

Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, WESTERHAM, Kent, TN16 1QN

Inspection dates	04/02/2015 to 06/02/2015	
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

- This school actively promotes the growth and development of its residential pupils. The school's success lies within the nurturing, respectful and sometimes challenging relationships which are established between the staff and residential pupils. Comments from residential pupils include, 'I love boarding here. It's helped me to grow up and learn to do things for myself'.
- A safe and secure physical environment promotes and protects residential pupils' safety and welfare. Beyond this, an educative culture actively encourages pupils to take measured risks and to learn from their mistakes. They are equipped to make their own decisions as far as they are able. Comments from residential pupils include, 'I now know that I can do more things for myself. I didn't know this before I started boarding'.
- Excellent communication systems ensure that staff across all disciplines, understand the aims and objectives of the school. The entire team works collaboratively to ensure that each department does its utmost to support residential pupils to maximise their own potential. Robust governance invites parents and carers to shape and influence the running and on-going development of the school.
- Parents say, 'my child is finally understood. The staff understand how [my child] communicates. This enables [my child] to feel valued and understood. [My child] is therefore treated as the teenager they are, despite their complex disabilities and associated needs'.
- All of the National Minimum Standards for residential special schools are met, and in some cases, exceeded.

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

This standalone welfare inspection was conducted over three days by one inspector. The inspection activities include a tour of the premises. Relevant heads of departments were interviewed and individual pupils were case tracked. Residential pupils were joined for activities and meals. The student council was observed while interviewing potential new staff. A new head of care has been appointed since the last inspection. the previous post holder has retired but remains as a governor.

The three recommendations from the previous inspection have been implemented and the school has continued to drive improvements resulting in an overall judgement of outstanding.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Valence school is a maintained residential special school. The school has 52 residential places for pupils aged between 11 and 19. Residential pupils live in six bungalows and a larger residential living unit, all situated close to the main school building within the grounds of the school.

The school caters for pupils with physical disabilities and/or complex medical needs. The last inspection of the residential provision was in March 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure that pupil's written goals, targets and success criterion is explicitly clear for staff to follow
- make accurate written records in respect of staff recruitment anomalies in every case.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Residential pupils say they trust and value their relationships with the staff, especially their key workers. Their comments include, 'I always talk to my key worker about my problems' and 'I do get nagged by my key worker to do more things for myself; sometimes I moan about this but my parents agree that it is good for me. It's right really'.

Such comments fully endorse the school's philosophy of appropriately pushing and challenging residential pupils to strive to achieve their own goals and aspirations. Over time, and with increasing maturity, residential pupils learn to value this approach. The impact of this ethos and practice encourages residential pupils to believe in their own strengths and abilities. They learn to challenge stereotypes and to value themselves, and each other.

An active student council routinely argues and challenges the wider school to hear, and respond to its views and opinions. Representatives of this group say, 'we tell the staff what we think and they listen to us' and 'we admire the staff who work here'. Their self-esteem and confidence soars as a result of the school's inclusive and valuing culture.

Residential pupils enjoy the boarding experience because it recognises their needs, abilities and interests with equal measure. Their comments include, 'I get the help I need with my health problems, the staff here understand how to help me' and 'I can use all of the equipment in the kitchen myself because of all of the adaptations'. Another pupil states, 'I'm going out with my key worker tonight to a concert. Just us two. I'm trying to change her taste in music'.

Residential pupils look to their futures with enthusiasm and positive expectations. Their transition journeys start at their own unique pace; some start planning earlier than others. Some pupils require more support than others. Highly individualised plans recognise how and when this planning should start and what it should look like. Pupils are extremely well prepared and supported. This maximises their chances of success for the next stage of their lives.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

Residential pupils enjoy and benefit from superb relationships with a wide range of safe, professional and caring staff. This level of stability nurtures appropriate and sustained relationships which inspire trust and confidence for the pupils. Their comments include, 'I can always talk to my keyworker about any problem' and 'if you need anything, there is always someone here to help you'.

Excellent communication systems exist between and across the whole school staff team. Different departments fully understand their own responsibilities and each others. They also recognise the value and impact of a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure that all areas of a pupil's needs are factored into daily care planning. A culture of mutual respect between all staff departments ensures a holistic approach is achieved.

Individual care plans are therefore derived from the close scrutiny of pupil's statements, therapeutic assessments, parental contributions and pupil's own input. A recommendation from the previous inspection, to improve upon the presentation of care plans has influenced a number of changes. Residential pupils are able to navigate their care plans and fully explain their own targets and goals. There are a few occasions however, whereby written goals and targets risk being ambiguous, particularly when writing the success criteria. Pupils may not know if and when they have achieved their target in some cases.

The significance of the high number of residential pupils with additional health and medical needs is represented by the large team of qualified nurses and therapists, based at the school. Excellent coordination places these team members within specific areas of the residential provision after school hours. Residential pupils become as familiar with these staff as with their own keyworkers. Their practical input and support, as well as their oversight and monitoring of nursing tasks, therapeutic interventions and physiotherapy exercises, ensures expert care is delivered. Residential pupils greatly value this aspect. Thoughtful and considerate planning ensures that many of these necessary tasks are built into ordinary routines and naturally occurring situations. A particular strength of the school is the way in which it provides pupils with highly individualised support and care in discreet and sensitive ways.

Keyworkers demonstrate an insightful and sensitive understanding of the holistic needs of the residential pupils. This is further assisted by the excellent relationships which they forge with parents and carers. One parent says, 'my child has extremely complex care needs, combined with communication difficulties. I am delighted that [child's name] has such a great keyworker who understands all of their nuances. Underneath it all, [child's name] is a teenager and they want to be treated as such. Their keyworker does exactly this'.

The residential team skilfully encourages pupils to explore and develop their own emerging personal identities. Sensitive support and guidance enables pupils' individual development across all aspects of their personal journeys. They can speak freely and openly about their concerns, anxieties, hopes and dreams. Their emotional and psychological well being is effectively supported.

Excellent catering arrangements are commended by the pupils. The catering team fully understands all pupils specific special dietary requirements and the quality of the products used is superb. Much excitement is demonstrated by the whole school as they await receipt of a Gold Award from the 'Food For Life Partnership'. Pupils speak with great enthusiasm and pride about growing their own fruit and vegetables.

A suitably adapted physical environment maximises pupil's independence. Spacious rooms, necessary specialist equipment and excellent maintenance arrangements are all factors of this superior accommodation. Its thoughtful layout promotes independence while protecting and ensuring the privacy and therefore dignity, of the pupils. A common theme has been followed throughout all of the residential areas. This relates to spacious and well equipped bungalows. Beyond this uniformed design, each bungalow is internally decorated and furnished to the unique tastes and personalities of its group of occupants. This is one way in which the residential pupils are enabled to place their own unique stamp on their living areas.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Excellent safeguarding arrangements are fully endorsed by pupils, parents and wider safeguarding agencies. Residential pupils say, 'I always feel really safe here, everyone looks after each other'. Comments from the local authority safeguarding adviser includes, 'Generally I have always considered the safeguarding arrangements in Valence to be an example of best practice'.

Strong recruitment procedures ensure pupils are protected from potentially unsafe adults. New staff do not commence at the school until all of the required checks and references are received and deemed suitable. One example of a reference anomaly is suitably verbally explained by the personnel department but this should be more explicitly recorded in writing.

Child protection and safeguarding training is routinely refreshed for all staff members. Those with designated responsibilities receive additional training and provide excellent oversight and monitoring of the school's overall safeguarding practices. This diligent approach results in detailed

investigations, wherever necessary. As a result, pupils are protected at the very onset of a concern being raised.

Staff know what to report and to whom. They understand the wide range of safeguarding risks which are apparent for the pupils. They speak knowledgeably about the specific vulnerabilities that disabled young people face. They also widen this understanding to incorporate the risks encountered by all young people in the community, regardless of any additional needs they may have. They talk about examples such as internet safety, cyber-bullying and sexual exploitation.

Residential pupils say that incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Some say, 'Bullying happening here? You must be joking! It's not the way at Valence'. Other comments relating to safety include, 'we get a lot of advice about social network sites. It's good we are allowed to use them because we know how to do it safely'. Staff members speak fondly about the challenges some pupils bring. '[Child's name] is always trying to find ways to beat our IT systems. They keep us on our toes'.

This approach is demonstrative of the school's drive to educate pupils to learn to safeguard themselves and each other. Appropriate risk taking is embedded throughout the school. Residential pupils learn valuable life lessons because of this practice.

Residential pupils routinely quote the school's code of practice and conduct. They describe a culture of tolerance and acceptance which is steeped in behavioural expectations. The general behaviour of pupils towards the staff and each other is overwhelmingly positive and respectful. To this end, the use of specific techniques such as physical restraint interventions is extremely rare. Pupils speak of their excellent relationships with staff throughout the school. Nevertheless, there are some examples of challenging behaviour being presented. Such episodes are very well and appropriately managed.

Staff describe such incidents as a means of communication from the pupils concerned. They speak about the frustrations and the understandable anger that some pupils feel about their own personal circumstances. Comments from staff include, 'It's our job to find ways to help individuals to manage their feelings and situations' and 'It's all about balance and giving appropriate consequences'.

In line with their own personal development needs, some residential pupils take greater risks by accessing the wider community. Individual risk assessments provide excellent safeguards while maximising such independence opportunities. To date, there are no episodes of pupils being absent or missing while out in the community or from school. Explicitly clear individual guidance is in place however, in the event that such an incident could occur.

Diligent health and safety monitoring ensures the premises and specialist equipment is very well maintained and free from potential hazards. Residential pupils understand and routinely practise fire evacuation procedures at different times of the day and night. Appropriate levels of security do not impinge upon pupil's freedom of movement. This approach is also reflected by high staffing levels. These provide appropriate and necessary supervision without being oppressive.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

Outstanding leadership and management arrangements place the residential provision as an integral feature and asset of the school. The head teacher effectively leads a senior management team which mirrors his drive, ambition and continuing improvement agenda. Heads of departments and senior managers work to a common aim of providing an education which is rich in providing experiences across all aspects of pupils' growth and development.

Strong governance holds this committed and passionate team to account. Comprised of external professionals, staff members, parents and friends of the school, the governing body sets high standards which it monitors with rigour. Pupils understand this element and they enjoy giving presentations and feedback to this group about their school. The student council is equally proud of its active role with regards to staff recruitment.

This is an on-going task which continues to bring challenges for the school. Many members of staff are long-serving. However, factors including the physical location of the school and socio-economic influences, do have an impact upon staff retention. In response, a rolling programme of recruitment is on-going. The commitment of existing staff members who routinely work additional hours ensures the use of agency staff is kept to a minimum and planned activities are rarely disrupted.

The school continues to welcome and invite observations, comments and complaints from all of its stakeholders. Issues and concerns are positively used as a learning opportunity, from which to shape future practice and to make improvements. The three advisory recommendations from the previous inspection have all been robustly implemented.

In response to a previous recommendation, a clear focus has driven improvements with regards to the supervision needs of the residential staff team. Revised and updated templates ensure that core areas of staff performance, training and development needs and work objectives are robustly discussed and recorded. The team gives high praise to its senior leadership. Comments from staff include, 'I get excellent support and guidance', and 'I receive excellent training which helps me to improve upon my own performance'.

Care plans and associated records are diligently completed and securely stored. These documents accurately reflect and endorse the policies and procedures of the school. Such policy guidance is regularly reviewed, updated and ratified by the governing body to ensure continuing compliance with legal requirements and good practice guidance.

A seamless handover between the previous and new head of care demonstrates excellent succession planning. The improvement and development work of the previous post holder continues to be strengthened. With a background in the management of children's homes, the new head of care brings relevant previous experience with particular emphases on strong and rigorous monitoring. The strengths and weaknesses of the school are firmly understood by a team which is able to secure continuing improvements.

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	119032
Social care unique reference number	SC041791
DfE registration number	886/7021

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	50
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Mr R Gooding
Date of previous boarding inspection	19/11/2013
Telephone number	01959 562156
Email address	pkniveton@valence.kent.sch.uk

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