

The Ashley School Academy Trust

The Ashley School Academy Trust, Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 4EU

Inspection dates	16/11/2016 to 18/11/2016	
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:

- The children make excellent social, emotional and educational progress, as a result of the support they receive from a high-quality team of residential staff.
- There is an extremely strong culture of continuous improvement, underpinned by a commitment to rigorous external scrutiny and self-critical review.
- The children enjoy residential life. They engage in a variety of activities which provide them with the opportunity to experience new things.
- The staff manage the children's behaviour extremely well. There have been no restraints or incidents of bullying in the residential provision since the last inspection.
- The service works exceptionally well with parents, carers and professionals and receives consistently outstanding feedback from them.
- The service engages with a wide variety of external agencies to improve the lives of the children.
- The staff access research-informed training and development opportunities. They are proactive at transforming theory into practice.
- Risk assessments have improved. Activity risk assessments are thorough and well

monitored and contribute to keeping children safe.

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 when residential staff do not have a relevant level 3 qualification, but hold another qualification, which managers consider demonstrates the same competencies, a mapping exercise to demonstrate this equivalency is undertaken. This should identify any potential gaps in demonstrable competencies and how they will be addressed.

Information about this inspection

One inspector undertook the inspection over three days. The inspector contacted the school at 09.15 on the first day of inspection; the inspection started within three and a half hours of this contact. Inspection activity included discussions with children, residential staff, the headteacher, deputy headteacher (behaviour for learning), lead pupil and family support worker and the residential team leader as well as parents, external professionals and social workers of residential children. A full tour of the residential premises was undertaken and the inspector spent time with children in each part of the residential accommodation. Documents checked include case files, placement plans, risk assessments, monitoring reports and policies and procedures in place within the school.

Inspection team

Ashley Hinson

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 137 pupils of either gender aged between seven and 16 years. The school currently has 54 children who stay between one and four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for children with moderate learning difficulties who have associated disabilities such as speech and language disorders, autism, and behaviour difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

This is an outstanding provision. Children in boarding make progress that exceeds that of peers who do not board. They make excellent progress socially, emotionally and academically as a result of the support that they receive in the residential provision. Parents and professionals report that children make significant progress in relation to their social and behavioural needs. Children grow in confidence and develop their capacity to manage their behaviour. As a result, the behaviour of children is excellent. A strong culture of safeguarding, underpinned by a valued and experienced safeguarding lead, ensures that children feel safe. Feedback from professionals is consistently outstanding. One child's social worker said: 'They are invested in the children. They want what is best for him. He knows them well and trusts them. My experience has been very positive, both in terms of my relationship with them and what they are doing with the child. He is happy here and we know he is safe.'

The interaction between the children and the staff is excellent. Good humour characterises these communications. A parent stated: 'There is a friendly atmosphere. Everyone seems bright and happy and focused on the job.' The staff are sensitive to the needs and abilities of the children. They support the children to develop their independence skills, thus increasing their self-esteem and preparing them for life after school. A parent said: 'They work a lot on their social skills and their independence skills through personalised plans. He learns things in residence that he now does at home. They are pushing his independence.' Another said: 'He has come along a lot in his confidence and self-esteem and can see that he can do things.'

The children speak very positively about the service. They are able to identify a range of adults whom they can contact if they have worries or concerns. They say that the staff help them if they have any worries or concerns. Consequently, they say that they feel safe.

The managers and staff embrace challenge and scrutiny as a vehicle for continual improvement. The service has responded to the disappointment of the last Ofsted inspection judgement with a rigorous and effective drive to improve the quality of the service.

Leaders and managers have strong and effective relationships with families. A social worker commented: 'They have good relationships with families but are able to communicate clearly about what is not working well, as well as what is working well.'

The children benefit from outstanding care and support. They make significant progress across a range of areas. This includes academic progress, social progress, improved attendance and improved behaviour. For example, children who attend boarding benefit from structured reading with boarding staff. As a result, children in boarding make greater progress than non-boarders in reading. For some children this progress is exceptional, for example making 12 months' progress in a three-month period.

Parents report the positive impact that boarding has on their children and the family as a whole. One parent said: 'It is brilliant for the children and for the parents it helps a lot. She has grown in confidence.' Professionals are glowing in the feedback they provide. An independent reviewing officer said: 'You can make the link between the structure and routine here and how his behaviour has improved.'

The service works with foresight, liaising with mental health services that report good and effective working relationships. A professional commented: 'Many of our referrals come from the school. They are proactive at initiating the contact. They are really open about engaging with other services.' This forward-looking approach contributes effectively to children receiving the support that they need at the time that they need it.

The residential provision is clean and tidy throughout. There are excellent displays on the walls. The effect is welcoming and inclusive. Work has taken place to address the issues identified during the last inspection. The residential provision is well resourced with books, board games and games consoles for the children to use.

The children benefit from home-cooked meals. The children say that the food is delicious. Menus incorporate individual dietary needs while also encouraging children to experience new tastes and textures. A parent said: 'She is trying new foods. She used to be fussy but now eats anything. It has broadened her palate'.

The children are able to access a range of activities. They report that these are enjoyable. A child said: 'We get to do loads. It is fun.' A parent said: 'She comes home full of it, telling us what she has been up to. She gets very excited about that'. These include activities that the children have not previously tried. For example, one child was going to watch her first football match. She was excited but had some anxieties about this. The staff supported her sensitively to manage these feelings, while also ensuring that she knew that she did not have to go if she did not want to. As a result of the support, the children receive new experiences and broaden their horizons.

The staff seek the views of the children. They act upon these. For example, the staff consult children on changes to the decorations in the building. Each house has a representative on the school council. The children are clear that the staff are interested in their views and opinions. A child said: 'We can talk to any of the staff. They listen to us.'

The children are able to contact their families while they board. The children have access to an adapted telephone to facilitate this. Parents report that the staff facilitate regular contact.

The service links with a wide variety of external agencies to improve the lives of the children. For example, the children are able to access a future leaders programme designed to improve their understanding of the world of work. This is positive, innovative engagement.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

A dedicated, highly regarded team provides support to the staff in relation to any safeguarding concerns. All residential staff are able to clearly articulate what they would do should they have any concerns about the safety of a child, or the conduct of a member of staff. When the staff identify concerns, they share these with appropriate professionals. The designated officer within the local authority is positive about the management of the school and the way in which it responds to any staffing concerns.

The children say that they feel safe. They say that bullying is not an issue. The children say that they can talk to staff if they are worried about anything and that this includes bullying. They are able to identify a wide range of people with whom they could share any concerns. They are aware of external sources of support such as independent visitors and governors. Professionals have no concerns about the safety of the children in the residential provision.

The staff have made improvements to the risk-assessment process. This is now clearer and does not contain the level of inaccuracies previously found. Activity risk assessments are thorough and well ordered. Managers effectively monitor these.

There have been no complaints about the residential provision since the last inspection. The children are aware of a variety of routes open to them to raise concerns and make complaints. They are clear that staff listen to them.

The staff manage children's behaviour through good humour and excellent relationships. They are able to support the children without recourse to physical interventions. They do this without negatively impacting on the children's natural energy and exuberance. There is almost no use of negative sanctions. The children have good behaviour routinely reinforced. For example, the children receive a 'star of the week award' to emphasise individual good behaviour. This further bolsters self-esteem and underpins the ethos of the service.

No children have gone missing from the residential provision. On one occasion a child became agitated and left the premises. The staff handled the incident without the need for physical intervention, but with the child remaining safe.

No new residential staff have been recruited. The staff have been consistent for the past year. This provides children with stability and predictability. This consistency underpins the progress that children have made.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for the children in the school. They lead by example. They have responded to the disappointment of the judgements at the last inspection with focus and determination. They embrace challenge, actively seeking it out. The combination of these skills and attributes results in a highly effective culture of continual improvement.

Managers have high aspirations for the children. They use data to monitor performance and progress. This enables them to further understand the impact of actions and to adapt approaches to children accordingly.

The staff work as a team. They are stable and consistent. The staff have grown in confidence and have embraced the new developmental opportunities that have come their way over the past year. They conduct themselves with great professionalism and are positive role models for the children and the service.

The residential care leader works effectively with the wider school managers. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are visible and accessible presences in the residential provision. Children know them and staff know them. They understand the service and are invested in it. As a result, the residential provision is an integral and valued element of the whole school.

The staff receive regular supervision. This provides personal and professional support and guidance. Practice is appraised regularly. The staff receive access to a range of training courses. They have recently received training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and autism. The majority of staff have attained their level 3 qualification, with most having exceeded this. However, when the management team deems a qualification as equivalent to the level 3 qualification, it does not formally record the rationale or map the competencies. This means that there may be gaps in staff competencies that the service has not identified.

The staff access research-informed training and are able to translate this into practice. For example, the staff have implemented learning from training courses into their approach to supporting children with their literacy. This openness and willingness to innovate further contributes to the improved outcomes for children.

There have been no complaints. Feedback is consistently outstanding. Families and professionals talk in glowing terms of the quality of the service that the school provides. Partnership work with parents and carers is excellent. This has led to significant service

developments. For example, in response to parents and carers raising concerns about the need for support during the long summer holidays, the school piloted a summer school programme. While this is evidence of excellent practice, the school has already moved forward with a self-critical review of the pilot to identify further opportunities for improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean that children and young people are not protected or that 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	137459
Social care unique reference number	SC024573
DfE registration number	935/7003

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	137
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to16
Headteacher	Sally Garrett
Date of previous boarding inspection	12/01/2016
Telephone number	01502 565 439
Email address	office@ashleyschool.co.uk

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