

Doucecroft School

Doucecroft School, Abbots Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex, CO6 3QL

Inspection dates	02/02/2016 to 04/02/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
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

- Young people benefit from being in residential care. Staff and managers know the young people well and are familiar with their emotional and developmental milestones. Staff have excellent relationships with them, treat them as individuals and celebrate every achievement.
- Staff and managers place the safety of young people at the heart of their planning. They protect young people through high levels of staffing and robust planning. Any risks are constantly reviewed and matched with suitable management strategies.
- Staff and managers are highly skilled in working in partnership. They liaise with other specialist professionals placing authorities. Feedback is extremely positive about the quality of care provided.
- Families feel that staff can be trusted to support and encourage young people even when they are challenging. Parents have great respect for the commitment shown by the team.
- Young people are supported to develop independent skills and take every opportunity to consolidate their learning. Lessons learnt in school and residential are applied to community life. As a result, they learn to view the future with confidence.
- Some areas for improvement have been identified. Managers need to ensure that

the school website is up to date and that it refers specifically to how residential provision fits into the school as a whole. External monitoring needs to comment on how this service benefits young people and identify actions that may sustain the improvement young people are making.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special school.

Points for Improvement

- Ensure that a supervision schedule is updated to confirm arrangements the supervision of residential staff for the following year.
- Ensure that the website is up to date and includes a clear statement about how the residential service fits into the overall ethos of the school.
- Ensure that independent monitoring is more robust and challenging. It should reflect on the role and impact of residential services on the progress that young people make and identify actions that will sustain progress.

Information about this inspection

The inspection took place within two hours of announcement. Inspection activity included talking to residential pupils and joining them for mealtimes, a tour of the accommodation, observation of staff handover meetings and scrutiny of case files and policies. In addition there were discussions with key staff, external professionals and parents. There are no responses recorded on Parent View.

Inspection team

Fiona Littlefield

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Doucecroft is a co-educational, day and residential special school for children aged from 3 to 19 years with autistic spectrum conditions. The school, which is privately owned by Autism Anglia, is situated in a small village on the outskirts of Colchester with additional post 16 provision in Kelvedon (7 miles away). The boarding accommodation is currently located in two boarding houses on the main site. Residential care is provided for up to 294 nights per year currently for students aged 9 to 19 years. There is some respite provision available for day students. There are 50 students on roll of which 14 are residential/respite students. The school was last inspected in November 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Young people to live harmoniously with one another. Staff teach them basic social skills which help them negotiate daily routines such as greeting each-other by name. Consequently young people know what is expected of them and learn to be tolerant and accepting of one another in social situations.

Staff and managers take every opportunity to celebrate achievements and personal progress from a young person who has learnt to brush their hair to another who has sustained a positive attitude. Young people and staff celebrate special milestones such as birthdays. Young people are allowed to be light hearted and playful but the overall atmosphere is calm and settled.

Young people make their views known in different ways. One young person worked alongside his key worker to directly record his views on his iPad for a forthcoming review. Another young person from boarding has been elected by his peers to represent them on the school council which meets twice a term. Young people can be playful, exuberant and have good sense of humour. One young person said: 'I am always happy to show people round if it gets me out of gym.'

As young people reach 16 years old the planning for their future is more focused on developing independence skills that will support them. Staff working together with young people and their families to achieve progress. The impact of residential provision can be critical in this work. For instance, educational staff will identify a be-spoke programme for a young person which can include time in a local college. Residential staff may contribute by teaching them to use public transport safely. One member of staff said: 'We do a lot of work around safety. We do this in stages, first going with them, than following them. Once they leave here, they are completely travel trained.' Other young people have never been away from their families so they come to stay in a residential unit for regular short periods so they get used to different environments. As a result, young people are prepared for independent life in a gradual planned way.

Staff understand the needs and vulnerabilities of the young people. Robust admission procedures to identify initial risks and match them with management strategies. Staff review these regularly to ensure that information is accurate and effective. Staff are constantly vigilant to any possible risks to young people including the need for internet safety.

Leaders and managers are committed and knowledgeable. They have a clear strategic vision, use resources efficiently and gather feedback from different sources to help them measure progress young people make.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Young people benefit from being looked after by a team of staff who speak knowledgeably about them and know their social and emotional milestones. Staff are highly skilled and understand that a new person will need support to settle in to the residential regime. For instance, when one young person was starting respite care, his teaching assistant came over with him after school to help him settle for the first couple of weeks. This meant that he felt secure and could relax into the new arrangements.

Residential staff liaise effectively with specialist therapists to develop be-spoke packages of care. They develop practical ideas that support individual young people. For instance, young people are asked to choose between a number of limited options on subjects such as where they would like to sit, what they want to eat or how they would like to personalise their bedrooms. For young people who are uncomfortable in making choices, this is a crucial exercise. Young people learn to relax and their confidence grows.

Healthy eating was raised as an area of improvement following the last inspection. Young people are encouraged to make nutritious options from the menu and are gradually expanding their repertoire of tastes. All young people learn to indicate their preferences either directly or using a pictorial aid. They can transfer this skill when they visit restaurants in the community. This expands their horizons and enhances their self-esteem.

Young people who attend the residential units benefit from a wide range of activities. On site they can use the gym, swimming pool or take advantage of a variety of games, arts and crafts. In the community they can go the local leisure centre or youth club or a local restaurant. All activities are carefully risk assessed. One member of staff said: 'We can never go off site without an up to date risk assessments on the young person, venue and activity. This is updated every six months and after any incident.' Many young people can find being in the community challenging but staff are patient and persistent. These are remarkable achievements given their starting points.

Young people also benefit from a close working relationship between staff and families. Staff in boarding liaise closely with parents. They inform them of any incidents as well as sharing strategies for managing behaviour. Staff and managers will also accompany parents to meetings with health professionals or other agencies. One parent said: 'I am always informed. It is amazing how much they care. It is not just a job to them.'

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Staff and managers maintain the safety of young people at the centre of their practice. Many young people have little sense of danger or stranger awareness so staff and managers have developed systems that ensure that young people are protected at all times. Before young people start boarding, the management team work with the family to develop a comprehensive picture of their needs and vulnerabilities. This includes how to best communicate and any trigger points for poor behaviour. The mother of one young person said: 'It took me ages to agree but I have confidence in staff to keep him safe.' This core activity lies at the heart of planning for every young person. Consequently, from the outset, young people are kept safe.

Staff from both the educational and residential teams work together so that young people can trust them. For instance, teaching assistants help out in the residential sites and staff from residential will help out at lunchtime in the canteen. As a result, young people develop secure relationships with staff who are familiar to them. One young person told his social worker: 'I feel that staff can help me contain my difficult feelings.'

Staff have developed strong links that lead to a seamless transition between residential care and school. Staff always accompany young people to their next appointment. Nothing is left to chance and no point of information is too minor to pass on to colleagues. Young people do not suffer from bullying and incidents of young people going missing are extremely rare. Consequently young people feel secure.

Staff know the young people very well and are quick to pick up on any signs of distress. They are confident that they would know how to respond appropriately in the event of a child protection concern. Many non-verbal young people used a variety of media to communicate their wishes and feelings. Staff take every measure to ensure that robust safety measures are in operation. This means that young people are able to develop communication skills and are protected while they do so.

Staff balance this caution by promoting good behaviour through positive reinforcement where every achievement is acknowledged and young people can earn a small reward. Staff emphasise the effort that young people have made. For instance, if they have not achieved their goal but have really tried, staff and managers celebrate their attitude. Young people gain confidence in their abilities.

The physical environment has been carefully designed to ensure the safety of young people who learn basic skills such as using the zebra crossing and walking on the pavement away from cars. All safety checks are up to date and there are regular fire drills which young people attend during the day. Following the last inspection, the risk assessment for locking the front door to the residential unit has been completed.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

Senior managers have close links with nationally based organisations that promote the interests of young people with complex needs. They have also contributed to a development plan for the school that gives a clear sense of strategic direction and reflects the long term needs of young people as they become adults.

Managers deploy their resources effectively to help young people make progress. For instance, all residential staff are deployed across both units. Young people know staff well but also learn to tolerate a degree of change. This is critical in helping them adapt to life in the community as they grow into adulthood.

Each young person has a care plan which set goals for that term and which provide a link across education and residential. For instance, they learn maths at school and staff incorporate this into activities such as food shopping. Young people improve their competency with money and budgeting skills.

The residential management team routinely monitors the progress of individual young people through reviews of care plans and statutory reviews where appropriate. They also review direct feedback from young people, their families, carers and external professionals. The team have addressed the improvement point following the last inspection and records of any negative behaviour are fully recorded and include the views of the young people. Significant episodes trigger serious case reviews which are used as an opportunity to review the service and review practice. Once a term all information is brought together across the school and residential provision to scrutinise goals. This purposeful attitude leads to very optimistic response from their families. One parent said: 'When he first went there, he couldn't read or write. A few weeks later, he was reading Harry Potter. I am over the moon with them.'

The management team are appropriately qualified with several years of experience. The staff team are either qualified to NVQ Level three or currently studying on the course. Staff have received regular safeguarding training. A senior member of the administrative team monitors the training matrix and provides accurate data. Staff receive supervision every term and find this useful and an opportunity to reflect on their practice. However, managers need to develop a new supervision schedule for the current year. Young people benefit from being looked after by staff who are valued and whose skills have been consistently reinforced.

Managers have made progress in improving the school website but this does not include a statement of purpose for the residential services. This would give a formal comprehensive picture of the role of residential services and indicate how they fitted into the overall ethos of the school.

Independent visits take place and are carried out by a school governor. The reports just about meet the required standards but provide little evaluation of the quality of provision and no details about the impact of boarding on a young person's overall progress. This has been acknowledged by the management team.

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	115426
Social care unique reference number	SC018010
DfE registration number	881/6032

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	14
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	9 to19
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Jane Smart
Date of previous boarding inspection	06/11/2014
Telephone number	01206 771234
Email address	jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/ofsted." If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

if you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016

