

Sunnydown School

Sunnydown School, Whyteleafe Road, Caterham, Surrey CR3 5ED

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a residential and day school for boys aged 11 to 16, who have communication and interaction needs such as Asperger's, often with associated emotional or learning difficulties. The school is fully maintained by the local authority and currently has 76 pupils, of whom 30 are boarders who reside up to four nights a week. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan and a number have social communication disorders. The boarding accommodation is on the first floor of a teaching building and has a semi-independent wing for older residential pupils. The school is situated in a residential area in Caterham. It was last inspected in June 2016.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 February 2018

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

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

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: 21 June 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- High-quality care planning ensures that the specific needs of each young person are identified and effective strategies for meeting the young person's needs are implemented in practice.
- There is a bespoke model of care that is understood by the young people; this provides them with consistency and a sense of stability and security.
- Safeguarding and protecting young people from harm are embedded in practice. There are strong and effective systems for monitoring safeguarding practice.
- Prompt action is taken to address any emerging concerns regarding the safety and protection of individual young people.
- The residential facility is a fully integrated and a valued asset of the whole-school provision. Effective communication takes place between teaching and care staff.
- Residential pupils make significant progress across all aspects of their lives but particularly in the areas of social skills, communication and levels of independence.
- Leaders and managers have made positive links with community organisations and young people are becoming more integrated into their local communities.
- Behaviour management strategies are tailored to the needs of individual young people and their effectiveness is kept under review.
- There is a comprehensive range of recreational and leisure activities designed to ensure that the young people have fun and learn new skills.
- The headteacher demonstrates a commitment to securing specialist support for young people with specific needs.
- Regular and effective communication with parents is maintained; staff work positively with parents to secure better outcomes for young people.
- Healthcare provision is strong and a sensitive approach is taken to delivering sexual health and relationships education.
- Staff listen to young people and provide them with many opportunities to express their views on the standard of care that they are receiving.
- The care managers are committed to learning from best practice and seek to continuously develop and raise standards in the residential provision.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Demonstrating how decisions are made during the process of allocating shared bedrooms and how any potential risks are taken into account during the process.
- Ensuring that the governing body has regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools when scrutinising the quality of care being provided.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that a record is kept of why decisions regarding bedroom allocation are made and undertake bedroom sharing risk assessments when necessary.
- Take steps to ensure that members of the governing body, particularly the governor with oversight of the residential provision, become more familiar with the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The young people develop positive relationships with the care staff who are focused on delivering high standards of care within a nurturing and supportive environment. Young people feel well cared for and are confident in the ability of staff to keep them safe and help them resolve any difficulties that they might be having. Young people who are new to the boarding provision generally settle quickly and soon begin to engage positively with the routines and activities on offer.

There is a strong commitment from residential managers and staff to hearing and acting upon young people's views. A fortnightly boarders' forum provides young people with the opportunity to make suggestions on how the residential provision could be improved and what leisure activities should be on offer. Young people chair the meeting and staff are on hand to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to express their views. The provision of an independent advocate is further evidence of the commitment to ensuring that young people's voices are heard.

The residential facility is fully integrated into the whole-school provision and effective communication is maintained between the teaching and care staff. This ensures that young people receive consistent messages about the support available to them and expectations in relation to their behaviour and engagement with school routines. The advice and guidance on how best to support young people given by other professionals, such as the speech and language therapist, are incorporated into young people's care plans and this promotes consistency of care.

The high standard of care planning has positive results, and most young people make significant progress. All of the parents consulted during this inspection were able to specify areas of progress made by their young people. The most common areas were improved social skills, independence and self-confidence. Many young people have built strong peer relationships, despite experiencing a degree of social isolation before becoming a residential pupil. One parent said 'becoming a residential pupil has transformed the life of my child'. Some young people have performed in a play delivered to local primary schools. This is an outstanding achievement considering the challenges that these young people have experienced prior to attending the school.

The young people have access to a comprehensive range of leisure and recreational activities. These include music workshops and martial arts, which are being delivered by external tutors. Young people are also encouraged to arrange after-school clubs which focus on their individual hobbies and interests. After-school activities are also arranged to assist young people to prepare for examinations and develop their independent living skills. A sense of ownership and belonging among the young people is achieved by involving them in large scale projects, such as designing and building a cycle track and building a new seating area in the grounds of the school.

Ensuring that young people are prepared for adult life is given high priority. A recent development is the semi-independent wing of the residential facility, providing accommodation for the older residential pupils. Although this facility remains supervised by staff, the young people are given more responsibility and are expected to practise their cooking and domestic skills. They acquire these skills through participating in an accredited assessment and qualifications alliance (AQA) programme, which teaches practical skills and has a positive impact on young people's self-esteem.

There are strong and effective measures for monitoring and responding to young people's health needs. Care staff promptly consult parents when it becomes apparent that a young person may need medical attention, and take steps to ensure that treatment is provided. Young people's mental health needs are given equal priority, and the headteacher has been proactive in ensuring that young people have access to specialist services. The system for recording and administering medication is robust and subject to external auditing.

Young people receive high-quality advice and guidance on the benefits of living a healthy lifestyle. They benefit from having a well-balanced diet and young people are unanimous in their praise for the improved quality of the food in recent months. There are many opportunities for young people to take exercise and engage in outdoor activities. Staff are particularly sensitive to the anxieties of young people engaging in sexual health and relationships education. The pastoral team identifies which young people may struggle in these lessons and plans in advance the support that will be made available to individual young people.

Staff know the young people extremely well, particularly in terms of their vulnerabilities, anxieties and communication style. The staff are vigilant to any signs of conflict between the young people. They encourage the young people to understand and empathise with their peers and resolve disagreements amicably. Consequently, young people have confidence in the ability of staff to mediate while maintaining clear boundaries.

At the last inspection in June 2016, a recommendation was made concerning the young people's need for privacy when they are showering and changing. The physical layout of the residential accommodation restricts the potential for private changing cubicles in the showering facilities. Some young people feel uncomfortable about this. Therefore, young people are instructed to get changed in their dormitory bedrooms, where screens have been provided to ensure that young people's need for privacy is respected.

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

The headteacher and residential care managers have instilled a strong safeguarding culture within the residential provision. The safety and welfare of young people is given high priority. Young people say that they feel safe and are appreciative of

measures that have been taken to increase their sense of security. These include an electronic system to alert care staff to a young person leaving their bedroom at night and security fencing around the perimeter of the school site.

Care staff have a detailed knowledge of each young person's particular vulnerability. The vigilance of staff across the school ensures that emerging safeguarding concerns are quickly identified. This has resulted in prompt action being taken to reduce the potential for young people to come to harm. Highly effective work has been undertaken to prevent young people from becoming radicalised by extremist views.

Individual risk assessments are completed for young people who have been identified as at risk of harm. They are reviewed and updated following any significant event. However, this proactive approach to managing risk is not fully replicated in the procedure for allocating shared bedrooms. This procedure does not consistently specify why it may not be appropriate for some young people to share bedrooms with certain peers, or demonstrate effective strategies for managing identified risks associated with bedroom sharing.

Young people are consistently given advice and guidance on how to keep safe in the residential facility, their local communities and online. Consequently, young people were able to explain to the inspector the steps that they would take to avoid coming into contact with unsafe adults. Young people said that bullying is not currently a concern in the residential facility and that staff have acted promptly in the past when bullying behaviour has occurred. Events designed to raise young people's awareness of what to do if they are bullied are held regularly.

There are well-established strategies for promoting positive behaviour and responding to challenging behaviour. These are embedded in practice and are fully implemented by staff caring for the young people. Young people benefit from having clear and consistent boundaries, and over time they acquire new skills for managing their anger and frustration at times of high anxiety. An incentive scheme is used to encourage young people to adopt behaviours which mirror the school's model of care and behaviour management.

Throughout this inspection the young people in the residential facility demonstrated excellent behaviour. Many of the young people said that they were confident in the ability of staff to manage young people's challenging or unsafe behaviours when this becomes an issue. There have been no occasions, since the last inspection in June 2016, when staff have had to resort to using physical interventions to manage young people's behaviour. Managers and staff regularly review the effectiveness of strategies used to support young people who have difficulty in meeting behavioural expectations. This demonstrates their commitment to identifying and meeting the individual needs of each young person.

There is a highly effective system for recording and sharing concerns about the welfare of young people. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) person monitors the system closely and all safeguarding matters are discussed at weekly DSL

meetings. This ensures that there is a timely, coordinated response to safeguarding and child protection matters. Referrals to external safeguarding agencies are made when appropriate, and regular consultation takes place with safeguarding professionals when serious or complex issues arise. Safeguarding issues are always discussed with parents and carers when it is appropriate to do so.

Young people's access to the internet is monitored closely. An electronic system identifies any internet searches, made by young people, which could indicate that they are placing themselves at risk. The DSL demonstrates a high level of professional curiosity when scrutinising these internet searches, and this is indicative of the overall commitment to protecting young people from harm. The deputy DSLs are fully engaged in this process, which is seen as an opportunity to learn from each other and develop good practice.

Safe practice underpins the staff recruitment process and this helps to ensure that unsafe adults are not employed at the school. Statutory checks on potential new employees are undertaken as part of the recruitment process, and effective risk assessments are completed where it is necessary for a new member of staff to commence their duties before all checks are completed. Referees who have provided a written reference are not currently contacted as part of the recruitment process. However, leaders and managers stated that verification of references will now become part of the recruitment process.

The physical environment is well maintained and care is taken to promptly identify potential health and safety hazards. Minor shortfalls were identified in relation to how some health and safety records are maintained, but these have not resulted in the health and safety of young people being compromised. Leaders and managers identified changes that will be made to ensure more effective record-keeping in future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is exceptionally well led by two residential care managers. One holds the level 5 diploma in leadership and management for residential childcare and the other is due to obtain this qualification within the next few weeks. The care managers benefit from receiving high-quality support from the headteacher who maintains oversight of the boarding provision and is committed to constantly raising the standard of care provided to young people. There is an experienced and skilled team of care staff whose members consistently provide warm, nurturing care and support.

Highly developed processes and systems ensure that leaders and managers effectively monitor the standard of care being provided. A particular strength is the monitoring of safeguarding practice. Internal and external safeguarding audits are undertaken and these result in comprehensive action plans being implemented to ensure continuous improvement. Effective action is taken to address any shortfalls identified in the practice of individuals or weaknesses in procedures for protecting

young people from harm.

There is a strong commitment to obtaining and responding to the views of stakeholders. Parents are regularly encouraged to express their views on the quality of the boarding provision. Recently, an electronic system for young people to provide feedback on their experience has been introduced. Steps have been taken to ensure that any young person who uses the system to disclose that they are at risk of harm can be identified and given appropriate support.

The quality of care being provided is also scrutinised by an independent visitor, who consistently seeks the views of young people when undertaking visits to the residential provision. The independent visitor provides a comprehensive report on her findings following each visit. Her views are valued by leaders and managers, and are seen as an opportunity to ensure that high standards of care are maintained.

The school has developed a bespoke model of care, education and support to meet the particular needs of pupils across the school. The model is known as 'RICE³' and seeks to promote resilience, independence and cooperation and so encourage, enable and empower young people. The model is fully embedded in practice and understood by young people. High-quality individual care plans set targets for young people which are based on the RICE³ principals, and the young people are motivated to meet these targets. They are fully engaged in setting the targets and reviewing the progress that they are making.

Leaders and managers build excellent working relationships with parents. One parent commented that, 'The care managers are always ready to answer any questions I may have; they are really accommodating.' Parents are fully consulted when any concerns arise regarding a young person's welfare. This is done with sensitivity and professionalism. Parents are also offered practical help and guidance in order to ensure that young people's needs are met. Leaders and managers network widely with other professionals in order to increase their knowledge and share good practice.

The headteacher has established links with many local community organisations. This has enhanced the potential for young people to become more engaged in their local communities and this has a positive effect on their confidence and self-esteem. Through engaging with local community organisations, young people develop their social skills and increase their potential for employment or further study when they leave the school. This positive approach to community engagement has also brought financial benefits. For example, funding was obtained to develop a sensory room, which is extremely popular with many of the young people.

The governing body has a strong presence in the school. The governor with responsibility for the residential provision and safeguarding has met and spent time with residential pupils on organised outings, and occasionally attends the weekly DSL meetings. He is therefore familiar with the school's policies and procedures for

keeping young people safe and maintains oversight of how these are implemented in practice. However, this governor and the chair of governors acknowledged that overall, members of the governing body would benefit from developing their knowledge of the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

The care staff receive good-quality training and support to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the young people. The induction programme for new staff is comprehensive. Regular supervision provides staff with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and review the effectiveness of the strategies in place for meeting young people's needs. The safety of young people and the group dynamics regularly feature in staff supervision meetings. Team meetings are effective forums for discussing practice issues. At these meetings, the care managers often refer to research and best practice guidance to promote the professional development of the team.

Leaders and managers are committed to helping the young people to achieve the best possible outcomes, while residing in a safe, stimulating environment. Their high aspirations for the young people are mirrored in the care and support delivered by a skilled and dedicated team of care staff.

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: SC013896

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Inspector(s)

Stephen Collett, social care inspector (lead)



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