

Meadows School

London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0RJ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Meadows School is a non-maintained residential special school, owned by Barnardo's children's charity. At the time of the inspection, there were 73 students on roll with three students residing at the school. The residential provision is located in one house within walking distance of the school. The school provides education and residential provision for children who have behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 March 2019

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

Date of previous inspection: 5 December 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Residential students have the staff's undivided attention while accessing the residential provision. They benefit from having consistency, as residential staff also support students in the school.
- Residential students learn and grow emotionally and socially. They are supported to explore their identity and have many opportunities to join in with youth groups. They are actively encouraged to have friends to the residential provision for dinner and to socialise with once any homework has been completed.
- Practices in the residential provision and school ensure that students are protected from avoidable risk. This includes regular checks of the home and fire protection equipment, and following safer recruitment practices.
- Residential students are confident about approaching staff with any worries or concerns.
- The residential students' emotional well-being is held central to planning and there are particularly strong links with local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), specialist police and social workers. This ensures consistency and better outcomes for children.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- The policies on the school website are up to five years out of date. They are not reflective of the policies currently being used by the school.
- Residential students and staff have not had suitable or effective training or guidance in how to respond if weapons are brought into the school. There is not a suitable 'lockdown' procedure to be followed in the event of an emergency.
- The school has not checked with the designated officer in the local authority when Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on staff provide information that needs to be clarified or investigated further.

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:

- 13.7 The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff and children have suitable support regarding the dangers of carrying weapons, and that staff know how to respond if a weapon is brought into the school.
- Ensure that there are suitable risk assessments for all residential students who self-medicate, including those over the age of 18.
- The school is to satisfy itself that it has completed all checks with relevant partner agencies when DBS checks on staff provide information that needs to be clarified or investigated further.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Residential students make measurable progress while accessing the residential provision. Due to low student numbers and the high staff ratio, they have the staff's full attention. Students benefit from having residential staff support in classes and activities in the school. When residential students are struggling in the school setting, care staff support them to continue their learning through participating in education in the off-site residential house.

Residential staff support students to learn and grow emotionally and socially. Staff help students with exploring their identity. Students are actively encouraged to have friends to the residential provision for dinner and to socialise with. A parent was extremely positive about the progress his child was making in the school and through accessing the residential provision.

Residential students said that they feel listened to and that staff will consider any ideas they have. They are aware of the complaints process, but have rarely needed to use it, as they are able to sort out any concerns they have by consulting with the staff. Observations showed students negotiating with staff about pocket money in an age-appropriate manner, and staff responding with humour when a student was clearly trying to get more than he was owed. These positive relationships help students to learn how to manage conflict or disappointment in a socially acceptable manner.

Staff have created strong working relationships with external agencies including CAMHS, specialist police and social workers. This allows students to receive specialist support when needed. Some students are allowed to administer their own medication, but not all have risk assessments in place.

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

Residential students said that they feel safe, and that they can approach staff with any worries or concerns they have. Records of child protection and safeguarding concerns are clear and show that there are high levels of scrutiny and transparency when the school investigates suspicions of harm, including students allegedly harming other students. Staff know how to respond when they are worried or concerned about a student's well-being. Leaders have promoted staff learning through the use of quizzes to ensure that staff understand all sections of the relevant guidance.

Staff are reflective when managing students' behaviour that they find challenging. They try to understand the cause of the behaviour, considering other matters that might be affecting the student. Staff see such behaviour as a method of communication. Plans for how to support students when they are struggling are explicitly clear and detailed about how to intervene and support students. There have

been recent concerns about students bringing weapons into school. Risks have so far been mitigated by students telling staff if they know another student has brought something into school they should not have. However, students and staff have not been given suitable training or guidance regarding weapons. There is not a suitable 'lockdown' procedure in place to be followed in the event of an emergency.

Staff are knowledgeable about how to address exploitation in all forms. They recognise that many of the students are at risk of becoming involved in criminal gangs and sexual exploitation in their home areas. They strive to ensure that students are equipped to recognise when someone is grooming them, and that they know how to respond in these situations. They are also realistic about the fact that students will continue to struggle to implement these strategies. When students are absent from the school, staff remain in contact with parents and the placing authority. In specific cases, they will meet with the student in their home area every week, to give the student another safe adult they can talk to.

Practices within the residential provision and school ensure that students are protected from avoidable risk. Health and safety matters are well monitored. Risk assessments would be improved if they noted the date on which the document should be reviewed. The school follows safer recruitment practices in line with the wider organisation. However, the school has not liaised with the designated officer in the local authority when DBS checks on applicants provide information that needs to be clarified or investigated further. The governor overseeing safeguarding is extremely knowledgeable about this field, and provides suitable guidance and challenge where necessary.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential provision is run effectively by a confident senior team. The majority of staff have been in post for a number of years and perform their roles to a good standard. Staff have high aspirations for all the students they care for, providing encouragement and instilling a desire to succeed in students.

Staff said they are well supported by leaders and managers, and that they can approach them at any time with ideas or concerns. Staff have the training required to meet students' needs and receive regular, challenging and evaluative supervisions. There have been some changes to the working patterns of the residential staff over the last academic year, and while some are a little unsettled, this has not been reflected in the care they provide for students.

The members of the leadership team are confident about challenging placing authorities' decisions if they do not feel these are in the best interests of the students, including escalating concerns as necessary.

Leaders in the school have good knowledge about students' progress academically, socially and emotionally. Care and education processes are closely linked and

students' plans are reflective of the whole-school approach to developing students.

The policies on the school website are not the policies in use in the school. Some had out-of-date information relating to national safeguarding guidance and processes. Students, parents and placing authorities do not, therefore, have easy access to policies and procedures. The school does not control the content of the website and has raised its concerns previously with the organisation that does. Staff have access to more recent policies, and most have been updated within the last few months.

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: SC024060

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Vaughan Jackson

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01892 529 144

Email address: meadowsschool@barnardos.org.uk

Inspector

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector



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