

Southfield School

Southfields Special School, Gipsy Lane, WOKINGHAM, Berkshire, RG40 2HR

Inspection dates	12/02/2016 to 12/02/2016	
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	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The boarding provision at this school has made a decisive and positive impact on young people who benefitted from it and on their families. One parent commented that it had 'saved' the relationship with her son.
- Former residential pupils and staff gave several examples of significant progress made whilst young people were boarders. Much of this has had a very positive effect on children's lives including avoiding coming into local authority care and/or young people transitioning well into college to further their education.
- Staff have a wealth of experience backed up by excellent training opportunities, which they drew on to good effect particularly in the provision of emotional care. Young people felt valued by those working with them and so increased their own self-esteem.
- The relationships developed by residential staff with boarders and their families have been exemplary and are regarded as instrumental in the progress young people have made. 'I can't speak more highly of them' one parent said, 'we would not be where we are today if it were not for them; they have given me my son back'.
- Leaders and managers have ensured alternative provision has been found for the young people who had been boarding, keeping the service open until arrangements for the last young person were in place. The school has contributed to packages of care by operating an 'extended day' to some pupils, former boarders among them, providing constructive activities until into the evening on school days.

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 window restraints are maintained so as to ensure that boarders are unable to exit bedroom windows
- Ensure fire extinguishers are immediately accessible, unobscured by any other items being stored in the same area.
- The school's policy on positive handling should make it clear that, for young people in the residential provision, restraint is only used to prevent injury to any person, or to prevent serious damage to the property, and that the purpose of maintaining good order and discipline does not apply in the boarding facility.

Information about this inspection

Currently the school's boarding provision has been closed, although a final decision to re-open or shut permanently has yet to be made. This welfare only inspection was therefore undertaken over one whole day, with notice being given the afternoon before.

The inspector undertook a tour of the residential provision and spoke with former residential pupils and staff. Records and policies were scrutinised. Interviews were held with key staff including the Principal, head of care, premises manager and human resources administrator. The inspector spoke to parents of former boarders and professionals by telephone. Contact was made with the local authority designated officer and relevant information was shared. Parent-view (Ofsted's on-line survey) was used to gather the opinions of a wider group of parents and carers.

Inspection team

Chris Peel

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Southfield School is a secondary co-educational maintained school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years, who have experienced social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. It accommodates up to 60 pupils at any one time, 14 of whom may stay in the residential provision. Currently, no boarders are on roll, although a small number had been accommodated until very recently. The residential accommodation is provided within an area of the main school site. Southfield School is situated in a residential area, near to Wokingham town centre. The residential provision was last inspected in February 2015. A primary school, which is on the same site, can take up to 10 pupils.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Former boarders spoken to during the inspection described how being resident at the school had helped them overcome difficulties with their behaviour, to 'mature and become a responsible adult'. They and their parents spoke of improving school attendance, reducing instances of absconding from lessons, learning to clean and wash clothes, and developing a trust and respect for adults. Given the starting point of many boarders this has often been a remarkable turnaround.

Staff have achieved this success with a combination of structured days, clear boundaries, role modelling and demonstrating warm, positive regard for the young people, one of whom commented 'they treated us all with respect and fairly'. This has often been in contrast with previous experiences and given young people a new sense of being valued. They were then able to take on the aspirations of staff so that, helped by high levels of supervision, challenging behaviour reduced to a very low level. In turn those behaviours became less apparent in the school and at home.

Young people liked the experience of boarding, feeling that they were rewarded for personal achievements such as doing well in school, and as a group when their behaviour had been good. These rewards included particularly exciting activities such as go-karting or laser quest. However, football, games of pool and cooking were also enjoyed. Staff used these to help young people to manage the experience of losing, of having to take turns and of cooperating.

Sanctions and the use of restraint were used on an infrequent basis; children and young people saw them as being fair and 'deserved' despite the fact that occasionally a sanction was imposed in boarding for misbehaviour in the school. They were also clear that staff would avoid physical interventions, encouraging them for example to take time out to calm themselves. They were used 'to keep you safe and not do something stupid like hurt or assault someone'.

Records demonstrate that the practice in residential provision was to restrain in order to prevent significant damage to property or someone being harmed. One account indicated 'maintaining good order and discipline' was an additional reason; the behaviour management policy does not differentiate between the school, where this is an acceptable reason, and boarding, where it is not. National Minimum Standards have not in practice been breached but potential for them to have been has been left open.

As young people were able to manage difficult emotions so they increasingly accepted responsibility for their behaviour and also developed the understanding that they can affect their personal situations for the better. This positive attitude has translated into taking opportunities open to them, particularly in education. Several boarders have enrolled on college courses of their choosing. One had returned to the school to undertake work experience during the inspection; it was in a role he was enjoying and was evidently taking the responsibility very seriously.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Staff have a strong ethos of 'finding the good in children'. They have seen behaviour as an indicator of underlying issues and problems which need to be addressed if young people are to progress. It has been a particular strength of those working in the residential provision that they have not only 'found the good' themselves but helped young people discover it too.

Boarders developed new skills and improved performance at sports, artistic endeavours and some academic subjects and this has encouraged a sense of self-efficacy. Just as importantly for their ability to form relationships with others, young people have developed greater emotional intelligence as a direct result of the efforts of staff to promote empathy, and understanding of how their behaviour affects the group. Consequently bullying was at a remarkably low level in boarding and the sense of comradeship was high.

Consistency of the staff team has led to an excellent working relationship between them, providing each other with support and enabling them to develop a joint resilience to the emotional challenges of the work. This has resulted in a cohesive approach that has ensured consistently high levels of support for young people.

Boarders had a high level of trust and confidence in staff, both those who permanently worked in boarding and those who undertook a shift one night a week. They were happy to speak to them about any matters that concerned them, whether about their experience in the residential provision, in the school or their life outside. Occasionally the Principal or head of care has been approached but at whatever level a young person raised an issue they felt listened to and thought matters had been resolved.

Families also expressed extraordinary regard for the staff; one parent said 'I can't speak more highly of them' adding 'no money would repay them'. This is the result of regular communication, at least weekly, ensuring parents and carers not only heard about what their children had been doing but learning what worked well too. More than once it has also meant that difficult issues such as safeguarding concerns have been able to be raised with families with positive outcomes. Staff saw this level of collaboration as crucial to the success of young people's placements.

As well as providing excellent pastoral care staff ensured that young people's physical needs were well met. Health and hygiene were high priorities; former boarders said that any medical needs were attended to promptly and parents remarked on the fact that their children seemed to do better in regard to standards of personal care than they had elsewhere.

Meals were all taken in the school dining hall and were regarded as being very enjoyable. A certificate is on display showing five stars for food hygiene has been awarded to the caterers.

Although the grounds and buildings show a degree of damage caused by pupils it is generally well maintained and repairs are effected promptly. Internally, residential accommodation is undergoing running repairs and the use of some rooms has changed since it closed. However, the evidence is that it was a homely and comfortable place to live, with young people able to personalise their own bedrooms and enjoy all its facilities. One commented 'it was like being at home, really. We had a laugh. It is a good place around here'.

Senior managers and staff take the safety of young people very seriously. The designated officer of the local authority had one concern passed to her about safeguarding practice relating to boarding. It was found that more could have been done to avoid a restraint but that the young person involved was not harmed. This has been addressed through additional training.

Staff who had worked in the residential provision were well acquainted with the procedures to follow in the event of a child protection concern, and talked through an example. This included visiting a parent after consulting with the local authority child protection team facilitating a discussion about the issues and promoting the safety of the young person. A recently devised recording format and booklet about safeguarding matters helps staff follow procedures and keep a good account of the process. This includes options of who to report to in addition to the designated safeguarding leads, although the policy does not indicate what to do if that member of staff is either implicated or away. While staff are aware of the 'Prevent' initiative and have received training on it, the policy on preventing extremism and radicalisation has not been updated to include it.

Significant efforts were made by staff to help young people understand the dangers of internet use, particularly to avoid cyber bullying and suitable restrictions are in place on school computers. Staff also worked with those young people who experienced bullying to help them identify behaviours that might meet with hostility (such as not keeping confidences) and how to make friends. Instigators of bullying behaviour including racist remarks are addressed in the school but these behaviours were rarely, if ever seen in boarding.

Missing persons procedures are in place and staff were able to demonstrate their understanding of them. Some boarders did abscond, often after leaving school and before arriving at the residential accommodation. Staff would conduct a search of the area and contact families to alert them; this is often where the young person would be. Families and young people reported that this was a supportive process and incidents reduced to zero overtime (although continuing at a constant level in the school overall).

In the main the residential accommodation is a safe place for young people to live, with appropriate risk assessments in place and safety certificates obtained. However, two oversights have undermined the commitment to safety; one was a fire extinguisher being hidden behind items being stored in the vicinity and the other was an inadequate repair to a window restrictor that meant it could easily be opened, allowing a young person to get out of a first story window had they wished. There is no indication that this ever happened or that concealing the extinguisher endangered a child, but points of improvement have been made due to the lapses.

Fire drills are regularly carried out and young people were able to tell me what they would do in the event of an alarm sounding.

Safer recruitment practice is excellent, with a thorough process to be followed that, for example, ensures gaps in employment history are explored and appropriate checks are undertaken. Employment is only offered to applicants who meet these requirements.

This has been a difficult period of transition for the school, but one that has been managed well. The decision to close the residential provision, at least for this academic year, has been taken due to falling numbers of referrals. Although opposed to it, staff have accepted that it is inevitable and their redeployment to other roles ensures their skills and experience are not lost. Morale has understandably been hit during the period of uncertainty and change but with the development of an extended day provision, to which staff are contributing, this is improving again.

The accommodation was kept open, with very few young people boarding, until adequate alternative packages of care were available to all. It closed at the end of January. This demonstrates the commitment by leaders and managers to make the welfare of pupils its overriding priority in the transition. Former boarders are able to take advantage of the extended day service until 07.30 in the evening, maintaining a beneficial level of support to them and their parents or carers.

Senior managers have a realistic evaluation of the performance of the school, with plans to improve areas of weakness. The Principal is considering different options to ensure the school is prepared to meet the changing pattern of needs of children being referred. An application has been made to increase the height of the perimeter fencing and additional security is being sought for the school gates. As levels of young people absconding have not improved in the school over a number of years plans are in place to encourage pupils who leave classrooms to remain on the school site.

Points of improvement from the previous inspection have been met with reviews of case files in place and training for the school chef to use fire extinguishers provided.

Governors have played a full role in overseeing the boarding provision, regularly reviewing policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding and the school's statement of purpose. Regular independent monitoring visits were being made while it was open, contributing to the scrutiny of high standards of care. The statement of purpose was reviewed very recently and lays out the school's aims and how they will be met. It still includes the provision of residential education as a final decision to close permanently has not been reached.

Liaison with professionals and families is extremely good. One social worker commented that staff were 'cooperative and good to work with' while a parent said 'I could get hold of people when I wanted and they would always inform me of events'. Visits have been made to the homes of boarders to improve communication channels and the head of care has made visits to discuss potentially difficult issues with parents. These have succeeded in addressing safeguarding matters without alienating the family.

Levels of training for residential staff were high with a termly in-house programme that ran right up to the closure. This included child sexual exploitation and the administration of medication. Additional courses have been attended on attachment, working with the travelling community and advanced behaviour management training (allowing participants to train in the approach). Since the last inspection one staff member has obtained a degree in social sciences.

As a result of this extensive input the staff team have an enviable level of expertise and knowledge that has helped to achieve positive outcomes for young people. These include potentially life changing results of maintaining young people in their families and

of increasing their life chances by improving educational outcomes and the ability to form secure relationships.

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	110191
Social care unique reference number	SC011332
DfE registration number	

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	0
Gender of boarders	Not applicable
Age range of boarders	8 to16
Headteacher	Dominic Geraghty
Date of previous boarding inspection	09/02/2015
Telephone number	0118 9771293
Email address	admin@southfield.wokingham.sch.uk

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