

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, SALISBURY, SP3 4HL

Inspection dates	27/02/2015	
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

- The effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. The quality of this provision enables pupils to make exceptional progress from their starting point in all aspect of their lives.
- Excellent relationships exist between the staff and pupils. These relationships are the basis for the excellent work the team undertake. The main feature of these relationships is the detailed understanding staff have of the individuals they care for.
- Monitoring and evaluations systems are outstanding. These linked with the teams drive to be a service of excellence ensures honest evaluation linked with a willingness to embrace new approaches and developments which will benefit the boarders.
- Boarders' safety is paramount. The school promotes and ensures their safety by working well with fellow professional where required. In addition, leaders ensure the staff are trained to a high standard.
- Boarding provision is of a high standard and provides a safe and secure environment for the boarder to develop and grow.
- The staff have high expectations for the boarders and themselves and strive consistently to achieve these.

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 informed at 09:00 on 24 March 2015 that the inspection would commence at 11:00 the same day. During the inspection all of the boarding houses were inspected. Formal meetings were held with groups of young people which included a group of prefects and school council members. In addition informal discussions took place with young people during the evenings spent in the boarding houses. This time in the boarding houses also provided an opportunity to observe boarding practices and the staffs interaction with young people. Interviews were held with key staff as well as the managers of the boarding provision. The schools policies and records were inspected, including the files of thirteen young people which were tracked during the inspection. There was no input into this inspection from Parent View as there were insufficient responses.

Inspection team

Wendy Anderson

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Appleford School is an independent, co-educational residential special school for children aged from 7 to 19 years of age, who have dyslexia and associated learning difficulties. The school has a Christian character and close links with its local church. The school is inclusive of children of other faiths. Pupils may be referred from local authorities or private sources.

The school offers the options of full boarding, weekly or flexible boarding and day provision. The residential provision currently comprises of three boarding houses two of which are located on the school site and one in the local village. They provide separate accommodation for boys and girls.

The school can accommodate a maximum of 78 residential pupils. The residential provision was last inspected on 26 March 2014.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for boarders are outstanding. Boarders live in a highly inclusive community and benefit from having exceptionally good quality relationships with the staff who care for them. Boarders have a very strong affiliation to their boarding houses and their fellow boarders. They really enjoy their boarding experience. One said 'it's like having lots of brothers and sisters'. Others said 'it is like having one big sleep over with your friends'.

For some boarders the school provides them with a stable base in which to be educated as their parents may be subject to service postings or frequent moves due to their employment.

Boarders make extremely good progress from their starting points at the school. This is especially noticeable in their increased self-confidence and self-esteem. This is further enhanced by their involvement in the local and wider community. Several boarders commented on the GCSE grades their previous school predicted for them. These were low but, since being at this school their current predicted grades are much improved.

Boarders are able to develop their practical and independence skills which will equip them well for their life after school. Boarders are very proud of their achievements in this area. One said 'I didn't want to learn how to do jobs round the boarding house and such but I now understand why it's important for me to do so'.

Boarders are encouraged and enabled to lead a healthy lifestyle. They understand the need for healthy diets and the need for regular exercise. The excellent range of activities includes physical activities as well as sedentary activities. The physical activity helps boarders' fitness levels and improves their coordination, working with and cooperating with others.

The school community is very caring and supportive of each other. This approach enables pupils to develop and grow in a nurturing, caring environment where they learn to apply these core values to the wider community and their future lives.

Boarders have a variety of ways to maintain contact with the families and friends. This includes phone, email and Skype. This is especially important for those pupils who have family overseas. Pupils and parents provide the school with a list of people the pupils can have email contact with, such as childline.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Excellent pastoral arrangements are in place to provide boarding pupils with effective support in all aspects of their life at the school. Staff have very high expectations and aspirations for the pupils they care for and this drive is central to all work undertaken by the staff team. One pupil said 'at my last school I was told I wouldn't get any GCSEs. Since being here my predicted grades are great'. The boarding provision is at the heart of the schools practices. The staff team are very committed and are proactive at developing boarding practice. There is a 'what next' and 'how can we develop' attitude across the school. They are keen to research and implement new initiatives which will enhance the lives of pupils who attend the school.

Excellent relationships exist between the staff and the pupils which are based on trust and mutual respect. These relationships are enhanced by the teams in depth knowledge and understanding of the needs of the individual pupil. These are further enhanced by the expertise the team have in working with pupils who have dyslexia and associated learning difficulties.

The school has an outstanding induction process for new pupils. The school provides young people and their parents with very detailed written documentation which reflects the school's current practices and facilities. All prospective new pupils undertake a three day taster visit which includes overnight stays for those who wish to board. From this visit the school assesses the prospective pupils and their needs and if the school can meet them. The headteacher operates a robust gatekeeping system for new admissions which ensures that pupils are appropriately placed. On admission to the school each new pupil is allocated a buddy from the existing school pupil population. Boarding pupils said they thought their introduction to the school was brilliant and helped them settle in quickly. One said 'it wasn't scary starting at the school. I was looking forward to it as I had already made some friends'.

Boarding and education staff work very effectively together to ensure consistent of care and practices which contribute to the improved outcomes for the pupils. These working relationships are enhanced by a number of the boarding team also carrying out learning support assistant roles in class.

Staff provide boarding pupils with very individualised support to enable them to reach their full potential. Each boarder has a social independence plan which contains clear individualised targets that are set in consultation with the pupil. These plans cover all aspects of the boarder's life including independence work. Targets are frequently reviewed to identify progress and new targets set. Where targets are not met, the staff revisit with the boarder why this is the case, and new strategies are developed.

Boarders are able to participate in an extremely wide range of activities both on and off campus. The range of activities is kept under review to ensure they are age appropriate and meet the boarder's current interest. Boarders spoken to said they were very happy with all the things they get to do in boarding time. They also said staff welcome ideas from them for new events. The activities on offer are not only fun but also develop boarders social skills and self-confidence. Boarders are also involved in their local community and charity work. This provides them with an opportunity not only to be part of their local community and learn how to be a positive member of the community. In addition all pupils at the school are involved in charity work. Some boarders have recently had the opportunity to visit a school in India which the school supports. They said this was a life changing experience and one they will always remember. One boarder said 'it makes you realise how lucky we are and how much we take for granted'.

Boarders are provided with excellent opportunities to develop leadership skills and be role models for other pupils. These include being a prefect member of the school council, dormitory captains, house captains and buddies for new pupils. Members of the school council and prefects spoken to were very clear on their roles and responsibilities and take these very seriously. This has led to the council and prefects being effective representatives for the pupil body. They also link with the effective consultation systems the pupils have to share their ideas with the staff to effect change. Although these are effective systems most of the boarders spoken to said they would just go and talk to a member of staff or the headteacher about their ideas.

The school has its own additional support team which includes a range of therapists. This team meets not only with the individual pupils but also with the staff team in developing strategies to address specific issues and drive practice forward. Practice developed is shared across the whole school so as to ensure continuity and consistency of care. This is a major benefit to the pupils as continuity is central to their progression.

The management and provision of health care for boarders is exceptionally well managed. This not only ensures boarders receive the health care they need but also that it is delivered safely. The policies and procedure for health care are comprehensive and strictly adhered to in practice.

When this is not the case the school responds robustly to ensure pupils welfare is safeguarded and their health needs met. Medication is securely stored and records regarding the administration of medications are comprehensive. Where required detail health care plans are in place for individual boarders. These ensure constancy of care for those boarders with complex health needs.

Boarders' accommodation is of a high standard. Boarding houses are well furnished, providing boarders with a homely, welcoming, comfortable environment in which to live and thrive. Since the last inspection a new boarding house has been provided for the girls off the school campus. This too is of an excellent standard. Boarders are very proud of their boarding house and their bedrooms. They are encouraged to personalise their bedroom with photographs of family and pets as well as bringing items that are important to them. In each of the boarding houses that group of boarders said their house was the best, demonstrating a strong affiliation to their boarding houses.

Catering at the school is of a good standard. Menus are well balanced, varied and offer boarders choice. There is a comments book in the dining room which enables boarders to provide feedback directly to the chef. Menus are then revised in light of these comments. Within the boarding houses pupils are able to have snacks and drinks outside of main meal times.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The safety of boarders at the school is outstanding. The safety of the pupils is at the heart of all the schools practices. policies and procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff are in place, which are strictly adhered with to safeguard pupils.

The schools safeguarding policy is in the final stages of a recent review. This review includes consultation with, and input from the local authority designated officer (LADO) and an external consultant. Consequently the policy the school follows in practice is in line with the local authority procedures. Once the policy has been ratified by the school's advisory board it will be made available on the school's website. All staff at the school receive regular training on safeguarding and child protection from external and internal trainers. This is then enhanced by on-line training. In addition to this training the head of boarding and the deputy have received advance child protection and safeguarding training. Staff interviewed demonstrated a very clear understanding and working knowledge of safeguarding issues and what action they would take if they had any concerns. Staff saw this as one of their main duties of care. The school has a good working relationship with the LADO which includes open discussion on issues as well as making referrals when required. The LADO reported positively on the safeguarding process at the school and has no concerns about their work in this area.

The behaviour of pupils observed throughout the inspection was exceptional. The school is a very caring community where an ethos of tolerance and respect of people differences is central. The main focus on managing behaviour at the school is that of positive reinforcement. There are consistent positive behaviour strategies in place which are very effective. The school has developed a behaviour management approach to include a lot of work with pupils on reflecting on their behaviours in order to develop their understanding of their behaviours, effect their behaviour has on others and strategies to reduce and eventually eliminate negative behaviours. This approach has been very effective and has led to a drop in negative behaviours. There have been no incidents of restraint in boarding and only one major sanction which was appropriate. The use of low level sanctions is based on the school rules which are good guides to supportive community living.

Boarders at the school do not see bullying as an issue. They said it very rarely happens and if it does staff are very quick to sort things out. Boarders were also clear that they would not stand

for it and would report any bullying incident to staff. Boarders said they do work on anti-bullying including cyber bullying in PSHE so understand different types of bullying. In addition, boarders said the school rules are all about 'looking after each other and respecting each other.' The schools policy and procedure for combatting and addressing incidents is detailed and clear with the main focus on developing pupils understanding of how their behaviour affects others, respect and tolerance.

Pupils' safety at the school is given a high priority and this is supported by a very robust risk assessment process which ensures pupils live in a safe and secure environment. Risk assessments have been reviewed since the last inspection and are now even more detailed to protect pupils. Boarders said they feel very safe at the school and staff work with them on personal safety especially linked with the use of the internet. All boarders were able to name a large number of staff in the school who they would feel comfortable talking to if they had any concerns. This included the school's independent visitors.

Clear policies and procedure are in place should a pupil go missing. Since the last inspection there have been no such incidents.

Since the last inspection there has been a thorough audit of the Health and Safety and fire records. These are now exceptionally well organised and managed. They contain all the required information in easily accessible and readable formats. This development means staff are no longer reliant on one person for this information as it is now accessible to all, easy to evaluate and monitor. This enhanced pupils' safety.

The school had very good maintenance systems which ensure that any work is quickly undertaken and means pupils do not live in an unsafe environment.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The leadership and management of the boarding provision is outstanding. Managers have an excellent and honest understanding of the provisions strengths and areas that would be further enhanced by future development. They already have action plans in place to address these areas. The leadership team have a very strong drive for excellence which is also evident in the staff team. There is excellent evidence of the school piloting new initiatives and strategies. The ethos is if it will 'benefit and improve outcomes for pupils then we will try it'. This can be seen in the developments that have taken place since the last inspection. This approach incorporates the robust monitoring of the boarding practices and documents by the head of boarding, the deputy head of boarding and the independent visitor. Information from these monitoring processes are evaluated and used to improve practices. The school welcomes this robust and honest scrutiny as it drives the school forward. The school not only has high expectations of its pupils but also of its staff and the service they provide.

The two areas for improvement from the last inspection have been met. The first of these related to a review of the way information and records on fire safety checks carried out both internally and by external contractors are stored. This has been undertaken and records in this area are easily accessible, clear and comprehensive. The second area was to ensure that food items stored in the boarding house refrigerators are appropriately stored and labelled and that fridge temperature records are maintained. This too has been done. Both of these improvements support the wellbeing and safety of boarders.

Boarders are cared for by a highly trained, child centred and committed staff team. The majority of boarding staff are suitably qualified to a level three NVQ and new staff are enrolled on this course at the point of appointment. Those in senior or management positions in the boarding houses have the required management qualifications.

New staff undergo an excellent induction programme. New staff said they felt this really prepared them for their role. They also spoke positively of the support they received from their colleagues and supervisors. The leadership team see the induction process as vital as it ensures their high standards are maintained. This then leads into a comprehensive training programme. This ensures that staff training reflects current practice and updates to legislation. It also has a strong focus on working with young people who have dyslexia and takes account of developments in this field. In addition, the school therapy team provide input into the staff training programme.

Staff to pupil ratios in the boarding houses are very good. This ensures boarders receive the individualised attention they require. It also enables boarders to take advantage of a wide range of activities both on the school campus and in the local community.

The staff team receive excellent support from the leadership and management team. This includes regular staff meetings, supervision and annual appraisals. Information from these sessions is linked to the individual team members training and development programme which in turn enhances the care the boarders receive. Within these records there is excellent evidence of concerns being effectively addressed with staff to improve their practice. Staff members interviewed were very positive about their support from the senior management team.

The school has excellent communication systems for keeping parents and carers informed and involved in boarders' lives. This is especially important where parents or carers live overseas. Boarders and staff produce colourful and informative newsletters as well as boarder staff maintaining regular phone or email contact.

All required policies are in place and are fully and effectively implemented. These are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current practices and changes to legislation. Records are comprehensive, detailed and helpful to the support of residential pupils. All records are securely stored.

All National Minimum Standards are met with the vast majority being exceeded.

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	126535
Social care unique reference number	SC039141
DfE registration number	865/6008

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
Number of boarders on roll	73
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 17
Headteacher	Mr David King
Date of previous boarding inspection	27/02/2015
Telephone number	01980 621020
Email address	secretary@appleford.wilts.sch.uk

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