

Meadows School

London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0RJ

Inspection dates

07/02/2017 to 09/02/2017

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

- Strong leadership and management ensure that the quality of care being delivered is effectively monitored and that any weaknesses are quickly addressed. Leaders and managers consistently strive for improvement.
- Practice relating to the safeguarding and protection of young people is highly effective. The assessment and management of risk are well developed. Staff take effective action to prevent young people from coming to harm.
- Staff have a detailed knowledge of the needs and vulnerabilities of each young person. Care planning is thorough and effects change.
- An innovative approach is taken to establishing young people's emotional resilience and psychological well-being. This information is used to identify priority areas of need.
- Effective behaviour management strategies are consistently implemented in practice.
- There is a stable, committed and highly skilled team of residential care staff. They form caring, supportive relationships with the young people.
- The governing body has a strong presence in the school. Governors prioritise the safety and well-being of young people and are familiar with current safeguarding issues.
- The majority of young people make significant progress across many aspects of their lives. In particular, they learn to regulate their behaviour, develop their social skills and improve their emotional well-being.
- There is a strong commitment to ensuring the professional development of staff

through training activities.

- Young people benefit from living in high-quality residential accommodation. They are treated with dignity and respect and feel valued.

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?

- Full records should be kept of the outcomes, following an investigation into an allegation made against a member of staff, and any recommendations made should be acted upon in a timely manner.
- Young people's care plans should fully address any concerns identified in the young people's individual risk assessments.
- The head of care should receive practice-based supervision from a suitably qualified professional.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with four hours' notice. Inspection activities included formal and informal discussions with residential pupils and joining pupils for meals. Discussions were held with the principal and the head of care (who is also the designated safeguarding lead person), school governors, members of care staff, teachers, the clinical psychologist and the school bursar. A telephone interview was undertaken with the governor who, until recently, had responsibility for the residential provision. Telephone discussions with parents and placing authority social workers were also undertaken. A wide range of documentation concerning the residential provision was reviewed. Feedback on Ofsted's 'Parent View' and 'Freetext' was also taken into account.

Inspection team

Stephen Collett

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Meadows School is a non-maintained residential special school, owned by Barnardo's children's charity. At the time of the inspection, there were 66 pupils on roll, aged from 9 to 19 years. Ten pupils reside at the school during the week: seven boys and three girls. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses. The boys' house is located within the school grounds and the girls reside in a house within walking distance of the school. The school is situated in Southborough, Kent, close to Tunbridge Wells and caters for pupils who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The majority of young people make good progress across most aspects of their lives. This is particularly the case for those young people who remain residential pupils for a significant amount of time. These young people often make excellent progress in terms of regulating their behaviour, developing their social skills and improving their overall sense of emotional well-being. Many young people spoken to during the inspection were able to reflect on the positive changes that they have made with the support of the residential care staff. The residential facility provides young people with a safe, secure base, from which they can begin to overcome the impact of past negative experiences. One social worker commented that this security had enabled a young person to focus more on her education and make good progress in terms of her reading ability. Other young people have undertaken highly successful work experience placements.

Young people develop positive relationships with the staff. They have confidence in the ability of staff to manage the residential houses effectively and provide good-quality care. One young person said, 'They know what they are doing and they will always fight your corner for you.' Young people were observed to be relaxed and comfortable in their interactions with staff. Meal times are sociable events, when young people communicate freely and plan how to spend their leisure time and arrange group activities with peers and staff.

Generally, peer relationships among the young people are positive. In many cases, the residential pupils build strong friendships with one another. During the inspection, the young people were often observed to be supportive of each other and would offer encouragement to any of their peers who might be struggling. Staff quickly identify potentially troublesome relationships that might be developing among the young people, and effectively intervene to ensure that no young people feel targeted or isolated by their peers.

The residential provision is organised and managed well. Highly experienced staff understand the particular needs of each young person. There is a determination among the staff to provide high-quality care. They reflect on their practice and identify areas where the provision could be improved. Senior leaders encourage this approach, and, as a result, a culture of continuous improvement is embedded in practice. The safety and well-being of young people are consistently given high priority.

The views and feelings of young people are valued and respected. There are many opportunities for young people to express their views, both individually and collectively. Records of young people's 'house meetings' indicate that this particular forum for young people to express themselves is more embedded in one residential house than the other. Young people said that they feel listened to. They enjoy the residential experience and are keen to become involved in the daily routines and activities provided.

Over time, young people develop age-appropriate independence skills. They learn the importance of maintaining good personal hygiene and how to complete domestic chores. As they mature, they become more self-assured in managing social situations, and

communicate confidently with adults. Some older young people have been able to secure part-time jobs, and many aspire to do well in college and achieve academic success.

The residential provision is highly valued across the school. Residential and teaching staff work in partnership to ensure that the holistic needs of young people are met. There are well-established communication channels, enabling effective sharing of information. This results in young people receiving consistent care, and boundaries being maintained.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential care staff have a thorough understanding of the individual needs of each young person. They take time to ensure that they are knowledgeable about young people's backgrounds and any particular disadvantages that they may have experienced prior to becoming residential pupils. This enables staff to reflect on why some young people become anxious and demonstrate challenging behaviour in certain circumstances. This level of understanding of young people's needs is reflected in their care plans. These plans clearly define the targets that young people are working towards and record the progress that they are making towards meeting these. Records of individual key-working sessions with young people demonstrate that staff offer the support and guidance needed for young people to meet their targets.

Young people who are new to the residential facility receive a sensitive and caring welcome when they arrive. A young person who was only admitted a few days before this inspection took place said, 'I was able to visit before I moved in; the staff and other boys all made me feel welcome, and I have made friends already.' A particular strength is that team leaders participate in initial key-work sessions with newly admitted young people, to ensure that they have oversight of how the staff are going to meet the needs of each young person.

The care that young people receive is sensitive to their identities and cultural needs. One young person is being encouraged and supported to purchase and cook food from her country of origin. As young people develop greater maturity, they are given higher levels of responsibility. They become better prepared for adult life, and this helps to improve their self-esteem. Staff consistently treat young people with dignity and respect. Great care is taken to ensure that closed-circuit television cameras, which monitor communal areas of the residential houses overnight, do not impinge on young people's privacy.

The arrangements for ensuring that young people pursue healthy lifestyles are strong. Young people are encouraged to engage in a range of activities in school and in the local community, which provide good opportunities to take exercise. For example, one young person attends local 'kick fit' classes, and staff are actively assisting another to join a local junior football club. Young people are provided with a healthy, balanced diet. Young people spoken to during the inspection were unanimous in their praise for the standard and quality of the food. Staff seek specialist advice when necessary, to ensure that they can support young people to manage specific medical conditions. All residential pupils are able to attend a nearby general practitioners' surgery if necessary. The residential facilities policy, relating to the recording and administration of prescribed medication, has been agreed with the general practice surgery. This approach has

contributed towards the arrangements for managing medication being safe and effective.

There is a strong commitment from managers and staff to promoting young people's psychological health and emotional well-being. Young people are able to access a range of specialist support services within the school. This includes individual counselling and group work activities. A clinical psychologist is available to advise staff on how they can best promote individual young people's emotional well-being and to undertake risk assessments for young people who may be experiencing significant mental health difficulties. The clinical psychologist liaises with external mental health agencies, to ensure that there is a joined-up multi-agency approach to supporting young people's emotional well-being.

Two innovative projects, which seek to establish young people's levels of emotional resilience and to identify their particular strengths and difficulties, are led by the clinical psychologist. The information gained is used to identify the areas where young people are most vulnerable in terms of their psychological development and emotional well-being. This enables more effective planning for how young people's needs will be met. This was confirmed by a social worker, who stated that young people's education, care and health plans are 'More reflective of their needs', as a result of work undertaken at the school. These projects also enable professionals to measure how young people's emotional resilience improves or declines over time.

Young people live in high-quality residential accommodation. They each have their own bedroom, many with private bathroom facilities. Most young people personalise their rooms, and they are encouraged to take ownership of their personal space. The communal areas are well furnished and comfortable, with space set aside for young people to enjoy a range of indoor leisure pursuits. Young people report that they feel safe in the residential houses and they sleep well at night. Staff facilitate young people keeping in contact with their family members when it is appropriate to do so. They take proactive steps to supporting positive family relationships, to the extent that they will supervise family contacts if it is decided that this would be in the best interests of the young person.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Practice relating to the protection of young people in the residential facility is strong. Staff have a detailed knowledge of each young person's vulnerabilities and their potential for coming to harm. This ensures that they take effective action to identify risks and implement strategies to mitigate these. Staff are acutely aware of the dangers that young people face when accessing the internet and social media websites, and of ways in which they risk becoming sexually exploited. Staff ensure that young people have access to a variety of resources to help them to learn about the risks, and then engage them in discussion so that they can assess the young people's levels of understanding. When young people are assessed to be at high risk of exploitation, staff monitor their internet access in the residential facility. This has resulted in potentially harmful relationships being disrupted.

Staff take proactive steps to prevent young people from coming to harm. This has

included following young people when it is suspected that they could be travelling to areas in the local community which may present a risk. Such actions have ensured that young people are safely returned to the school. A social worker commented that, as a result of the work undertaken by care staff, the local authority knows 'far more about the level of risk associated with the young person's internet use'.

Young people's individual risk assessments provide staff with clear strategies for reducing the potential for each young person to come to harm. They identify how staff must respond in an emergency and the longer-term interventions, such as attending support groups, which will assist the young people to avoid dangerous situations. Key-work sessions build on this and often focus on helping the young people to keep safe. Although individual risk assessments clearly identify young people's vulnerabilities and the strategies for working with them, these are not always replicated and reflected in the targets set out in young people's care plans.

All residential pupils spoken to during this inspection said that they feel safe at the school, and the majority said that they would speak to a member of the care staff if they had any worries or concerns. Young people report that bullying is not an issue in the residential provision and that they are confident that staff would intervene effectively if it were to become a problem in the future. This can be attributed to the high profile anti-bullying message given to young people from staff working across the school.

Effective child protection practice is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures that are reviewed and updated to reflect changing legislation and best practice. Staff are required to demonstrate that they have read the relevant documents. For example, staff have recently familiarised themselves with new guidance on how to manage and respond to incidents of 'sexting' between pupils. This approach ensures that policies and procedures are implemented in practice. There has been one incident of a young person going missing from the residential provision since the last inspection in March 2016, and the local protocol for responding to missing incidents was followed by the well-informed staff team. Staff effectively assess the likelihood of individual pupils going missing, and these assessments are taken into account when deciding on the appropriate amount of unsupervised free time that each pupil should have.

An established behaviour management model, known as 'therapeutic crisis intervention', is embedded in practice throughout the school. Residential staff were able to confidently describe the techniques that they use to de-escalate challenging behaviour. They have a good understanding of the underlying causes for young people's challenging behaviour and focus on promoting good behaviour while maintaining consistent boundaries. There have been no incidents in which staff have had to resort to physically restraining a young person in the residential houses since the last inspection. Physical restraint of day pupils is also declining. The number of physical restraints (11) that took place in the autumn term 2016–2017 was half the number that took place in the autumn term 2015–2016. The therapeutic crisis intervention model ensures that young people are given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their behaviour following a serious incident.

Child protection concerns are promptly reported to the head of care, who is the designated safeguarding lead person in the school. Information is then shared with the

relevant child protection agencies. A detailed record is kept of all child protection referrals, and the actions that are subsequently taken to support young people and to keep them safe. The head of care consults the local authority safeguarding children in education team when necessary. Consultation also takes place with the designated person in the local authority when there are concerns regarding the practice of an adult working in the school, or when a young person makes an allegation against a member of staff. In one case, detailed records were not kept regarding the outcome of an investigation following an allegation against a professional working in the school. There has also been some delay in implementing the designated person's recommendation that two staff members undertake refresher training, relating to behaviour management. None of these staff works in the residential provision, and no young people have come to harm as a result of these minor shortfalls.

The governor with responsibility for overseeing safeguarding within the school has significant experience of child protection practice and development. He maintains regular communication with the head of care, and takes a proactive approach to identifying any possible weaknesses. He demonstrates a thorough understanding of the particular vulnerabilities of the pupils attending the school and links these to the risks that young people face in their communities. This governor has recognised that some pupils could potentially be at greater risk of becoming radicalised by extremist views, as a result of their particular needs and behaviours. This approach ensures that young people's safety is always seen as a priority issue.

No external staff have been recruited to the residential facility since the inspection in March 2016. Recruitment documents for other staff working in the school demonstrate that great care is taken to avoid unsuitable adults becoming employed. All necessary background checks are completed before staff begin working with young people, and the interview process allows for some analysis of how effective the candidate will be in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. Some minor gaps in one candidate's career history had not been fully explored during the recruitment process, but, overall, practice in this area is strong.

The residential houses are well maintained. Health and safety checks are undertaken in a timely manner, and all safety equipment is routinely serviced. Young people regularly take part in fire drills and are familiar with the evacuation procedure. Young people live in a safe environment, where steps are taken to ensure their ongoing physical safety.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The residential provision is exceptionally well managed by an experienced head of care, who has obtained a diploma in social work. He leads a stable, highly skilled and committed team of residential care workers, who have significant experience in supporting vulnerable young people. All of the team members hold a suitable qualification for their roles, with the exception of one member of staff, who is currently on course to become qualified in April 2017.

A culture of high aspiration for the young people permeates the school and is clearly evident in the residential provision. Leaders and managers are committed to ensuring that young people receive high-quality support from school staff and from external

professionals. During this inspection, the head of care demonstrated this by communicating with a number of external colleagues, to ensure that the arrangements being made for a looked after child review meeting were in the young person's best interests.

Arrangements for monitoring the quality of care being delivered are highly effective. These include quality assurance inspections from Barnardo's staff who are external to the school. An independent visitor makes unannounced visits to the residential houses six times a year. Her reports indicate that young people are always given the opportunity to express their views on the care that they are receiving. The reports are detailed and indicate that external scrutiny of residential provision is robust.

The governing body has a strong presence in the school. Minutes of governors' meetings verify that governors regularly visit the premises and make observations of staff practice. The head of care provides progress reports for governors' meetings and addresses the governing body when necessary. During this inspection, the governor with oversight of safeguarding practice was able to give a clear account to the inspector of all current child protection and safeguarding issues. He was able to describe how discussion with the head of care had resulted in weaknesses being identified, relating to how information is shared and what steps had been taken to address the issue.

A system for monitoring serious incidents, known as 'behaviour watch', ensures that senior leaders are kept well informed. Senior leaders are required to review all serious incidents and to assess whether the school's behaviour management process is being implemented in practice. This allows senior managers to quickly identify where practice needs to be developed, or where there are any shortfalls in staff performance.

Residential care staff benefit from receiving practice-based supervision every four to six weeks. This is focused on how the needs of young people are being met and on their own professional development. Regular staff meetings also provide a forum for staff to reflect on their practice and to consider the impact that it is having on the young people. Residential care staff feel that they are supported well by the senior leadership team, and that there is a shared understanding of what they are trying to achieve for young people. The care staff have the confidence to question the senior leadership team if they have any concerns regarding the development of the service. This demonstrates a collaborative approach to ensuring continuous improvement within the residential provision.

The head of care is currently supervised by the principal. Both parties agree that this is an effective arrangement, and the head of care feels that he receives the support and guidance needed to fulfil his role. However, the arrangement does not provide the opportunity for the head of care to focus on social work practice and development. This current supervision arrangement does not allow for professional challenge and reflection on the impact of changing legislation pertaining to children's social care.

A comprehensive range of training opportunities are available for managers and staff. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that staff regularly update their skills and knowledge, in order that they can meet the needs of the young people. One afternoon a week is set aside for staff to undertake training and professional development activities.

This means that staff have the opportunity to update their knowledge on practice models used in the school or to focus on areas where they feel that their knowledge needs updating. A member of staff commented that refresher training, on issues such as internet safety, is always welcome due to the ever-changing nature of the risks that young people face. Leaders and managers have recognised this and adopted a creative approach to ensuring that staff acquire the skills that they need to undertake their roles effectively.

Leaders and managers familiarise themselves with resources that are available to help young people to keep themselves safe. They invest in the resources which will most effectively meet the specific needs of pupils at the school. These have included innovative training packages focused on supporting young people to avoid becoming exploited on line and the dangers of being influenced by extremist views.

The head of care maintains effective communication with external professionals, particularly when there are concerns for a young person's welfare. Placing authorities are kept informed of the progress that young people are making and are fully consulted when the young person's circumstances are preventing them from meeting their targets. This approach is mirrored by the residential care staff, who are committed to working in partnership with professionals, parents and carers to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people.

At the last inspection, in March 2016, one area for improvement was identified. This was in relation to not consistently recording young people's views when a sanction was imposed. There has been an improvement in this area, and, in the majority of cases, young people's views are now recorded. Oversight by leaders and managers ensures that all national minimum standards for residential provision are being met.

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'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 their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	119029
Social care unique reference number	SC024060
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	10
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	9 to 19
Headteacher	Mike Price
Date of previous boarding inspection	07/03/2016
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