

# Arbour Vale School

Arbour Vale School, Farnham Road, Farnham Royal, Slough SL2 3AE

## Inspection dates

20/09/2016 to 22/09/2016

## 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

- Inspirational senior leaders have embedded a strong culture of celebrating young people's achievements. They maintain a high standard of scrutiny and monitoring to ensure that young people's experience of the residential provision is positive.
- Managers embrace research-based practices and adapt these to the young people's needs. Behaviour interventions and care plans are individually tailored. Thus they are effective.
- Young people enjoy their stays. They are enthusiastic participants in activities held within the residential service, school grounds and the local community.
- Young people make superb social and academic progress. They learn to manage their emotions within the residential and school settings. Previously at risk of exclusion, they are now able to successfully manage the school day.
- There is a strong ethos of excellence in sports and integration into the community. All young people relish having the opportunity to compete in their chosen sport. As a consequence, they are also expanding their social horizons and gaining confidence.
- Effective safeguarding arrangements protect young people. They report that they feel safe. This is strengthened by staff who ensure that young people have access to a range of communication methods to express their views and feelings.

### 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?**

Consider a more formalised, focused approach to gathering young people's views.

### **Information about this inspection**

Ofsted conducted this inspection with three hours' notice. On arrival, an initial meeting was held with the headteacher and head of care. Inspection activities included observation of residential practice over two evenings and informal discussions and observations with young people at the residential service. The inspector also held interviews with residential care staff, the educational psychologist, director of physical education and governors. Telephone interviews were held with the director of education, social worker manager and parents. Questionnaires for young people were analysed during the inspection. Information was provided by the local statutory safeguarding authority, and a tour of the accommodation and school was undertaken. A wide range of documentation concerning the residential provision was scrutinised.

### **Inspection team**

Suzy Lemmy

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 moderate and severe learning difficulties. Some pupils have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The school's residential provision, Arbour Vale House, is purpose-built and located within the school grounds. There is accommodation for 12 pupils. The stated aim of the residential provision is to work on specific objectives with pupils who attend the residential service through education programmes, extended learning opportunities and the delivery of a 24-hour curriculum. Overnight placements are from Monday evening to Friday morning, inclusive.

## Inspection Judgements

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

**Outstanding**

Young people make exceptional personal, social and academic progress. They thoroughly enjoy their time at the residential service. This is enhanced by an extensive activity programme which promotes social opportunities and new experiences. Resources and activities include the sensory room, hydrotherapy pool and adapted bikes. Young people are also active in the local community. Some attend local social groups, such as the Scouts. Canoeing, go-karting and fishing are also very popular. One young person, who was asked about his favourite activity said, 'Go-karting and bikes!' Parents and carers value these opportunities. One parent said, 'My child wants to go back to the school after a couple of weeks of the school holiday. He prefers all the activities laid on there.'

Staff ensure that young people recognise the importance of protecting their own personal safety during these busy and exciting times, for example, by assisting them to complete a safety assessment of the area before a fishing trip. Such practice encourages young people to think for themselves as part of growing up. In order to further enhance their future life chances, staff have organised an adventure holiday to enable the young people to transfer the daily living skills that they have learnt in school to a more challenging environment.

Staff further promote independence through programmes tailored to the young people's specific needs, for example, independent self-care, walking to school and using public transport. Young people who can demonstrate safe behaviour are given fobs to front doors. This gives them additional responsibility and recognition of their maturity. Their self-esteem soars as they are gaining the skills that will prepare them for moving on to adult placements. The staff's embedded practice of recording, evaluating and celebrating such achievements means that each young person's achievements are very well evidenced. This is extremely helpful for the staff of their next placement and aids continuity.

Staff forge extremely positive relationships with parents and this is of huge benefit for the whole family. Staff work closely with parents to help them to learn strategies to reduce challenging behaviours at home. One parent said, 'The home helped my child to become independent in her personal care and to eat more fruit and vegetables. She is able to do this at home too.' Another parent explained, 'Staff have taught my child to indicate how she is feeling, for example, if she is tired or hungry. The staff are very patient.' This forward-thinking service wants to improve such partnerships further and is working alongside an external family worker who is offering support for families within the home environment. The aim is to provide an even more consistent approach across both settings. This inclusive approach extends to young people who are very much involved in setting their own areas of self-development. One young person has identified the behaviours that he needs to reduce in order to reach his goal to stay at home for an extra night.

Residential staff fully support a 24-hour curriculum. They contribute to the young people's educational needs by providing quiet spaces for homework. The concept of learning extends beyond young people's academic achievements. Some young people are working towards a first aid and/or rebound therapy qualification. While increasing

their awareness of safety issues and healthy lifestyles, they are being equipped with essential life skills for the future. Young people engage in arts and crafts after the evening meal to create a calm atmosphere before bedtime. Staff read to them as part of the bedtime routine. This has improved young people's sleep patterns. Those who previously found it difficult are now able to sleep through the night.

A trained nurse devises and reviews healthcare plans and ensures that staff undertake appropriate training. Staff are able to meet young people's health needs effectively, for example, by administering their required medication. They fully support young people to attend medical appointments by using social stories. This approach prepares them for what to expect and greatly reduces their anxieties.

Staff are excellent role models. They motivate the young people to demonstrate socially acceptable behaviours. There have been no physical interventions since the last inspection. Staff are well trained and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of de-escalation and distraction techniques to maintain a calm atmosphere. Their expertise and practice has been further enhanced by the adoption of a new database that helps senior managers to collate, record and evaluate data. A continually reflective and analytical response is effective in predicting triggers and reducing challenging behaviours. As a result, young people are learning to take responsibility for their own behaviours. One young person is now able to self-calm by moving away from stressful situations. He is also able to tell staff what is making him unhappy, something that he was unable to do before he accessed the residential service.

Young people's emotional well-being is a top priority. Staff are suitably trained to support young people's mental health issues and ensure targeted specialist support is available if necessary. Young people's emotional well-being is enhanced by the loving and nurturing environment which ensures that they feel cared for and valued.

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

### **Outstanding**

Staff are meticulous in gathering information from parents, carers, teachers, social workers and health professionals prior to a young person joining the residential service. This forms a comprehensive approach to care planning. At the point of joining the residential service, a baseline assessment is completed as a tool to measure continuing progress. Excellent communication is grounded in the close liaison between residential and education staff through handovers prior to and after the school day. Consultations with the speech and language therapist, occupational therapists and an educational psychologist ensure that practice is consistent across all settings. Staff were observed using a variety of methods to aid young people's communication. The speech and language therapist said, 'Staff do an amazing job, they are so well trained and keep up to date. They use a range of communication methods to suit the young people. There is not much more I can do.'

Staff know each young person extremely well. They consistently implement supportive nurturing strategies to promote positive outcomes. Care plans identify young people's needs with specific targets to promote their development. Staff review these targets regularly to ensure that they remain purposeful. Detailed care plans include a snapshot of the young person for quick reference. These are readily available to ensure that staff have vital medical information to hand, in the event of an emergency.

The physical environment provides excellent multi-sensory stimulation. Young people access a sensory room that is designed to be adaptable to a home environment. There is also a quiet area for study and therapeutic learning. Arts and crafts are readily accessible to young people to stimulate learning and social skills through play. Young people make good use of visual prompts displayed on the walls. These help them to express their feelings. As a result, young people are better able to communicate a wider range of their emotions. One young person was observed using a visual timetable independently to help him with his evening routine.

Social communication skills are nurtured. Lego therapy, where young people have to communicate with each other to build blocks, promotes trust, patience and visual and verbal communication. Displays around the residential service depicting positive values and ethics are further complemented by the staff who role model tolerance and valuing diversity. Young people learn to mirror this and engage with each other in constructive ways.

Staff actively listen to and act upon young people's views, wishes and ideas. Questionnaires solicit meaningful feedback because they are adapted to suit the young people's abilities. Communication boards, used by the young people to request activities, are easily accessible. Young people confidently contribute to their annual review meetings using a range of communication methods suited to their needs. One young person represents the residential pupils at the student council and he ensures that he gains the views of the other young people prior to a meeting. However, there is no similar forum exclusively for the residential service. The head of care is keen to develop this in conjunction with the speech and language therapist.

Young people benefit from a healthy and varied diet of their choice. The catering manager works skilfully with the young people to arrive at healthy and desirable menus. Staff follow suit and help the young people to make fruit smoothies for evening snacks to involve them in learning about healthy eating. This activity was observed to be very popular during the inspection.

Staff work with the educational psychologist to use a research-based approach. Lego therapy and rebound therapy are effective interventions and young people's emotional well-being is promoted by strategic targets in areas of social thinking and mindfulness. The educational psychologist commended the staff's additional skills and said, 'The staff are empowered to go above and beyond on a daily basis.'

Staff promote and celebrate young people's diversity. Examples include cooking halal meat, using young people's preferred communications aids, encouraging one young person to listen to a recording of the Quran as his calming strategy and researching varying places of worship. Staff celebrate festivals with young people and act as interpreters for families. More recently, the young people actively participated in Autism Awareness Week to raise its positive profile.

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

## **Outstanding**

The welfare and protection of young people are fundamental to all practice. Highly effective safeguarding systems are successful. Good-quality training ensures that staff have the necessary understanding of issues that can pose risks to young people, such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, including how such risks can be heightened

by a young person's disability. Safeguarding concerns are diligently recorded and monitored for patterns and trends which may indicate that further intervention is required to support the welfare of a young person. This practice is enhanced by an innovative database which records all safeguarding issues for clear analysis. All staff are familiar with this system and are confident to use it. Each concern is shared with all staff and professionals involved in a young person's care. Sensitive information remains confidential and filters ensure that it is only available to the staff who need to know it. Senior managers review all safeguarding incidents and oversee all data added. They understand that seemingly small concerns can build up an evolving picture that requires intervention. No safeguarding referrals in relation to young people in the residential service have been necessary since the last inspection.

Managers and staff work in conjunction with external professionals to ensure young people's safety in the residential service and at home. Joint working has prevented a young person from needing to be placed in an alternative provision away from the family. Staff have worked closely with parents, for example by role modelling strategies to demonstrate how to prevent challenging behaviours. This has been instrumental in the parents' decision for the young person to remain at home with a shared care arrangement. Staff also supported the local authority in relation to a safeguarding situation that occurred in a young person's home environment. They attended safeguarding meetings and continue to monitor the young person closely, reporting any concerns. The manager of the social work team stated, 'The residential service is a very valued resource for us and parents.'

Written risk assessments provide staff with the guidance and strategies that they need to provide young people with a protective environment. Changes to this guidance are swiftly communicated as risks change and young people mature. This approach enables young people to take measured risks which aids their continuing growth and development.

Following an advisory recommendation from the last inspection, the school's safeguarding governance has been strengthened. A new chair of governors, with extensive knowledge of safeguarding in educational settings, has been appointed. He undertakes external training to ensure that he remains up to date with legislative and practice changes.

There have been no incidents of young people leaving the residential service without permission. The high level of supervision and young people's close relationships with staff mean that young people have no desire to leave. An appropriate policy is in place to safeguard them if such an event should occur and relevant documentation has been updated.

Comprehensive health and safety systems protect young people. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied, including fire drills. Staff recruitment processes have improved. The safer recruitment policy has been revised and updated in line with an advisory recommendation from the last inspection.

High staffing ratios ensure close but unobtrusive supervision for the young people. A number of potential risks are reduced, such as bullying incidents. This is further strengthened by a strong whole school culture of the tolerance and acceptance of all young people. The staff's educative approach has led to young people designing posters and completing questionnaires on this topic. Young people demonstrate that they have a good understanding of how to recognise and report bullying.

Young people are learning to keep themselves safe with regards to their use of the internet. Staff effectively use the school's internet policies and procedures but they do not overly rely upon filters and restrictions. More so, they engage young people in meaningful e-safety training to educate them about the wider risks when they are away from school. Staff have devised a booklet to advise parents on how to keep their child safe at home and within the community. This guidance includes the school's complaints procedure, e-safety advice, signs of child abuse and how to recognise it. Further parental guidance includes what to do if their child is being bullied, including the actions that the residential service will take to safeguard young people. Strong partnership working values parents and carers, and ensures that the school's safeguarding procedures are transparent.

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

### **Outstanding**

Highly effective leadership and management of the residential service enable staff to create a safe, nurturing environment. Within this, young people develop self-care and independence skills, and are given the opportunities that they need to reach their potential. The head of care is aspirational and dedicated to improving the service. She has clear management oversight and seeks to continually find new ways for the young people to make progress and achieve.

The headteacher and head of care work closely together to ensure that young people receive an extremely high standard of care. This is mirrored by the strong relationships between the residential and school staff. Any staffing shortages in the residential provision are met by the school staff who enjoy spending this time with the young people and know them well. Links between the headteacher and the residential service are further enhanced by the headteacher's daily visit to the service. In addition to these social visits, the headteacher also undertakes 'learning walks', which are unannounced and are well focused on checking the quality of provision. This promotes an ethos of constructive feedback and development of the service.

Continuous and effective monitoring on all levels maintains an outstanding service and drives improvement. New systems in place have improved internal monitoring. Active involvement with external monitoring and quick responses to recommendations result in robust actions by the head of care to make improvements. Sophisticated data systems track young people's actual progress in comparison to their predicted progress. The latest results show that young people in the residential provision are exceeding their predicted progress. An obvious measure of this success is that young people who were at risk of being excluded from school now manage the school day without incidents. This superb achievement has reduced the number of young people being educated in out of county provision. The director of education reported, 'The residential service has been successful. It has significantly reduced the amount of young people needing to attend out of county placements and it has served its purpose and more.'

Regular weekly team meetings ensure that staff discuss relevant issues relating to each young person. Staff receive training following these meetings. All staff have the level 3 qualification in childcare or are enrolled on it. Young people benefit from experienced and highly competent staff who receive relevant training to keep them safe and to promote their development. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal which improves their practice. Recent new staff have transferred from the school to work more



directly with young people in a home environment. They are being supported to work confidently with young people in this different setting.

Staff work as a close-knit team. One staff member said, 'If you are struggling with a young person's behaviour, there is always someone around who will approach you and offer their support.' Another staff member said, 'The difference between here and other places I've worked is that you never feel that you will be left alone to get on with it. Support is always available.'

The school's strong inclusion ethos provides the young people with many opportunities to excel. Its links with local and national initiatives inspire young people to compete in their chosen field. Young people have participated in celebration ceremonies and promoted their school within the sporting community. Strong local business links further enhance the employability of the young people. Some have been offered apprenticeships and pathways to careers in subjects like the performing arts. School leavers return to mentor current young people during school skiing trips. Having positive role models to look up to motivates young people to be successful. Innovative links have been forged with the adjacent mainstream school where its pupils gain coaching qualifications, which they use to tutor the young people. This wider school community benefits all involved.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110185
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC370928
<b>DfE registration number</b>	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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	11
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	2 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Debbie Richards
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	14/03/2016
<b>Telephone number</b>	01753515560
<b>Email address</b>	debbie.richards@arbourvaleschool.org

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