

# Cuckmere House School

Cuckmere House School, Eastbourne Road, SEAFORD, East Sussex, BN25 4BA

<b>Inspection dates</b>	19/03/2015	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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 innovative use of the residential facility supports residential pupils to make the most of extended learning opportunities provided at the end of the school day. Evidence gathered by the school demonstrates improvements in key measures, such as attendance and attainment.
- Residential pupils are strong advocates for the service. They relish the opportunities provided to them and recognise the genuine difference it makes in their lives. They highlight that using the residential provision helps prepare them to learn, and praise the effective planning by staff that improves their opportunities to achieve.
- Parents provide clear descriptions of the positive impact the residential provision has for the social and emotional development of their children. They value the excellent lines of communication established with them by care staff.
- Committed and passionate staff deliver an exceedingly high quality of care that centres on the individual needs of residential pupils. The safety and well-being of residential pupils is prioritised ensuring that they feel safe, valued and respected. Difference is recognised and respected.
- Leaders and managers have driven change since the last inspection that has resulted in clear improvements. Excellent monitoring of the service continues to identify key strengths along with areas for further improvement
- All national minimum standards are met and all areas are judged outstanding.

### 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 inspection was announced at 9.00am. The inspector was on site by 12.20pm the same day. Residential accommodation areas were inspected. Both formal and informal discussions were held with residential pupils at different times. Meetings took place with the executive head, head of care, head of school, business manager, chair of governors, governor with lead responsibility for safeguarding and a number of residential care staff. Telephone calls were made to obtain feedback from parents and carers as insufficient responses to Parent View were registered. A wide range of documents were sampled and scrutinised.

## Inspection team

David Putnam

Lead social care inspector

# **Full report**

## **Information about this school**

This residential special school is for boys aged between five and 16 years who have an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). The school is maintained by the local authority. It is part of a federation, which is a collaboration/formal partnership that includes one other residential BESD special school, a day BESD special school and a range of alternative provision provided by the local authority. At the time of this inspection plans for the federation to become an academy were at an advanced stage.

The school's residential provision is located in a separate building in a residential area of the town, approximately half a mile from the main school site. Up to 12 boys can stay overnight and they generally stay between one and three nights during the school week. Extended day provision is also provided for both primary and secondary pupils, enabling them to stay into the evening for activities and a meal before returning home.

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

- promote timely opportunities for all staff to attain recognised qualifications promptly and efficiently
- ensure that all documents available to a public audience are those that are most up to date.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils at the school are outstanding. An innovative and creative approach to the use of the residential facilities attached to this school brings extensive benefits to the emotional and social development of residential pupils. Provision at the single residence, Tower House, is not used in a traditional way. Instead different groups of pupils stay on set nights each week to provide them with opportunities to benefit from extending their curriculum beyond the school day. Opportunities are provided through wide ranging organised activities and the chance to socialise with their contemporaries in a safe and structured way. Senior leaders and managers monitor the impact of the service and are able to evidence significant and demonstrable improvements in the attendance and academic achievement of those pupils who utilise the residential facility.

Some residential pupils offer their own explanations for the progress identified by the school. They comment that because they stay so close to school they are able to sleep in longer, they avoid long journeys to school and feel rested and prepared for the school day. One pupil explained that as a result of careful planning they are going to be able to stay each night before scheduled GCSE examinations. He expressed relief at knowing he will be able to get to school in good time, reducing potential pressure.

Residential pupils are enthusiastic advocates for the service, indicating that those who choose not to attend, 'don't know what they're missing'. They see Tower House as 'awesome'. Without exception feedback received by the inspector was positive. Residential pupils benefit from affirming and constructive relationships with staff and each other. Residential pupils say it is a place where they can spend time with their friends in a way that is different to being at school. Considered planning by staff ensures that the balance of groups is appropriate to enable staff to meet identified needs, but also to allow friends to spend time together. One residential pupil said, 'We're all different, but we all get on.' Other comments include many references to the residential facility feeling like a small family. Residential pupils relish the opportunities provided to them. They fully engage with activities that provide new and exciting experiences. Many of these help them to keep fit and healthy; others stimulate their interests or expand their knowledge.

The views of residential pupils are central to the running of the service. This comes across strongly in many ways and helps them feel their opinions are valued and respected. One clear example is the inclusion of younger pupils in Year 6 who also now benefit from accessing this extended provision. This addition to the service was introduced when a direct question was asked by a pupil. Leaders and managers took prompt action to bring about this change.

Residential pupils grow in confidence and maturity over time, resulting in discernible changes in behaviour. These are emphasised by comments from parents and carers, which include; 'He has definitely improved his social skills'; 'It has given him much more confidence'; 'The staff, "get him", he has a bond with them'; and 'It helps him with his anxieties... Tower House has been teaching him to manage and cope'. School staff, who also know individual residential pupils well, highlight that problems that sometimes present at school are not prevalent in the residential provision. This further evidences the positive influence the provision has upon residential pupils.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Outstanding

The quality of the school's residential provision and the care provided are outstanding. Thoughtful and considerate induction practices help residential pupils prepare to stay in the provision. This enables understanding of expectations placed upon them, in addition to the rewards that come from attending. Listening to each individual residential pupil is central to the quality of care

provided. Even when they come to stay after extensive introductory processes, if they are not confident or comfortable about remaining, staff are sensitive, responsive and supportive of individual needs.

The service is provided to augment the provision of the school. It is seen as a 'wrap around service' by senior leaders. The deployment of the care staff in both the school and the residential provision ensures that there is continuity and consistency for residential pupils. This enables care staff to get to know each residential pupil extremely well. Any risk of carrying over issues from one place to the other is counteracted by the caring, considerate approach of staff who ably and consistently communicate that they want what is best for each individual child or young person.

Parents and carers say that the quality of communication from staff is of a very high standard. Some compare this favourably to previous experiences they have had in other schools. Parents and carers say that they relish what they see as the refreshing attitude of care staff. They highlight a willingness by staff to move forward and deal with presenting issues rather than simply reporting them. They see this as central to the delivery of positive outcomes in the lives of residential pupils. They use words or phrases such as, 'remarkable' and 'very caring' to describe the quality of care and the residential provision.

Resourceful and committed staff persistently seek out opportunities for residential pupils to have new and exciting experiences that stretch them. At the time of this inspection nine different activities were available for residential pupils to sign up to. Applications are successfully made for grants to purchase equipment or provide qualified coaching opportunities. For example mountain bikes and related safety equipment are purchased and staff are suitably trained to lead this type of activity. Packages of golf lessons have been obtained through a local professional with the appropriate nationally recognised qualification. Similarly, care staff pass on knowledge and skills obtained through their own areas of interest and expertise.

Residential pupils are given responsibilities commensurate with their abilities and stage of development. They grow in confidence as they develop and mature. While rules are not extensive there is a respect for the expectation of positive behaviour which is sensitively communicated. Consequently, residential pupils are supported to take responsibility for making sensible choices, such as preparing to go to bed on time. While there is not a formal process, all take turns to help complete chores as part of living together. For example, everyone assists with clearing up after meals.

Food is plentiful and of a very high standard. One residential pupil said, 'it is like eating in a restaurant every night.' Others are supported to try new foods. This helps them to realise that they like foods that vary in flavour and texture, even when they are new or different. Residential pupils also develop independence skills by helping out with the preparation of meals or baking as part of their activities. All these elements help provide a normality of routine to their time in the residential provision.

The residential accommodation is maintained and decorated to a high standard. Communal spaces are brightened by informative and colourful boards. Many incorporate photographs of individuals and group activities that spark memories for and anecdotes from residential pupils. This helps them recognise what has changed and what they have achieved. Information is displayed about different festivals or cultural events which are marked at the appropriate time of year. This helps residential pupils to value difference and respect other people's perspectives as they expand their own learning. Pupils always stay in the same bedrooms during each stay. This ensures consistency and familiarity. Even though there is space in many rooms for two beds, a policy of single occupancy is maintained at all times. All have their own bed and are able to personalise their space in the room. In this way they are able to place their stamp on their own space.

Arrangements for managing medication are robust and rigorously adhered to. This helps to keep residential pupils safe. Due to the proximity of most parents and carers, if individual children or young people are unwell they will invariably return home. This further emphasises the view of leaders and managers, that the residential provision is a service that augments the care children and young people receive from their parents or carers.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

## **Outstanding**

Provision for ensuring the safety of residential pupils at the school is outstanding. The welfare of residential pupils is central to practice throughout the school. All policies and procedures relating to aspects of safeguarding are rigorously implemented. Residential pupils experience the impact of this as a direct result of the professional attitudes coupled with genuine affection demonstrated by all staff toward them. The passion, drive and commitment of staff to want the best for each individual child or young person are clearly communicated in a way that demonstrably promotes the safety and well-being of every individual. The result is an overwhelming presentation of residential pupils who feel fundamentally safe in an environment where staff do not just care for them, but care about them.

Robust and efficient recruitment practices are consistently evidenced and contribute effectively to ensuring that the safety of residential pupils is enhanced. Leaders and managers have introduced subtle, but efficient improvements since the last inspection. These ensure that all necessary information is gathered consistently, meaning that actual or potential gaps in information are filled.

Comprehensive training in safeguarding practice is given the highest priority by all staff. The safety and well-being of residential pupils is further promoted through the development of the whole staff team. Efficient systems ensure that all care staff receive training in a wide range of subjects that result in safe experiences for residential pupils. This ensures that practice relating to the storage and administration of medication is efficient and safe. Any member of staff is able to provide first aid if needed. All staff demonstrate an alertness and responsiveness to issues that may impact upon the health and safety of residential pupils, both in Tower House and when they are out in the wider community. This includes specific training when new or different activities are offered to the residential pupils.

Staff expertly use their training in a recognised technique to de-escalate difficult and challenging behaviours and, when absolutely necessary, safely restrain residential pupils. However, restraints within the residential provision are extremely rare, with just one occurring during the year preceding this inspection. This highlights the skill and efficacy of staff, but further emphasises changes in behaviour displayed by residential pupils as a result of the quality and safety of care they receive.

Formal incidents of residential pupils going missing do not occur. There have been a very small number of instances when pupils have expressed a desire to go home and these have been consistently and safely managed. Through clear policies and procedures staff know what to do and act accordingly. A willingness to listen to the views of pupils coupled with close liaison with parents and carers ensures that matters are handled appropriately and children and young people are kept safe. Residential pupils say that bullying can occur, but also confirm that they are comfortable about raising this with staff. They are clear that matters are dealt with promptly, adding to their sense of safety and well-being.

Leaders and managers constantly seek to enhance practice and procedure. To this end, policies are reviewed regularly in a demonstration of an ability to adapt and improve. Changes ensure that the vulnerabilities of individual residential pupils are acknowledged and understood. Clear

and consistent lines of communication ensure that staff are supported to understand and implement changes swiftly and efficiently.

The safety of residential pupils is further promoted by positive and constructive relationships with external safeguarding agencies. When necessary, appropriately trained, designated staff make referrals to these outside agencies. This helps to keep residential pupils safe, but also positively promotes the welfare of children and young people outside the school. When appropriate, leaders and managers challenge the safeguarding practice of others and advocate strongly on behalf of the residential pupils in their care.

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

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. A highly experienced and dynamic management team lead a committed and enthusiastic group of care staff. In turn, the senior leadership team are both challenged and encouraged by a passionate governing body that brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to drive improvements further. All have a comprehensive understanding of the significant difference the residential provision contributes to the overall function of the school.

The head of care has a clear vision for the service. She recognises the characteristics of an outstanding provision, having managed other services that have attained that judgement. Her enthusiasm inspires other staff to deliver the best for residential pupils. Leadership is characterised by a desire for the service to become even better.

Developments and improvements are prioritised through effective monitoring processes. This secures a fundamental understanding of areas of strength within the service and those where development would be beneficial. Residential pupils play a key role in identifying the changes they want to see. Their voice is heard loud and clear in all aspects of the school. Clear plans are developed with well-defined criteria for recognising success. This ensures that enhancements in the service are targeted and achieved in a timely way.

Staff benefit from excellent training opportunities that equip them for their role and expand their learning and development. A detailed internal induction process is augmented by a nationally recognised process for people undertaking this type of work. When there are difficulties completing this in designated timescales, leaders and managers ensure time is allotted to staff to achieve this. Regular supervision meetings are seen as supportive experiences by staff. Their personal development is further considered through an annual appraisal of their work, when targets for improvements are clearly set.

Parents and carers praise what they see as excellent communication with them from the care staff. Regular telephone calls are augmented by contact at parents' evenings. They describe a sense of working together in ways that directly benefit their children.

Leaders and managers took immediate action to address the four recommendations for improvement made at the last inspection. Changes made led to the establishment of sound practice in relevant areas of service delivery. All aspects of the process for vetting new staff have been clarified to avoid any potential confusion. The implementation of systems now ensure that maintenance tasks are efficiently reported and acted upon, in particular when they impact upon the safety and welfare of residential pupils. Safeguarding training is made available to any governors, including those who undertake independent visits to the residential provision. Monitoring by leaders and managers is supported by the recording of dates when individual risk assessments of residential pupils are reviewed.

Immediately prior to this inspection a technical problem on the school's website led to an older

version of the statement of principles and practice being temporarily displayed. This had limited impact upon residential pupils, their families or other professionals as the matter was immediately addressed and resolved by leaders and managers during the inspection. This demonstrates an ability to efficiently respond to matters as they arise.



## 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>	114696
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC050165
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/7036

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>	Maintained School
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Frank Stanford
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	04/06/2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01323 893319
<b>Email address</b>	office@cuckmerehouse.e-sussex.sch.uk

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