

Doucecroft School

Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex CO6 3QL

Inspection dates

7–9 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders, governors and trustees are not ensuring that the independent school standards are met.
- The school does not meet all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- Leaders and governors do not review school policies frequently enough to establish how well they are implemented or how well they promote good practice and meet current guidance.
- There is insufficient reference on the impact of residential provision on the education of pupils in the school.
- There are no systems in place to track and record the progress of pupils in non-core subjects or of the progress of pupils when in residence.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders successfully implement the school's preferred approaches for the teaching of autism, promoting pupils' learning and personal development well.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils make rapid progress in their behaviour and rates of attendance.
- Leaders have sustained good teaching and learning, which means that pupils continue to make good progress over time.
- Staff use the very detailed assessments for the core subjects to match tasks and resources to pupils' different abilities.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards (NMS) for residential special schools (if RSS)

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards'), the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that:
 - all of the independent school standards, and national minimum standards for residential special schools are met and fully understood
 - leaders at all levels, including governors, regularly monitor all the school's policies and procedures, to ensure these are updated and implemented effectively.
- Improve pupils' learning and raise achievement, by:
 - developing and implementing systems for assessing, recording and tracking the gains pupils make in knowledge, skills and understanding of non-core subjects
 - tracking the progress of pupils in the residential provision to demonstrate the quality of its impact on academic achievement in school.
- Good practice recommendations in relation to the residential provision:
 - Residential staff and managers should consider a consistent approach to working with non-verbal pupils so their responses are directly recorded and reviewed.
 - Managers should update the Missing Child Policy to reflect the recent closure of the Kelvedon site.
 - Managers should update their Runaway and Missing from Home protocols and procedures to demonstrate how this works in practice.
 - Ensure the website makes sufficient reference to residential provision and its impact on pupils' education.

The school must meet the following independent school standards

- The proprietor must ensure that arrangements made to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school, and such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools (paragraph 8, 8(a), 8(b)).
- The proprietor must promote good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that:
 - a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out all the sanctions used by the school in the event of pupil misbehaviour
 - the policy is implemented effectively
 - a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour (paragraph 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c)).
- The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
 - demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)).

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school has and consistently implements a written behaviour policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour. This policy includes:
 - measures to combat bullying, including cyber bullying, and to promote positive behaviour
 - school rules
 - disciplinary sanctions
 - when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed and
 - arrangements for searching children and their possessions(NMS 12.1).
- The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary (NMS 13.1).
- The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix 1 of the NMS for residential special schools (NMS 13.7).
- The school's procedures are compatible with the local runaway and missing from home and care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the head of care (or school equivalent) follows the local RMFHC protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority (NMS 15.6).
- Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include:
 - checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and, where they exist, individual care plans for children
 - evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded
 - assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and
 - opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish)(NMS 20.2).
- The headteacher (or school equivalent), governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school carries out, and records in writing, once per year:
 - a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, in relation to:
 - its statement of purpose
 - its staffing policy

- the placement plans for individual children and
- an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards (NMS 20.4).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Requires improvement
How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision	Requires improvement

- School leaders, governors and trustees do not demonstrate the skills needed to fulfil their duties to ensure that the independent school standards and the national minimum standards for residential special schools are met.
- Leaders do not check that the school's policies and procedures are implemented effectively. The behaviour policy lists only two possible sanctions and the incident book for recording unacceptable behaviour contains additional sanctions that are not referred to in the behaviour policy. The guidance given to staff in the behaviour policy is inaccurate.
- The school policies do not refer to the boarding provision specifically and, as a result, the residential service does not have a clear and positive profile promoted within the school.
- The senior management team does not consistently challenge practice or drive improvement in the residential provision.
- Leaders of the residential provision have not responded to the point for improvement raised at the previous inspection of residential care, which asked them to write a clear statement of purpose for the residential services.
- The managerial oversight is not systematic or rigorous. Information about staff and pupils is not organised effectively, such as training records for staff, which are managed in head office but are not up to date. The recording of medication is not robust with some gaps and mistakes that are crossed out but not initialled.
- There is no review of the operation of the welfare arrangements in the residential provision to ensure that it meets the national minimum standards. The management team do not review the quality of the service as a whole, including not taking into account feedback from children, parents and outside agencies.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are committed to the implementation of the proprietor's Autism Anglia ethos and senior leaders work effectively as a team to promote this aspect of pupils' learning and well-being. They closely monitor pupils' behaviour, attendance and safety well, when they are attending alternative provision or college.
- Managers and staff work well together on a day-to-day basis in the residential provision but this does not lead to a clear understanding of the benefit that residential provision can bring to pupils' overall performance in school.
- Staff and managers skilfully develop supportive and warm relationships with day pupils and residents.
- Parents have very positive views of the school and residential provision. In the Parent View returns and in discussion, almost all said they would recommend the school to others. In discussion, a local authority representative had no concerns and said that

communication between the school and local authority was good.

- Good leadership of teaching is sustaining good practice, enabling pupils throughout the school to make good progress. Leaders have introduced new arrangements for managing the performance of teaching, which successfully identify strengths and areas for developing practice. Leaders set targets to improve performance and staff benefit from support and regular training to update their teaching skills.
- The curriculum is very relevant to the needs of the pupils. There are good opportunities to develop communication, literacy, numeracy and personal development, including the use of visual aids and timetables, electronic aids, objects of reference and signing. There are well-chosen topic themes with well-conceived opportunities to develop skills across different subjects and activities.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively, including British values, through a relevant programme of personal, social, health and economic education. Each pupil has an individual record of the progress made in their personal development.
- Assessment systems in the core subjects are relevant to the needs of pupils and have some strong features. Baseline assessments for determining attainment in the core skills are thorough and well developed. The assessments are based on each pupil's education, health and care plan and include specialist assessments by the school's therapists. This information from baseline assessments is used to develop individual learning plans for each pupil with clear targets set to improve their basic skills.

Governance

- The governing body and trustees are not ensuring that all the independent school standards are met.
- Governors and trustees receive regular reports from school leaders, which consider such matters as equine therapy and students' destinations on leaving school. The reports help governors and trustees to have a clear overview and to challenge leaders effectively for most aspects of the school's work.
- Governors do not hold leaders to account for the progress different groups of pupils are making across the full range of subjects.
- Monitoring visits by governors do not comply with national minimum standards and do not provide the necessary scrutiny for the service or drive improvement. In particular, governors' monitoring does not evaluate the effectiveness of care offered or challenge future actions.
- Governors do not review the school's policies and procedures for the welfare, health and safety of pupils effectively enough.
- Governors ensure that the school reflects the aims of the proprietor's Autism Anglia strategy, through its ethos and specialised curriculum.
- Governors oversee the arrangements for appraisal effectively but not all have an accurate view of the school's priorities for development.
- Governors closely monitor most aspects of safeguarding pupils, such as safe recruitment procedures, and they check that staff training in safeguarding arrangement is up to date.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Inconsistencies in implementing and updating some of the policies for the residential provision have been addressed recently by strengthening procedures to review the practices for ensuring pupils' safety.
- Behaviour is good and pupils adopt safe practices in the school and residential provision. Any concern, no matter how trivial, is promptly referred to the designated officer and communication with local authorities has been strengthened.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance, behaviour and safety regularly in college and alternative provision. Risk assessments are carried out thoroughly for all activities in and out of school, including for school trips and with alternative providers.
- Staff maintain high levels of supervision at all times, which ensures the safety and well-being of pupils. Parents are confident that pupils are safe.
- Procedures for recruitment are thorough and all training in safeguarding is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff have detailed knowledge of pupils' needs and a secure grasp of the school's preferred approaches for teaching pupils with autism, which they use effectively.
- The teaching of physical education is outstanding. Teachers provide a range of challenging activities in football, cricket, using the trampoline, gymnastics, and athletics. Staff systematically record progress and provide pupils with awards to celebrate their achievements.
- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is good across the school. The teaching of communication skills is outstanding as teachers, support staff and therapists work seamlessly together in planning and using communication aids and signing to promote learning.
- Teachers and support staff make good use of assessment information for literacy and numeracy to plan a range of activities matched to the different learning needs of pupils, making good use of well-chosen resources and methods.
- Staff make good use of the assessments by therapists to promote communication and deepen understanding. In a science lesson, key stage 2 pupils used torches with different coloured filters to explore light. Pupils at key stage 3 made models of Stonehenge using clay, in their history topic. Staff used laminated cards showing different cars to pupils at key stage 4 with questions on road safety to deepen their understanding during a debate of the restrictions which ought to be in place for inexperienced young drivers.
- Support staff work seamlessly with teachers to ensure that the learning needs of individual pupils are met by focusing on how well they understand new ideas. Staff also using questions effectively to deepen pupils' thinking and developing their use of language.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and supported well in residential activities, such as applying mathematics when shopping within a budget.

- There are no tracking systems in place to record the progress pupils are making in non-core subjects. As a result, teachers do not know how well all pupils are achieving over time in a range of subjects. The progress of residential pupils is not tracked rigorously to show the impact residential provision has had on their academic progress and social and emotional development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Although records of every incident are filed, they are not all completed fully. Some aspects are missing. There is a lack of clear oversight and monitoring of the records.
- The safeguarding policy is regularly updated and provides useful guidance on allegations made against staff. The information about how to deal with allegations made against the headteacher, a governor or a trustee are not explained in full.
- Pupils adopt safe practices in school, such as using the internet safely and wearing protective clothing during practical activities. They demonstrate knowledge of traffic markings and safe crossings as they move around the school site.
- High levels of staff supervision and engagement with pupils ensure that pupils stay safe. In the residential provision, staff know how to escalate concerns about pupils, and do so effectively. The school's system for alerting the designated officer, should a concern arise, works well to protect pupils and ensure their overall well-being.
- There is good oversight of the use of physical interventions by a specialist teacher, who trains the staff well.
- Parents say their children are safe and pupils say that they feel very safe in school.
- Pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, including British values. Pupils show respect for others from different backgrounds and they celebrate different festivals such as Christmas, Diwali and Chinese New Year.
- Pupils learn to share and take turns, and grow in self-confidence and self-esteem as they move through the school. They often reflect on how well they are doing and the importance of good behaviour and conduct.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. It is consistently good and sometimes outstanding in lessons, around the school and in the residential provision.
- Pupils make rapid progress in managing their behaviour as staff provide them with good role models and show them how to manage their behaviour effectively. Parents, pupils, staff and visitors confirm that behaviour is at least good in the school.
- There is little bullying and few incidents of unacceptable behaviour. Parents and pupils say that any form of bullying is dealt with quickly by staff.
- Pupils make excellent progress with their attendance which is above the national average.

- The curriculum promotes enjoyment of learning and pupils want to be in school. Many pupils achieve 100% attendance and quickly develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Although there are some shortcomings in implementing the behaviour policy and the recording of sanctions, pupils demonstrate good and sometimes outstanding behaviour. Pupils respond well to the discipline policy and the systems for rewards and sanctions. Staff provide good role models for pupils' behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school's records of progress, pupils' work and visits to lessons show that pupils make good progress over time from their different starting points.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in physical education. Last term, seven pupils gained the Football Association sports leadership award and are currently supporting other pupils in learning football skills. Pupils leave with at least three awards in a range of sporting activities including swimming, gymnastics, trampolining, football, cricket and running. A few pupils have interviews for the next Paralympics.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school and pupils' progress in communication and social skills is outstanding.
- Pupils at key stage 2 make good progress in their use of phonics for reading and writing. Their work shows that they make good progress across a range of subjects including art, history, design and technology, computing and science.
- Pupils at key stage 3 build on their good learning in key stage 2 and continue to make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- At key stage 4, pupils make good progress towards their examination courses in functional skills and entry level awards, and are well prepared for transition to the sixth form.
- Students in the sixth form continue to make good progress, especially in independent living skills, preparation for the world of work and in literacy and numeracy. All students successfully transfer to college and sustain their places when they leave school.
- Different groups of pupils make equally good progress from their different starting points, including the few who are looked after by the local authority. The girls are doing as well as boys and records show that those with the most severe learning difficulties are making good progress from their much lower starting points.
- Although pupils' work and visits to lessons over time show that pupils are making good progress in non-core subjects, assessment systems for tracking the progress in these areas of learning are not in place.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The curriculum is highly relevant to prepare students for the next stage of their education. There is a strong emphasis on developing independence skills in preparation for work and part-time college placements.
- Students make good progress on a variety of courses, such as motor vehicle

maintenance, horticulture, animal care, and catering.

- Residential staff provide residents with a range of good-quality experiences:
 - A few residents are learning to drive a car, which represents exceptional achievement over time.
 - Some residents are managing the weekly household food budget, thus promoting functional skills in mathematics well.
 - Residential staff encourage residents to use transport safely.
 - There is a rota of domestic chores and jobs for each learner, such as tidying the kitchen, washing up and laundry.

These responsibilities and skills help to prepare learners well for independent living after school.

- Teamwork between teachers and support assistants is strong.
- All staff, including care staff, provide good support in developing students' skills, including communication and independent living skills.
- The attendance, behaviour and safety of students while attending alternative provision are rigorously checked and full risk assessments are carried out before students participate in the activities.
- Leaders have developed very positive links with parents, who are encouraged to work closely with staff in planning their child's transition from school into college. As a result, all learners successfully transferred to college in July 2016 and continue to sustain their placements. Most of the current students have confirmed places at college. Parents speak very highly of the school's work to prepare their children for college.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

Requires improvement

- The leaders and managers across the school are not fully effective in working together to identify and tackle weaknesses in the service. The senior management team does not consistently challenge practice or drive improvement in the boarding service.
- Residents' progress is not tracked rigorously to demonstrate the impact that boarding has on their academic and behavioural achievements in school.
- Residents benefit from secure and supportive relationships with staff. They gain confidence that their views and opinions will be taken seriously and acted upon. They improve their personal and life skills that will help to sustain them as they grow into adults.

Quality of care and support in the residential provision

Good

- The residents benefit from being cared for by a team of dedicated and well-trained staff, at least half of whom are long-standing and well-established in the school.
- Staff talk knowledgeably about the pupils. They know them well and have developed warm and appropriately affectionate relationships with them. Teaching and residential

staff work together daily so that information about residents is shared promptly about their day.

- Staff work particularly well to help residents improve their social skills. Staff are imaginative in helping residents take some responsibility for their personal routines through the use of pictorial aids. Many children make excellent progress in taking on their personal tasks, which has given them confidence and supports their independence.
- Staff are skilled in helping residents express their wishes and feelings using different media so that they learn to ask for what they want and avoid unnecessary conflict.
- Residential accommodation is of good quality, allowing residents space to be on their own if they need to.
- Staff help residents make the most of opportunities to socialise and learn to live more harmoniously together.
- Residents are involved in planning for healthy and attractive meals, going shopping with staff and in the community. They learn to incorporate mathematics into their activities which helps to develop their sense of budgeting and understanding of money.
- Policies and procedures do not specifically reference what happens and what is expected in the boarding provision.

School details

Unique reference number	115426
Social care unique reference number	SC018010
DfE registration number	881/6032
Inspection number	10026061

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school. The inspection of residential provision 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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	10
Proprietor	Autism Anglia
Chair	Mr Clive Stobbs
Headteacher	Alison Jane Smart
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,714 to £79,902
Annual fees (boarders)	£89,821 to £184,148
Telephone number	01206 771234
Website	www.doucecroft.org.uk
Email address	jsmart@autism-anglia.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–23 January 2014

Information about this school

- Doucecroft is a day and residential special school for boys and girls, aged from three to 19 years, with autism. Many pupils have moderate or severe learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs and are funded by their local authorities.
- There have been no children of Nursery or Reception age and no pupils at key stage 1 on roll for the past three years.
- The school is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) to admit 64 pupils. There are 49 pupils on roll including 11 students in the sixth form.
- Four pupils are looked after by their local authorities.
- The school is privately owned by Autism Anglia.
- The school first opened in 1977 and has been established at its current site since 2005. At the time of the previous inspection, the school was operating from an additional site at Kelvedon, which is now closed.
- The school uses a range of alternative providers for older pupils and sixth-form students. Alternative providers include Chelmsford and Colchester Colleges, for vocational training; Butterfly Lodge near Colchester, for animal care and horticulture; Halstead swimming pool; Mersea youth camp, for outdoor activities; Zinc Arts in Ongar; and the Art Café in Colchester, for work experience.
- Residential care for up to 294 nights per year is provided for 13 pupils and some respite residential provision is available for day pupils. The school's residential provision was previously inspected on 2 February 2016 when the overall experiences and progress of children and young people was judged as good.
- The leadership team has been restructured since the previous inspection. The head of education at that time was appointed as substantive headteacher in September 2016 and new senior leaders took up post in January 2017.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was an integrated inspection of the school and the residential provision.
- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to conduct an unannounced emergency inspection, at the same time as the integrated inspection, as a result of a complaint received by a member of the public in September 2016. The DfE required inspectors to report against the independent school standards 7(a), 7(b); 8(a), 8(b); 9(a), 9(b), 9(c); and 16(a), 16(b) in part 3 (the welfare, health and safety of pupils) and 32(1)(b) and 32(3)(a) in part 6 (provision of information).
- Inspectors observed lessons and activities across the school, in residential provision, and in the sixth form, with senior leaders. The lead inspector looked at samples of pupils' work, the school's information about the progress pupils are making, including destinations, and heard some pupils read.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders of the educational and residential provision, representatives of the trustees and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils and held informal discussions with pupils in the residential accommodation at breakfast, lunchtime and breaktimes.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including curriculum plans, duty rotas in the residential provision, the school's self-evaluation and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors looked at a range of policies for promoting the health, well-being and safety of pupils in school and in the residential provision, including the safeguarding and health and safety policies.
- Inspectors examined the school's website to determine if the required information was published.
- Inspectors carefully considered the responses to the 20 Parent View returns and also held telephone discussions to seek the views of parents and stakeholders. There were no questionnaire returns from staff.
- There is no separate section for the early years provision in this report because there have been no children in Nursey or Reception for the past three years.

Inspection team

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