

# Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

## Inspection dates

2-4 March 2016 and 21-22 March 2016

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

The quality of care and support	<b>Good</b>	2
How well children and young people are protected	<b>Requires improvement</b>	3
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	<b>Requires improvement</b>	3

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision requires improvement because

- Not all national minimum standards (NMS) are met, and areas for improvement were identified at this inspection.
- Safeguarding concerns are not always managed well. Two disclosures were not reported, and one concern was not responded to quickly enough. Senior leaders were unable to confirm that boarding staff who start work at the school prior to the receipt of a disclosure and barring service (DBS) check are supervised in accordance with the school's risk assessment.
- Boarders are looked after by a number of new and existing boarding staff who do not receive regular supervision, or who have not had an annual appraisal of their performance. Not all boarding staff started a formal care qualification after successfully completing their probation period. Senior leaders took action to address this weakness during the inspection and have plans to provide boarding staff with regular supervision from April 2016.
- Some boarders have high-risk behaviours that pose a risk to themselves or others. The therapy, learning support and pastoral teams understand these needs well. However, written risk assessments or support plans guiding all staff in how to deal with these behaviours are not in place, so the potential arises for contradictory approaches.
- Leaders' and managers' monitoring of the boarding provision is not robust. Visits by the independent person, required in law six times each year, have not occurred this frequently.

- The arrangements for supervising pupils during lunchtimes require improvement to prevent some pupils overeating or not eating.
- The bedrooms and the bathroom in one on-site house are poor in comparison to other parts of the school's boarding provision. Privacy is seriously compromised.
- The lone-working policy does not include guidance for staff specifically on lone working with young people, or make reference to safeguarding arrangements.

## Strengths

- The quality of care and support that young people receive is good. Boarders report that they feel safe at the school and like boarding. They have good opportunities to develop personally as well as academically, and make good progress in these areas.
- The senior leadership team has expanded this year in recognition of the importance of the boarding provision and pastoral care required by some pupils. The designated safeguarding lead, head of boarding and the head of pastoral care are members of the senior leadership team. The advisory board continues to support the development of the school. At the headteacher's and proprietor's insistence, the advisory board has become more challenging, questioning the effectiveness of the school and encouraging staff teams to provide evidence of the positive impact of their work on pupils.
- Senior leaders have taken action to strengthen the management of boarding and the provision of pastoral care. New staff have been appointed to these key roles and have started to implement improvement plans to develop the quality of care further.

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

### The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

- **5.3:** Ensure that toilet and washing facilities provide appropriate privacy for pupils.
- **6.3:** Ensure that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy, and that appropriate action is taken to reduce the risks that are identified.
- **11.1:** Ensure that the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school are made and that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- **19.2:** Ensure that all existing staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3

qualification, or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these standards should hold these qualifications, or begin working towards them within three months of confirmation of employment.

- **19.6:** Ensure that all staff have access to support and advice for their role. Ensure that they also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.
- **20.1:** Ensure that the governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who is independent of the management of the school, to visit the school six times, spread evenly over the course of a school year, and to complete a written report on the conduct of the school. When the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the headteacher (or school equivalent).
- **20.2:** Ensure that most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced and that they include:
  - Checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments and, where they exist, individual care plans for pupils;
  - Evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to pupils and of whether they are safeguarded;
  - Assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and
  - Opportunities for any pupil or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitors (in private if they wish).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all national minimum standards are met.
- Ensure that there are rigorous strategies in place to manage staff who start work prior to the return of a disclosure and barring service check.
- Review the lunchtime meal arrangements to reduce the risks of young people overeating and/or not eating.
- Ensure that the boarders' bedrooms in Elm House provide sufficient privacy. This particularly relates to the see-through glass panel in the bedroom and bathroom doors.
- Review the lone working policy to ensure that the guidance and subsequent risk assessments refer specifically to working with pupils and safeguarding arrangements.



## Information about this inspection

This inspection was undertaken in two parts over a three-week period, by three inspectors. The school was given a short period of notice of the initial inspection and no notice of the return visit. The return visit was undertaken to secure additional evidence.

The inspectors spoke with the senior leadership team, the proprietor, the independent visitor, members of the therapy and pastoral care teams, the designated safeguarding lead, personnel managers, boarding house managers and boarding staff, and with pupils. One inspector spoke with boarding pupils in their four boarding houses and reviewed the quality of accommodation that they are provided with. A wide range of policies, records and documentation was scrutinised and inspected. The inspectors took account of the feedback received from Parent View.

Inspectors were made aware during this inspection that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the allegations were considered by inspectors, alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection.

## Inspection team

Helen Cawston	Senior Her Majesty's Inspector
Chris Golbourn	Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Paula Lahey	Social Care Regulatory Inspection Manager

## **Full report**

### **Information about this school**

Appleford School is an independent, co-educational residential special school for pupils, aged from 7 to 19 years of age, who have dyslexia and associated learning difficulties. The school has a Christian character and close links with its local church. The school is inclusive of pupils of other faiths. Pupils may be referred from local authorities or from private sources. The school offers the options of full boarding or flexible boarding and day provision. The residential provision currently comprises four boarding houses, two of which are located on the school site and two in the local village. They provide separate accommodation for boys and girls. The school can accommodate a maximum of 85 residential pupils. At the time of this inspection, there were 75 residential pupils. The residential provision was last inspected in February 2015.

## Inspection judgements

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

**Requires Improvement**

The school has faced a number of challenges this year. These include an increase in pupil numbers, an extension of their age range, the introduction of a new boarding house, changes in the staff team and a number of safeguarding issues. Senior leaders and staff members have attempted to deal with the additional challenges, but not all NMS are met. There are weaknesses in arrangements to protect pupils that mean that the overall experiences of pupils are not consistently good.

Boarders who live in Elm House are not accorded the same privacy as those who live in the other three houses. In Elm House, there are see-through glass panels in all bedroom doors and the bathroom door. When asked what would improve their experiences of living in this house, a boarder said, 'Panels on the doors'. In addition, the bath and shower facilities in this house lack sufficient privacy. The shower cubicles do not have lockable doors. The bath is situated in a communal part of the room, and the curtain surrounding the bath does not provide sufficient privacy. Senior leaders said that boarders do not use the bath, but they had not asked them if this was due to the lack of privacy.

Pupils are responsible for serving themselves at lunchtimes with minimal staff supervision. Staff members are keen to develop pupils' independence during mealtimes, but during the inspection the minimal supervision resulted in opportunities for pupils to overeat, take second portions before everyone had sufficient food, and left pupils at risk of not eating and this going unnoticed.

Pupils make good academic progress, as a result of good support for their individual learning needs. The homework system has developed this year to enable pupils to have increased opportunities for independent learning. The school council reported that this opportunity is working well.

The senior leaders have responded well to providing pupils with good opportunities to continue learning and to develop increased independence. The school now has a dedicated sixth form and these boarders have their own designated home in the local community. Boarders living in the sixth form home said that they like the increased responsibilities and trust that staff give them. They especially enjoy staying up later and having increased freedom.

Pupils' personal development continues to improve. The school operates a prefect system, enabling pupils to develop leadership skills and self-confidence. The prefects help to facilitate snack time for the younger pupils and act as mentors to all pupils. The school council continues to provide pupils with good opportunities to help make decisions about the development of the school. Pupils elect the council members, which include a mixture of day pupils and boarders. The headteacher, head of boarding and senior leadership team attend the council meetings. Council members reported that these meetings provoke good discussions about pupils' suggestions, and that they understand the decisions that are made. As a result of the school council's effectiveness,

pupils achieved changes to the school uniform and have been provided with additional common rooms for older pupils.

Pupils are helped to care about others and to develop their understanding of their local community and wider national issues. The school council decides on a charity to support and pupils are actively involved in fundraising. Pupils have been involved in helping to care for their local community by joining in a clean-up day and singing to a group of local residents.

A number of pupils spoke positively about their experiences. One boarder said, 'Weekends are awesome', when talking about boarding and the activities available. This view was shared with another boarder saying, 'Boarding – it is fun'. Another boarder said, 'I love this school.' Some boarders said that one of the best things about boarding was making friends and spending time together.

### **The quality of care and support**

**Good**

Pupils receive good pastoral care and support. As a result, they make good progress in their personal and social development as well as achieving well academically. In 2015, all year 11 pupils gained five GCSE awards. The therapy teams, learning support team and pastoral care staff work effectively together and ensure that pupils' learning, emotional and therapeutic needs are well met. Pupils have good opportunities to learn about their emotions and about how to talk to others about how they are feeling. The support teams have good links with external organisations, enabling pupils to gain access to specialist support and help when needed. In addition, boarders have good avenues through which to contact their families, external support agencies and the independent listener.

The school has introduced a model of reflective practice to support the management of highly challenging and risky behaviours presented by some pupils. It is a positive initiative that is providing staff with an effective model on which to base their practice and understanding of dealing with young people's complex needs. Staff members recognise that this initiative is still in the early stages, but developments continue this year. More staff are now trained in the practice, and senior leaders say that there is now less resistance in the staff team to implementing it.

Staff help pupils to reflect on their behaviour and to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and others. As a result, incidents of challenging behaviour are decreasing. Pupils said that staff do not impose sanctions or use restraints on them. Boarding staff recognise and praise boarders' positive behaviour. 'Pupil of the Week' awards are given, recognising boarders' achievements. Recently, this accolade has been awarded to boarders who have been kind to others, settling well into boarding and demonstrating constant good behaviour.

Pupils are confident at speaking with the adults that care for them. Pupils said that when they are worried about something they can talk to staff. Pupils were especially positive about the head of pastoral care, saying that they like spending time with her because she listens to them and helps them.



Following the success of the school council, the head of boarding is planning to devise a boarding house council. She hopes that this initiative will provide boarders with an additional forum through which to take on increasing responsibility for the running of and development of their boarding houses. House meetings already take place and enable boarders to talk about living together and to suggest ideas for activities. Boarders generally get on well together. One pupil said that boarding was 'like one big family. We all help each other and they are like my sisters'.

Pupils have good opportunities to develop their interests and hobbies. Boarders spoke positively about the judo club, bingo games and being able to visit the local gym. A local cricket and athletics club delivers its sessions on the school campus. As a result, boarding pupils join in with the activities and have increased opportunities to mix with community members and other young people. Pupils make good use of the on-site facilities including the climbing wall, refurbished sports hall and the computer suite. An additional mini-bus has been purchased and provides boarders with further opportunities for community activities. A scout group is being developed at the school, and pupils continue to progress with their Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Staff help pupils to become more independent and to develop good social skills. Each pupil has individual development targets and practises these during everyday activities. Boarders develop life skills by preparing their own breakfasts and snacks, and helping with household chores. Boarders take on increasing responsibility for caring for themselves, including learning to cook and managing their laundry. The senior leadership team has started to develop a programme to assist older pupils to have more freedom in the local community.

Pupils receive good help to stay fit and healthy. Boarding staff are trained to deliver first aid and administer medication to young people. Individual health plans are sufficiently detailed and guide staff in how to support pupils' specific medical needs.

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

### **Requires Improvement**

Despite senior leaders' actions to strengthen the school's safeguarding arrangements, the extent to which pupils are protected is not yet good. Senior leaders did not deal as meticulously with three child protection concerns as they had with others. As a result, the pupils involved in these concerns were potentially placed at risk of harm. Senior leaders took action during the inspection to consult with external safeguarding agencies about these concerns.

A number of other child protection concerns have been dealt with effectively. Senior leaders report that external agencies have praised their management of specific child protection concerns. The school now has an increased number of staff trained to deal with child protection concerns. The importance of this role is recognised and the designated lead for managing child protection is a member of the senior leadership team. The new designated lead has taken action to improve the system for documenting and filing child protection records. Further development is needed to ensure that the decisions that senior leaders make in response to child protection concerns are always comprehensively recorded.

Safer recruitment processes require improvement. A small number of staff have started

work prior to the receipt of a DBS check. Other recruitment checks, including obtaining references, checking gaps in employment history and completing a barred list check were undertaken on these staff. For the majority of these staff, a risk assessment was recorded on their file stating, 'The employee will not be permitted to access the boarding houses at any time without direct one-to-one supervision'. Senior leaders were unable to evidence how this strategy is implemented in practice for boarding staff that live on site.

Written plans to equip boarding staff robustly with strategies to manage pupils' complex and risky behaviours (for example self-harm and sexualised behaviour) require improvement. Sometimes written risk assessments are used. At other times, staff discuss the behaviours and rely on their shared knowledge and understanding of the pupils' needs. This approach results in the potential for staff to respond to pupils in contradictory ways.

Staff understand the risks to pupils presented by the internet. Senior leaders have carefully considered how to provide pupils with age-appropriate opportunities to use mobile telephones and wi-fi while ensuring they are protected. Staff help pupils to make safe choices when using social media and the internet. E-safety training has been provided for pupils and their families. Staff have helped pupils to understand about online grooming and exploitation.

Staff take robust and effective action to help pupils to understand the dangers of smoking and using drugs. Senior leaders have established effective links with the local police community support officers. As a result, these officers meet with pupils to help them to understand how to stay safe. Staff are responsive to incidents of pupils going missing from the school. They search for pupils and liaise with the police to ensure their prompt and safe return.

Pupils spoken with said that they feel safe at school and living in the boarding houses. Pupils did not report a culture of bullying in the school and said that generally pupils get on together positively. One boarder said, 'We all try to get on. If there are any issues, we try to sort them out before they get out of order.'

During the inspection, senior leaders took action to secure loft hatches in some bedrooms, deep clean some shower cubicles and shorten pull cords. Pupils and staff have regular opportunities to practise the fire evacuation procedures.

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

### **Requires Improvement**

Despite senior leaders' enthusiasm and commitment to providing a high-quality service to pupils, their effectiveness in meeting all of the NMS has reduced since the previous inspection.

Significant changes have taken place in the boarding provision this year, including an increase in the number and age of pupils who board and changes in staff personnel. The previous head of boarding and a house parent/deputy head of boarding left unexpectedly at the end of July 2015. Senior leaders took action to minimise the disruption caused by these significant changes. An interim head of boarding, whom the

boarders and their families already knew well, was appointed while recruiting for a permanent replacement. In addition, the responsibilities of members of the senior leadership team increased, for example managing child protection matters and spending more time in the boarding houses.

A new permanent head of boarding is now in post. Senior leaders recognise the importance of this role. As a result, the position no longer includes the added responsibilities of managing a boarding house. The current post holder has a higher proportion of non-contact time to focus on boarding developments. The head of boarding has started to implement some good initiatives to improve the quality of provision for the boarders. These improvements include the development of a key worker role, setting up a boarding house council and increasing opportunities for boarders to alert boarding staff to how they are feeling and what they may be worried about. These developments are in the early stages and are not yet available in all of the boarding houses and to all of the boarding pupils.

Despite the regular leadership meetings and good provision of the advisory board, monitoring of the boarding team's performance has declined in effectiveness. Visits by the independent person to assess impartially the quality of the boarding provision have not taken place as frequently as required. Visits should occur six times a year, yet in a 12-month period only three visits took place. One of the visits did not include a discussion with the pupils, to seek their views on the quality of the boarding provision, or assess all of the matters required by the NMS. As a result, senior leaders have missed opportunities to identify some of the weaknesses evident at this inspection.

The quality of support and development for new and existing boarding staff is mixed. Formal supervision sessions are not given sufficient priority and, as a result, have not taken place regularly. In addition, boarding staff have not received an annual appraisal of their work performance. Not all boarding staff have started or gained a relevant care qualification within three months of completing their probation. Other opportunities to support staff are good. Boarding staff have received training and guidance in first aid, medication management, basic self-harm, child protection, extremism, autism spectrum disorders and attachment. Boarding team meetings occur more frequently than before and provide staff with increased opportunities to talk about their work. Weekly newsletters are provided to staff to keep them up to date with school developments and decisions from the senior leadership team.

The lone working policy requires improvement. The document has not been reviewed since 2014 and lacks important information about lone working with pupils or sufficient consideration about safeguarding. Other policies were up to date and provided staff with good information.

Senior leaders demonstrate good capacity to deal with the weaknesses identified at this inspection. The leadership team is ambitious and encourages the staff teams and pupils to be aspirational. There is good evidence of senior leaders securing and maintaining improvements to the school and boarding provision. Senior leaders have identified areas for further improvement. Development plans include specific and measurable targets that are focused on enriching the quality of provision for pupils.

## 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 exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact that 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 that children and young people are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

**Unique reference number**

**Social care unique reference number** SC039141

**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** 84

**Gender of boarders** Mixed

**Age range of boarders** Seven to 18 years old

**Headteacher** Mr David King

**Date of previous boarding inspection** 27 February 2015

**Telephone number** 01980 621020

**Email address** secretary@appleford.wilts.sch.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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk) or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.co.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.co.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2017

