

The Ashley School Academy Trust

The Ashley School Academy Trust, Ashley Downs, LOWESTOFT, Suffolk, NR32 4EU

Inspection dates	12/01/2016 to 14/01/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The children and young people make good social and educational progress because of the support they receive from a high quality team of residential staff.
- Leaders and managers are active, visible participants in the residential provision.
- The young people enjoy residential life. They engage in a variety of activities. There have been no incidents of bullying within the residential provision since the last inspection.
- The staff manage young people's behaviour very well. There have been very few restraints in the residential provision since the last inspection.
- The school works closely with families, who consistently provide highly positive feedback. External professionals are also very positive about the care provided.
- Safe recruitment checks take place, but there is a lack of detail regarding the checking of references by telephone.
- There is no comprehensive risk assessment of the sleeping arrangements. Other risk assessments are not always sufficiently detailed or clear.
- Records do not consistently capture the views of children and young people who have been involved in a physical intervention.

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?

- Complete a comprehensive risk assessment of the sleeping arrangements, which includes, but is not limited to, the dormitory arrangements, the night time cover, and the needs of the children and young people, with the findings of the risk assessment acted upon.
- Ensure that any written record of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force is made within 24 hours and includes the children and young people's views.
- Capture the detail of what has been verified when checking references for new staff.
- Ensure that all risk assessments relating to children and young people and activities are up to date, accurate and address the risks posed.

Information about this inspection

One inspector undertook the inspection over three days. The inspector contacted the school at 10.00 on the first day of inspection; the inspection started within three and a half hours of this contact. Inspection activity included discussions with children and young people, residential staff, the headteacher, deputy headteacher (behaviour for learning), lead pupil and family support worker and the residential team leader as well as parents, external professionals and social workers of residential pupils. A full tour of the residential premises was undertaken and the inspector spent time with children and young people in each part of the residential accommodation. Documents checked include case files, placement plans, risk assessments, monitoring reports and policies and procedures in place within the school.

Inspection team

Ashley Hinson

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 133 pupils of either gender aged between 7 and 16 years. The school currently has 53 residential pupils who stay between one and three nights a week. Two houses located on the school site provide the residential accommodation. The school is in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for pupils with complex/moderate learning difficulties who have associated disabilities such as speech and language disorders, autism, and behaviour difficulties. The last residential provision inspection took place in January 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

The children and young people make very good progress because of the support they receive in the residential provision. They make progress academically and socially. Parents, professionals and children and young people recognise this. The children and young people develop their independence skills in preparation for life after school. One family member said: 'I have seen him grow and develop in a way I did not think possible.' Another stated: 'Her confidence has gone through the roof. She was a watcher but now she joins in. She puts her hand up and initiates conversation. It is lovely to see.' The residential provision aims to continue to develop a more in depth analysis of pupil progress.

A small team of staff work in the residential provision. They work well together. Although there has been a high turnover of staff, this does not appear to have had a significant impact on the children and young people. Families report them coping with the changes well. A thorough induction and training programme is in place to support new staff.

The service meets the health needs of the children and young people. There have been no safeguarding concerns arising from the quality of residential care provided. The staff know how to raise concerns. As a result, children and young people are comfortable and contented in the care of a staff team who meet their needs well.

The children and young people behave extremely well whilst accessing the provision. A young person said: 'My behaviour has improved so much since coming here.' They get on well with one another and have access to a range of activities. Consequently, they enjoy their time in residence.

Leaders, staff and managers take into account the views of children and young people. The school council includes a residential representative. The staff discuss the plan for each stay with the children and young people. Leaders and managers work hard to establish high quality and effective relationships with family carers. As a result, parents and carers feel there is a strong partnership approach and feedback is extremely positive.

The residential provision is an integral part of the wider school. School leaders and managers are active in residential life. They are visible, engaged and respected by the staff they lead. The whole staff team are well aware of the needs of the children and young people and they strive to ensure that they receive the best care that meets their needs.

The quality of care and support

Good

A small staff team, who know them well, supports the children and young people. They are able to discuss individuals' needs with insight and empathy. The staff present as professional, committed and caring. The interactions are high quality, characterised by warmth and good humour. Exchanges are adapted to the differing needs of the children

and young people.

The children and young people have access to a range of games and other resources. As well as electronic gaming devices, there are a large number of books, both fiction and non-fiction, available. Staff spend time reading with children and young people in the evenings. This helps to convey a message about the centrality of literacy and significantly contributes to the associated progress children and young people make.

The children and young people access a range of external leisure activities. A parent said: 'She loves staying there because of all the things they get to do.' Many of these have a positive impact on physical and mental health. For example, some children and young people are involved in a disabled children's football team; something they are clearly proud of. The staff support individual children and young people to engage in activities that are targeted to help them become healthier. The food is varied, healthy and well liked.

The children and young people are able to contact their families whilst staying in the residential provision. Parents report frequent contact and children and young people confirm that they can access a phone for this purpose. When they arrive from the school day into the residential provision, a meeting takes place with staff. At this meeting, staff and children and young people agree the shape of the evening together. This provides a consultative approach and puts children and young people at the centre of their care.

The quality of the residential environment is variable. Some areas are bright and homely, whilst others are in need of attention. A programme of repair and improvement is underway to address this. The residential accommodation is in two houses, one for males and one for females. There is a mixture of single rooms and dormitories. One sleep in staff per house supports the children and young people at night. In an emergency there is access to on call staff, who are also on site. Whilst there is some consideration of associated risks, in some individual risk assessments and the lone working risk assessment there is no overarching or comprehensive risk assessment of these sleeping arrangements. As a result, it is unclear if all predictable risks have been considered and responded to.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The children and young people report feeling safe. There have been no safeguarding concerns relating to staff in the residential provision. The staff are consistent in their response to queries about what they would do if they had concerns about safeguarding. Clear procedures exist that consider the needs of disabled children. An experienced and highly regarded colleague, who manages safeguarding concerns, supports the school. The school has worked proactively and creatively to support safeguarding needs. An example is facilitating a safety group in partnership with sensory support services. An appropriate range of health and safety checks take place to increase residents' safety.

There have been no incidents of bullying since the last inspection. Interactions between children and young people are warm and positive. They get on well. A parent commented: 'Before he came here he did not have any friends, he could not make them but since he came here, he has made loads.' Children and young people clearly state that bullying is not something that occurs. The staff are aware of the potential for low

level behaviours to develop into bullying and are quick to address this.

No children and young people have been missing from school. The staff team are alert to the possibility and are aware of the procedures to follow should an incident occur. As a result, staff are equipped to act swiftly to safeguard any young person who may go missing in the future.

The children and young people are clear that they can talk to a wide range of people if they are concerned or worried. There are posters up on the walls in residence that identify who they can speak to. The staff reiterate this in the meetings that take place each day. A phone is available at all times. Two local police community support officers regularly visit and act as independent listeners. These impressive arrangements contribute to an environment in which children and young people have the opportunity to raise concerns, which enhances the overall approach to safeguarding.

The staff, managers and leaders are committed to promoting good behaviour. There is a whole school approach to behaviour management. There have been very few incidents of physical intervention or sanctions needed since the last inspection. However, one record has not captured the view of the child involved in an incident within an appropriate time frame. Leaders and managers took action during the inspection to address this and improve the recording process.

The staff complete risk assessments for individual children and young people and in respect of activities. These risk assessments lack depth and clarity. Some contain inaccuracies and contradictions. Others include information which bears no relation to the activity at hand. There are generic sentences that dilute the message. Monitoring processes have not identified these shortfalls. Whilst these shortcomings do not appear to have impacted upon the safety of the children and young people, unchecked, they have the potential to do so.

Leaders and managers follow procedures for safe recruitment and monitoring of staff. However, the records relating to reference verification offer no information regarding what verification takes place. Capturing this would further improve the recruitment process.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The management team are committed and active in the residential provision. They have suitable experience and training. They articulate high aspirations for children and young people. They work as a team. There is a clear commitment to improving the quality of the provision and ensuring children and young people make progress.

Governors are involved and informed. They receive quality assurance reports and undertake monitoring visits. They visit other provisions to learn from them and bring back suggestions for improvement to the service. The staff and children and young people know who they are. The school governors ratify the policies and procedures.

The staff receive half termly supervision. This is regular and scheduled. Annual appraisals take place. The staff are well trained and qualified to undertake the work they do. Internal trainers provide safeguarding training. This is highly regarded by the staff

team. Trainers tailor the training to the needs of the children and young people. This equips the staff to meet their needs. There is a whole school approach to the training, with staff from the school accessing the same training as residential staff. There is acknowledgment that residential staff may require additional training and governors are working on an evaluation of their training needs.

There have been no external complaints since the last inspection. There have been two concerns raised by children and young people about the change in snacks to a healthier alternative. The staff addressed this with them.

Leaders and managers welcome external scrutiny. They have recently put in place a new arrangement for independent monitoring visits. This process is in its infancy and it is not possible to establish its effectiveness yet. The school is the lead in the local Challenge Partners Hub, a national charity owned and led by schools who work together to lead school improvement, and has had a quality assurance review as part of this enterprise. The headteacher has also commissioned external challenge and support for the service from experienced professionals. This openness to challenge contributes towards the service meeting its aims and objectives.

External professionals and families speak consistently very highly about the quality of care and the quality of the school as a whole. Families see the school as supportive and inclusive. They see the whole staff team, including leaders and managers, as approachable and communicative. Feedback gathered from questionnaires completed by parents was overwhelmingly positive. Professionals feel the service is responsive and creative. A social worker said: 'We work so closely together. The children feel happy settled and safe in their care.'

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

Unique reference number	137459
Social care unique reference number	SC024573
DfE registration number	935/7003

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	128
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 16
Headteacher	Sally Garrett
Date of previous boarding inspection	21/01/2015
Telephone number	01502 565 439
Email address	office@ashleyschool.co.uk

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