication styles and train staff to offer choice in the most effective way, whether touch, eye contact or by using communication aids.

Pupils are keen to be independent and they have the specialist equipment they need to help them achieve this. One parent said, 'the school environment is perfect' for her child. Several pupils are progressing towards leaving the school and the next stage in their lives as young adults. They learn practical skills such as shopping, cooking, and using a washing machine and have good information about future educational and occupational opportunities. Another parent commented: 'it's an amazing school, I'm really sad she's leaving'.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. Arrangements for pastoral care are strong. Parents speak of total confidence in the quality of care. They describe an enduring relationship since early childhood with school. Teaching, residential, and therapeutic staff work in a cohesive partnership with parents, teachers, and with placing social workers. This caring team of adults delivers an excellent level of consistent care. Satisfaction levels amongst pupils, parents, and associated professionals are extremely high. They say that children experience a sense of inclusion and acceptance at the school, especially those who have previously felt isolated and different in mainstream education.

Care plans provide the basis for effective physical and health care. New, more targeted care plans now identify aims for independence for some pupils. Plans are less clear about the small steps that staff take to help children develop and for those with more complex sensory and learning

needs. A stronger focus by staff on informal discussions around relationships, their emotional needs, and vulnerabilities could enhance pupils' ability to prepare for independence. The school has identified and has plans to develop this aspect.

Trained residential staff manage health care and medication exceptionally well in conjunction with a team of external nurses and health assistants, who have a daily presence in school. Staff gather information meticulously from parents and medical professionals about the right way to help children who need medical assistance with feeding, or particular equipment, such as ventilators or emergency epilepsy treatment. A parent said, 'medical care is excellent.' Where children need external help, such as counselling or mental health support, the school assists parents to secure this. These arrangements ensure seamless, quality health care that has parents' full support. Social work professionals are impressed with the school's creativity and 'can do' attitude. Pupils eat healthily; fruit and vegetables are available at meals and for the evening snack. The school has worked to improve the quality of food. It has not always been universally popular with pupils. It is, however, hygienically prepared is nourishing and reflects pupils' cultural, religious and dietary requirements. Greater opportunities for smaller friendship groups, choice and for more homely serving at tables of shared food, would promote a more relaxed or independent mealtime experience. The school is already making plans to improve this with a refurbished school hall and other initiatives.

Pupils really enjoy the social aspect of staying in what they call, 'resi.' They have opportunities for activities they would not otherwise experience: to spend time with their friends, away from parents, in a safe, but also independent environment. Pupils and parents see this as invaluable and life enhancing. Staff are trained to promote play. Pupils enjoy wheelchair football. Activities include valuable 'rough and tumble' on large soft play equipment: enjoying the outdoors, and helping with gardening. They cook and try out different foods from around the world, learning about diverse cultures, customs, religions, and flavours.

Accommodation is improving and the school plans further renovations to bathrooms and corridors and for pupils to help personalise the newly decorated environment. Space is at a premium and the headteacher plans to introduce a new area in the gatehouse lodge. This is a good opportunity for independence for older, more able pupils in a completely separate building. Pupils who are more dependent can share a more self-contained 'flat' at the end of the boarding corridor. In practice, currently most pupils are part of a larger group in the new communal lounge. Pupils share with one or two other pupils, or can sleep alone, if that suits them better. They say they like this and it feels like a 'sleepover.' They have the mobility equipment and skilled help they need to help them move from wheelchairs to bathe, or relax in bedrooms or chill out in front of the TV.

Families are regular welcome visitors: they volunteer, join meals, and play an active role. Parents say that regardless of how often they phone, staff are always patient and understanding of their need to keep in touch about their children. This instils vital confidence and trust.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

## **Outstanding**

Residential pupils' safety is outstanding. Parents say that the headteacher has a special skill in picking the right staff to work with their children. Recruitment policy, procedure, and practice ensure this is so. Robust safeguarding arrangements and delivery of intimate personal care recognises and respects the particular vulnerabilities of pupils with learning, physical, and sensory needs. Parents say this aspect is 'handled fantastically.' They are not at risk through going missing from school and feel safe from harm, abuse, accident, and exploitation. Where staff practice is in doubt, the headteacher takes effective action.

The headteacher has developed outstanding safeguarding practice: staff pick up a red card when

they have a concern, a physical reminder that they must pass information on and that this takes precedence over all other tasks. The local safeguarding authority confirms full confidence in how the school protects children within a multi-agency child protection framework. A placing social worker said that the school had been crucial in supporting local authority action to safeguard a young person. This social worker said they had: 'never worked with a school that has been so amazing.'

Pupils gain confidence in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Bullying is not an issue and rigorous admission assessments are effective at minimising any behaviour that might jeopardise vulnerable pupils. Staff understand, and teach pupils, about cyber safety. Behaviour is exemplary. Staff consult with parents and behavioural specialists if pupils need extra help to behave in a positive and social way, or take longer to settle into residence. A parent said, 'No bullying- it's fantastic.'

The environment is safe. Health and safety arrangements are robust. Fire safety is satisfactory: regular drills ensure that staff and pupils are safe in the event of a night-time evacuation, and that storage of pupils' equipment and wheelchairs does not impede emergency action. Pupils feel very safe and security arrangements respect rights to privacy and balance children's freedoms with learning to take normal risks.

### **Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding**

Leadership and management of residence are outstanding. The headteacher maximises the residential opportunity for as many pupils as possible and is keen to creatively develop the provision even further. Governors bring a rich range of skills and experience.. They are committed, active, engaged, and well informed through a system of regular monitoring visits and reports about the provision. The head of care sets targets for residential development, linked to the whole school plan and governors track achievements. This results in a greater range of opportunities for pupils. The benefits are clear: 27% of pupils in residence achieved significantly over and above their learning targets for attention, interaction, and independence, in contrast to 13% of pupils who did not stay in residence. Parents see their children as: 'more grown up- having that time away.'

The school consults well with parents and with pupils about their experience, because they want to get it right. Pupils bear influence through residential and school council meetings. They gave their views about decor and refurbishment and about meals. They have asked for an easy access fridge in the lounge. Formal feedback about their suggestions is not always evident, though the outcome from their input about some things is clear in the choice of colour and furnishings, and improved choice at teatime. Parents are very clear that they can raise any issue or concern with the headteacher, who they have complete trust in.

The school celebrates difference and diversity and the staff team mirrors pupils' ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The right to participate and contribute to society is central to the school's ethos. All pupils have equality of opportunity and the school organises very successful holidays for those who otherwise would not have this chance. Staff see pupils blossom during such activities.

Pupils have excellent, consistent care from familiar, knowledgeable staff. The small core residential staff team are a stable and well-qualified group. The combination of care and educational staff in residence maximises all aspects of pupils' development and means they easily share information when pupils achieve new goals or have fresh needs. Systems for staff support, appraisal, and training are good and ensure that staff have the right skills to deliver the right care at the right time.

Partnership working with parents is a terrific strength. One parent said: 'It's a home from home.' From monthly coffee mornings, to a targeted series of gatherings around pupils' transition to adult services, the school provides an invaluable forum for mutual support for the benefit of pupils. One parent said, 'the value to the young person cannot be measured.'

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138094
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC006451
<b>DfE registration number</b>	856/7003

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	38
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	4 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jane Booth
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	06/03/2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	0116 273 7151
<b>Email address</b>	jbooth@ashfield.leicester.sch.uk

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