

Helen Allison School

Longfield Road, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0EW

Inspection dates

26/06/2019

Context of the inspection

This visit was undertaken to monitor the progress made since the integrated inspection undertaken in January 2019, when the residential provision was judged inadequate. The visit considered an action plan submitted by the school following the inadequate inspection. The visit was unannounced. The social care inspector met with the interim principal, the interim head of residential care, the chair of governors, the director of education and deputy director of education. A visit to the residential house was undertaken and a range of records viewed and scrutinised.

The school's residential provision is closing at the end of the summer term 2019. However, due to the seriousness of concerns resulting from the previous inspection, a monitoring visit was completed.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

The changes implemented, since the last inspection, to the school leadership, the residential management and the governing body have resulted in improved monitoring of the residential provision and significant improvement in the protection and well-being of the residential pupils. Leaders and senior leaders visit the residential house regularly and listen to the pupils' views and opinions.

The interim arrangements put in place following the last inspection have been positive. Leaders have fulfilled their interim responsibilities effectively. Both the interim principal and the interim head of the residential provision have worked well together to monitor practice more effectively, implement new systems, scrutinise current and historical practices and records and take timely action where necessary. They have been supported by senior leaders such as the director of education and deputy director of education. In addition, the governing body has also provided improved support. A new and permanent principal has been recruited and is commencing on 1 July 2019. There will be no need for a residential care manager as the residential provision is closing.

Safeguarding practices across both the school and residential provision have been subject to comprehensive, and robust, review and change. As a result, residential pupils' safety is much improved. All policies and procedures continue to be subject to ongoing review and scrutiny to ensure that they continually meet the guidance issued by the Secretary of

State.

Arrangements now ensure that those staff with designated safeguarding roles have the skills and competencies to make safe decisions that protect the children. Safeguarding leaders have refreshed their training and there are improved and clear lines of communication between them. Safeguarding practices are improving quickly. Action taken has provided improved protection for pupils. The school is working closely with external safeguarding agencies in relation to current referrals and investigations.

A detailed and comprehensive review of all incidents and restraints has taken place since the last inspection. This has resulted in referrals being made to safeguarding agencies and, in some cases, disciplinary measures being taken. Recording of physical interventions is much improved, with evidence that pupils and staff can have a debrief following such incidents. The staff undertaking these debriefs have undertaken training to improve this practice. The senior leaders have improved oversight of these records. The leaders have taken clear action to improve recording of incidents, with improved analysis and monitoring. Daily monitoring of records enables timely intervention of any follow-up action needed. There is improved regularity of the safeguarding team meeting; they now meet weekly to review all incidents.

A change of representatives to the governing body has resulted in significantly improved monitoring of the leadership and delivery of care. The more robust systems now allow for improved flow of information to the governing body, from local to provider level. Governors now visit the residential house, and this adds an extra layer of scrutiny.

There is much-improved practice in ensuring that sleeping arrangements have been risk-assessed to lessen the risk of bullying and harm. The need for additional sensory equipment has been assessed and current residential pupils are suitably catered for; their sensory needs are met.

Action has been taken to widen the range of pupils on the school council. This ensures that the residential pupils' voices are heard across the school.

Suitable action has been taken to ensure that all required information about the pupils is sought and recorded. The interim head of the residential provision has created new recording systems that are of a very good standard and meet the recommended levels of detail.

The appointment of a new standard 20 visitor has taken place since the last inspection. This much-improved monitoring and reporting has meant that leaders and the governing body gain a true reflective report of the residential provision. As the residential provision is closing at the end of July 2019, there will not be a need for this to continue.

Senior leaders and management are acutely aware of the need to continue with the changes identified and being put in place and that their impact, for some areas, needs time to fully embed. There is a clear commitment to making change happen.

National minimum standards

The school has made good progress and now meets all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Inspection team

Liz Driver

Lead social care inspector

Information about this school

Helen Allison School is owned by the National Autistic Society and moved to its present site in Meopham in 1991. The school provides co-educational day and weekly boarding facilities for children and young people with autism spectrum disorders aged 5 to 19. The school is situated on the edge of the village in a semi-rural area. The residential provision is situated several miles away from the school building, just outside Gravesend. At the time of this inspection, the school had 81 students, two of whom are resident during the week, plus two flexi-residents.

School details

Unique reference number	118993
Social care unique reference number	SC024066
DfE registration number	886/6046

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	81
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to 19
Headteacher	Anna Molony (interim)
Date of previous boarding inspection	29/01/2019
Telephone number	01474 814 878
Email address	Anna.Molony@nas.org.uk

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