

# Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This is a residential special school maintained by a local authority. It provides education, care and accommodation for boys, between the ages of nine and 18, who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are currently 37 weekly boarders. All the accommodation is based on the school site.

**Inspection dates:** 24 to 26 January 2018

**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:** 29 November 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The level of integration that is achieved and maintained between the young people's education and care is exceptional and is supported by excellent communication between care and teaching staff.
- As a whole, the school goes to extensive lengths to meaningfully involve parents, carers and external professionals in the care, education and progress of the young people.
- The young people are able to engage in a wide and stimulating range of sporting, recreational and developmental activities that expand their experience of the world, build their confidence and develop skills for independence.
- The genuine care and interest shown by staff towards young people and their clear and consistent application of appropriate boundaries ensures that the young people feel secure. Young people are willing to try new experiences and they make good progress.
- Staff display a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of how to keep the young people safe and they are skilled in managing and reducing risks.
- The staff team is highly ambitious about what the young people can achieve.
- The staff team demonstrates energy and commitment to continually improve the service.
- The senior leadership team provides a highly effective blend of experience, knowledge, ambition and creativity that is firmly focused on the progress and well-being of the young people.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- To improve recording systems to reflect more clearly the progress that the young people make in non-curricular areas.
- To improve further the programme for learning daily living skills.

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

- Further develop methods for measuring, reviewing and reporting on the progress of residential pupils against the objectives of their placement plans.
- Extend the programme for expanding daily living skills by making these more ambitious, effective and applicable to all likely future living arrangements.

## **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## Inspection judgements

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

The cohesive, motivated and caring multi-disciplinary staff team has put in place a well-organised and structured weekly programme. This creates an effective whole-school environment in which the young people thrive. One young person said: 'This place has meant everything to me. It's the whole environment that has made the difference.'

The caring and predictable residential provision enables young people who have become estranged from mainstream schooling and other social structures to settle and to start building positive relationships. Less positive behaviours diminish, anxieties reduce and the young people become more trusting of adults. Young people are increasingly willing and able to access learning and most make excellent progress in all areas. Some progress is significant such as a young person who arrived as electively non-verbal and went on to develop normal patterns of communication. One young person summarised his views of the school by simply stating: 'I love this place.'

Teaching staff assist young people with their daily transition from formal learning to the more relaxed residential setting, and care support workers assist the young people and teachers during classroom time when necessary. This provides a continuous level of support and care that helps young people to build trust and promotes a positive relationship between the young people and all staff.

Despite the highly integrated system of care and education, a clear distinction is made between these parts of the young people's daily lives. This is positive because it helps young people to distinguish between their home and school lives while successfully transitioning between the two. This is supported by regular 'parents' evenings, where key care staff attend with the young people and assume a parental role. The achievements and progress of the young people are affirmed on these occasions and care staff are better able to support the young people in their academic achievements.

Warm and supportive relationships with appropriate boundaries are evident between the young people and the mixed-gender care staff teams. Staff go to considerable lengths to provide the young people with family-like experiences, within the constraints of residential care. Meals are shared together in the communal dining room in family-size groups, comprising the young people and a mix of staff. Food is served at the tables and good manners and conversation are encouraged. Healthy eating is consistently promoted and the young people enjoy the choice of meals available.

When young people require a specialised health service, for example for their therapeutic, speech or motor developmental needs, a dedicated, on-site multi-

disciplinary team provides support quickly. Through strong working relationship with local health providers staff are also able to quickly access universal medical services for the young people.

An exciting and challenging array of sporting, outdoor and countryside activities provide the young people with regular opportunities to discover and develop their interests and abilities. These include hikes, climbing and skiing. Because staff are skilled and confident in these pursuits, they are able to help the young people to take developmentally-appropriate risks. These opportunities build young people's confidence and give them enjoyable and affirming memories.

The staff team is ambitious for the young people and their futures. Staff proactively support young people to make a successful transition from the school when it is time for them to leave. The young people are encouraged to acquire a range of skills for daily living. This programme needs to be further improved to increase its usefulness for young people who need help to develop their independent living skills.

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

Staff are highly skilled in identifying, understanding, managing and reducing the risks that the young people face. They do not shy away from complex and challenging areas of risk when these arise but respond with care and sensitivity. Staff take appropriate action to manage these risks, working closely with other professionals when necessary. This enables young people with particular vulnerabilities and needs to continue to progress within the school environment, without disruption, at critical stages of their development.

Sophisticated systems and processes support effective communication between all staff. Significant incidents and any changes in the behaviour of the young people are quickly and efficiently shared; this enables staff to respond to young people's changing needs and moods and reduces or avoids the need for coercive measures. Reports for this inspection period show a substantial reduction in the use of floor restraints for the young people across the whole site. Leaders attribute this largely to improved communication and planning to prevent and respond to potentially challenging behaviour.

The information systems that are used across the care and education provision provide detailed reports on issues relevant to safeguarding practice, helping leaders to monitor and improve practice in a targeted way. These systems are being further refined.

Expected standards of safeguarding practice are the same for all staff across the education and care provision; this is a whole-school approach. Monitoring systems are used effectively to track staff learning and to ensure that staff remain up to date in aspects of safeguarding training and awareness. This includes mandatory,

specialised and refresher training in areas such as around child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

The standards and requirements of safeguarding practice in the residential provision exceed those laid down in the applicable statutory guidance.

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

Leaders and managers place no limits on what the young people who stay in the care provision might achieve during their time at the school. Leaders are strong, experienced and capable. They lead the care staff team with dedication and enthusiasm, demonstrating a confidence in the integrated model of care and consistently applying relevant learning to practice. They are not complacent and remain acutely aware of where the service needs to be further improved.

Staff are able to describe confidently the positive changes and progress that the young people make. These achievements are not always reflected clearly enough in the young people's records.

Leaders are instrumental in achieving the high level of integration between care, education, specialised support and administration that is so beneficial to the young people. Care staff are supported in their efforts and motivation by effective individual and group supervision and team meetings. Care staff report that they feel strongly supported in their roles and that they have ready access to all levels of management.

Leaders and managers are outward looking and have established a strong network of external support. They are skilled in accessing additional services and are confident about escalating their concerns when the external support that the young people receive is insufficient. Care and education staff regularly visit young people's family homes throughout the year; this supports the engagement of parents and carers in young people's progress and helps staff to understand the full context of young people's lives.

### **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:** SC050152

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Gerry Crook

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01323 893138

**Email address:** [admin@bowdenhouse.towerhamlets.sch.uk](mailto:admin@bowdenhouse.towerhamlets.sch.uk)



**Inspector:**

John Pledger, social care inspector



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