

Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, BROADSTAIRS, Kent, CT10 1EB

Inspection dates	09/02/2015 to 13/02/2015	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Good	2
Quality of residential provision and care	Adequate	3
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 only join the school following thorough assessment processes. Input from previous schools, involved professionals, parents, and wherever possible pupils themselves, produces good quality initial care planning information. Pupils join the school in planned ways which respect their own unique needs. Bespoke transition arrangements help residential pupils to settle into their new surroundings with minimal stress and anxiety.
- Residential pupils develop trusting and appropriate relationships with the staff, especially their keyworkers. They enjoy familiar routines which add to their feelings of safety and security. For many, this is a vital component which needs to be established before they feel confident to try new experiences.
- Good safeguarding arrangements protect and promote the safety and welfare of the pupils. A safe physical environment is staffed by suitably vetted adults. Regularly refreshed child protection training reminds all staff of their duties and responsibilities. This guidance is implemented in practice.
- Effective communication systems are valued by parents, carers and other professionals. Their contribution and input with the care planning and reviewing process demonstrates the collaborative approach of the school.
- Pupils are actively encouraged to have a voice which influences the service provision. As far as their disabilities allow, every pupil is encouraged to express their views, opinions and ideas.
- Staff strive to give pupils the skills and resources they need to become confident and effective communicators. Many of their residential targets are concerned with the development of these skills. Pupils become safer as their confidence, assertiveness and communication techniques develop. They are better equipped for leaving school and adult life.

- Strong leadership and management arrangements are driving improvements. The senior leadership team understands the areas of weakness and has clear development plans in place to tackle these.
- All of the national minimum standards for residential special schools are met.

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. All areas of the school and its residential provision were toured. Case tracked a number of residential pupils, spoken with and joined pupils for after school activities, including mealtimes. Key staff were interviewed in respect of their positions, as well as groups of staff team members, including direct care and ancillary staff.

The school is undergoing a number of changes, not least the introduction of a new head teacher. Positive change is occurring. This includes a staffing restructure and a full review of pertinent policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Stone Bay School is a local authority maintained residential special school for up to 66 young people aged 11 to 19 of whom 28 are boarders and the remainder are day pupils.

The school is situated in Broadstairs and caters for young people with learning, behavioural and communication needs; a high percentage of students have Autistic Spectrum Disorders. All students have a statement of special educational needs.

The residential accommodation is provided in six units, located on the school site, most of which are within the main school building.

The school was last inspected in March 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure every aspect of the staff recruitment process meets best practice guidance on every occasion
- keep current residential staffing levels under review
- continue to bring all aspects of the residential accommodation up to the same good standard
- provide all keyworkers with sufficient time and resources to become proficient with the new care planning tool
- provide residential pupils with appropriate risk taking opportunities. This is specific to their internet use
- ensure the school's use of all potentially restrictive measures are effectively communicated to, and agreed by all stakeholders.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Residential pupils develop positive and appropriate relationships with the staff. They learn to trust the regular routines which bring the order and safety they need. Settled pupils begin to relax in the caring and nurturing culture of the residential provision. This leads to their increased confidence and greater feelings of value and self-worth.

As pupils gain in confidence, their desire to explore the wider aspects of the residential provision increases. In many cases, new friendships with peers are formed. New experiences, such as outings are explored. For some pupils, these achievements demonstrate exceptional progress. Breaking ritualistic habits and taking risks is a major step towards their increasing independence.

Residential pupils are actively encouraged to have a voice within the school. To this end, keyworkers work hard to implement communication targets in every day situations. They say, '[child's name] is really getting the hang of using their communication aids. They are learning that they do have a voice after all. It's fantastic'.

Seemingly simple tasks, such as choosing a drink or asking for an item, are incredibly challenging social situations for some of the pupils. When such breakthroughs occur, they are richly celebrated, so as to encourage these developments to continue. Consequently, forums such as the student council provide challenges for the staff to manage. With such a wide range of disabilities and skills amongst the pupils, the school works hard to ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to express their views and opinions. Residential pupils learn to value themselves and this becomes their experience.

Some pupils struggle to understand and therefore manage their own health and medical needs. In such instances they receive the care and support they require. Residential pupils enjoy good general health because this is effectively promoted by appropriately trained staff through good quality meals, the opportunity to take regular physical exercise and the safe administration of any necessary medication. Beyond such immediate health needs, pupils receive good support to cope with their emotional and psychological difficulties. Staff understand the explicit issues for some individual pupils and provide appropriate support. Such pupils learn to value and rely upon this sensitive approach. They actively seek out opportunities to express their own worries and concerns because they trust that they will be heard and supported.

As far as their disabilities allow, residential pupils are encouraged and supported to take appropriate risks. Examples such as going out into the local community, preparing their own drinks and snacks and in one example, painting their own living area all provide excellent opportunities to taste fresh experiences and acquire new skills. One pupil comment includes, 'Being able to do more things makes me feel better about leaving school'.

Quality of residential provision and care

Adequate

Thorough initial assessment processes ensure that residential placements are only offered when the school is confident that it can effectively care for prospective pupils. Once accepted, collaborative working between educational, care and therapy staff begins with immediate effect. An arrangement of partnership working with parents and carers is quickly established. This ensures their input in terms of the initial care planning process. Similar good practice in the preparation for annual review meetings further ensures that pupil's progress is monitored in line with the contents of their individual statement of need.

Keyworkers are able to describe the needs of pupils in very good detail. Hence, the quality of the

direct care and support they provide is good. However, a new care planning process is being implemented in response to a previous recommendation. This process is designed to more accurately capture the progress of pupils but it is not yet fully embedded and understood by all staff members. Some staff members are struggling to understand and therefore implement this new process.

Changes has taken place within the staff team through redundancies. Members of the current residential team are working additional hours to ensure safe staffing levels continue. However, their ability to undertake additional pieces of work, including their familiarisation with the new care planning tool is compromised because they spend the majority of their time providing direct care.

This decision presents some risks in terms of the current quality of the care planning process. However, the commitment from the residential team to work additional hours effectively reduces the need for the use of agency staff. This provides continuity for the pupils. Furthermore, individual and group activities during residential time are rarely disrupted.

Residential pupils enjoy good physical and medical health. Staff are appropriately trained and supported in terms of procedures, such as medication administration. Although the majority of meals are provided by the main school kitchen, regular opportunities are created to support pupils to prepare snacks, meals and drinks for themselves. Staff seize this opportunity to encourage independence and also to hold discussions with pupils about the value of healthy eating. Any on-going external specialist health input is accurately captured within individual care files. This enables the staff to understand pupil's additional needs which may include their psychological health and emotional well being.

Complaints and representation systems are effectively tailored to meet the varying needs of the pupils. Keyworkers are good at recognising and measuring whether pupils are happy or content with the services provided by the school. Regular meetings within each residential area are effective in obtaining feedback about the quality of the care provided. Staff are extremely interested in obtaining the views and opinions of the pupils. One pupil says, 'I know how to complain if I need to' and 'We often do surveys and things to tell the school about how things are'. Strong links exist with another nearby school. This relationship has led to new independent visitor arrangements. These are frequent and provide the residential pupils with access to a familiar face who understands, and passes on the issues and topics they raise.

The variable quality of the residential accommodation is being addressed. Some aspects of the girls' accommodation are superior to the boys' in terms of furnishings and décor. All residential areas are cleaned to a very high standard but this does not detract from the poor quality of the furniture in some of the communal areas. All residential pupils are actively encouraged and supported to fully personalise their own bedrooms. Some pupils choose to bring in treasured possessions from home and these are kept safe. Kitchen and dining areas also differ in terms of their aesthetic appearance and practical use. For example, one such area lends itself to providing good physical access for the pupils. They sit together with staff and readily socialise with each other. Another area is poorly presented and awkwardly arranged. These factors inhibit mealtimes from being sociable and interactive occasions.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Robust safeguarding practice keeps the residential pupils safe from potential sources of harm. Staff across all disciplines and departments receive on-going and updated safeguarding and child protection training. This is specifically tailored to incorporate each staff member's own levels of responsibility. For example, designated child protection officers receive external designated person's training and ancillary staff receive child protection awareness updates yearly.

Consequently, staff across all levels understand what and how to report to concerns.

The residential care team demonstrates a strong awareness of the potential risks and vulnerabilities faced by the residential pupils. Individual risk assessments accurately reflect these. Residential staff training and guidance incorporates the wider issues, such as internet safety, sexual exploitation and the unique risks associated with having communication difficulties. This heightened awareness results in many welfare and safeguarding discussions between and across all levels of staff and departments throughout the school.

Protective factors include clear procedural guidance and practical steps which keep pupils safe. However, the universal use of internet filters and blocks limits the opportunities to teach pupils to take responsibility for keeping themselves safe.

Following the recent staffing restructure, the business manager now retains the lead role for staff recruitment. This process is typically robust. It serves to protect pupils from potentially unsafe adults. However, a small number of omissions presents avoidable risks. Examples include the absence of an explicit written record to explain employment gaps in one example and another example of an incomplete written record of a staff interview. The business manager's planned safer recruitment training is a priority.

Explicit and clear individual behaviour management guidance is derived from the school's comprehensive behaviour management policy and procedure. Its strict implementation ensures that staff are suitably trained in their use of behaviour management strategies which include de-escalation and physical intervention techniques. Staff speak with compassion and understanding about the extreme self-harming behaviours which are sometimes exhibited by some of the pupils. Their comments include, '[child's name] gets very frustrated and can't always communicate their views. It's our problem, not theirs' and 'We don't sanction children who struggle to communicate but we do physically intervene if they are hurting themselves'.

Meticulous monitoring with regards to the use of physical interventions and sanctions is conducted by a range of senior staff. Objectivity and appropriate challenge is assured. Patterns and trends are examined and this thorough approach drives down the reliance upon and use of such interventions. Staff place much greater emphasis upon trying to understand the reasons why individuals engage in episodes of challenging behaviour in order to implement effective de-escalation techniques.

Residential pupils do not go missing from the school. Thorough shift planning ensures every staff member knows and understands who their allocated residential pupils are at the commencement of their shift. The whereabouts of pupils are known and unobtrusively monitored as a result. Strict security measures further ensure that unauthorised personnel are prevented from entering the whole school site and residential areas. The use of coded doors and strategically placed surveillance provides further safeguards. While such measures are seen by parents, carers and other professionals as providing additional safeguards, the use of such equipment is not always explicitly described within individual placement agreements or care plans. It is recommended that such methods are explicitly explained in order to demonstrate the school's transparency about such measures.

Robust risk assessments are applied in terms of locations, activities and individual pupils. Staff and residential pupils are safe because this effective guidance is implemented in practice. Regular health and safety checks are robustly completed and a rolling programme of maintenance and repairs ensures the continuing safety of the physical premises. Recent improvements include the addition of an upgraded fire escape route which includes the boys' residential area.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

Strong and effective leadership is becoming embedded. The new head teacher is reviewing

policies, practice and the overall staffing structure. While staff describe initial changes as unsettling, they further confirm their understanding of the vision and development plans for the school. The roles and responsibilities of individuals, as well as departments, are more targeted, specific and clear.

The strengthening of the therapy provision is one such target. Flexible working hours for such staff finds their more frequent presence within and across the residential provision. This aspect continues to drive the school's desire to become a centre of excellence for children with complex communication difficulties.

Six advisory recommendations were made from the previous inspection and all of these have been implemented into on-going development plans. The school actively responds to ideas, critiques and observations made by all of its stakeholders. Formal complaints from parents, carers and external parties are rare. However, the receipt of any such feedback does result in appropriate and timely responses which seek to achieve resolution and transparent relationships.

Members of the residential team speak about clear direction, good support and motivational leadership. They describe the head of care's management style as 'inclusive and supportive.' Comments from staff include, 'The vision is clear' and 'The head of care and head teacher are always around to provide extra practical support when it is needed'. To this end, the residential provision is highly regarded as a central focus of the school. Staff across all departments are frequent visitors to the residential areas because there is such high personal and professional investment in this aspect of the school's provision.

A previous recommendation with regards to staff supervision and appraisal has received targeted attention. Staff are very positive about developments in this regard. Their own supervision meetings have an improved focus and are clearly recorded. Their on-going training and professional development needs are clearly tracked and monitored. The school's provision of relevant training has always been positive, its impact is now better monitored and evaluated. End of year appraisals are now scheduled for every staff member.

It is this emphasis upon evaluation and monitoring which has significantly changed with the arrival of the new head teacher. New formats and processes critically analyse the quality of the care provided for the pupils. Individuals and departments are held to account in terms of their impact upon the learning and progress made by the pupils. Greater emphasis is now placed upon wider research and how legislative and local changes will impact upon the school's provision. One example of this is a piece of work which is currently focused upon the school's perceived impact of the future changes to the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The school is already anticipating change and is therefore better prepared to meet new challenges.

These internal quality assurance methods are complemented by additional external factors. The Standard 20 visitor, visiting governors and the independent listener all bring additional comments and perspectives. These findings are used to reliably inform the residential team of its strengths, weaknesses and areas for continuing development.

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	119056
Social care unique reference number	SC023693
DfE registration number	886/7058

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	28
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Billy McInally
Date of previous boarding inspection	17/03/2014
Telephone number	01843 863421

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