

Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Inspection dates

27/03/2017 to 29/03/2017

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Inadequate **4**

The quality of care and support

Requires improvement 3

How well children and young people are protected

Inadequate 4

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inadequate 4

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is inadequate because

- There are significant failures in safeguarding practice that may compromise the welfare of students.
- Some safeguarding incidents have not been reported to external safeguarding agencies or have been referred to them only belatedly.
- The systems to manage, monitor and audit safeguarding concerns are ineffective. Senior managers have failed to demonstrate sufficient understanding of safeguarding issues. The consequence of this is a culture in which staff do not always recognise their responsibilities and have not internally reported all matters of concern.
- The quality of complaint investigation and the application of disciplinary proceedings have been poor.
- There is no risk assessment for staff working alone in the residential provision overnight. Staff have occasions left children unattended.
- Managers have provided only irregular and poor quality staff supervision; staff practices and concerns have not always been followed up.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

- NMS 11.1 The school ensures that; arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- NMS 13.1 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 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.
- NMS 13.6 Staff with management responsibilities have an adequate level of experience or training in the management and practice of boarding to ensure that children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.
- NMS 13.8 The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate.
- NMS 13.9 The records specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate.
- NMS 15.5 The head of care (or school equivalent) has in place a staff disciplinary procedure which is clear. The procedure clearly separates staff disciplinary processes from child protection enquiries and criminal proceedings, and is known by staff.
- NMS 15.9 Where only one member of staff is on duty at any time, risk assessment has been carried out and recorded in writing, identifying any likely risks to children, staff and members of the public.
- NMS 18.1 The school has, and follows, an appropriate policy on recording and responding to complaints that is compliant with relevant regulatory requirements.
- NMS 18.2 The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to residential provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- NMS 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.
- NMS 19.4 The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated if necessary.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the temperature of all medication fridges is consistently checked and recorded.
- Ensure that residential students have individual Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans of sufficient detail, rather than just a list.
- Ensure that there are sufficient staff on all shifts to meet the needs of the children, particularly during the night.
- Promote wider awareness of the independent person who visits and who is able to offer support for students and parents about independent living post school.
- Develop individual risk assessments relating to the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Apply consistency in undertaking telephone verification of staff references.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced on the morning of the inspection and the social care inspectors were on site three hours later. Six of the eight residential bungalows were visited. Mealtimes were shared and observed with the residential students. Interviews were undertaken with the head of social care, interim head of care, members of the residential staff team, chair of governors and governor with safeguarding responsibilities, and members of the healthcare team. Observation of the student council and meeting with the independent visitor were also undertaken. Feedback from parents that the school had gathered was viewed. Documents relating to the safety and welfare of students were sampled and scrutinised.

Inspection team

Liz Driver	Lead social care inspector
Sophie Wood	Social care inspector
Teri Peck	Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Valence school is a maintained residential special school. The school caters for pupils with physical disabilities and/or complex medical needs. Currently, 54 students aged between 11 and 19 years board. They live in eight bungalows. Accommodation is situated within the grounds of the school. The residential provision was last inspected in March 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Inadequate

Due to the serious shortfalls in the promotion of safeguarding and welfare, the overall experiences of the residential students are inadequate.

Student experiences and progress are hindered due to the poor leadership of the residential provision. On occasions, staff members' lack of understanding of safeguarding has led to students being put at risk. Poor referral, investigation and subsequent poorly applied disciplinary proceedings have, on occasions, left the students at risk of further harm. Inappropriate staff practice has resulted in negative residential experiences for some students.

Leaders and managers are not effective at identifying and tackling weaknesses, as systems to monitor and audit are not sufficiently robust and therefore do not provide data or evidence for senior leaders to act on. Senior staff with responsibility for residential provision have failed to carry out their duties to ensure that students have a positive experience and are protected. Some staff have failed to provide dignified and safe care.

Residential students say that they enjoy their experience and appeared happy throughout the three-day inspection. There are trusting and relaxed relationships between the students and staff. Many friendships are formed between the students. The inspectors observed students being very respectful of each other and understanding of their individual needs.

Students in general make good progress in regards to their education, health, emotional and social well-being. Individual complex health and communication needs are taken into account when assessing progress made. Most students make good progress from the point of when they start at the school. Assessing progress continues to be an area that the school is developing.

Students are able to integrate into the local and wider community, sharing experiences that they thoroughly enjoy. Staff provide a wide range of activities both on and off site, and these take account of individual preferences. The views and opinions of the students are routinely sought and suggestions taken seriously. The student voice is seen as central to the day-to-day planning and running of the school.

The residential accommodation is of a very good standard, with all adaptations necessary. On occasions, students may have to wait until they can experience the residential facilities of the school while specialist equipment suitable to their individual needs is acquired.

The residential provision strives to work in partnerships with parents, carers, placing authorities and external agencies to support the students. There is significant room for improvement in working effectively with safeguarding agencies.

The quality of care and support

Requires improvement

Overall, the quality of care ranges from poor to good. Some staff have failed to provide a safe and dignified standard of care, whereas the vast majority of staff work with a passion to ensure that students receive safe and sensitive care. Senior staff's response to the poor quality of care has been insufficiently robust. Poor care has included inappropriate use of language, unsuitable behaviour students being left unattended during the night time. It is noted that many staff strive to ensure that students are safe and treated with respect and dignity, especially when providing intimate care.

Residential students are happy in their residential accommodation. They have their own or shared bedrooms. New students are welcomed into the home living areas. A student said, 'I really like my bungalow and it felt warm and cosy very quickly.'

Development of individual support plans that students carry with them enable staff to know and understand their individual needs across areas such as speech and language, diet, moving and handling, and individual likes and dislikes. They also identify suitable individual goals that help students to progress. They comprehensively describe the unique needs of each student. Students and their families are encouraged to add to and amend this key document. The students are very well informed of their support plans and happily talk through them.

A multidisciplinary approach to the writing of support plans means that the healthcare team, education and residential staff all contribute. The range of healthcare professionals provide students with direct expert care and advice. Healthcare professionals are employed by the school or by the local NHS Trust.

Procedures for medication administration do not prevent errors and near-misses occurring. Procedures for recoding and reporting of errors have been improved since the last inspection, but there is still room for improvement as to who takes responsibility for any errors that may require a safeguarding referral. The administration of medication is a joint responsibility between the School and NHS Trust a therefore a consistent and jointly agreed monitoring and reporting system needs to be established as the current arrangements are confusing.

The school positively promotes and safely delivers students' self-medication of medicines. Clear and robust programmes allow for students to gain confidence in managing their medicines at their own pace. There are suitable fridges in the residential accommodation used exclusively to store particular medications. However, the temperature of the fridges is not consistently monitored or recorded, which creates uncertainty in appraising how safely medications are stored.

Many staff with expertise in a wide range of areas have input into the development and delivery of support and health plans. In general, all students' needs are identified at the initial stage of referral through the school's assessment procedures. However, on occasion, important information is not present and then the school challenges professionals to ensure that it receives all necessary information. Assessments allow for staff to be aware of possible risks, for example sexualised behaviours. Nevertheless, they

are not always followed through with risk assessments being updated or drawn up in response to changing and presenting behaviours. Managers do not provide staff with clear strategies to manage such behaviours.

Delivery of complex dietary needs is supported by a qualified dietician and speech and language therapist, who communicate with both the staff and students to ensure that all aspects of students' diets are met. Mealtimes are very well organised, with each student having an individual eating plan. These plans identify students' preferred eating position, preferred choice of food, and required eating adaptations. A detailed staff plan ensures that there is a sufficient number of staff members in the dining room at lunchtimes who are able to offer appropriate individualised support. Students said that they enjoy the food and were well informed about healthy eating. More complex eating methods, such as gastrostomy feeds, are also well managed and undertaken with good levels of hygiene.

The school has a transition programme that champions independence. A newly employed member of staff is focusing on developing this area further. There is evidence that this provides a good standard of preparation for students to experience a smooth transition into further education, semi-independent living, or a return to their home with independence skills. This is enhanced by the provision of an independent visitor who himself has complex health and communication difficulties and who successfully operates a business in providing support to students and their families. He provides an extremely positive role model to all of the students. The school can improve by ensuring that all students, parents and staff are informed of when he is due on site. The school follows up on students once they have left the school: in practice, most move on to further education.

How well children and young people are protected

Inadequate

Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of the students are ineffective and mean that students are not always protected from harm. There are serious shortfalls in the school's practices and procedures.

The designated safeguarding lead at the school has failed to ensure the application and delivery of safe practices and procedures. In addition, he has failed to meet the guidance issued by the Secretary of State ('Keeping children safe in education', September 2016) and the local safeguarding procedures. Management of safeguarding and child protection concerns by the designated safeguarding lead and the human resources department, are ineffective and at times unsafe. The safeguarding team is not organised or efficient in team members communicating with each other to make well-informed decisions.

A culture has been allowed to develop in which some staff have not reported safeguarding concerns. When they are reported, they are not always reported on to the appropriate safeguarding agency. Those that are have not always been reported in a timely manner. Investigations undertaken by the designated safeguarding lead are of an extremely poor standard and quality. Records are brief, disorganised and lacking in professional detail. Decision making as a result of poor quality investigations is unsafe,

and in some cases has put the students at risk of further harm. The safeguarding practice is not reliable and senior staff have failed to pick up all pertinent issues. Therefore, unsafe practice can be and has been missed.

Issues of poor staff conduct, including the use of inappropriate language and gestures in the presence of students, have not been suitably or robustly addressed. As a result, students have been put at further risk of harm. Additionally, staff have, on two known occasions, left students unattended during the night. This puts students at risk of harm due to their complex health needs.

Recording systems in relation to incidents are overcomplicated and prevent clear monitoring and auditing by the senior management team. Learning from incidents has not taken place. A new governor with safeguarding responsibilities has begun to identify some areas that require improvement, and she provided a clear verbal commitment to ensuring improved future oversight of safeguarding matters and addressing all serious shortfalls.

Recruitment procedures are consistent. Telephone verification of references is not always undertaken at the start of employment but are completed by the end of individual probation periods. Successful probation is subject to full vetting procedures being completed and scrutinised. The school council has influence in the appointment of potential staff and representatives are present during interview. This ensures that the voice of the students is actively considered when recruiting staff who will support them.

No residential students have gone missing during residential time. There is confusion among staff around what a physical intervention is and what it is not. Staff training needs to be reviewed to make clear what they are trained and not trained to apply in terms of hands-on behaviour management. Mostly, this relates to staff being able to power off a wheelchair that the student is driving and putting themselves or others at risk. Sanctions are not applied. Students earn merits as part of a school-wide reward system, which includes recognition of kindness towards others. Pupils confirm that bullying is not a problem in the school.

Health and safety routines across the school are well organised and effective. Students experience fire evacuation drills so they and staff know what action to take if a fire occurred. Each residential accommodation bungalow has a brief list of students and what to do for them in the event of fire; however, this is not sufficiently detailed. Personal emergency evacuation plans need to be in place to address properly the complex health, moving and communication needs of each student.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inadequate

The management of the residential provision is ineffective. Although managers are suitably experienced and qualified, in practice the management of safeguarding has been very poor. The human resource department's response to concerns about staff has also not been rigorous.

The school has experienced changes in its management structure recently due to

sickness; this has included both residential staff and governors. New appointments have been made, but it is too early in their tenure to assess the effectiveness of these changes. The period of change has been challenging. The head of social care has maintained overall responsibility for the residential provision.

The school's lack of effective monitoring systems to ensure the welfare of the students has resulted in missed opportunities to learn from incidents. Monitoring is hindered by complex systems and poor communication and understanding of roles and responsibilities among staff. In turn, the governing body is not suitably informed of how the school is functioning. There is a lack of challenge and strong oversight from senior staff and the governing body.

The school has clear disciplinary and complaints procedures which are accessible to all staff. Managers have not followed the school's own policy on recording and responding to complaints. In addition, the school's written record of complaints does not identify those complaints relating to residential provision, or what actions have been taken following the investigation, regardless of whether they are upheld. Poor quality investigations have not been identified or challenged by leaders. As a result, inappropriate decisions have been made regarding disciplinary proceedings.

There has been a considerable change in residential staffing since the last inspection. All new members of staff receive structured induction training. However, the absence of regular supervision for probationers has meant that the structured induction is not fully explored or utilised by them. Some experienced staff have also not received regular supervision, mainly those working during the school day. This means that any shortfalls in staff practice are not discussed or support offered. In addition, the school's learning and development programme is not evaluated for effectiveness at least annually, as it should be, nor updated where necessary. Despite these shortfalls, staff met during this inspection appeared happy and enjoying their roles.

Staffing numbers are suitable to meet the needs of residential students. The night-time work pattern means that night staff work alone in each bungalow with on-call support. There have been two incidents of waking night staff leaving students unattended.

External visits to the residential provision carried out by governor's result in satisfactorily detailed reports. However, these visits have failed to identify the serious shortfalls. Again, this indicates that monitoring needs improving.

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 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. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number

Social care unique reference number SC041791

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 54

Gender of boarders Mixed

Age range of boarders 11 to 19

Headteacher Mr Roland Gooding

Date of previous boarding inspection 14/03/2016

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