

# The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this residential special school**

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 139 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. The school currently has 52 children, who stay between one and four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for children who have moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders, autistic spectrum disorders and behavioural difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 13 to 15 November 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,** taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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:** 16 November 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Excellent professional practice has been maintained since the last inspection, due to a culture of continuous improvement.
- The children make excellent and sustained progress through the support that they receive.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious, inspiring and confident.
- The children benefit from strong, positive relationships with a stable, confident, child-focused and aspirational staff team.
- There is highly effective partnership working with safeguarding professionals.
- Staff manage children's internet safety very thoroughly.
- Behaviour management in the residential provision is highly effective.
- Parents and professionals give outstanding feedback about the quality of the service.
- Leaders and managers encourage staff to be innovative and inventive.
- The children benefit from specialist speech and language input.
- The children benefit from access to a wide range of activities, many of which they would not otherwise be able to do.
- The children are able to identify trusted adults with whom they can share concerns.
- The support for staff is comprehensive and ambitious.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They have responded comprehensively to the point for improvement identified at the last inspection.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

This is an outstanding residential provision that is an integral and highly valued element of the school. Leaders, managers and staff have ensured that excellent professional practice has been maintained since the last inspection. Across the board, this is underpinned by a lack of complacency, combined with a culture of continuous improvement.

The children make excellent and sustained progress because of the support that they receive from child-focused, enthusiastic staff. The progress that residential pupils make is measured, monitored and maintained over time. This progress is consistently greater than that of day pupils. A parent said, 'I have seen her [child] make a hell of a lot of progress. Her reading just in the last year has gone up loads of stages.' The children make good progress in their attendance and attainment. They develop their independence skills because of the support and guidance of the staff. The children recognise this themselves.

The children benefit from strong, positive relationships with an established, confident and aspirational staff team. They experience high-quality care, delivered with dignity and respect. Their achievements are celebrated. The inspector could see children and staff interacting throughout the inspection and saw positive behaviour being reinforced.

The staff are sensitive to each child's context and place within their wider family. The children are able to contact their families. Phones are available and have been adapted to enable each child to 'speed dial' their families.

Leaders and managers encourage staff to be innovative and inventive. This has enabled creative practice to flourish. Consequently, already strong practices are improving further. For example, new approaches to engaging with parents and carers have resulted in highly effective working relationships with children's families.

The children are able to identify a number of adults with whom they can share concerns. There is information available for children in the houses about how to do this. The children are aware of these displays and are able to articulate whom they can talk to. The adapted phones include 'speed dial' contacts for helplines such as Child Line.

Leaders and managers undertake reviews of their practice to identify ways in which it can be improved. Individual staff members are assigned specialisms and undertake research into these areas. Research-informed training is given to staff, who translate it into practice. For example, following formal training, one member of staff is researching how environmental changes may improve reading support in residence. This approach emboldens staff, increases engagement and contributes to improved

outcomes for the children.

The children have good support to manage their health needs while in residence. The school has strong links with the local health services, including learning disability mental health services. The staff work in partnership with health agencies to minimise the distress and disruption that the children may experience when needing health input. This is particularly important when working with families whose children have multiple appointments.

The children benefit from specialist speech and language input. Leaders and managers ensure that this input includes staff from the residential provision. The residential staff talk with passion about the opportunities that working alongside speech and language specialists have given them. This results in the staff reflecting on practice and making changes to improve the quality of the service.

The children benefit from access to a wide range of activities that are designed in consultation with them. The children enjoy opportunities and experiences that they would not otherwise have. These include creative activities that are provided by external agencies. During the course of the inspection, the children were engaged with an external charity in an exercise to create an animated music video.

The quality of the residential provision has improved since the last inspection. New kitchens and new carpets have been fitted and improvements to the bathrooms have been carried out. The children were involved in the decision-making process regarding these changes. They report being very pleased with the outcome.

Leaders and managers give careful consideration to the arrangements for transition into the school. They have reviewed the transition process. This review identified areas for potential improvement. This is another good example of proactive and reflective practice and a drive to improve.

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

The help and protection that managers and staff give to the children are outstanding. Highly effective partnership working with safeguarding social workers supports and drives change in families. This results in sustained improvement in children's lives.

The staff have a strong and effective approach to supporting children to manage the risks that their use of the internet may pose. A member of staff has been appointed to take a lead on this work. A champion has been appointed in the residential provision. Between them, they operate a comprehensive system that raises the awareness of emerging risks and enables positive responses to incidents that occur. The staff routinely reflect with the children on staying safe online. This takes place prior to each of the frequent internet sessions. The lead staff distribute important information about new and emerging concerns to other staff and the families. This increases the potential for staff and families to pick up on worrying incidents.

A social worker emphasised the outstanding, assertive practice that took place with one family. While other professionals baulked at the need to be honest and say difficult things, the social worker said, 'We did not have this from the school'. The staff still managed to maintain a positive working relationship with the family. The social worker described the school as being 'the best I worked with, the most contributing'. The school's contribution has helped to ensure that the child has been able to remain with their family. The social worker talked with great positivity about the changes that have taken place in the family.

A highly regarded safeguarding lead promptly addresses safeguarding concerns. The staff understand the approach to safeguarding at the school. Careful logging and sharing of safeguarding concerns result in the children receiving timely support. When appropriate, the staff in the school work directly with the children to help them to develop their understanding of what they have experienced.

There have been no incidents of children going missing.

Behaviour management in the residential provision is highly effective. Incidents are infrequent. There have been no physical interventions in the residential provision since the last inspection. Behaviour is managed through strong, positive relationships between the children and the staff. A parent said, 'They [staff] have just got such a good relationship with all of the kids in there that I have never seen anything. If they [children] get too excited, they [staff] just need to say enough is enough. They [children] have been well behaved. There is mutual understanding.' The staff support the children to manage relationships well. For some children, this is an identified goal and it features in their independence plans.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher monitor and review the risk assessments. Risk management planning commences prior to any admission taking place. During the course of the inspection, a planning meeting took place for a child who is not due to start in residence for a number of months and who has complex health needs. This meeting involved the staff, the residential manager, health professionals and the child's family. This inclusive, effectively planned approach to admissions ensures that staff understand risks well. This reduces the potential for risks to result in harm.

The staff make sure that children are able to identify trusted adults with whom they can share concerns. In each house, the children were able to point out whom they could contact. An independent person visits the school. He is known to the children and they are able to relate to him, having spoken to him.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding. Leaders and managers in the residential provision are ambitious and confident. They have inspired the staff whom they lead. Staff who were previously disillusioned are now enthused and passionate about their work. A member of staff said: 'Things are good.'

There is a vision of where we are going. There is a direction and a vision. The vision is driven. 'Feels like we are all on the same path.'

Leaders and managers are familiar faces who lead by example. They are enthusiastic about learning and undertake frequent reviews of practice to identify potential improvements. They have instilled similar attitudes in the staff whom they manage. The staff are passionate, enthusiastic and proud of the service that they provide. They are committed to improving the children's lives. Each member of staff was a positive contributor to the inspection. Each was keen to talk about the work that they do and the difference that they make. There is a collective culture of high aspiration for the children.

There are highly effective relationships with families. Creative approaches to engaging with parents has seen consistently increasing attendance at parental events. Feedback from families is consistently outstanding. Comments include:

- 'The residence is excellent.'
- 'There is nothing they [staff] do that they could do better.'
- 'The staff are incredible. They understand and know each child so well, and deal with any challenging behaviour sympathetically and effectively.'
- 'I am really impressed with the house staff and the team. I don't know what I would do without them.'
- 'The Ashley School is an amazing place. It is always a joy to visit and see how polite and courteous the pupils are, and to see how professional and dedicated the staff are. My child loves attending school there and has made huge progress.'
- 'My son has developed friendships at school and talks about them at home — such a positive development. The school is putting good support in place to help develop his [child's] interaction skills, which is a priority.'

Leaders and managers have excellent relationships with partner agencies. Feedback from external professionals is very positive. Quotes from professionals include:

- 'The school has been brilliant. I have no worries or concerns.'
- 'They [staff] are very helpful. We have a meeting with them each half term. We go through how we can help. It ensures consistency. It is really helpful.'
- 'They [staff] are always well organised, always available. No problems at all. They are friendly and welcoming. The staff know the children very well.'
- 'I found [member of staff] to be incredibly helpful. The working relationship was really, really good.'

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision. They actively invite challenge and embrace monitoring. This has resulted in sustained improvements over the last two years.

The support for staff is comprehensive and ambitious. The staff receive regular and effective supervision. This considers personal and professional needs and the needs of children. Regular team meetings take place. The staff report that these are engaging and informative. New research, guidance and reviews are shared in a timely way at these meetings. For example, the recent 'Good intentions, good enough' review was discussed in the most recent meeting. These discussions support the staff to stay up to date with emerging information about the sector. There is a comprehensive training plan for staff. The residential staff have access to both routine and specialist training. This includes training sessions that focus on safeguarding disabled children. The staff also have training in specialist communication. Staff are therefore well equipped to meet the children's needs.

Leaders and managers have responded comprehensively to the point for improvement identified at the last inspection. A detailed and thorough mapping exercise has been undertaken to map a staff member's qualification against the required level 3 qualification.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference 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:** SC024573

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Sally Garrett

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Ashley Hinson, social care inspector





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