

# Doucecroft School

Abbotts Lane, Eight Ash Green, Colchester, Essex CO6 3QL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Doucecroft is a co-educational day and residential special school for children and young people aged from three to 19 years who have autistic spectrum disorders. The school is privately owned by Autism Anglia. It is situated in a small village on the outskirts of Colchester. The residential accommodation is located in two houses on the main site. Residential care is provided for up to 294 nights per year for students aged nine to 19 years. There is respite provision available for day students. There are 43 students on roll, of whom 16 are residential/respite students. The last welfare inspection took place in October 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 15 to 17 May 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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

**Date of previous inspection:** 9 October 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The quality of the residential school has improved since the last inspection.
- All but one of the five unmet minimum standards identified at the last inspection have been fully addressed.
- The young people have good relationships with the staff, who know them well.
- The young people make progress academically and socially and develop their independence skills because of the support that they receive.
- When young people raise concerns, staff take them seriously.
- The staff have increased their awareness of issues relating to the safeguarding of disabled children and young people.
- The quality of monitoring, both internal and external, has improved.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Records relating to recruitment do not show that efforts have been made to explore gaps in applicants' employment histories.
- The school's written record of complaints is not sufficiently clear regarding the nature of the complaint, the action taken and the outcome.
- The school uses multiple individual risk assessments. When one risk assessment is updated, corresponding risk assessments are not consistently reviewed and updated.
- Feedback from families was mixed, with some very positive feedback and some negative feedback.
- When the staff use symbols to communicate, the symbols are not consistently chosen carefully to best enable accessibility

## **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 standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that the school's written record of complaints is clear about the nature of the complaint, the action taken and the outcome.
- Ensure that when updating one risk assessment, any corresponding risk assessments are also reviewed and updated.
- Consider undertaking a consultation with parents of the residential students to understand concerns and identify ways to address them.
- Ensure that when using symbols to communicate, the symbols are chosen carefully to best enable accessibility.

## **Inspection judgements**

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

This is a good residential school. Since the last inspection, there has been a dedicated drive to improve quality. Generally, this has had a positive effect.

The young people have good relationships with the staff, who know them well. The young people and staff are comfortable in one another's company. These relationships provide the foundation for the progress that the young people make and positive experiences that they have. The staff are positive about the young people.

The records on young people's case files highlight their individual strengths and characters, as well as difficult behaviours and issues. Consequently, the records give an accurate picture of the young people.

The young people make progress because of the support that they receive. The staff are ambitious for the young people, who attend school and are making academic progress.

Parents report that their children develop independence skills at the school. The staff understand the importance of helping the young people to prepare for life after the school. The young people develop practical skills such as emotional resilience. One young person spoke about how the most important thing that he has learned is to manage his feelings.

Professionals speak positively about the progress that young people make. One professional said, 'I am really happy with the service that has been provided and the progress that he has made. He was socially isolated. He now goes to a youth club. He gets involved with different activities and he is involved with other young people.'

The staff help the young people to manage their health needs. The staff have links with mental health support services that they access when needed. A designated member of staff has oversight of the medication process. Errors are recorded and reviewed. Systems have changed as a result of these reviews.

The staff consult with the young people using alternative and augmentative forms of communication to encourage involvement. The staff adapt information to make it more accessible for the young people. However, there are times when the staff do this without full consideration of an individual's communication abilities.

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

The young people are relaxed in the company of staff. They have access to staff who know them well. The staff are alert to potential indicators of harm. When young people raise concerns, the staff and managers act on them. One young person spoke about his confidence in the staff and managers to keep him safe.

All professionals spoken to during the inspection said that the young people are safe

at the residential provision. The young people's sense of safety contributes to the progress that they make. A social worker said, 'She [the young person] is safe there. She feels safe there. She came from a school where she did not feel safe and she would hide herself away. She is more confident and outgoing and keen to try new things.'

No young people have gone missing or participate in harmful risk-taking behaviours. The staff have had access to training on safeguarding disabled young people. As a result, the staff have a better understanding of the increased risk of abuse that disabled young people experience.

There have been recent incidents in which concerns about bullying have arisen. The staff and managers have taken the concerns seriously and are working with the young people and their families to manage these. As a result, young people and their families feel supported and have confidence in the staff.

The young people have regular one-to-one time with staff to explore their feelings. One young person spoke with passion about the way in which the support from staff has enabled him to change his behaviour. He believes himself to be a new person, able to cope with emotions in a way that he could not have done before.

On occasions, the staff use physical interventions to keep the young people safe. When they do this, it is usually for a very short time. Managers now ensure that staff receive a timely debriefing following incidents. As a result, reflection and learning from incidents has increased and the staff feel supported.

The leadership team now monitors behavioural incidents on a weekly basis. The team also provides all of the residential staff with extra behaviour support training. This has increased their understanding of behaviour management across the school.

The staff understand the roles of the designated safeguarding staff at the school. The staff know who they can contact and how. Consequently, the staff raise safeguarding concerns when they arise. These concerns are then shared appropriately with external safeguarding professionals.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The residential provision is led by an experienced manager and an experienced deputy manager. A wider management team supports them. The managers have a good understanding of the young people's individual needs and the effect that their diagnosis has on them.

Leaders and managers have improved the recruitment of agency staff members. A clear system is now in place and is being followed. However, records relating to permanent staff are not sufficiently clear because they contain unexplained gaps in employment histories.

Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated and monitored by the managers. However, updates are not consistently completed on all risk assessments

at the same time. This results in some inconsistencies between risk assessments.

There have been three complaints since the last inspection, which leaders and managers have resolved. However, the records of these complaints are not sufficiently clear, they contain errors and some dates are missing. This does not provide a satisfactory record.

Professionals are consistently positive about the quality of the service. They said that they have good relationships with the staff and managers. Feedback from families is mixed. Some families speak with great passion about the quality of the residential provision. They describe the difference that it has made to their children. However, some feedback received was less positive.

The staff report a more joined-up and inclusive approach to the residential provision. They said that it is now a valued part of the whole school. As a result, the staff and managers feel more supported, guided and appreciated.

The physical environment has improved since the last inspection. Leaders and managers have scheduled extra work to improve this further.

The quality of handovers has improved. A clear system is now in place and is understood and followed by the staff. This lessens the potential for important information to be missed or confidential information to be overheard.

The staff and managers receive supervisions and appraisal. Supervision records are clear. The staff have access to a range of training that helps them to feel equipped to carry out their roles.

Leaders and managers have improved the monitoring of the residential provision. The governors' monitoring is now more rigorous and external scrutiny has improved. Progress monitoring has improved and is beginning to embed itself. This has resulted in a greater understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

## **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:** SC018010

**Headteacher:** Mrs Jane Smart

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspector**

Ashley Hinson, social care inspector (lead)





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