

# Mount Tamar Special School

Row Lane, St Budeaux, Plymouth, Devon PL5 2PY

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Mount Tamar Special School provides 105 places for children from five to 16 years old who have emotional and behavioural support care needs. The boarding provision, named Drake's View, provides boarding for up to nine children per night from Monday to Thursday during term time. The school is situated in the city of Plymouth. The boarding accommodation comprises of two floors in a purpose-built building adjacent to the school.

**Inspection dates:** 27 to 29 November 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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	outstanding
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 13 July 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Pupils benefit from their boarding experiences. Data clearly evidences how they make progress socially, emotionally and academically through boarding at the school. Feedback from the pupils and their parents/guardians is overwhelmingly positive.
- The boarding staff succeed in providing pupils with consistent and structured routines in a calm environment. The manager and the staff have high aspirations and expect positive behaviour. The pupils understand the rules and expectations when boarding and demonstrate improved behaviour.
- A wide range of activities are on offer. The pupils speak enthusiastically about the activities that they can take part in, such as golf and swimming. Some pupils attend youth and sports clubs in the community. The activities offer the opportunity to learn new skills, to increase their self-esteem and to make friends.
- The pupils feel safe when boarding. They do not run away or go missing. The staff focus on rewarding positive behaviour and supporting the pupils to learn from any mistakes. The issuing of sanctions is rare. Physical restraint is rarely used to manage behaviour due to effective de-escalation of incidents by the staff.
- A strength of Drake's View is the trusting and positive relationships that the staff build with the pupils. The staff use a positive and nurturing approach. They understand and know very well all the children who board. There is strong, collaborative working with school staff and outside agencies. This further informs care plans.
- Leaders and managers recently introduced an independence programme. Older pupils board for four nights a week for six weeks. They learn skills such as budgeting, cooking and how to travel independently on public transport. Work placements are arranged. Pupils are expected to get themselves up, to make a packed lunch and to travel to work independently. The pupils comment on how many new skills they learn and how the programme has increased their confidence.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Improve the recording of physical restraints, so that it is always clear how staff tried to de-escalate negative behaviours and why the restraint was necessary.

## Inspection judgements

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

Boarding has a positive impact on the social, emotional and academic progress of pupils. For many pupils, it is the only opportunity that they have to make friends and to learn new life skills.

When boarding, the pupils flourish in the care of the staff. They learn to develop positive relationships with the staff, who are excellent role models. Friendships are made with others who are boarding. The pupils learn tolerance, respect and how to be thoughtful and kind towards others. The pupils are treated with dignity and respect by the staff. The pupils come to understand that the staff really want them to achieve great things and that staff believe in them, so they improve their behaviour and gain the confidence to learn new skills. One parent commented: 'My son's anxiety and social interaction are so improved since he began staying at Drake's View.'

The staff listen to pupils and their views are acted upon. Pupils take part in boarding meetings to discuss their views. Actions taken as a result of these meetings include new coat hooks for bedrooms have been fitted and action taken by the staff to stop a door banging has been arranged.

A strength of the provision is how the head of care and the staff are implementing an innovative project to enable the older children to learn independence and life skills. Four pupils at a time stay at Drake's View for six weeks for four nights a week. At the end of the six weeks, pupils are able to use public transport independently and to budget for, shop for, prepare and cook their own meals. As part of the project, work placements are organised. Employers work closely with the staff. The pupils on the project learn to complete an application form and attend a mock job interview. This activity raises the self-esteem of the children and is leading to job offers from employers.

A wide range of activities are on offer. The staff understand the importance of the pupils using their energy positively after school. Pupils can choose to go swimming, to play golf, to ride bikes, to go on walks and to play table tennis and pool. The pupils comment positively about the activities. They enthusiastically choose which activity they would like to participate in at the meeting that takes place daily after school.

Parents are fully involved. A meeting room is provided where parents of pupils who attend Drake's View can attend each fortnight. It is an opportunity for parents to consult the staff and to provide support and advice to each other. Parents report that they really value this opportunity to meet. Feedback from parents was overwhelmingly positive. They really value the opportunities that the provision gives their children and the opportunity that they have to spend time with their other

children, secure in the knowledge that their child is safe and is having fun.

Placement plans contain clear aims and targets that are regularly reviewed. Clear guidance is in place for the staff about how best to care for each pupil so that they make maximum progress. The plans are written in partnership with the pupils, academic staff, youth workers and parents.

Healthcare needs are identified and met. Management of medication is safe and effective.

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

The pupils are safe and feel safe when boarding at the school. One pupil said: 'This is a nice, safe place.' All pupils spoken to could identify which member of staff they would speak with if they were worried.

The staff achieve a balance of allowing the children to take risks and learn, while keeping them safe. Pupils are encouraged to learn to use public transport independently, while being shadowed by the staff. Others participate in activities such as golf, swimming and bike riding in the school grounds on a purpose-built track. Risk assessments are in place for individual children and all activities. These documents identify potential risks and provide the staff with clear guidance on how best to keep the pupils safe.

The primary responsibility for the pupils remains with their parents/carers. Most pupils stay at Drake's View for two nights a week. Parents sign consent forms. These give permissions to allow their child to take part in activities and to allow the use of alarms on bedroom doors, if it is risk assessed as necessary to keep the child and others safe.

Safeguarding concerns or disclosures from the pupils are comprehensively and safely dealt with by the staff. There are strong links with the police and safeguarding professionals. The staff are vigilant and know each child very well, so that if there is a change in a child's behaviour, the staff are aware and respond accordingly. The local authority safeguarding professional commented positively on the school's response to any safeguarding incidents.

A strength of the boarding provision is how the staff make positive relationships with the pupils and how they effectively manage behaviour. The pupils have complex and varied behavioural support needs. The staff know how best to respond to each child to de-escalate any incidents. They effectively use a gentle, respectful and nurturing approach along with appropriate humour. Pupils respond positively to this approach. The behaviour of the pupils who board improves as they respond to the consistent and firm boundaries and expectations from the staff.

Physical restraint is rarely used in the boarding provision. When it is used to keep a child and others safe, it is used for a minimal time and with minimal force by staff

who are appropriately trained in an accredited technique. The reasons for most restraints are clearly recorded to evidence why a restraint was needed after attempts at de-escalation failed. On one occasion, the record of restraints did not clearly evidence what de-escalation was tried prior to a restraint.

Staff recruitment procedures are comprehensive. Extensive checks are undertaken on prospective staff to ensure that they are suitable to work in the boarding provision.

Pupils do not go missing. The staff are clear about what action they would take if a child did go missing, in line with the school's policy and procedures. The pupils report that there is no bullying. They all get on well and learn tolerance and a respect and understanding of diversity.

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

The head of care and headteacher provides strong and clear leadership to the staff. She is experienced and appropriately qualified to undertake the role. The staff comment positively about her leadership and how well they are supported.

Leaders have an ambitious vision and high expectations about how they intend the pupils to achieve. There is a culture of aspiration and positivity in the boarding provision. The staff are committed to positively changing the lives of the pupils in their care using innovative and creative strategies.

A recent innovation is the independence project. This project was introduced by the head of care in response to an identified need. Many pupils were not learning the life skills that they needed for when they left school. The pilot for this project is now complete. The first four pupils recently successfully completed the programme. Data evidences the extensive range of skills that they have learned and how they have benefited from the programme.

A development plan is in place for the boarding provision. It documents how the intended continuous improvement will take place and in what timescales. Strengths and areas for improvement are detailed and document how the improvements will take place. An independent visitor undertakes a monitoring visit each month. These visits include speaking with the pupils and parents to gain their views and any concerns that they may have. A report is then produced that informs the monitoring of the quality of care being provided.

The pupils benefit from staying in a high-quality environment. Recent redevelopment of the boarding provision means that the pupils are benefiting from refurbished bedrooms and the addition of a large lounge and dining room. The pupils value the improvements and take care of Drake's View. They enjoy using the very large lounge for games of table tennis and pool. There is an area that they can relax on sofas to watch television or computer games. All pupils comment positively about their bedrooms, how comfortable the beds are and how they could not think of how they could be further improved. All bedrooms are now fitted with en-suite showers. This

improvement provides privacy for the pupils.

There is a culture of learning and a desire to further improve. Learning from the independence programme has been evaluated to inform the next course. Analysis of data using a whole-school approach is informing how the children are making progress and what else could be implemented to help them further improve.

The head of care works closely and liaises with the academic staff, youth teams and therapists to ensure a holistic approach. This informs each care plan and termly targets for each pupil.

The staff report that they are well led and receive supportive and informative supervision from either the head or deputy head of care. They benefit from an extensive training programme that equips them with the skills that they need to effectively care for the pupils.

## **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:** SC038087

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Brett Storry

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector(s)**

Tina Maddison, social care inspector (lead)





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