

Cuckmere House School

Eastbourne Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 4BA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This residential special school is for boys aged between 5 and 16 years who have an educational statement or an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). The school is part of the Sabden Multi-Academy Trust. The trust includes one other residential SEMH special school; a mixed day SEMH special school; and a number of alternative provisions. The school's residential provision is located in a separate building in a residential area of the town, approximately half a mile from the main school site. Up to 12 boys can stay overnight and they generally stay for between one and three nights during the school week. Extended day provision is also available for primary and secondary pupils. This enables them to stay on into the evening for activities and a meal before returning home.

Inspection dates: 30 October to 1 November 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 24 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The residential experience is highly valued by boarders. Boarding helps to support increased academic attainment, attendance and improved behaviours.
- Feedback from parents is extremely positive. One parent said, 'I cannot put into words the positive impact achieved for my son.'
- Boarding staff also work within the day provision and, as a result, have a unique insight into the behavioural patterns and academic needs of boarders. This helps them to provide a unique range of activities and enables them to extend the curriculum into the boarding house.
- Boarders learn new and valuable social and independence skills. One parent reported that, following input from boarding staff, he has been able to take his son out to dinner for the first time.
- Behavioural management is highly effective. Staff provide highly effective supervision to boarders, intervening with great skill and making excellent use of their strong relationships with boarders.
- Boarders benefit from an extremely committed staff team. Staff work together consistently and with a strong desire to educate and inspire.
- Admission and induction processes are rigorous and very effective. Staff visit prospective boarders at home and offer them extended provision into the evening, prior to considering whether an initial overnight stay would be appropriate.
- Managers have implemented an exciting and innovative service development plan, including the introduction of new theoretical principles. This is driving continuous improvement to enhance further the care that is offered to boarders.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The kitchen facilities in the boarding house require updating to allow staff to cater for boarders more effectively.
- The reports of the independent visitor require more in-depth analysis of safeguarding arrangements for boarders.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Boarders thrive in this residential provision, which is integral to the success of the school. Despite only enjoying a stay for one night per week, boarders make significant progress compared with those not accessing the residential provision. For many, their stay is the highlight of their week. In the last academic year, attendance for primary school pupils who board increased by 16%, and by 15% for secondary-aged children. This dramatic improvement is mirrored by a reduction in behavioural incidents. For pupils of primary school age there were 25% fewer behavioural incidents and for those of secondary school age there were 27% fewer. Outcomes for boarders are also positive; of those leaving at the end of the last academic year, all moved on to planned college courses.

The boarding house offers care which is uniquely flexible and nurturing. Extended day provision is offered until boarders are ready to move towards overnight stays. Boarding is provided during periods of high anxiety, such as examinations or difficulties at home, in order to support boarders and to help prevent family disruption.

Feedback from boarders is extremely positive. One boarder said, 'How can you change something this good?' A placing social worker said, 'He [the child] is nothing but glowing about the boarding house.'

The boarding house is a warm, friendly and extremely child-centred environment. It is a large, well-facilitated space which allows boarders to enjoy a number of separate activities dependent on their mood and wishes. The boarding house is decorated with art that has been created by boarders, and with photographs of recent trips and activities such as go-karting. Informative educational displays depicting events such as Remembrance Sunday decorate the walls. Staff recently promoted the importance and value of regular reading by celebrating 'Roald Dahl Week'. These activities are recorded in DVD format for boarders, and the progress made by boarders is celebrated by regular awards and praise from staff.

Communication between boarding staff and academic staff is outstanding. One parent described this liaison as 'seamless' and a placing social worker stated that the boarding house is 'an extension of the curriculum'. Boarding staff are employed in the day school and demonstrate excellent knowledge of the behavioural and academic progress of boarders. This enables boarding staff to set appropriate behavioural and academic goals for boarders such as spelling the days of the week and managing their anger more effectively.

Boarders benefit from the excellent planning, preparation and inventiveness of staff. This results in a highly positive structure and routine, and the development of close and trusting relationships with staff. Boarders recently celebrated kindness week by preparing a cup of tea for their teachers. Activities such as painting candle holders for the Hindu festival of Diwali, or participating in a clean-up of a local beach, broaden boarders' understanding of other cultures and issues affecting their local community.

Boarders learn a wide range of new skills that are relevant to their age. They develop enduring friendships by supporting and mentoring each other. Boarders assist with laying the table and help staff to prepare evening meals; this is a source of pride. One boarder exclaimed, 'I am chef tonight!' Staff incentivise engagement by offering formal accreditation for achievements such as baking a cake.

Behaviour management is highly effective. Staff enforce boundaries consistently and with a high degree of empathy. Staff use their excellent relationships with boarders to understand behavioural patterns and to intervene quickly before situations escalate. When conflicts do occur between boarders, staff mediate effectively and encourage boarders to resolve their differences among themselves. Boarders understand the clear and consistent behavioural expectations and learn to apologise directly to staff and to each other when difficulties occur.

Boarders feel heard. The student voice newspaper contains interviews by boarders with other boarders on their views on particular events and activities. Parents and boarders complete surveys, and their recommendations are incorporated into the planning of future events.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Safeguarding practice is very strong. Staff handle sensitive issues through excellent communication, consistency and strong management direction. Managers use recording systems effectively to track and monitor the progression and impact of potential concerns.

Staff accurately risk-assess the changing needs of young people on a daily basis. This information is shared readily with key professionals such as placing social workers. Risk assessments are extremely detailed and offer a clear and vivid analysis of the needs of boarders. Risks are identified very quickly and safeguarding action is proactive and creative. Assessments incorporate all of the recommendations of statutory education assessments and give clear guidance as to areas of concern and for development. One social worker referred to the 'vital work' undertaken to support a boarder who is subject to a child protection plan. Assessments include the wishes and feelings of boarders about possible trigger factors for their behaviour, and the preferred staff response, such as allowing them to calm down before discussing the issue that caused them to become upset. Staff consistently enforce these strategies. This approach supports boarders to learn to manage their own behaviour and to reduce their anger outbursts.

Boarders report feeling very safe and trusting of staff. One boarder said, 'There is no bullying here, everyone is cool. If there is a problem, staff are there.' High staffing levels allow for close levels of monitoring and for boarders to choose not to participate in the evening activity if they wish.

Partnership work with parents is prioritised. Parents feel engaged and fully involved. This is supported through regular coffee mornings, allowing parents to share their experiences and behavioural management techniques with boarding staff and with each

other. One parent said, 'I can now take him out to a restaurant and not worry about it.'

Planning for activities is meticulous. One staff member is skilled in outdoor pursuits instruction and another is a qualified swimming teacher; these skills support safe and risk-assessed planning for activities. Advice and assistance regarding suitable risk assessments and other aspects of safeguarding are appropriately sought from host local authorities when required.

Support for boarders is comprehensive. Boarders benefit from a number of specialist services provided by the school. The school's speech and language therapist and school nurse visit the boarding house to advise and guide staff on strategies to support boarders. Staff access the wider community for additional support and educational opportunities. The fire service and a dental hygienist recently visited the boarding house, much to the delight of boarders.

Staff advocate very strongly on behalf of boarders. Where issues arise at home or in placement, staff ensure that these concerns are well documented and are passed to allocated social workers. This supports the early resolution of potential worries or problems and promotes the development of trusting relationships between boarders and staff.

Boarders do not go missing from the boarding house. Staff understand the procedure they should follow in the event of such an incident occurring.

Internet safety is promoted highly. Staff regularly discuss with boarders the potential dangers posed by the internet and 'gaming' with unknown others who may pose a risk to them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The boarding provision benefits from an exceptional management team. The head of care has been in post for 9 years and has been employed by the organisation for 11 years. She is also the designated safeguarding lead for the school and is well respected by the staff team and boarders. She is effectively supported by her deputy, who has been employed by the school for 31 years. Managers have known the boarders and their wider families for a lengthy period, and understand well the dynamics within families. Managers enjoy an extremely supportive and cohesive relationship with the school's senior management team and its trustees.

Managers demonstrate a unique understanding of boarders. They speak of the achievements and progress of boarders with obvious pride and pleasure. This helps to sustain exceptional levels of motivation. An ambitious service development plan is in place and demonstrates a consistent desire for improvement. The school continues to implement new and exciting therapeutic initiatives. The success of one recent initiative was recognised by a boarder who said, 'Because of my therapy I feel so much better about myself.'

Managers drive a culture of learning and development for staff. They recently asked staff to undertake a quiz regarding a relevant piece of government legislation. Staff report that a rigorous programme of training is in place, and spoke with enthusiasm about a recent course on trauma and its positive impact on their practice.

Managers network very effectively. The head of care attends a local safeguarding forum to share ideas on practice and to ascertain any concerns affecting the local area. At present, the reports of the independent visitor offer insufficient analysis of the safeguarding arrangements within the provision; this limits the scope of managers to implement and monitor improvements.

Staff morale is high. No members of staff have left since the last inspection. A permanent member of staff who recently joined the team has settled in well. Staff report high levels of management support, supervision and appraisal. The team is small and well bonded. Agency staff are not required. This promotes excellent consistency of care for boarders.

Admission and induction processes are excellent. Staff visit boarders at home to discuss plans for overnight stays with parents and to find out about boarders' routines; this limits the possibility of homesickness and ensures that boarders gain maximum benefit from the experience of staying overnight at the school.

Groups of boarders are kept to small and manageable levels and boarders are carefully selected based on their age and interests. Managers prioritise quality of care over admission numbers. This promotes a positive and cohesive atmosphere. Managers are open and reflective when placement difficulties occur. They scrutinise interventions and care-planning decisions to assess whether improvements can be made.

The living environment is homely and well maintained. Accurate risk assessments and health and safety checks are conducted regularly. This means that the boarding house is safe for all to live and work in. At present, the kitchen space needs to be updated to allow staff to cook for young people more effectively. The interior of the home is re-decorated on a regular basis. This ensures that young people continue to live in surroundings that are homely and of which they are rightly proud.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with two hours' notice. Inspection activities included: formal and informal discussions with boarders, sharing meals and participating in an evening activity. Discussions took place with the headteacher, the head of care, teaching staff, other members of the senior management team and members of care staff. A telephone discussion also took place with a governor. A wide range of documentation concerning the residential provision was scrutinised. There were three responses on 'Parent View' for analysis and a face-to-face meeting occurred with one parent.

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives

of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC050165

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Frank Stanford

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01323 893319

Email address: office@sabden.org.uk

Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector



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