

Ramsden Hall Academy

Ramsden Hall Academy, Heath Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, Essex CM11 1HN

Inspection dates

05/10/2016 to 07/10/2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good **2**

The quality of care and support

Good 2

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good 2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The children continue to make progress academically, socially and behaviourally as a result of their boarding experience.
- The boarding service is valued as part of the whole school. There is an integrated approach to meeting the children's needs.
- The management team for the boarding service is explicit that it will not tolerate any negative behaviour from the children which places themselves or others at risk. Children enjoy boarding so this basic understanding is important to maintaining a stable and protected environment.
- The children participate in a range of stimulating recreational activities. Each activity is carefully assessed. Staff are not risk-averse and the children get the chance to try new and exciting pursuits. Children learn to take instructions, work as a team and develop their social skills.
- Children make progress because they have developed secure relationships with the staff, who understand their needs and vulnerabilities well. Staff are skilled at managing them, reassuring them and helping them to settle. As a result, children's behaviour stabilises and they enjoy their stays.

- Feedback from families, social workers and external professionals is generally very good. The school has good relationships with families, and is supportive and flexible so that the children and their parents benefit from the boarding service.
- There are areas of practice that the school could improve further. In one instance, a member of staff was appointed before all references had been received. This represents a shortfall in the minimum standards, but the impact is limited and will not affect the judgement for that area. References for new staff are not confirmed verbally prior to confirmation of employment. The accommodation requires investment to provide good-quality, homely residential accommodation.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

- Ensure that the school operates safe recruitment and adopts recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State, with particular reference to making sure that references have been obtained and scrutinised before appointment (national minimum standard 14.1).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school should follow best practice in safer recruitment by verbally confirming references before appointing new members of staff.
- Boarding accommodation needs to be improved and updated to provide good-quality, homely residential provision for the children.

Information about this inspection

The Principal, Mr Garry Walker, was informed of this inspection as the school day began, and two inspectors arrived about one and a half hours after this phone call. Inspection activity involved talking with boarders, a tour of the accommodation with two children and joining children for mealtimes. Staff handover meetings and interactions with children were observed, and children's case files were scrutinised. Inspectors looked at policies, had discussions with key boarding staff and talked to two parents, which all provided evidence used to complete this report. Comments were obtained from social workers and external professionals.

Inspection team

Fiona Littlefield
Joanne Heller

Lead social care inspector
Second social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Ramsden Hall Academy is a maintained residential special school for 83 male pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Billericay, with residential on the site, with 27 pupils residing at the school for between one and three nights a week. The school caters for pupils with a statement of special educational needs or Education Health Care Plan that deems them to have Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. The residential provision was last inspected in March 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Children make progress in meeting their educational and behavioural milestones as a direct result of their boarding experiences. Staff and managers follow a rigorous admission process to ensure that the children and their families know what to expect from the service, and that children commit to behaving in a way that keeps them and other children safe. Children want to board, and this voluntary engagement lies at the heart of their success.

Leaders and managers work closely together. Staff and managers approach the care for children holistically, assessing progress in terms of academic, emotional and behavioural improvements. They can rely on accurate data about the children's progress, but also use feedback from the children, their families, professionals and local authorities. They have a clear view of the quality of the service that they provide, can identify strengths and have plans to tackle areas of development. The education and boarding services are seen as distinct but mutually supportive. Children benefit from this highly integrated and personal approach.

The boarding service is organised round the needs of the children, so listening to their views and opinions is central to the care that they receive. Children confirm that they help to choose activities, what they want to eat and what nights they want to board. They feel that they are taken notice of by staff, who will help them come to a solution. They say that their voice is heard and that the children's residential council is effective. Children particularly liked being asked to, and were able to, vote for best female and male members of staff. As a result, it is one environment where they relax without stress or pressure. One child said: 'I used to be known as "Mr Fight club" but now I'm much calmer and never fight now.'

The quality of care and support

Good

Children benefit from their stays in boarding, because they have developed secure relationships with staff who know their needs well and speak fondly of them. Staff are adept at settling the children down so that they can enjoy their time, such as at the end of the school day, when children rush in to tell them their news, or at night when staff will read them a story. Staff are highly skilled in interacting with the children and they all value the relationships and mutual respect that are important factors in the success of the service. One member of staff said: 'The relationship with the children is like a favourite auntie. All of us really care about the boys. It's a joy to watch them grow, thrive and develop, and see the changes.' Staff talk to children, calming some children's exuberance, persuading others to wear appropriate clothing for an activity or suggesting that a very shy child might show some card tricks to the inspector to build their confidence. Children relax, and this is reflected in calm and stable behaviour.

Mealtimes provide an important opportunity for staff to promote children's health. The school provides food that is healthy, attractive and of good quality. Staff from across the

school promote awareness of a balanced diet, but are also extremely skilled in teaching the children basic social manners, so that they listen to one another and exchange ideas. No child is ever left unattended, with the result that children enjoy mealtimes, seeing them as a social event.

Children benefit from a plethora of activities that they can participate in, from indoor games to a wide range of sports activities. Each activity is extensively assessed so that children are always safe. At the same time, staff are not risk-averse. Some staff have specific qualifications to teach challenging pursuits, such as sailing, kayaking and archery. Some of the children were recently taken on an activity holiday by the head of care, supported by other staff. The children helped out with cooking and washing, and participated in sports, such as sailing and wall-climbing. This was the first holiday that many of them had ever experienced. Children find this exciting and challenging and it enhances their self-esteem.

Staff and managers are engaged in a programme of improving and updating individual care plans for the children who attend boarding. This work identifies individual targets and how they will be met, key working sessions and progress against behavioural, social and educational milestones. Children are clearly involved and their views are included. This produces a consolidated plan for the child, reflecting the work of the whole school. Children are aware of this cooperative approach, and it helps them feel secure.

The quality of accommodation provided is adequate, in that it provides the space for children and they like it. Staff have worked hard to try to brighten areas to make them more child-friendly. However, the decor is somewhat tired, with poor lighting and paintwork flaking away. Overall, the accommodation requires investment to provide good-quality, homely residential accommodation.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Safety lies at the heart of practice in the boarding service. The head of care meets prospective new boarders and their families for an introductory discussion to spell out goals and expectations. He is explicit that any negative behaviour which places themselves or others at risk will not be tolerated. Children enjoy boarding and want to come, so this basic understanding is important in maintaining a stable and protected environment. Children know who they can talk to, and most issues are sorted out immediately. However, if they have made a formal complaint, this is dealt with quickly and decisively. Consequently children are safe and feel safe.

Staff and managers in the boarding team compile an assessment of all known risks, matching them with clear management strategies. These are well set out, give the context behind that child's behaviour and include the child's views. The number of negative incidents in boarding is extremely low. Children are clear that there is no tolerance of bullying and, if it occurs, it is dealt with immediately and comprehensively. There have been no incidents of restraint or of children going missing since the last inspection.

Staff and managers work together across boarding and education departments, and information is reviewed daily and weekly. Staff and managers place a high value on

accurate information and are purposeful in making sure that issues are shared and responded to. If it emerges that a child has been involved in unsafe behaviour in school, this will affect their boarding time. For instance, one child who had been involved in an altercation in school was still allowed to come to boarding, but was not assessed to be safe enough to go out on a cycling activity with the other children. Children learn that there are consequences for their behaviour and that staff and their families are working together. This helps them to feel secure and stabilises their behaviour.

Staff are clear what to do if they have any concerns about a child. They take appropriate action to support them in school, and they work in partnership with families to support parents too. This means that children are safer as a result of being a boarder.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training and are confident that they could deal with any child protection issue effectively. Both staff and managers are aware that the risks of internet abuse or grooming are particularly prevalent. The school operates a system of parental controls within the building and children are required to hand in any electronic devices at night. However, staff and managers are also aware that the children need to know how to use the internet safely. They have used imaginative television programmes or games to reveal some of the hidden dangers and how to deal with threatening or intimidating messages. As a result, children learn how to keep themselves safe.

Children's behaviour also improves because they are looked after by staff whose good opinion matters to them. Domestic and personal routines are clear and explicit, so children know what is expected. For instance, they learn to bring down their washing, keep themselves clean and tidy and make basic snacks or drinks. A very stable staff team is expert at recognising signs of conflict and de-escalating it. One member of staff said about one child: 'I have known him for a year. We hit it off and I have seen him every time he comes into boarding. I am aware when he is struggling and can help to calm him down.' Children respond especially well to the points system, which rewards good behaviour and which can lead to helping to choose activities and assuming more responsibilities. If a child behaves badly, sanctions can be applied, but these are rare and always allow the child to redeem themselves through improved responses. One external professional commented: 'The key is spending time with them, so they will play or watch them play football, or watch TV or play games with them.'

All staff appreciate the importance of maintaining a safe and pleasant school environment. For instance, the caretaking team works with the headteacher to ensure that the building and grounds are attractive and safe. This means that children learn to take pride in their environment.

Staff recruitment is not always in line with best practice. One member of staff was appointed before full checks were completed, and this represents a breach of the minimum standard. However, the impact is limited, in that this only occurred once and the current team is extremely stable. In addition, the school is not verbally confirming references. This is raised as a point of improvement for the school to consider how to ensure that its procedures are sound and robust.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Good

The boarding service is managed by an effective and skilled team. The head of care gained his national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 4 in 2010 and has several years' experience of work in this field. The team has recently been strengthened by an additional experienced officer who is also qualified to NVQ level 4. Managers are currently working on some shifts during the week to oversee and reinforce good practice. The staff team is extremely stable, with the most recent member of staff recruited in 2014.

The management team places a high value on training, and all staff have appropriate qualifications at NVQ level 3, and receive regular training to equip them with the necessary skills to maintain a good service to the children. Staff have all had yearly appraisals and confirm that supervision is now regular. Staff speak highly of the management team, feel that on-call arrangements are sound and that they are well supported. Children benefit from being looked after by staff who feel valued themselves.

Both staff and managers in the boarding provision are clear that the ultimate purpose of the service is to support a child's learning. At the same time, they are extremely proud of the contribution that boarding makes to the child's overall development, including how they meet their social and behavioural outcomes. For instance, the mother of one child said: 'He gets to say something about activities. It really helps his learning as he is totally different. He has learned to get along with others and how to start looking after himself, his routines, making a cup of tea.' This means that children are equipped with skills that prepare them for adult life. This helps them to view the future with more confidence.

Staff and managers work closely with colleagues in the school's leadership team to evaluate the service and the quality of care provided. Data which compares attendance levels, behavioural incidents and the academic achievements of boarders with non-boarding children is scrutinised. For instance, school attendance for boarders is 15% higher than for non-boarders. In terms of educational attainment, boarders are more likely to achieve GCSE grades in English and mathematics than non-boarders. Information is reviewed in the context of feedback and comments, as well as compliments and complaints from the children, families and a range of professionals. Managers and leaders across the school know the individual children who attend boarding extremely well, so plans are tailor-made to address their care. Children benefit from this highly integrated approach to their care.

The school is in the process of joining an academic trust, which gives an additional level of inquiry into the service that the school provides. Senior managers acknowledge that the boarding service has a discrete role, but also concentrate on how the educational and boarding sides of the school support one another and help the children to acquire life skills. For instance, senior managers in the school, the care management team and the trust are working to secure funding to improve boarding accommodation. This will include developing specific areas for the children to develop independence skills as they prepare for adult life.

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	115449
Social care unique reference number	SC018026
DfE registration number	881/7021

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	27
Gender of boarders	Male
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Principal	Mr Garry Walker
Date of previous boarding inspection	01/03/2016
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