

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 who have autistic spectrum conditions. The school is privately owned by Autism Anglia. It is situated in a small village on the outskirts of Colchester. The residential accommodation is in two houses on the main site. Residential care is provided for up to 294 nights per year for students aged nine to 19. There is respite provision available for day students. There are 51 students on roll, of whom eight are residential/respite students. The last welfare inspection took place in May 2018.

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 May 2019

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: 15 May 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This is a good residential provision that parents value and children enjoy. While the inspection has identified some shortfalls, all of these occurred before the appointment of the new headteacher. The new headteacher has improved the quality of the residential provision. Staff spoke highly of the immediate effect that she has had.

The staff are respectful and empathetic. They are reflective and have a good understanding of children's needs. Staff spend time with the children and get to know them well.

Parents are positive about the residential provision. They see the value that it provides and can identify the progress that their children make. One parent said, 'Staff help my child to do things that we simply never thought possible, through perseverance, dedication and commitment.'

Good multi-agency working results in staff working closely with therapists to implement, review and amend approaches to communicating with and supporting the children. Consequently, the children make progress in their social skills, behaviour and independence.

The staff work with the children to support them to move on from the residential provision. This work includes enabling children to access work experience. One child was delighted to discover, during the inspection, that his work experience has led to a job offer and paid employment.

A dedicated member of staff oversees the approach to healthcare. The staff communicate with health professionals promptly to raise concerns. This ensures that the children receive appropriate, timely medical support.

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

Staff know how to raise safeguarding concerns. They have received training in safeguarding disabled children. The staff have access to experienced, trained safeguarding lead staff.

Staff understand safeguarding procedures and their responsibility to safeguard children. When safeguarding concerns arise, these are shared promptly with the local authority. When there are serious concerns about staff practice, thorough investigations take place and managers take effective action.

An independent person visits the school regularly. These visits provide the children with an additional person with whom they can talk and to whom they can report any

concerns. The independent visitor is also able to raise any concerns, which further safeguards the children.

The number of physical interventions has reduced. Holds are appropriate and usually for a very short period. The pastoral lead monitors the records of physical interventions and provides managers with data on compliance, with recording expectations.

Managers follow safe recruitment processes. A new member of staff now oversees the recruitment process. They have introduced new training and guidance for the team. As a result, managers have met the previously unmet national minimum standard.

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

The new headteacher is interested in and engaged with the residential provision. She has developed a good working relationship with the experienced residential manager. The residential manager is now based in the residential provision. This provides her with clearer oversight and awareness of the provision.

Leaders and managers have addressed two of the four points for improvement raised at the last inspection. This has resulted in greater consultation with families and improved systems for communication.

The quality of monitoring arrangements is not good enough. This has been a recurring theme at inspections and contributes to the issues that have been identified. Although governors are regular visitors to the school, they have not undertaken enough formal monitoring visits.

Records of responses to complaints are not good enough. The school has not followed its own policy on responding to a complaint. Neither internal nor external monitoring identified this issue. As a result, the actions taken to address concerns are unclear.

Monitoring of risk assessments has not identified areas that need to improve. One child's risk assessment contains contradictory information and does not give sufficient guidance to staff on managing the risk relating to a child who refused to evacuate the building during a fire drill. Monitoring did not pick up this shortfall.

Managers are confident and assertive in challenging providers when they feel that action to meet children's needs is insufficient or inappropriate. This challenge is effective and results in improved services for children.

Strong multi-disciplinary team meetings take place to discuss children whose behaviour is causing concern. These meetings are attended by therapists, residential

staff and education staff, who all make positive and proactive contributions to plans to support children.

Parents and social workers gave positive feedback about the residential provision. Managers have increased their engagement with parents, holding a recent coffee morning and through the use of questionnaires.

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 has, and follows, an appropriate policy on recording and responding to complaints that is compliant with the relevant regulatory requirements. (National minimum standards 18.1)
- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who is independent of the management of the school, to visit the school six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the head teacher (or school equivalent). (National minimum standards 20.1)

Recommendations

- Ensure that monitoring of risk assessments is strong enough to identify inconsistencies and omissions.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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/teacher in charge: Mrs Louise Parkinson

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01206 771234

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Inspector

Ashley Hinson, social care inspector (lead)



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