

Arbour Vale School

Farnham Road, Farnham Royal, Slough SL2 3AE

Inspection dates

14 March 2016 to 16 March 2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding 1

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 outstanding because

- Young people consistently make outstanding personal and academic progress as a result of accessing the residential provision. Examples include: tolerating others and sharing, where previously they were unable to do this; improved sleeping patterns and routines; and developing life skills such as walking to school independently and running errands.
- The management and senior team encourage staff to have extremely high aspirations for all young people in their care. They model appropriate care and lead by example. Staff are positive about their work, are confident in their roles and want to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people.
- Young people learn to interact with both staff and others accessing the service. Activities are well planned and considered, in order to build confidence and relationships within the peer group. Young people access the community regularly and, when able, use public transport. Parents comment that this has helped them to be able to take their child out in the community when they are at home.
- Young people's care is well coordinated and in-house care plans are of a particularly high standard. They are informative and direct staff on how to support the young people to ensure that they gain the most from their stay. Young people are central to all plans, and staff seek their views and ideas on what they would like to develop,

and which skills they would like to learn.

- Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's vulnerabilities, anxieties and needs. They take time to settle those who are upset, and identify the cause of the issue and remedy this whenever possible. Staff are confident in the processes to follow, should they be concerned for a young person's welfare or well-being. Staff have all received training in child protection and safeguarding, and have demonstrated a sound understanding of their responsibilities. Further, staff are knowledgeable regarding exploitation in all its forms, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. The governor with the lead for safeguarding requires some external training for the role and the recruitment policy requires clarification regarding applicants who have lived overseas.

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 that the governor charged with safeguarding and child protection receives training in relation to this role from an external agency.
- Revise the safer recruitment policy to include the length of time that an applicant must have lived in the UK in order no longer to require checks from other countries that they may have previously lived and/or worked in.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was announced via telephone to the head of school on the morning of the first day. On arrival, an initial meeting was held with the headteacher and head of care. The inspector held discussions with residential care staff, the educational psychologist, the local authority designated officer and governors. All residential areas were observed and visited during the inspection, and the inspectors observed and, when appropriate, took part in activities with young people in addition to having discussions with them. The inspectors held telephone discussions with the lead special educational needs coordinator at the local authority, social workers and parents. Questionnaires for residential students and staff were analysed during the inspection. The information gathered was evaluated, and any lines of enquiry followed up with relevant staff. A range of documents and records were also examined during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jennie Christopher

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Arbour Vale School is a maintained residential special school located on the outskirts of Slough. It provides education for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or autism. The school's residential provision, Arbour Vale House, is purpose-built and located on the school site. There is accommodation for 12 young people. The stated aim of the residential provision is to work on specific objectives with young people through education programmes, extended learning opportunities and the delivery of a 24-hour curriculum. Overnight placements are from Monday evening to Friday morning.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people consistently make outstanding personal and academic progress as a result of accessing the residential provision. Examples include: tolerating others and sharing, where previously they were unable to do this; improved sleeping patterns and routines; and developing life skills such as walking to school independently and running errands. Young people's progress against their targets is regularly monitored by a variety of tools. Daily reports highlight the areas that each young person is working towards to ensure that staff remain on task in supporting individual progress. Weekly and half-termly reports for parents and relevant agencies identify progress over time, and provide clarity on young people's progress for statutory reviews and future goal-planning. Strong links with education staff ensure that goals and targets remain relevant for the young person.

Young people learn to interact with both staff and others accessing the service. Activities are well planned and considered, in order to build confidence and relationships within the peer group. Young people access the community regularly and, when able, use public transport. Parents commented on how this has helped them to be able to take their child out in the community when they are at home. Individual interests are developed, but also diversified to allow for a greater range of interests. Of particular note is the use of Lego therapy, where young people communicate to build a certain model. Observations demonstrated young people using visual and verbal communication, and trusting each other. Young people are confident in approaching staff to help or assist them, yet also complete tasks independently as much as possible.

The safety of young people is a high priority. The physical environment is secure, and only those young people who are able to responsibly use fob passes to the external doors have them. However, staff are not risk averse, and allow young people to challenge themselves and try new activities and skills. Staff are confident of the processes and procedures to follow, should they be concerned for a young person.

The service is well managed and is run with young people's needs held central to all planning. Staffing is organised so that all young people know who will support them that evening. Staff are confident in their roles and each other's abilities, knowing they will be supported by others in the team. They say that they can contact leaders and managers at any time, and that they are listened to. Young people are afforded the opportunity to share their views informally at any time. Questionnaires are taken termly, and observation of behaviour and what they enjoy is ongoing. The school council includes a representative from the residential group. Staff are skilled in using communication aids that are developed for individual young people, and encourage them to make as many choices as possible throughout their stay.

Staff form extremely strong relationships with the young people accessing the residential provision. They have excellent skills in communicating with young people through varying styles and techniques. Young people appear calm and relaxed, as a result of being listened to and their needs understood. Young people identify staff who they trust and will seek several staff members to spend time with or to assist with their activities or life skills programme. Young people are always treated with dignity and respect, with individual difference celebrated. Religious and cultural needs are catered for, and all young people learn about, and celebrate, events across the religious calendar. Young people have the opportunity to pray and reflect independently, and staff support them to access places of worship. The culturally and religiously diverse staff team ensures that it provides the appropriate guidance for each young person while promoting British values. All young people respect each other's differences in religious and cultural heritage, while celebrating their shared skills and achievements.

Young people's care is well coordinated and in-house care plans are of a particularly high standard. They are informative and direct staff in how to support young people to ensure that they gain the most from their stay. Young people are central to all plans, and staff seek their views and ideas on what they would like to develop and the skills that they would like to learn. Close liaison with education staff and the therapies team ensures consistency in approach and goal-setting. Plans are updated at least half termly to ensure that they remain relevant and challenging to the young people's abilities. Staff record achievements clearly on pre-printed daily records which identify each young person's targets. Further, staff photo-document activities and tasks that young people have engaged in during the week, to provide a journal for both the individual and their family. The half-termly 'The House' booklet for parents involves them further in their child's care, and insight into what their child and the group have achieved during that period.

Staff are committed to their roles and are continually seeking to provide the best quality care and experiences for young people. They research new approaches and initiatives, seeking advice and guidance from specialists such as educational psychologists, paediatricians, and speech and language therapists in order to create a positive environment and experiences for young people. They will accept and try new approaches and exhaust all strategies to meet an individual's needs. When appropriate, staff will act as a translator for parents who have English as a second language in order to support further the care and experiences of the young person, both in school and at home. Partner agencies and professionals are complimentary of the staff team, confirming that staff are eager to learn new skills, yet will also respond to and rectify any issues or concerns that are raised.

The activities on offer to young people are extensive, meeting both their social and emotional needs. Weekly planners identify how each day will be broken up into activities

to ensure that a routine is maintained away from the classroom. When appropriate, young people access groups in the community such as Scouts. During the inspection, all young people were engaged in a sports challenge for a national charity, which included walking, cycling and swimming. Other activities include arts and crafts, baking and trampolining. Young people have also engaged in activities in recognition of autism awareness week.

Young people's medical needs are well catered for. A parent was particularly complimentary of the help and support from staff in gaining a diagnosis for their child's medical condition. The residential provision kept logs of episodes of the young person being unwell and attended medical appointments with the family, aiding them in explaining the symptoms, when the parents had felt unheard. Medication is stored securely and staff are trained in safe administration. Young people are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and learn what this means for them. Healthy eating is promoted and there is a variety of food available. Those with self-imposed limited diets are encouraged to try new foods to broaden their palate.

The accommodation is homely, despite being in an institutional setting. There are several areas for relaxation, group and individual activities. Young people's artwork is displayed in communal areas, along with photographs of young people and staff, providing a sense of belonging. A 'feelings' board gives young people the opportunity to express how they are feeling and to seek the support they may need. Bedrooms are personalised, and are decorated and furnished in line with individual needs. Young people can contact their parents when using the residential provision, and many parents visit them during their stay.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Young people's demeanour and actions demonstrate that they feel safe in the residential provision. They approach various staff when they are worried or upset. Those able to understand the concept of safety said they felt safe in the residential provision, in recent surveys. They have access to an independent listener, who spends time in the provision at least once every half term.

Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's vulnerabilities, anxieties and needs. They take time to settle those who are upset. They identify the cause of the anguish and remedy this whenever possible. Staff are confident in the processes to follow, should they be concerned for a young person's welfare or safety. Staff have received training in child protection and safeguarding, and demonstrate a sound understanding of their responsibilities. Further, staff are knowledgeable regarding exploitation in all its forms, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. Young people who have previously been exploited online are supported to use the internet safely and keep themselves safe. Systems within the computer service also prevent young people from accessing inappropriate content online. The governor charged with safeguarding is

knowledgeable and confident in her role. She has received extensive in-house training, but has yet to access training from an external agency.

Reporting of safeguarding concerns is robust. The local authority officer charged with safeguarding is confident in the school's approach to child protection and feels that it reports concerns to partner agencies as appropriate. He has worked closely with the school to ensure that systems are sound and that concerns are directed to the correct teams within the local authority. Records of concerns are clear and stored securely. A chronology for each incident demonstrates the action taken and any follow-up required. Referrals to the social work duty team are timely, although recent changes to many young people's allocated social worker have not been forwarded to the school. Staff have chased this several times via email, so far with no adequate response.

Young people's individual programmes include sessions on personal safety, relationships and, when appropriate, consent. They have recently completed 'stranger awareness' programmes and will undertake a first aid course in the coming term. They are taught the dangers of being away from adults when in the community and who to approach, should they become lost. There have been no incidents of young people being missing from the provision. However, staff know what to do should this happen. Young people's risk assessments are updated regularly and this allows them to take age-appropriate risk in line with their ability. This includes walking independently to the school and having a key fob with restricted access to both the residential and school buildings.

Behaviour is monitored effectively across the school. The behaviour team regularly reviews incidents, identifying any trends and patterns. Young people's behaviour plans focus on positive reinforcement and redirection. As a result, there has been no restraint used in the residential provision for over a year. When this is agreed, some young people use 'time out' to quieten and calm. However, this is not enforced physically and young people do not have to leave the group. Close liaison with other services within the school and external partner agencies ensures consistency in approach, and new ideas and innovations in the approach to supporting young people. Young people are able to share their feelings after an incident through various communication methods, including pictures and iPads. Bullying is not identified as an issue within the residential provision, and imbalances in power in friendships and relationships are monitored closely.

Young people are protected from avoidable risks through regular maintenance and checks of safety systems, including fire detection systems. They are involved in fire evacuations and all have relevant evacuation plans. Safer recruitment is practised within the school, with a range of pre-employment checks and verifications undertaken prior to staff being allowed to work with young people. However, the safer recruitment policy does not stipulate the length of time an applicant must have lived in the UK for them not to require a police check from other countries where they may have lived or worked.

The head of care, managers and senior staff within the residential provision have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They are keen to improve continually the quality of care provided to young people. Any shortfalls are tackled immediately, leading to a consistently improving service. Reviews of the provision by governors are robust and provide a sufficient level of challenge. The head of care implements these, and the views from young people and their families, in the development plan, which is reviewed half termly. The headteacher and head of care regularly monitor the effectiveness of the residential provision and its impact on the educational progress of young people. They are reflective and critical in their evaluation, and identify strategies to develop and improve the service further. They regularly seek the views and ideas of other agencies and professionals to ensure that the service is continually evolving and implementing the most up-to-date practice and strategies. All policies and procedures have been updated since the last inspection, reflecting changes in initiatives and guidance, both locally and nationally.

The management and senior team encourage staff to have extremely high aspirations for all young people in their care. They model appropriate care and practice, leading by example. Staff are positive about their work and are confident in their roles. They want to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. They feel valued by the leaders and managers of the school and say that they can approach them with any ideas they have. They further comment that they are well trained and have access to a range of learning opportunities. Staff benefit from regular supervision which links directly to targets set in their annual appraisals.

Staff are confident in the skills of their colleagues and feel that they work well as a team. Staff understand their roles in meeting the aims and purpose of the service. There is a high ratio of staff available at all times, affording young people the adult attention required for them to thrive and learn new skills.

Staff work collaboratively with the school and have staff who work across both settings, sit on the behaviour team and liaise closely with class teachers to ensure consistency. They effectively challenge teams or services that they feel are not providing the quality of service required for young people. They also liaise incredibly effectively with parents, engaging them in their child's care, and supporting them with appointments and translation as necessary. There have been no formal complaints since the last inspection, and staff remain in close contact with parents to ensure that any issues are managed swiftly. These usually relate to misplaced belongings. Staff produce comprehensive reports for statutory reviews and meetings, championing the needs and successes of young people very well.

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	110185
Social care unique reference number	SC370928
DfE registration number	871/7035

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	11
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	Two to 19
Headteacher	Debbie Richards
Date of previous boarding inspection	9 February 2015
Telephone number	01753 515560
Email address	debbie.richards@arbourvaleschool.org

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