

# Helen Allison School

Helen Allison School, Longfield Road, Meopham, GRAVESEND, Kent, DA13 0EW

## Inspection dates

01/12/2015 to 03/12/2015

## The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding** **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is outstanding because

- Students make significant progress as a result of the highly effective collaborative working between care, therapy and education staff. Staff implement strategies compiled following on-going, detailed assessment of students' needs. This ensures students receive tailored care and support to promote their specific developmental requirements.
- Students flourish and improve their social, communication and behavioural skills. Through extremely responsive and positive relationships with staff, they are developing confidence and self-esteem knowing they are valued as unique individuals.
- The safety of students is central to all practice. Robust and effective safeguarding measures protect students. Staff are confident and competent in their safeguarding role and implement appropriate action to protect students' welfare.
- Using a multi-disciplinary approach to behaviour management, the education and psychology team closely monitor incidents and train staff to develop their understanding of behaviour. Consequently students benefit from successful strategies to reduce their anxiety and assist them in managing their emotions.
- Leaders are passionately committed to providing students with high standards of individualised care and support. All staff share this dedication which is clearly demonstrated through numerous examples of best practice in providing care and support for students with complex needs resulting from autism.
- A strength of the school is the support provided for families. Staff work in partnership to promote students' development and provide additional support in the

form of support groups.

- Leaders are proactive in extending the benefits of their expertise to the wider community, working with teachers from other schools and community groups to help develop a broader understanding of autism to benefit young people in the wider society.

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the independent person is not part of the governance of the school.

## Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the Principal, head of care, principal speech and language therapist, deputy principal, occupational therapist, business and finance officer, human resources officer, senior assistant heads, well-being officer and designated safeguarding lead, residential staff and students. Both residential houses were visited with observation of staff and students' interactions and activities. The inspector joined students for one meal. Policies, records and individual student files were examined. Telephone or email contact was made with parents and the local safeguarding team.

## Inspection team

Jan Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders aged 5 to 19 years of age. The school is situated on two sites a few miles apart, with one site providing education for older students. The two residential houses are situated several miles away from the school buildings, in Gravesend. At the time of this inspection the school had 73 students, with nine resident. The school also operates a flexi-boarding service for young people who attend the school.

## Inspection Judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

Through highly personalised support students with complex needs resulting from autism make excellent progress. Meaningful and well-considered targets derived from genuinely close, collaborative working between care staff, therapists and school staff. This enables resident students to grow and develop their social, communication and behavioural skills. Developing students' life skills and independence skills is integral throughout the school's curriculum, including the time they spend in the residential environment. Care staff support them to become confident young adults at a pace and level appropriate to their ability and vulnerability.

Staff know the students very well and are nurturing and responsive to their needs. Through consistent, positive interactions, students develop warm, trusting relationships with staff. As students develop their social and communication skills they learn how to deal with social situations and establish friendships. Students benefit from excellent behaviour management approaches with their behaviour improving as a result of systematic, rigorous analysis of incidents and strategies by the speech and language therapists, psychology team and staff.

Students are happy and enjoy their residential experience. Their welfare and well-being is central to all practice with staff implementing strategies to promote their development and protect them from harm.

Leaders and managers are aspirational and with the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff team ensure students receive individualised support so that their unique and specific needs are met. Students thrive in an environment where they are valued as individuals and where their views and opinions matter. A parent remarked 'the school has been absolutely fantastic'.

### The quality of care and support

**Outstanding**

Highly individualised care plans demonstrate that staff know students extremely well. Support strategies are specific to the needs of each student and include particular therapy interventions for staff to use to promote development and provide a constructive experience. Staff are skilled in implementing these support strategies within a structured environment. Adopting a positive and enthusiastic approach, staff offer a nurturing environment where students can develop their individuality, benefit from opportunities to maximise their potential and improve their self-esteem.

Interaction with students is calm and focused allowing them to respond positively to the support staff offer and build trusting relationships. Enabling students to make their views, opinions and needs known is a clear priority for staff. Speech and language

therapy is embedded into the whole day, supporting students with communication difficulties. Care staff receive training to support students' communication needs. Individual support plans include information on assisting students with their social and communication skills. Staff use alternative forms of communication for students who are pre-verbal to aid their understanding and ensure they have opportunities to express themselves. This integrated approach to therapy allows students to benefit from the consistent application of communication methods best suited to their individual needs.

Staff are proactive in seeking students' views and opinions, providing them with choices and support to help make responsible choices according to their age and ability. Each student has a key worker who meets them individually and advocates on their behalf to ensure their opinions are known. Students are involved in residents' meetings and the school council where they can put forward their views in a more formal setting. Students thrive, develop confidence and self-esteem knowing their views and opinions are important and that staff listen and appreciate them as unique individuals. Although they also have a visitor who they can contact if they feel unable to talk to staff about an issue, this visitor is involved in the governance of the school, though not in day-to-day management, and consequently is not strictly independent.

Individual health and well-being profiles highlight all medical and health needs. Their emotional needs have a high priority. Valuable therapeutic work by the psychology and therapy teams help reduce students' anxiety levels. Liaison with external health professionals, such as the child and adolescent mental health service, ensures students receive the specialist support they require. Systems for the administration of medication are robust. Staff are well-trained to manage medication safely and managers and staff regularly audit the process to monitor safe practice.

Staff organise structured activities for students with a focus on physical activities to promote their well-being. Community experiences such as swimming, high-rope sessions, bowling, youth club and trips to the local park provide opportunities for healthy leisure pursuits. These expand their social experiences and provide opportunities for developing appropriate social skills to become more confident in managing situations. In addition, staff promote students' individual interests ensuring they participate in activities they enjoy.

Accommodation for students is comfortable and tailored to meet their individual needs. This enables them to relax and reduces their level of anxiety.

Parents report extremely positively on the school and the residential provision. One commented that 'staff are very knowledgeable and understanding' and another that staff 'understand his individual needs'.

## **How well children and young people are protected**

## **Outstanding**

Extremely effective safeguarding measures protect students. All staff are acutely aware of students vulnerability and staff responsibility for ensuring safety. Students are happy and relaxed in the residential environment. Parents report they have no concerns about

their child's safety.

Staff are well-trained and confident in their safeguarding role, with the necessary understanding of current issues that can pose risks to students such as child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation. The designated safeguarding officer leads a safeguarding team which considers all concerns referred by staff. Appropriate action is taken including consultation with, and referral to, external agencies.

Managers take a robust multi-disciplinary approach to behaviour management. The deputy principal trains staff to develop their understanding of the behaviour of students and the strategies for managing it. She closely monitors incidents of inappropriate behaviour in terms of its cause and the effectiveness of support strategies. Therapists observe students in the residential setting to consider the impact of environmental factors and suggest improvements to assist students in managing their emotions. The assistant psychologists, deputy principal and speech and language therapists are readily available to staff for advice and guidance in relation to behaviour concerns.

Staff also receive training in a model of behaviour management which focuses on de-escalation of potentially difficult situations and the use of physical intervention as a last resort. Extremely positive relationships between staff and students underpin successful behaviour strategies. Through consistent implementation of behaviour management plans, students develop a sense of safety, protection and trust enabling them to respond to the support staff offer. In line with the integrated, multi-disciplinary approach, all staff involved with a student meet to compile risk assessments. These are highly specific to the student and rigorous. Termly reviews of students' plans and risk assessments by this multi-disciplinary group ensure strategies are current and appropriate for their developing needs. Consequently, incidents involving physical intervention are not frequent in the residential provision and behaviour management is excellent.

Throughout the school there is an emphasis on educating students so that they can keep themselves safe. E-safety has a high priority with input from the local community police officer and on-going work by staff to ensure students are aware of the risks they face when using the internet. Parents and carers are included in this programme to ensure they have sufficient knowledge to monitor their child's on-line safety. A proactive approach to bullying helps students appreciate the effect of their behaviour on others.

There have been no incidents involving students leaving the residential provision without permission. Appropriate measures are in place to protect students who are at high risk if they leave the premises without staff support, including site security and liaison with the local police in line with local authority protocols. These measures do not restrict students with greater levels of independence.

Comprehensive health and safety measures protect students. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied including regular fire drills. Robust recruitment processes safeguard students from unsuitable adults working with them.

**The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

**Outstanding**

The Principal is passionately committed to providing high standards of individualised education and care for students and senior leaders share this dedication. The recently appointed head of care is part of the senior leadership team, who view the residential provision as an integral and valuable aspect of the school. The stable and experienced care staff team support the work of education staff and the therapy team in implementing specific strategies to support residential students. Students benefit enormously from this truly multi-disciplinary approach to their education and care.

Training and development of staff has a high priority to ensure all staff understand autism and have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support students and promote positive outcomes. The appraisal and supervision process to manage staff performance ensures they understand their role, have clear objectives and training to support student progress and achievement.

Monitoring of the residential provision is a continuous process on all levels to drive improvement and ensure students benefit from high standards of care and opportunities to develop. Incidents occurring in the residential provision are closely scrutinised by the head of care and the psychology team to evaluate the effectiveness of support strategies and implement changes to programmes of individual support. Detailed and thorough reports by an independent visitor identify action points to improve the quality of provision. On a strategic level, the head of care produces an evaluative annual report as does the Principal to assess the effectiveness of the service. Shortfalls identified at the previous inspection have been addressed.

Working with parents and carers is a strength of the school. Staff work collaboratively with families, know them well and keep them informed of the student's targets and progress so that students benefit from a consistent approach. Weekly support meetings for families enable parents and carers to benefit from the staff's wealth of experience and expertise. Working with the belief that children and young people with autism can be further helped by developing a broader understanding of autism in the wider community, the school provides evening workshops for external professionals on specific, relevant topics and organises training for teachers from other schools and community group leaders. Leaders and managers are aspirational and proactive in disseminating excellent practice to benefit children and young people with autism.



## What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118993
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC024066
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6046

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>	Residential Special School
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	9
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	5 to19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susan Conway
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	16/09/2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	01474 814 878
<b>Email address</b>	Susan.Conway@nas.org.uk

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