

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford School is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged from 7 to 19 years of age, who have dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, there were 136 children attending this school. Of these children, 60 were using the boarding provision. Most children stay full time at school, including weekends, and some have flexible arrangements.

The boarding accommodation is provided in three areas on the school site, with one house for younger children located in the nearby village. Additional services include three host families.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 March 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 9 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Children enjoy their boarding experience, where they have fun and achieve. They make significant progress in their learning, and in their social and personal development.
- Children have many opportunities and positive experiences. These include trips overseas, supporting charitable events, joining youth groups, participating in sports events and achieving The Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are valued and regularly sought.
- School staff work well together, and effectively with parents. Leaders and managers have developed strong links with the local safeguarding agency.
- Boarding staff are passionate about meeting the needs of children and enhancing their boarding experience. Boarding staff report that they are supported well by leaders and managers.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- One potential safeguarding incident was inappropriately recorded in a sanction log book. Staff members did not follow procedures and failed to report this to a senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding children. Therefore, leaders and managers were unaware and did not have the opportunity to consider if there were any safeguarding implications.
- There is a range of recording systems across the school. Sanctions are recorded differently in some boarding accommodation and this has hindered the monitoring of such records. Leaders and managers plan to expand the use of the new software program to improve the collection and analysis of records of children's behaviour.
- The behaviour management policy refers to the school day and lacks specific guidance relating to boarding time. The sanctions imposed by boarding staff are not included in the behaviour management policy.
- The monitoring systems have not ensured that all records relating to children's behaviour are scrutinised. Monitoring systems have not been effective, resulting in two national minimum standards not being met.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (National minimum standard 11.1)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (National minimum standard 13.4)

Recommendations

- Review the behaviour management policy to be more specific to boarding time.
- Review the recording system of sanctions to ensure consistency across all of the boarding accommodation.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Overall, children report that they like this school and their stay in the boarding provision. Children recognise the progress they make with their academic studies, personal achievements and independent living skills. Older children reflect positively on the support and opportunities that this school has provided as they look forward to moving on to a college.

Children are consulted regularly and can have their say through formal gatherings, such as the school council and meetings. Positive relationships between the children and staff promote individual chats to explore children's views. There are regular discussions about the food and changes within each boarding area. The school council chooses a charity to support and arranges fund-raising events. This level of engagement encourages children to think of others and raises their awareness of being a good citizen.

Parents report positively about the care provided to their children. One parent commented, 'Appleford has a family atmosphere where children are made to feel welcome.' Another parent said, 'Staff are well trained and caring, support and pastoral care is always available.' A few parents expressed views on some areas in which they would like to see improvements, such as being able to contact the boarding staff during evenings and weekends, better showers in one boarding area and increased choice of weekend activities. Leaders and managers are fully aware of these matters and have plans in place to address them.

Communication is very good with parents and children and is conducted by using email and portals via the school website. Weekly newsletters are very informative, with advice about technology and the safe use of social media. Weekend newsletters include photographs and details of the activities undertaken.

Boarding staff know the children well; they recognise when children are upset, and they are responsive to situations where children may require additional support. Strong collaboration occurs among teaching staff, boarding staff, the therapy team and senior leaders. Together, they devise strategies to support children with their learning, emotional well-being and personal development. These pastoral meetings are effective and evidence that leaders and managers have a good understanding of the needs of children. Information is disseminated effectively to the boarding staff team.

The boarding accommodation has improved since the last inspection. Junior boys and girls now reside together, off site, in a big house with a garden. A refurbishment of the oldest building has led to bedrooms with fewer children sharing and additional communal space. All children have access to lockable storage space to keep their possessions safe. One area that requires improvement to be of the same good standard as the other boarding areas is the bathroom in the oldest building. This

work is scheduled in the school development plan.

In addition to the boarding provision, the school has three host families who provide accommodation for children. This alternative care provides good support for children who may struggle to be within a larger group. Suitability checks are complete for host carers, in accordance with safer recruitment procedures. Most host carers are also employees of the school.

Children benefit from the many activities and opportunities provided by this school, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, horse riding, yoga, judo and many more. Sport is a popular choice and children have represented the school in regional and national competitions. The school has been recognised for these achievements with a national award for 'outstanding sport'. Some children had an amazing cultural experience in February 2018 by travelling to northern India to support and sponsor a local school. This year, at the time of this inspection, 29 children were away in Austria skiing. Such experiences contribute well to the personal development of children.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Regular training is delivered to all staff with regards to safeguarding of children. Concerns are generally reported to senior managers with responsibility for safeguarding within the school. However, one incident was managed by addressing behaviour and recorded in a sanction log book. The boarding staff members overlooked the possibility that the incident could be a safeguarding concern. Staff members failed to record and report the incident according to safeguarding procedures; consequently, the senior manager with responsibility for safeguarding was not informed. The failure to escalate this incident means that the potential risks were not explored to consider whether any action was required, or not.

Safeguarding records confirm that other concerns are reported appropriately within the school, and to external agencies when required. Safeguarding records are comprehensive and include a chronology of events. A new software program to report and record safeguarding concerns has recently been implemented. This development will assist with the monitoring of safeguarding concerns and include pastoral and welfare issues. Leaders and managers work effectively with the local authority safeguarding advisers and attend training events.

Overall, children are polite, respectful of others, and of the school rules and boundaries. Within the last 14 months, no child has been restrained and the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced. Some children are selected to be anti-bullying ambassadors. This role is effective in increasing the opportunities for children to raise a concern if they feel bullied by others.

Information and advice are provided to children on how to keep themselves safe in relationships, in the community and in their use of technology. The pastoral team

decides how to respond to emerging issues among children. There are no reports of children going missing or the police being called to manage behaviour.

When children display negative behaviour, they are spoken to and supported to avoid any repetition. Sometimes sanctions are imposed, such as being denied time on a games console or to assist with tidying up in the boarding area. These sanctions are minimal and appropriate at the time. However, the recording of such sanctions in log books varies across the different boarding areas, hindering the monitoring and review of these records. The new software program has capacity to record sanctions and the school plans to transfer to this electronic system. The school behaviour management policy relates to the school day and lacks focus on boarding time. Leaders and managers report that this policy is currently under review.

The school site, including the boarding areas, is maintained to a very high standard. Sound systems of reporting and monitoring ensure that matters relating to health and safety, and fire safety, are given a high priority. Children and staff practise an evacuation of the boarding buildings each term and children confirm that they know what to do if the alarm sounds.

Safer recruitment procedures are followed. There is good evidence of exploring the career histories and references of all applicants. Such good practice assists with the assessment of suitability of adults to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers strive for continual improvement. They make good use of audits, monitoring and inspections to raise standards across the school. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements to the boarding environment, the structure of the boarding provision and the implementation of new recording systems.

In response to a recommendation from the last inspection, all staff now have regular meetings with regards to their professional development. Staff report that these meetings focus on their specific areas of responsibility. This level of supervision provides a good structure to reflect on staff practice and identify any training needs.

Boarding staff are very enthusiastic about their work. They report that they are supported well by leaders and managers through team meetings, supervision and training. Ready access to the therapy team is valued by boarding staff as they work together to help children. Boarding staff are passionate about meeting the needs of children and enhancing their boarding experience.

Systems are established to monitor all aspects of the boarding provision. The senior leadership team holds regular meetings and reports to an advisory board that provides a level of governance at termly meetings. However, such systems lack rigour due to the failure to monitor all the records of any sanctions within the boarding provision. In addition, the monitoring visits, as arranged by the proprietor,

have not reviewed all of the sanction log books. These monitoring visits now occur during evenings and weekends. This improvement, since the last inspection, ensures that children are consulted about their boarding time, beyond the school day.

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

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Inspectors

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