

Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firlie Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Inspection dates

29/11/2016 to 01/12/2016

The overall experiences and progress of young people

Good **2**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well 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 leadership team is committed to ensuring that young people are happy and thrive in the residential provision. It continually develops new ways to enhance the young people's experiences.
- There is strong and effective partnership working, both within the school and with external professionals. This provides young people with coordinated services.
- Young people are given opportunities to express their feelings and make choices in the knowledge that they are listened to and their views acted on. There are good relationships between staff and young people.
- Staff promote healthy lifestyles and ensure that young people have access to specialist therapeutic services.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school is compliant with all national minimum standards.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was announced by telephone, to the headteacher of the school on the morning of the first day. An initial meeting was held with the headteacher and chair of governors. The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, residential care staff, the senior leadership team, the chair of governors and the family support coordinator. The inspector observed activities with young people, in addition to having group and individual discussions with them. The inspector held telephone discussions with the designated officer, social workers and parents. A range of documents and records were also examined during the inspection.

Inspection team

Suzy Lemmy

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

This is a residential special school maintained by a local authority. It provides education, care and accommodation for boys, between the ages of nine and 18, who have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are currently 24 weekly boarders. All the accommodation is based on the school site, which is located in the town of Seaford. The residential provision was last inspected on 14 July 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of young people

Good

Good relationships were observed between staff and young people. Staff are patient and sensitive towards young people, and humour plays a large part in interactions. Young people like being with staff, and staff enjoy spending time with young people. The inspector observed a card tournament being played enthusiastically between the staff and the young people. Another group of young people was cooking a roast dinner to be shared with peers and staff. Staff role model good social interactions. The young people have the opportunity to enjoy a range of activities in the residential unit and in the community, such as film nights, bush craft, forest walks and trampolining.

Staff value young people's views and actively seek them through a range of informal and formal forums. More formal methods, such as keyworker sessions, school committees and house meetings, are effective in demonstrating to the young people that their opinions matter. Staff act on the requests made, for example changing menus, planning activities and agreeing the design of an award. Informal discussions take place throughout the day, and settling routines at bedtime give young people the opportunity to have individual time with staff. This creates a nurturing atmosphere in which young people can form trusting relationships with staff.

School staff have a strong anti-bullying ethos. The anti-bullying committee is effective in reducing such incidents. A representative of the group told the inspector, 'Bullying is not a problem in the school anymore because of the work we have done.' Young people who may show bullying behaviour are invited to the group to help them to understand their impact on others. This helps them to take responsibility for their actions. An anti-bullying week further enhances the work undertaken.

The residential provision is well organised. Staffing levels ensure that there are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the young people's needs. Young people can join in with evening activities in the community or remain at the residential care provision if they choose. Any gaps in staffing rotas are met by either care staff or school staff. Agency workers are not used. The use of school staff enhances relationships between them and the young people and provides consistency of care. Staff and peers compete in a football tournament, for which the names of young people are picked randomly from each residential service to ensure that they mix with each other. This initiative promotes a strong school identity.

Young people are part of the integrated school community that includes education, health and therapy provision. The school funds therapy support provided by an external therapist. He offers sessions to young people and is able to respond to young people who would be reluctant to attend more formal appointments. In addition, the headteacher has good links with child and adolescent mental health services, and the staff facilitate access to this resource.

Staff encourage the young people to be adventurous and develop a charitable mind-set. For example, a group of young students raised money for charity by paddling from Newhaven to Southease, a distance of about 5 miles. This involved planning the event, gaining permission from the captain of the Newhaven to Dieppe ferry to cross the mouth of the harbour and presenting the donations at the local RNLI station. This was an experience of which the young people were very proud.

Parents speak highly of the impact of residential care on young people's outcomes. Comments from parents include, 'He has made progress in every way', and 'He has improved socially and in his predicted grades. I couldn't fault the staff in any way.' Staff work in partnership with parents to share strategies and reduce challenging behaviour. One parent said, 'I have noticed the difference in his behaviour both at school and at home. He behaves much better since he has been at the school'.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Well-planned induction practices ensure that young people are prepared for their placement at the residential setting. The student and family co-coordinator visits them and their families prior to their being accepted at the school. An informative children's guide and welcome pack help them to know what to expect. Young people visit the school and residential service and have overnight stays prior to moving in. Longer introductions are agreed, if needed, to help them to make the move from home. They are encouraged to take pride in their environment, personalise their bedrooms and keep their rooms clean and tidy.

Staff value young people's relationships with friends and family and ensure that they are able to keep in touch with them while at Bowden House School. Some young people do this using their own electronic devices. However, they all have access to school telephones. This helps to prevent homesickness and ensures that the young people settle well.

Young people make significant progress in all areas. Clear objectives with achievable steps towards agreed goals motivate young people to improve. A system in which young people earn privileges and awards for good behaviour is successful. Young people identify their own targets and choose their rewards, for example meals out, later bedtimes or a cup of tea in bed. The younger group has competitions to read every night, for which young people gain prizes. This has proved very popular. They compete against each other to read the greatest number of books. This has reduced the time spent on electronic devices and improves their reading levels. The incentives brought in through 2016 have had a positive impact on young people's behaviour, resulting in a reduction in positive handling incidents.

The food committee plays an active role in choosing menus. The committee uses games and quizzes to introduce young people to different foods. All young people enjoy a diverse, healthy diet with a choice of meals eaten with their residential group and staff. Mealtimes are a sociable time when young people learn good table manners and interact socially.

Young people benefit from education about their health needs. Staff promote healthy lifestyles, for example taking exercise, eating a varied diet and not smoking. Young people access smoking cessation support and are rewarded if they are successful. They are encouraged to participate in a range of activities that promote exercise, for example going to the gym, swimming and football club. One young person, who previously did not want to go out on activities, has increased his participation as a result of being able to choose the activity for his group. His peers' positive response to his choice enhanced his status in the group. This increased his confidence and self-esteem.

Handovers between school and care staff involving the young people are effective systems for sharing information. Verbal and written handovers ensure that staff across both settings work as a team. This is extended to the evening homework club and 'make up' time, when young people complete unfinished schoolwork. This ensures that the school has a 24-hour curriculum, which improves young people's academic attainment. This is further enhanced by the multi-disciplinary input, which is offered to all the young people. A speech and language therapist devises a programme of support, with clear targets for all young people, which is implemented by school and care staff. This consistent approach results in improvements in the young people's social and communication skills.

The staff team equips young people for moving on. A supported independence programme effectively helps the young people to improve the skills that they need to move on to a college placement or work. Young people have opportunities to learn practical skills and travel independently.

How well young people are protected

Good

Individual risk assessments and care plans are used effectively to ensure that information is shared and staff are aware of the strategies that they should use to reduce safety risks. Managers have made timely referrals and consultations with the designated officer whenever safeguarding allegations have been reported.

All staff have training in managing child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The headteacher works effectively with external professionals to reduce young people's risk of radicalisation and gang-related crime. Staff educate the young people about these risks during formal key-work sessions and informally, when appropriate.

On the occasions when young people leave the premises without permission during residential time, staff respond quickly and follow them. They are aware of missing-from-home policies relating to the young people and put these into practice. One young person's frequency of absences from the school has reduced following staff intervention. He now rarely leaves the school site and uses other strategies to calm himself.

Staff balance and reduce risk by careful planning and organisation. Risk management in relation to offsite activities is thorough. Staff ensure that they assess any risks and put safety measures in place while allowing young people to participate in adventurous and challenging pursuits.

Behaviour management techniques, used to identify triggers and to ensure that staff have strategies to manage difficult behaviour, have reduced effectively the level of positive handling interventions. Staff discuss young people's behaviour at team meetings and implement strategies that work. The ethos of praising and rewarding good behaviour has contributed to this reduction in negative behaviours. Staff reinforce boundaries, and the young people are rewarded for adhering to them. Any positive handling interventions that occur are evaluated and analysed by senior managers. Staff ensure that young people's views are recorded. This enables them to reflect and take responsibility for their behaviour. Any sanctions are accurately recorded and are monitored by the independent visitor. This enables the staff to ensure that the sanctions remain proportionate and protects the young people from unfair measures being

imposed.

Comprehensive health and safety systems are in place to protect the young people. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied, including fire drills. All necessary safety checks are completed. In addition, the catering department received the highest level of award for hygiene and food safety.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

There is a strong senior management team that provides effective and efficient leadership. Practice is under constant review to ensure that staff performance and conduct are at a consistently high standard to meet the young people's complex needs. The recommendations from the last inspection have been met. The headteacher invited the designated officer to the school to discuss protocols and processes regarding managing allegations. This was effective in building positive links with relevant professionals.

The residential provision is managed by two heads of care, who hold the level 4 national vocational qualification in health and social care. They lead a team of committed residential care staff, who either have, or are working towards, the level 3 qualification. A number of staff leaving has led to a recent recruitment drive. New staff are enthusiastic and share their knowledge, experience and ideas, which have been received positively by the rest of the staff team.

Personnel files demonstrate safe recruitment and vetting of staff. Induction programmes for new staff include completing mandatory training, reading policies and procedures, and reading young people's care plans, behaviour management plans and risk assessments, prior to starting working directly with the young people. New staff are mentored and given shadowing opportunities until they are deemed ready to work on their own. This ensures that new staff members are confident and knowledgeable about the young people before they are responsible for their care.

The headteacher prioritises staff retention. A review of the staffing structure will enhance the opportunities to gain additional responsibilities. Staff's emotional welfare is prioritised by the senior leadership team. An initiative whereby staff can access therapeutic support and counselling sessions demonstrates that staff's well-being is important. This enables them to meet the young people's emotional needs more effectively.

Staff have regular supervision. They are able to use the time to reflect and evaluate on their practice. Supervision records demonstrate the sharing of information relating to the young people and discussions about any safeguarding concerns that the staff may have. Supervisors constructively challenge staff when needed as well as praising good working practices. Staff report that the senior leadership team has an open-door policy and they can seek advice and guidance. The senior leadership team works hard to maintain a strong, well-functioning staff group. Staff were observed to be enjoying their work and performing as a team.

All complaints are taken seriously and responded to swiftly in a rigorous manner. For example, a concern raised by neighbours was dealt with by staff encouraging young

people to write letters of apology. Young people are expected to engage in restorative justice. In this way, they learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Parents and professionals report that communication is of a good standard and they are kept updated. Joint working with external professionals ensures a multi-professional approach. A social worker said, 'Staff communicate any concerns to me straight away.'

Monitoring by the headteacher, the senior leadership team and the independent visitor takes place as required. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and take into account any updated research or guidance. A school development plan specific to the residential provision is in place to ensure continual improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of 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 young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by young people are outstanding, and the impact that 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. 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 young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean that 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	100986
Social care unique reference number	SC050152
DfE registration number	439921

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	25
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	Nine to18
Head teacher	Mr Gerry Crook
Date of previous boarding inspection	14/07/2015
Telephone number	01323 893138
Email address	admin@bowdenhouse.towerhamlets.sch.uk

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