

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford School is an independent special school with boarding provision for pupils aged from 7 to 19 years of age, who have dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties.

The school has a Christian character and close links with its local church. The school is inclusive of children of other faiths. The school offers the options of full boarding and day provision with options for flexi-boarding.

The boarding provision currently comprises five boarding houses located both on and off the school site; additional services include two host families. The school provides separate accommodation for boys and girls.

At the time of this inspection, there were 75 boarding pupils. The boarding provision was last inspected on 7 to 9 March 2017.

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 January 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 7 to 9 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders, managers and the proprietor have continued to improve and develop the quality of care in the residential provision. This senior leadership team is tenacious and determined. Their oversight of the boarding provision is good.
- Senior leaders, managers and the proprietor meet regularly to monitor the quality of care provided and to evaluate the progress that children are making. Together, the team identifies where improvements can be made and takes the necessary action in response.
- The management of child protection concerns has strengthened further. The lead for safeguarding and the deputy have the required skills and experience to undertake their role effectively. Together, they have developed and maintained good relationships with safeguarding agencies and social care professionals. Prompt action is taken to protect and support children.
- Children benefit from a multidisciplinary team approach to meeting their individual health and well-being needs. The pastoral and therapy teams work in partnership with the head of boarding and boarding staff.
- The boarding provision is integral to the school's operation. Both the head boy and girl are boarders and advocate for the boarding pupils and developments in the boarding provision. The head boy and girl are good role models for the other children.
- The children care for each other. All potential and new boarders are allocated a buddy/mentor who helps them to settle in. Other children are anti-bullying ambassadors and advocate for the boarders' safety, welfare and well-being.
- Senior leaders have taken action to enhance the staffing levels during the evenings and weekends. This has provided children with an improved opportunity to pursue personal interests and hobbies. Some sixth form students are learning to drive, while others are learning independence skills that include budgeting, shopping and cooking meals.
- Most children spoke positively about their experiences in the boarding provision. They said that they are making good progress. Children make the most of the wealth of extra-curricular sports activities and keep themselves fit. Daily personal fitness sessions, introduced in September 2017, have helped to develop the children's physical and emotional well-being, which in turn has improved their resilience.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Two national minimum standards have not been met. In one house, children are not provided with an individual place where they can lock away personal items. Staff do not always receive regular, good-quality supervision and appraisal.

- Currently, a wealth of records are maintained about the children. However, these records do not all correlate with each other well or demonstrate fully the action that staff members have taken to help children. In addition, not all sanctions given to children during the evenings and weekends are recorded.
- Although the independent monitoring of the boarding provision has improved, the visitors typically visit during the school day, which limits their ability to rigorously review the children's experiences at evenings and weekends.
- Overall, recruitment processes have improved since the last inspection. Staff no longer start work without a satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and references from the most recent employer. However, on one occasion, leaders and managers had not thoroughly explored a candidate's complete work history involving work with children.
- Despite a wide range of systems being available to children to help them to express their views, not all of the younger children feel confident yet to use them.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

- 9.3 Reasonable protection is provided for children's personal possessions and for any children's money or valuables looked after by the school.
- 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.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all children have a lockable facility to secure their personal possessions.
- Ensure that all boarding staff receive regular, good-quality supervision and appraisal. Ensure that these sessions include discussions about their work with children and how to keep them safe.
- Ensure that managers seek to obtain references from all previous employers where candidates have worked with children.
- Improve the quality of record-keeping to ensure that records correlate well with each other and evidence the action staff have taken to help children. Ensure that all sanctions are recorded.
- Ensure that the monitoring completed by the independent visitor includes visiting the boarding provision in the evenings and/or at weekends.
- Explore additional ways to help the younger children to develop confidence in expressing their views about their boarding experiences.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

There are five boarding houses, three on site and two in the local community, in close proximity to the school. The standard of boarding accommodation in four of the five houses is good. More work is needed in the fifth house to bring it up to the same standard. Extensive refurbishment work is scheduled to commence in the summer of 2018 to address this. In one house, children do not have an individual lockable storage box to enable them to keep personal items safe. The children said that they would like this as the children in the other houses all have this provision. Two children currently live with host families ('out boarding'). The host families are also employees of the school, and therefore are provided with training and support. Senior leaders took immediate action during the inspection to verify whether this provision constituted a private fostering arrangement.

Children make good progress in relation to their education, behaviour, health and general well-being. In 2017, the school celebrated a 16% increase in GCSE achievements. In addition, the school's netball team came 8 out of 50 at an international netball tournament. All A level students have received offers of places in higher education and the vast majority of GCSE students secured a place at a college of their first choice.

House parents know the children's needs well, and children are provided with good support and attention. Most children said that they can speak to staff if they have any worries or concerns. Posters displayed throughout the boarding provision provide children with information and the contact details of the three independent listeners and external support agencies. Most parents and carers who contributed to the inspection were very positive about the care and support their child receives, and the majority of children who spoke with the inspectors agreed. However, some parents said that they would like to see further improvement in the communication from boarding staff, the management of some children's behaviour and the quality of food.

There are a wide range of systems for staff to gather children's views about their care and experiences. For example, suggestion boxes are in every home; house meetings, boarding council meetings and school council meetings take place regularly; there are mentors and anti-bullying ambassadors available to children and the complaints procedure is on the school website. However, some of the younger children do not yet feel confident to use these systems to provide leaders and managers with feedback about their boarding experiences. Some children told the inspectors that their mattresses were not comfy, that they would like to be able to warm up a heat pad before bedtime and that they would like a bigger range of choices for supper. Leaders and managers took immediate action during the inspection to provide children with these items. The children were very pleased about their new mattress toppers and having hot chocolate with marshmallows for supper.

Most children spoken with reported that their dining experience has improved and that the quantity of food available to them is better. Children are able to make suggestions for mealtimes and meet with the cook regularly. However, some children told the inspectors that they remain dissatisfied with the quality of some food, particularly at breakfast time. One child also said to the inspectors, 'I would like a cup of tea with my dinner.' Senior leaders took immediate action to provide children with a hot drink choice at dinner times and are looking at the breakfast provision.

Following an analysis of behavioural incidents, leaders and managers made changes to the school timetable. Children are now provided with more structured activities, increased extra-curricular activities and opportunities for daily personal fitness sessions. This change of provision has resulted in a significant reduction in unsettled behaviour and has had a positive impact on children's engagement and well-being.

Children recognise that at times bullying does occur. However, they said that they feel safe and are confident that any incidents are managed well by the anti-bullying ambassadors and staff.

When incidents of negative behaviour do occur, leaders and managers take prompt action to understand what happened and why. At times, consequences and sanctions are given. Children spoken with said that the consequences were fair and reasonable. Records relating to major sanctions, such as exclusions, are recorded. However, sanctions given during the boarding time, such as removing an activity or grounding a child, are not always recorded. This limits leaders and managers' ability to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of all of the consequences.

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

Leaders and managers ensure that young people are safe and protected. The school's safeguarding procedures have been strengthened. The designated safeguarding lead and the deputy designated safeguarding officer have received the appropriate level of training. All staff receive annual safeguarding training; this year, training has included child protection, understanding self-harm, protecting children from exploitation, safe administration of medication and 'Prevent'. Staff spoken with demonstrated a good understanding of their responsibilities to keep children safe. All safeguarding concerns are promptly shared and reported to the relevant safeguarding agencies and/or to the police. Records about child protection matters are detailed and well maintained.

Action has been taken to ensure that individual risk assessments are personalised. These documents now provide staff with clearer guidance about how to manage and mitigate risks. Boarding staff spoken to demonstrated a good understanding of the risks and challenges for children in their care and had strategies in place to support them.

No instances of children going missing or being at risk of child sexual exploitation or radicalisation have occurred. The use of restraint is rare; there have been two

separate occasions that staff have had to physically hold a child since the last inspection. The holds were for a limited amount of time and risk assessed as appropriate and necessary. Training records show that three out of the four staff involved in these incidents had not received the appropriate training to hold children. Senior leaders are aware of this and have plans to provide staff with the required training.

Staff recruitment and selection processes have improved. Staff no longer start at work until enhanced DBS certificates and references are completed. Gaps in employment history are always scrutinised and records now demonstrate the decisions that managers have made about the suitability of an applicant. The interview process has been strengthened, as candidates are asked specifically about safeguarding practices. On one occasion, leaders and managers did not explore a candidate whole work history involving work with children. References for all previous childcare employers were not sought.

Children's medication is managed safely. Leaders and managers have taken appropriate action to ensure that staff only administer regular medication when there is a clear prescription. Staff have been provided with training to help them to manage medication safely.

Young people live in an environment that is kept safe and very well maintained. Comprehensive health and safety systems are in place and help to protect children, staff and visitors. Staff are trained in fire safety and children have experienced evacuations of the building. Environmental risk assessments are regularly reviewed to ensure that all known risks are managed well. Leaders and managers ensure that there is regular servicing of the accommodation's utility services and electrical equipment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

In March 2017, the boarding provision was judged by Ofsted to require improvement overall. Since then, senior leaders, managers, staff and the proprietor have been working hard to improve the boarding opportunities and experiences for the children. Collectively, they have used inspection feedback, recommendations from the independent person's visits and findings from internal audits to learn from and improve the quality of care provided. Leaders and managers took effective action to deal with the one national minimum standard that was not met at the last inspection and the recommendations that were made.

Since the previous inspection, the management of the boarding provision and sufficiency of staff have been reviewed. The head of boarding no longer manages a boarding house. This has enabled her to have effective oversight of the residential provision and focus on her child protection and pastoral responsibilities. The head of boarding works cohesively with boarding staff, pastoral staff, the therapy teams and the leadership team. Following a full review of the house parents' skills and strengths, changes were implemented. Two new house parents and additional

boarding assistants were appointed and are supporting the children. These changes have provided children with better quality of care and more opportunities for personalised activities.

Leaders and managers undertook a rigorous review of children's behavioural patterns and trends. They identified that changes to the curriculum and children's daily timetable were necessary. From September 2017, the educational timetable was extended, providing all children with more structured learning time. In addition, all children are provided with daily personal fitness sessions and increased opportunities for extra-curricular activities. The children in Year 10 are also attending independence and personal learning sessions. These opportunities are being mapped against the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme to formally accredit them. Children said that they are happy about the changes; they said that as a result, they feel healthier and are pleased that they are able to gain extra qualifications through their independence learning programme. Data collected demonstrates that since the implementation of these changes, children have been less anxious, unsettled behaviours have reduced and children are starting to develop more resilience.

The boarding provision receives enhanced scrutiny from the proprietor, who maintains regular contact with the headmaster and regularly attends meetings with the senior leadership team. In addition, the number of independent visitors had increased. The frequency and rigour of their visits have improved, bringing challenge and effective scrutiny to help the leadership team to make improvements. Typically, the independent visits take place during the school day, limiting the visitor's ability to fully understand the children's experiences at evenings and weekends.

Currently, a wealth of records are maintained about the children. However, these records do not all correlate with each other well or demonstrate fully the action that staff members have taken to help children.

Staff morale is good, boarding staff are motivated and said that they love their job. Staff training opportunities have improved. Staff are provided with the training to help them to understand the children's needs and to obtain formal childcare qualifications. The staff spoke positively about the head of boarding, reporting that she is available to them to talk through any worries or concerns they have. Supervision and appraisal do take place, but they are not always provided regularly for all house parents and boarding assistants. Supervision sessions do not always include an opportunity for staff to talk about their work with children or about safeguarding concerns. A system of peer review has taken place for some staff, which they found beneficial. This system does not yet include feedback from children about the staff who look after them.

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 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: SC039141

Headteacher: Mr David King

Type of school: Other Independent Special School

Telephone number: 01980 621020

Email address: secretary@appleford.wilts.sch.uk

Inspectors

Sharron Escott, social care inspector (lead)
Paula Lahey, social care inspector
Clare Davies, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018