

Ripplevale School

Ripplevale School, Chapel Lane, Ripple, Deal, Kent CT14 8JG

Inspection dates

15 to 17 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

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Residential pupils receive targeted, bespoke support which enables them to be successful across their personal, academic and social development.
- Excellent relationships between staff and parents foster superb partnership working. Residential pupils receive consistent support, guidance and advice, which greatly increases their chances of success.
- A small but cohesive whole-school staff team effectively contributes to the residential provision, which is highly valued by all. Care plans and targets for residential pupils are implemented seamlessly throughout the school and residential timetable, because of this collective approach.
- Strong safeguarding practice is complemented by regularly refreshed staff training and guidance. Topical issues and risks are effectively shared with parents, thus raising awareness of keeping residential pupils safe at home as well as at school.
- Senior leaders recognise the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision. Despite continuing financial investment, referrals remain slow. However, ambitious development plans see other aspects of the provision growing, in terms of additional internal expertise, such as speech and language support and a developing sixth form. Inspections are embraced as learning and improvement opportunities.

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?

- Review individual activity risk assessments, to ensure that staff are provided with clear instructions about the actions that they need to take.
- Further embed the residential team's appraisal and supervision systems in line with the education model currently in use.

Information about this inspection

The school received three hours' notice of this inspection, which was conducted over three days by one inspector. A full premises tour was undertaken, and interviews were held with the principal, head of school, residential team leader, designated person for safeguarding, business manager, teaching staff and estates manager.

The one residential pupil was absent due to ill health, but their parent was spoken with, and a detailed case tracking exercise was undertaken.

Day pupils, some of whom have accessed the residential facilities, were joined at mealtimes. Their contributions, with regards to the school's support mechanisms and the impact of the school council, were invaluable and secured a strong pupil voice throughout this inspection.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood

lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Ripplevale School is an independent special needs day and residential special school. It caters for a maximum of 80 boys, with 22 residential placements available. Boys who have an autistic spectrum diagnosis and who may also exhibit a range of emotional and social behavioural difficulties can join the school from the age of six to 18 years. The residential provision is managed by the principal, a team leader and a team of care staff. At the time of this inspection, one boy was accommodated in one designated residential house on the main school site near Deal, Kent. The residential provision was last inspected in March 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Residential pupils enjoy their residential experience because it is uniquely tailored to meet their needs. Thoughtfully planned admissions processes are individually designed to welcome new pupils at their own pace. This includes the needs and wishes of their parents, this demonstrates the school's partnership approach towards looking after its pupils. A parent said, 'We were all welcomed, right from the start.'

At the point of admission, residential pupils receive bespoke packages of care and support, which fully incorporate their own views, wishes and aspirations. This inclusive approach increases their feelings of value and self-worth. A parent said, 'My child had poor experiences of education and wasn't attending school before coming here. His confidence has increased significantly because he now feels valued and listened to.' Written care plans and review meeting minutes are steeped in comments and suggestions made by residential pupils who are learning to advocate for themselves. For some individuals, this is a phenomenal achievement.

Consistent staffing levels provide residential pupils with safe and reliable routines. A core group of four permanent staff members works across the residential and teaching provision. A parent said, 'It is the consistency which has really helped.' Minimal staff absence aids this continuity, and there is no use of agency staff. One member of staff commented: 'We support their homework completion and make sure wider interests, such as music, fishing, whatever it is, are built in and provided. We make room for spontaneous activities, but our boys also need structure.' This is achieved through familiar and trusted evening and morning routines. Consequently, eager learners are ready to engage at school.

Across the school, all pupils have a strong voice and influence on school matters. School council members take their roles extremely seriously and encourage their peers to raise matters and ideas through this forum. The council has been influential in determining the nature of extra-curricular clubs and activities, as well as deciding which local and national charities the pupils choose to support. Residential pupils take real ownership of their bedrooms, choosing the décor and selecting which room will be their base throughout their stay. Immaculately clean and tidy bedrooms reflect the way that the boys value their accommodation, and show they practise their independence skills. A member of staff said, 'All of our boys learn how to handle a Hoover and duster!'

Secure, respectful relationships between the staff and residential pupils are central to the pupils' successful outcomes. The importance of learning to communicate effectively, particularly when feeling under pressure, is reinforced at every opportunity. Staff are excellent role models in this regard. They engage respectfully with each other and the pupils, taking time to offer clear explanations and give well-reasoned responses when pupils ask questions. Over lunch pupils said, 'It can be really hard when people don't understand what you're trying to say but they do here,' and, 'They explain things so they make sense.'

This ongoing dialogue encourages residential pupils to engage in meaningful two-way discussions about important aspects of their lives, such as leaving school. A member of staff said, 'It's so important to keep revisiting their choices with them, encourage them to consider all the options.' During the previous inspection, one residential pupil was in the process of making such decisions, and has since elected to move on from the school to commence an apprenticeship he found for himself in his home area. This is a fantastic outcome. He continues to write to the principal using his work email, proudly describing his ongoing achievements. Older pupils learn to take responsibility and to rise to the challenge of taking control of their own futures.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

At the previous inspection, the new head of school was liaising with the care team to better coordinate a whole-school approach to care planning. Superb progress in this regard results in carefully constructed goals and targets, which transfer seamlessly across school and residential time. Success is maximised, and this has a further impact on pupils' desires to continue to achieve.

This focused approach ensures that residential pupils' social and personal achievements transfer into the classroom. For example, building upon their confidence and self-esteem saw one residential pupil increasingly achieving their educational target of asking for help in lessons. Consequently, he is developing in his independence and approach to learning.

Sensitive staff fully appreciate the impact that pupils' past histories and experiences have on their attitude to learning, coping with behavioural expectations and living away from home. Regular key working time explores the pupils' social and personal learning needs, focusing on an educative and empathic approach. As a consequence, residential pupils develop appropriate, effective coping strategies. Those who exhibited challenging behaviours in previous settings no longer do so. Although staff are trained to use physical restraint techniques, no such incidents have occurred within the residential provision for a number of years. Early intervention, including the expert use of de-escalation techniques, encourages pupils to verbalise their frustrations and anxieties and to seek suitable resolution.

Excellent healthcare resources benefit all pupils. Residential staff regularly update their training in first aid and the administration of medication. A dedicated medical room is accessible to all pupils who are unwell or who require treatment during their time at school. When necessary, residential pupils access additional treatment, such as dentistry, with the support of residential staff. One residential pupil refused to engage with this treatment from home, but is now taking greater responsibility for looking after his braces.

Superb catering arrangements are commended by the pupils. A suitably qualified catering team uses local butchers and suppliers for fresh, high-quality produce and has again been awarded a five-star health rating. The team understands and accommodates

any presenting dietary needs and allergies of individuals. Over lunch, one pupil explained, 'I'm not allowed to have a lot of things. It's fine though because they always make sure I get things I like.' Pupils take turns in clearing tables and tidying up after themselves and each other. Supervising staff encourage meaningful conversations and gently remind the boys about social graces and good manners. Meal times are relaxed, social occasions, subtly used as a teaching tool for life skills.

Residential staff embrace their responsibility to know residential pupils well. Throughout this inspection, staff expanded upon the content of written care plans, explaining in detail precisely why and how specific methods of teaching and communication are either used or avoided for specific pupils. Parents endorse this finding. One said: 'They know him so well. He responds superbly to the boundaries and loves the routine. It is absolutely the right environment for him.'

A wide range of activities is routinely reviewed to ensure their continuing relevance and benefit. Residential pupils set the scene for these and are encouraged to try new experiences, which enrich their lives. Recent events include going to the theatre for the first time and offering to assist with the lower school summer camping trip. Some activities become regular hobbies and pastimes. One residential pupil has become more adept and adventurous with his cookery talents. His parents said, 'It's great. He's cooking for us at home now!'

Senior leaders recognise the potential limitations of such a small residential provision. This is echoed by parents. One parent said, 'The only thing I would change is to have more residential pupils to broaden his social experiences and friendship group.' The school's commitment to the remaining pupil remains strong. High staffing levels, and a generous activity budget enable him to invite school friends back for evening activities, and sleepovers are currently being considered.

Superior quality accommodation is highly valued by all. The main house accommodates a dining room, kitchen, medical room and therapy rooms, which are accessed by all staff and pupils. Residential areas, including a lounge, staff office, bedrooms and bathrooms, are all suitably, but not obviously, protected within the same building. This creates a natural flow throughout the house. It looks homely and inviting, beautifully furnished and very well maintained.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Competent, well-informed staff understand the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures. They implement these fully in practice. A highly skilled and experienced designated person translates legislative and local authority guidance into clear and effective procedures for staff to follow. Combined with a mixture of regularly refreshed external and internal training sessions, all of the school's staff maintain their understanding and skills. Additions to the staff training schedule over the last year include 'Prevent' duty awareness and updates made to the Department for Education guidance, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'.

When translated into practice examples, staff identify how they implement the training in their own actions. Their own roles and responsibilities are very well understood. For

example, residential staff speak about the risks associated with lone working, and a member of the caretaking team noticed potential hazards in the car park. As a result, he now patrols this area when school transport is arriving and leaving. One residential pupil was spending a lot of time using a games console, and staff have extended their 1:1 key working time to include discussions about the risks of making online friends.

The school's e-safety lead provides an added layer of teaching for pupils in how to manage themselves safely when using the internet and social media sites. In recognition of pupils' vulnerabilities, the school restricts their ability to bring in mobile phones, but recognises their access to such equipment when at home. Consequently, pupils are taught about the associated risks of using Facebook, Instagram and online chat rooms. Other current topics are factored into such guidance, including radicalisation and an increasing focus upon sex and relationships when pupils reach the sixth form. This rounded approach strikes an excellent balance between protecting pupils and providing them with the information that they need to start thinking for themselves.

No child protection concerns have been raised within the residential provision since the last inspection. Nor have there been any allegations made against staff members. However, a number of day pupils and their families are receiving support and intervention from the school and local authority services. In this regard, the designated person's actions in making consultations and referrals to safeguarding agencies have been prompt and necessary. One such incident involves a case of internet bullying, which has led to liaison with the local area designated officer and headteachers from other schools.

A similar diligence is evident with regards to lower level concerns that staff may identify. The designated person explained, 'I tell every staff member to think about the subtle signs. Possible indicators that something isn't right.' This approach generates a high number of welfare discussions, which do not always reach the threshold of reporting to child protection agencies. However, this practice does result in excellent quality monitoring from a welfare perspective, which enables the whole-school team to consider early intervention and support. Examples have included making additional contact with parents and carers to offer practical support and liaising with social workers and foster carers to ensure a coordinated approach.

This practice of partnership working is further demonstrated by the school's educative approach towards parents and carers. Its recent drive to promote awareness about child sexual exploitation included providing information about the work of Operation Willow, a Kent Safeguarding Children Board initiative aimed at prevention and increasing everyone's awareness and responsibilities. This example typifies the school's drive to equip parents and carers with the skills and knowledge that they need to protect and educate their children at home.

As pupils become older, the school adopts an increasingly flexible approach towards potentially risky activities. Through the growing sixth-form provision, pupils' need to become increasingly independent is carefully supported. Some pupils are beginning to use public transport and others are developing their social and interpersonal skills in new settings, such as local colleges. For some, this means spending time without direct staff support. School staff speak knowledgeably about the potential risks for pupils and the public, including potentially misunderstood communication and behaviour, but this is not

always accurately captured within current individual risk assessments. The school is advised to review its guidance in this regard, to ensure that all staff fully understand their responsibilities in protecting confidentiality while ensuring a pupil's well-being.

Residential pupils are accommodated in well-equipped, safe and secure surroundings. A slick maintenance and repairs system keeps safety risks to a minimum. This is further complemented by the regularity of routine health and safety checks, which include fire safety. No new staff have joined the residential team, but strong recruitment practice has been implemented for other positions within the school. Pupils are protected from potentially unsafe adults as a result.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Through diligent internal monitoring, combined with a keen understanding of the wider sector, senior leaders have a clear vision of their continuing development of the school. Consequently, its ongoing well-planned gradual growth secures its financial viability and the commitment of a stable, long-serving staff team. Well thought-out succession planning further secures strong leadership arrangements. For example, the residential team leader has recently undertaken designated person's training and is learning the role through shadowing the current post holder.

Additional posts have also been appointed to, with regards to a special education needs coordinator and a qualified speech and language therapist. The sixth-form provision, introduced last year, is continuing to attract interest from parents and pupils who need to consider the next stage of their education. It is therefore disappointing to the senior leadership team that the residential provision has not enjoyed similar growth. Nevertheless, the school's commitment to its remaining pupil remains; there are no plans to withdraw the residential resource at this time.

A small residential team provides consistent, high-quality care and support, which sees superb progress being made. Regular working patterns ensure stability and consistency, which is particularly necessary for the residential pupil currently in placement. Staff maintain their skills and knowledge through regularly refreshed mandatory training, as well as by attending new and additional courses which enhance their skills. Examples include higher-level child protection training, and every member of the residential team currently has a minimum of a level 3 diploma qualification in childcare.

At the previous inspection, the residential team leader and the new head of school were establishing greater linkage between care and educational targets and plans. This is now embedded, so they have moved on to assessing the residential team's supervision and appraisal process against the one used in school. The latter is a superior model and its benefits are obvious for the residential team who already have additional roles and responsibilities as teaching assistants during the school day.

Three recommendations were made at the previous inspection, and all have been acted on. The school welcomes the inspection process, as is demonstrated by incorporating such feedback within its evolving development and action plans. No complaints have been received since the last inspection. A parent said, 'If I had cause to complain, I

would. But the team are so easy to approach and speak with. Anything I wish to discuss gets quickly dealt with.'

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 that the boarding/residential provision has had on 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's 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 that their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or that their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	118995
Social care unique reference number	SC023668
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	1
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	Six to18
Headteacher	Mr Ted Schofield
Date of previous boarding inspection	23 March 2015
Telephone number	01304 373866
Email address	info@ripplevaleschool.co.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

