

Ratcliffe School

Ratcliffe Special School, John Nash Drive, DAWLISH, Devon, EX7 9RZ

Inspection dates	08/02/2016 to 09/02/2016	
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

- Children and young people thoroughly enjoy their residential experience. It positively contributes to their learning and development by improving their engagement and confidence. Parents feel confident in the school and the benefits of the residential provision. One parent described the residential provision as being 'the strongest aspect of the school' in that she had noticed tremendous progress in her son since being a residential pupil. Another parent described her child as being 'a different child, a much happier child' since joining the school.
- The staff team are experienced and suitably qualified. They provide excellent continuity of care as they consistently work in one of the four residential houses, and turnover is exceptionally low. This means that staff get to know young people really well and develop good team working practices to ensure changing needs are well met. Within the residential provision, behaviour is managed very effectively. Any incidents are responded to in a considered and child-centred way. The use of restraint and sanctions are minimal, as are the incidents of young people going missing. Children and young people feel safe and well cared for. They enjoy excellent relationships with the residential staff and can identify several adults they can talk to. Parents feel they can trust the school and residential provision and that staff understand their child's individual needs and vulnerabilities.
- Each of the residential houses provide a good standard of accommodation. They each have a character and identity of their own and it is apparent that much attention is given to making them as comfortable and attractive as possible. Children and young people have their own bedroom and can personalise them to their own tastes. Communal areas are comfortable and inviting. The houses have a range of additional facilities, such as a gym, computer room toy room, all of

which are used regularly. Staff give really good attention to ensuring children and young people have a range of activities to enjoy both within the houses and outside in the local community. Football and swimming are really popular as is the care of the school's recently acquired pigs.

- While care practices in the residential setting are at least good, some weaknesses exist in relation to the effectiveness of management oversight. For example, care files are not consistently well organised, staff recruitment files do not clearly evidence robust management oversight and sign off, and some key policies are in need of updating to ensure they include up to date information and the latest government guidance. Other areas identified for management attention include ensuring staffing levels at key times, such as breakfast, fully support residential pupils and the impact of several day pupils visiting the houses prior to school starting. While governors regularly visit the residential houses, their reports do not include enough detail or evaluation.

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 care files are well organised and all relevant and up-to-date information is easily accessible.
- Ensure staff recruitment files are fully audited and signed off.
- Ensure all policies are up-to-date and contain the latest government guidance.
- Ensure staffing levels are adequate at particularly busy times.
- Ensure governors' reports include a clear evaluation of the effectiveness of care and whether children and young people are safeguarded.
- Ensure clarification is sought about night time fire drills.

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Norma Welsby

Lead social care inspector

Heather Chaplin

Social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

This residential special school is a local authority provision for young people aged between five to 16 years. It is now federated to its neighbouring residential school which is registered as a children's home. Pupils are of mixed gender, with communication, interaction disorder and social developmental needs, many of whom have been identified as being on the autistic spectrum. The school provides a flexible residential service for up to 35 young people, between Monday and Thursday. In addition, the school provides extended day support before and after school, for the many of the 83 pupils who attend the school. The school is located in a coastal town in South Devon. Both the school and its four residential houses are on the same campus. All residential pupils have a single bedroom. All residential areas have kitchenettes, dining and sitting areas. The school has grounds of approximately 10 acres, a vegetable garden, a polytunnel greenhouse and keeps pigs. Residential pupils have the use of a wide range of facilities including outdoor hard and soft play areas and many of the school's indoor facilities, such as the computer suite, during planned after school activities. The school and the residential provision were last inspected in March 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Children and young people enjoy and benefit from their residential experience. For many, it contributes to them having a more positive attitude to school and as a result, their engagement improves and they make good academic and personal progress. The residential provision is well organised and child-centred. Children and young people enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities and benefit from social opportunities that may be limited at home. Parents describe their children as 'fitting in' and being 'accepted' at the school. They also report how their confidence and motivation has improved.

The relationships between residential staff and pupils is excellent. Staff know young people very well and provide very personalised care and support. The school's range of therapists provide specialist support from which many pupils benefit. Beyond the school, there is effective partnership working with a range of other professionals, to ensure young people receive appropriate support throughout their time at the school and during their transition to post sixteen opportunities. Regular multi-agency meetings are held to plan for the future. Relationships with parents and communication home is described as 'excellent'. Many parents and their children have often experienced difficult times at other schools and feel relieved and appreciative of the support they receive from this school.

The safety of children and young people is given high priority. Staff are child-centred in their approach and are knowledgeable about their responsibilities in keeping children and young people safe. Behaviour is safely and effectively managed. Several parents report improvements in behaviour and routines which benefit their home life. One parent described how the residential provision is helping their child to establish healthy sleep patterns which is having an enormous positive impact on their whole family.

The quality of care and support

Good

Children and young people are well consulted through daily interactions, weekly house meetings and the student council. They are treated with respect and dignity and their needs are responded to positively. Staff communicate with individual's who have limited verbal speech in a variety of ways as well as positively encouraging verbal speech. In this way all children and young people feel valued and can contribute to the running of the house and plans being made.

The residential accommodation provides good standards throughout and there is a rolling programme of refurbishment in place to ensure all houses provide equally good facilities. One of the houses is due to have a new kitchen and open plan diner. It is felt

this will provide a more sociable layout and support greater opportunities for young people to participate in cooking. Throughout each of the houses, to varying degrees, children and young people have the opportunity to cook and bake and learn to undertake a variety of domestic tasks. Children and young people have a strong sense of identity with and attachment to their house. A parent described the residential staff and other children as 'like a second family' to her son. If, for whatever reason, it is felt that a young person would benefit from moving houses, this is carefully considered and arranged. A parent described how this had occurred recently and said she was delighted with how well this had been arranged and the benefits that were already being felt.

Children and young people benefit from a wide range of social and recreational activities. There are many opportunities available in each of the well-equipped houses and the grounds but also in the wider community. The staff have access to a range of vehicles in the evening and so can facilitate trips out. Good emphasis is placed on encouraging children and young people to keep themselves fit and healthy and lots of sporting opportunities are provided. The school has recently acquired pigs which is helping children and young people to learn about animal care and also about wider concepts such as animal welfare and the food chain.

The school has excellent arrangements in place to support physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Staff liaise effectively with families and professionals and will provide support to attend external health appointments. There are a team of on-site therapists who provide a range of specialist services including speech and language, counselling and massage. The management and administration of medication is thoroughly and safely organised. While the quality of care and support children and young people receive at this provision is at least good, written plans and care files are not consistently of a good standard and would benefit from a thorough review.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Residential pupils are safe and feel safe. Their parents trust the school and the residential provision. There is ongoing and open communication. Parents are invited to visit and their children can contact them while they are staying away from home.

Staff have an excellent understanding of the procedures to follow where there are concerns about the safety of a child or young person. They receive regular refresher training. Staff have daily discussions about the children and young people which includes their safety and welfare. There are named designated safeguarding leads, details of which are clearly displayed. There is good liaison with the local authority and records kept of referrals made. Children and young people know how to complain. They enjoy excellent relationships with residential staff and can identify several adults that they can talk to about any concerns.

Positive behaviour is consistently promoted in the residential provision. Staff use effective de-escalation and diffusing techniques. They know the young people really well and understand triggers and what strategies are likely to be most effective. Residential staff use minimal physical restraints and sanctions. They work in a very child-centred way and demonstrate a good understanding of the legislative framework. Incidents are recorded and reviewed and these reflective practices have supported a reduction in the use of restraint.

Children and young people are clear about how they are expected to behave both within the school and the residential provision. They are taught to respect others and how to keep themselves safe by learning about risks associated with going missing, bullying and other forms of discrimination. Work has also taken place to appraise staff and young people about risks in relation to the use of the internet and radicalisation.

Staff have a good understanding of the risks associated with individual children and young people. Their priority is to keep young people safe while also supporting them to have age-appropriate opportunities to learn and develop. For example good attention is given to helping young people to use public transport safely and confidently. While there are individual written risk assessments in place, these vary in quality. They are presented in a variety of formats and specific current risks and the strategies to be deployed to manage these are not always completely clear. Fire procedures are thorough, including regular alarm bell tests, drills and servicing. A fire risk assessment is in place but it does not include whether the residential provision should be undertaking night time fire drills and the school's health and safety officer was asked to clarify this as soon as possible.

The school has a comprehensive catalogue of written policies and procedures. It was noted that some are in need of updating. The safeguarding procedure does not include safeguarding needs associated with radicalisation. The missing from care policy does not include reference to statutory guidance for children who run away or go missing from home or care. The behaviour management policy does not clearly distinguish that physical restraint cannot be used to maintain 'good order' in the residential provision. In each of these areas staff are knowledgeable and practices are good and these shortfalls are not judged to have a significant impact on children and young people, but require addressing.

The leaders and managers of this residential special school are committed to the success of the residential provision. They recognise its value as being integral to the progress that residential pupils make and they are committed to continued improvements. There has been a good response to the three areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. The school is now federated to its neighbouring residential school. This means that the head teacher is the Principal of both schools. Much work has been put into achieving this status and leaders, managers and governors envisage considerable benefits to being a federation in the future.

The positive ethos and objectives of the residential provision is demonstrated in practice. Its principles and aims state; 'Residential placement should be seen by everyone involved as a positive experience'. This is partly achieved through the strong relationships that exist between residential staff and residential pupils. One pupil echoed many others' comments when he said; "I like it here. We have lots of fun. The staff are great'.

The head of care is suitably qualified and experienced. He is well supported by the principal who clearly values the residential provision. Staff turnover is very low. Each house has a senior and a small team of carers. Staff are well trained and experienced. Sixteen of the eighteen residential staff have achieved at least a level 3 Diploma and the remaining two staff are currently studying for this qualification. Staff say they feel well supported by the head of care and through staff meetings, daily discussions, supervision and training. Supervision records show that practice-related supervision takes place, albeit at varying intervals. While recruitment processes are thorough in practice, records do not fully evidence a robust approach to management oversight and sign off.

Governors regularly visit the residential houses and their role across the whole school is valued. Their reports include some valuable points, but they do not always include a clear evaluation of the effectiveness of care and whether children and young people are safeguarded.

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

<School URN>

Social care unique reference number

SC003895

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

82

Gender of boarders

Mixed

Age range of boarders

5 to16

Headteacher

Date of previous boarding inspection

24/03/2015

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