

# Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

## Inspection dates

21 February 2017 to 23 February 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

- Residential pupils know that they are highly valued by staff who demonstrate genuine care and affection for them. The strength of these relationships helps residential pupils to readily settle, enjoy their residential experience and maximise all that the provision has to offer.
- Effective communication underpins the school's ethos and practice. A high number of residential pupils join the school with a history of very limited communication skills. They find their voice through the creativity of resourceful staff who use a variety of communication aids and adaptations. The confidence, dignity and self-worth of residential pupils soars as a result.
- Inquisitive staff work hard to understand and interpret residential pupils' unique and challenging behaviours. The school's mantra is to understand the message and work out what the individual is trying to say. This practice results in proactive behaviour support strategies, with minimal use of physical restraint interventions.
- Parents and carers have trust and faith in the staff team. Excellent relationships in this regard achieve consistent care and support between home and school.
- Strong safeguarding arrangements continue to be strengthened. The welfare and protection of the residential pupils is seen as everyone's business and responsibility.
- Superb leadership and management arrangements hold everyone to account within a nurturing and enabling environment. Staff are supported and managed in equal measure, to ensure the best outcomes for the residential pupils.

## **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?**

- Embed the personal, social and health education programme (PHSE) into the residential provision.

## **Information about this inspection**

The school was given two hours' notice of this inspection. Meetings were conducted with the headteacher, the head of care, residential care staff and department leads including estates, teaching, parent liaison, catering and members of the therapy team. The chair of the governing board (also the safeguarding lead) was interviewed, as well as a visiting family member. A full tour of the premises was made and meals were taken with the residential pupils. Afternoon and evening activities were observed and joined, in order for residential pupils to be spoken with. Telephone contact was made with parents, carers and the local safeguarding team. Written and electronic records in relation to safeguarding, care planning, health and school policies and procedural guidance were sampled.

## **Inspection team**

Sophie Wood

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Stone Bay School is a local authority maintained residential special school with 52 girls and boys aged 11 to 19, of whom 23 are weekly boarders. The school is situated in Broadstairs, Kent, and caters for young people who have learning, behavioural and communication needs. A high percentage of students have autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The residential accommodation provides a number of separate living areas and all bedrooms are single occupancy. All residential accommodation is located on the school site, within or attached to the main school building. The school was last inspected in March 2016.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

Residential pupils make friends and enjoy enriching social experiences. Their comments include 'I like being with my friends the best' and 'we do lots of fun things here'. Thoughtfully prepared activities are designed to appeal. In particular, fun-filled group and team games, often delivered under the watchful eye of the speech and language team. Busily engaged residential pupils were observed to have fun without fully realising that they were also learning to share, take turns, cooperate with others and practise their communication skills. All school staff see the potential learning in every activity. A staff member said, 'I will be one happy key worker when he learns to wait for his turn!' Parents and carers commend this aspect and say, 'For my child's social development the residential provision is vital.'

Many residential pupils have experienced difficulties in previous settings. The school takes a pragmatic approach towards descriptors of 'challenging behaviour' and immediately starts to work on individual communication systems. The parent of a new residential pupil said, 'I cannot thank the school enough. My child is less frustrated, she can better communicate and all that previous anger has virtually gone,' and, 'It's the difference at home that is so important. No more battles. It's just wonderful!'

Staff reward residential pupils at every opportunity for each tiny milestone or target achieved. This practice fully supports the school's care planning tool, which precisely explores each individual's starting point across a wide range of areas. Consequently, social and independence targets and goals are correctly pitched. Residential pupils and their parents/carers enthusiastically contribute to this process, which frequently results in the same goals being practised at home. Residential pupils' chances of success are maximised as a result. The embedded 'can do' ethos of the school encourages residential pupils to be proud of their achievements and who they are. One parent said, 'The staff just love her. I know they do. Even her naughty ways. Every bit of her!'

Well-planned residential routines help the residential pupils to be ready and eager to start their school day. Due to staff's excellent understanding of individuals, potential flash points and triggers are anticipated and therefore avoided. For example, one individual needs to get ready in a particular order of repetitive tasks, some have rituals and others require a lot of time. Staff said, 'Some behaviours are only a problem to onlookers and don't need to be changed whereas others need to be worked with.' Skilful staff think very carefully about whether an individual's behavioural traits really are a barrier to their ability to make progress or not. Their approach and techniques frequently lead to residential pupils joining their classrooms in good shape and ready to learn. On occasion, when this does not occur, residential pupils are fully supported by the care team to continue with their learning within the residential provision while alternative provisions are sought. Such practice values the pupils up until the day that they leave the school.

Strong partnership working between the residential and education teams blurs the boundaries between each department. This is purposeful and engineered to create a

seamless approach towards the waking hour's curriculum. The success of the residential care planning system is rated so highly that it is now being introduced into the education provision. Consequently, the individual targets and goals of residential pupils are keenly supported in a consistent manner regardless of the time of day or setting. Residential pupils are successfully learning to communicate, make choices, practise their social skills and become increasingly independent.

Many of the older residential pupils demonstrate a thirst to leave the school and to move on to their new ventures. Their comments included 'I'm excited to leave' and, 'I'm looking forward to it'. Such comments are testament to the school's success in preparing the residential pupils for the next stage of their lives. A staff member said, 'It's hard to see them go but if they leave with excitement then we have done our job.' Staff's input and interest in leavers has no distinct timeline. Open days are regularly attended by former pupils who relish coming back for visits. Some, who have struggled since moving on last year, are still receiving appropriate advice and guidance, as are their families.

### **The quality of care and support**

### **Outstanding**

Residential pupils settle quickly because of high-quality assessment and joining processes. Rich information is sought from previous schools, involved professionals, parents and carers. Introductions to the school are individually tailored and might include tea visits before overnight stays. Patient staff said, 'It is best when the child and their parents/carers make the final decision that everyone is ready. Typically, the children can't wait to join us.' Skilful staff quash parental anxieties early on. Regular and meaningful 'professional' contact by way of written reports and weekly contact books is routinely interspersed with ad-hoc telephone calls when something wonderful happens. One parent described, 'When he does something brilliant, they phone me there and then. They don't wait for the next meeting because they're as excited as I am!'

Staff's accurate understanding and implementation of the school's care planning tool increases the residential pupils' chances of success. The residential team has been using the 'Performance Indicators for Value Added Target Setting' (PIVATS) for a number of years. Well-trained, superbly supported staff competently design and implement stretching goals and targets. Key to this system's success is the well-informed participation of each residential pupil. Many can accurately describe their own targets and are keenly focused on achieving them.

The collaboration between all staff members across the school is a particular strength. For example, members of the estates team understand why and how a bedroom needs to be designed and equipped in a particular way. Teaching staff and residential key workers routinely enter each other's domains. One staff member said, 'There's no professional snobbery here. We are all needed and we all bring something unique to the children.' This fantastic statement fully reflects the culture of the school. Parents and carers are also a vital part of this team. They are routinely consulted along their child's journey. One parent said of their child's residential team leader, 'Oh she is just fabulous and knows him so well. It's like co-parenting. We work together. She thinks the world of my boy.'

Notwithstanding the positive impact of the blended approach of all school staff, the calibre of those in key positions is integral to the school's success. Senior leaders are

able to focus upon bigger picture issues because department leads are competent and capable. They are passionate about outcomes for the residential pupils and strive to support them and their families. For example, the family liaison officer actively pursues and challenges the quality of local authority assessments, care plans and proposed future placements for school leavers where this is appropriate. One carer said, 'My child and me would not be in the good shape we're in without all that this school has done for us. He will be moving on to the right place because of the support we've had from here.' The care team around this particular individual are equally commended for the time, effort and energy that they have given to support introductory visits, frequently on their days off, to enable a smooth move.

## **How well children and young people are protected**

**Good**

Well-trained staff receive regular and updated safeguarding and child protection training, which is commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. Since the last inspection, an additional number of designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) have been appointed across the residential and education teams. A very clear safeguarding reporting procedure leads to the designated person, the headteacher and the safeguarding governor. All of whom are fully conversant with the school and the local authority's safeguarding protocols.

Visual displays of the safeguarding team are commonplace throughout the school. Good staff deployment ensures a sufficient number of DSLs are readily available throughout every 24-hour period. Staff know what to report and to whom. They operate a culture of recognising the extreme vulnerabilities of the residential pupils within which they are confident to challenge, explore and to think the unthinkable. This protects children. One superb example involved a more junior staff member raising a concern about the head of care. A residential pupil had pointed to a scratch and then to the photograph of the head of care. The subsequent investigation found that the residential pupil merely wanted the head of care to know that he had hurt himself. The staff member was commended by the head of care for his actions.

A recommendation from the previous inspection to improve upon the quality and content of individual risk assessments for residential pupils has been implemented. These documents contain concise, informative information about an individual's immediate triggers, idiosyncrasies and coping mechanisms. Short, sharp instructive guidance tells staff, and in particular, new staff and professional visitors, what to do in order to reduce immediate risks. Some residential pupils have additional mental health and psychological difficulties which can result in physically challenging and aggressive behaviours. Staff's calm response to such outbursts were observed to be sensitive and in accordance with the letter of the written guidance. Consequently, residential pupils are consistently supported to overcome their own personal difficulties within an embracing environment that wants the very best for them. A staff member said, 'If it's painful for us to see her suffering, what must it be like to be going through it? We just have to persevere and see this through.'

Staff recognise the obvious vulnerabilities of the residential pupils, compounded by having learning and communication difficulties. Whole school training materials are regularly updated to include the changing landscape of child protection topics. More recent guidance includes updates on radicalisation and the changing and evolving risks

around internet safety. Staff keenly target specific areas of vulnerability for individuals, for example, by working on stranger danger for one residential pupil and the use of social media for another. There is a strong PHSE provision within the curriculum that teaches pupils about their personal safety but this is not carried on within residential time. Leaders are currently exploring this gap.

Staff receive regularly updated and accredited behaviour management training, which includes the use of physical intervention techniques. Given the high profile of the de-escalation element, staff rarely resort to the use of physical intervention. Any such use is stringently monitored. Staff are held to account. Leaders are in regular liaison with another school in order to share experiences, review practices and to make transparent comparisons. This relationship is used as a benchmark to bring peer scrutiny and independence to such a vital area of child protection. It is a strong preventative measure which reduces the risk of insular practice.

Slick maintenance, repair and replacement procedures keep environmental hazards to a minimum. All staff take their health and safety responsibilities seriously and do their bit to swiftly report concerns. Some areas of the residential provision are subject to a lot of wear and tear due to the needs and behaviours of some individuals. A rolling programme of refurbishment and repair is diligently monitored by the estates manager who ably balances the safety needs of the premises against the aesthetics. Fire safety receives the utmost priority. Evacuation practises are routinely executed across the day and evening to ensure all potential gaps and points of concern have been planned for in the event of a real emergency. Creative staff help to enhance the physical environment wherever possible, by joining in with decorating and fundraising to purchase much needed and wanted play and recreational equipment.

Staff understand the potential risks of the location and immediate environment. They also recognise the potential for restrictive practices to creep in. To this end, the use of coded door entry systems, CCTV and areas of restricted entry are routinely monitored, with such policy guidance reviewed. Surveillance measures are not used within communal living or private areas but they do monitor entry and exit sites of the premises. Residential pupils say that they feel safe at school and in particular, at night.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

### **Outstanding**

Competent senior leadership gains the respect and loyalty of a passionate, strongly committed staff team which strives to achieve the very best outcomes for the residential pupils. All members of the residential care team either possess or are working towards the completion of the required diploma childcare qualification. In addition, all core mandatory training is up to date, including Makaton signing for the catering team.

Leaders are supportive yet challenging in equal measure. Every staff member has targets which set out how they as individuals contribute to the positive outcomes for the residential pupils and deliver the school's aims and objectives. Following a previous recommendation, the content of staff's individual supervision meeting records now better capture the content of these discussions. Extra meetings are called where necessary, to either address a performance issue quickly or to recognise an exceptional piece of practice. Staff know where they stand. They welcome the transparent approach



of senior managers.

One staff member said, 'If you are here for the children and are prepared to work hard then you will love it here.' Another staff member said, 'In the climate of local authority cuts, it can be a worry but we are always consulted and told the truth.' In recent times, the school has recruited staff and more latterly, instigated a redundancy process. Yet the staff team remains steadfast in its commitment and approach to providing high-quality care. Staff members are commended for the support they provide to each other and their focus upon meeting the needs of the residential pupils. Many staff team members are long-serving and refer to current leadership arrangements as 'the best they've ever been'.

Managers use protected monitoring time to diligently explore staff's practices and the progress of the residential pupils. Leaders and managers know the school's strengths and weaknesses and where they want to be. The current focus is steadfastly upon the recruitment of a speech and language lead, following the recent departure of the previous post holder. Beyond an immediate replacement, leaders are seizing the opportunity to fully review this important aspect of the school's work to further build on and improve the quality and impact of this element of its provision. The headteacher said, 'There is nothing as important as the children's ability to communicate. Everything else follows this.'

Strong governance includes a good number of parent governors who bring a diverse and challenging dimension to leaders and managers. Regular subcommittees question expenditure and scrutinise the reports and information presented by the school. The health and safety committee has a visionary plan to ensure everyone's safety and well-being within the constraints of a tight budget. The main success ingredient across and throughout the school is the genuine and tangible professional respect and challenge that is demonstrated by all departments and disciplines. This practice brings everyone together with the singular aim of working together to achieve the very best outcomes for the residential pupils.

## 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'.

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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	119056
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC023693
<b>DfE registration number</b>	119056

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	23
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Billy McInally
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	10 March 2016
<b>Telephone number</b>	01843 863421
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