

Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Valence School is a maintained residential special school. The school caters for pupils who have physical disabilities and/or complex medical needs. Currently 39 students, aged between 11 and 19 years, board. They live in five of the eight bungalows provided for residential care. Accommodation is situated within the grounds of the school. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2017.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 September 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 31 October 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Students are happy, they have fun, and they are given the same opportunities as anyone else. They are encouraged and able to be children.
- Each of the boarding provisions is welcoming and feels homely. Students appear relaxed.
- Gaining independence skills is a priority. Students leave the residential provision with a huge range of skills in readiness for adult life.
- Effective quality-assurance systems ensure a consistent drive towards improvement. Senior managers are now quick to identify weaknesses.
- Students feel very comfortable with staff and interact well with them. Individualised support keeps the students at the centre of practice and generates a culture of respect and acceptance.
- There is now a good oversight of safeguarding processes. Audit trails are stronger and there is effective partnership working with other agencies and parents to ensure the safety of all students and staff.
- Students' progress because of boarding, both in their academic achievements and in their social development.
- The staff have developed strong and effective links with other agencies, both on-site and in the local authority, to ensure that students' needs are met.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The vacancy rate for residential staff remains high. Although this does not currently have an impact on the quality of care provided, it needs to continue to be addressed. There is currently a reliance on agency staff.
- Care plans and risk assessments lack the necessary detail for all staff to be able to fully identify each student's support needs.
- Some recording of safeguarding concerns and incidents is not detailed enough to provide confidence that all necessary action has been taken.
- Staff do not always eat with students to promote social interaction. This is an area the school could develop further.
- Although the senior leadership team has changed, and this has led to significant improvements, the responsibilities and accountability across all the teams is not

clearly defined.

- The senior leadership team carefully considers new admissions into boarding. However, the rationale behind the decisions about which house the student resides in and when students share a room is not recorded.

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 for residential special schools:

- 15.1 There is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school.

This relates to recruitment and retention.

Recommendations

- Ensure that risk assessments are completed and reviewed when students move into a bungalow, and when they share rooms ensure that all necessary risks are considered.
- Continue to improve consistency in the recording of safeguarding concerns and incidents.
- Ensure that support plans and risk assessments are detailed and identify all support needs.
- Develop social interaction in the home further by ensuring that staff consistently eat with the students.
- Ensure that staff responsibilities and accountability are clearly defined to enable effective communication.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students thrive as a result of the individualised support provided in the residential provision at this school. Students leave the school with confidence and the skills to be as independent as possible. Students were extremely positive, and were eager to describe what it is like to be a boarder. 'It's caring and it's like a family', 'it's just perfect' and, 'I would give it 20 out of 10' were just some of the comments students made. It is evident that they genuinely love boarding, have fun with their friends and feel that staff are caring.

Staff know the students well and are able to act on any concerns. Although there is a reliance on agency staff due to vacancy rates, this isn't having a demonstrable impact on the quality of care provided. There is a nurturing approach from all staff.

Each residential bungalow is individualised and there is a relaxed atmosphere. The provider is in the process of personalising the bedrooms depending on students' needs. Students are very involved in this process. Each student is encouraged and supported to develop their independence by being involved in cooking the evening meal. However, staff do not always sit and eat with students. This is a missed opportunity for further social interaction.

Students identify the impact boarding has had on their progress academically, emotionally and socially. They are now more independent and able to learn new skills in preparation for adulthood. Both students and parents cited examples of students' progress, and how they demonstrate greater confidence and a greater sense of identity. A parent stated, 'He is now his own person.'

Communication with parents and professionals is good, and ensures that everyone is kept up to date. There are links with the medical and therapy team which ensure that all health needs are fully assessed and reviewed. The permanent staff were aware of how to keep students safe and meet their medical needs. The support plans and risk assessments in place include nurse and therapy input. However, they lack necessary detail, such as the level of staffing support needed.

Staff help students to develop a strong voice in the boarding houses, and provide them with many opportunities to put their views across. Students can now take ownership and have responsibility in making change. They relish this opportunity to be more independent. An inclusive approach empowers them to influence their plans for their futures.

Staff provide a range of opportunities and experiences for the students, both in the school and externally. Some students choose to be in the bungalows with friends and socialise, while others enjoy activities in the community. Students have fun with the staff and each other. This is achieved by staff in a nurturing but not risk-averse way.

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

Staff are confident about who to speak to for advice on safeguarding and are proactive in reporting and being alert to the vulnerabilities of the students due to their disability. There is now a multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding practice, with effective partnership working with other agencies and parents to ensure the safety of all students and staff.

The introduction of the online system for recording safeguarding concerns is enabling trends and patterns to be fully identified, and audit trails are now much stronger. There is better oversight of safeguarding records and the actions being taken. The person responsible for safeguarding will escalate matters when they feel that appropriate action is not being taken. The detail given in the record needs improving; the leadership team is aware of this, and the need to ensure consistency.

Staff benefit from high-quality safeguarding training. This is refreshed frequently to ensure that staff practices reflect current developments in safeguarding. Students currently staying at the school are not deemed to be at risk of child sexual exploitation, self-harm or radicalisation. However, potential risks are understood by staff.

There is good oversight from the governors and senior management, which enables them to be fully aware of any safeguarding concerns and ensures that they have confidence in the processes in place.

Staff are confident in their ability to recognise changes in behaviours which may indicate there is a concern. Students spoken with during the inspection did not feel that bullying was a concern, and felt instead that the school is an inclusive environment. There have been some restrictive physical interventions which were appropriate and the minimum needed to keep everyone safe.

Students are aware of how to complain, and this is encouraged by the staff team to ensure that students are heard and any concerns acted on. There is a culture of openness where staff and students work together in a community to resolve any differences. Students all reported that they felt safe and could talk to staff if they didn't.

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

Since the last inspection, a new head of safeguarding and social care has been appointed. She has made significant improvements in the short amount of time she has been at the school. She is still developing the role and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of processes, and putting in place action plans to embed these improvements.

Senior leaders have high expectations of themselves and of the staff team. They see

this as a key component of the students reaching their full potential.

Staff report that they are well supported; however, there is some disjointed practice. It is not clear who holds what responsibilities across the different teams and disciplines. Staff would benefit from having clearly defined accountability to enable effective information sharing.

The school continues to struggle with the recruitment and retention of staff. There is currently a residential staff vacancy rate of 32%. There is a reliance on staff undertaking additional shifts, and on agency staff. The high vacancy rate was not seen to have an impact on the care being provided; shifts are well planned. Students reported that they felt well cared for. The senior leadership team is carrying out staffing reviews and consultations, with proposals being provided to the governing body. Although there is a great deal of work being undertaken to recruit new staff, this has yet to have an impact.

Transitions into boarding are well managed, with gradual processes in place to ensure that each student is well prepared and the staff are aware of how to support them. Although the senior leadership team will discuss any potential risks and which residential accommodation will be suitable, this is not currently documented. In addition, if students share rooms the decision-making and rationale are not evident to enable effective review.

Staff undergo a range of training. This includes undertaking a range of specialist training to enable them to be equipped with the necessary skills to support the students' health and medical needs; this is overseen by the nursing team.

The governing body is visible and provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Its members have developed their understanding and have learned from previous concerns. Residential is now seen as an integral part of the school. Governors visit the school regularly and are clear on the development plans for the school.

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: SC041791

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Roland Gooding

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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