

Farney Close School

Bolney Court, Crossways, Bolney, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5RD
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an independent residential special school for children aged nine to 18 years who may experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. A board of directors, a board of governors and a board of trustees oversee the running of the school. The school is approved to accommodate a maximum of 72 residential pupils. All residential pupils reside on a weekly basis and return home at weekends. At the time of this inspection, there were 50 residential pupils on roll.

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 September 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 3 December 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The majority of the children accessing the residential facility benefit from building strong, supportive relationships with the care staff who are looking after them. The inspectors observed staff nurturing and supporting children, particularly at times when the child was anxious or distressed. Children have the opportunity to express their views on the care they receive, although the children acting as representatives on the pupil forum could not think of any examples where their views had resulted in changes being made.

Residential care staff encourage the children to speak about their school day when they return to the residential houses in the afternoon. This helps resolve any difficulties the child may have experienced during the day and makes a clear distinction between education time and social time. There is not an established system for teaching staff to hand over to care staff at the end of the school day. Care staff are made aware of any significant events through an electronic messaging system. This does not provide them with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on these events with the teaching staff who have first-hand knowledge of the events.

There are not adequate facilities for children to make private telephone calls to parents, carers and other significant adults. In the residential houses the children may use the office phone with a member of staff present, but if they wish to make a private call they have to use a payphone in the main school building. This arrangement limits the ability of children to access external support agencies.

The care staff have a good understanding of each child's physical and mental health needs. There is an acknowledgement that a significant number of children who attend the school started smoking cigarettes before they were admitted. There are measures in place to manage this, but there is not a strong enough emphasis on supporting children to give up smoking. Children are provided with a good range of healthy meals and snacks. Mealtimes are well-managed, sociable events.

There are suitable arrangements for caring for children who become unwell. There is an effective system for managing prescribed medication. Any medication errors are quickly identified and investigated. Remedial action is taken to ensure that the child's health will not be put at risk.

The children have access to a range of specialist support workers in the school who help them to become more emotionally resilient and to manage their anxieties more effectively. The speech and language therapist gave clear examples of the work she has undertaken to support children to understand and express their fears and anxieties. This is a stepping stone to children increasing their self-esteem and confidence.

The work undertaken to prepare older children for semi-independence is a strength of the residential provision. There are two residential houses where these children learn many life skills that will assist them in their transition to adulthood.

The children are given the opportunity to engage in a range of after-school activities. This ensures that children have fun, develop new interests and skills and take regular exercise. The children spoken to during this inspection spoke positively about the activities available to them.

Despite there being shortfalls in the standard of care being provided, the parents, carers, and social workers spoken to during this inspection were able to give examples of progress that children have made while at the school. This largely consisted of children being better equipped to manage their anger and take greater responsibility for any unacceptable behaviour they may engage in. Some children were also able to reflect on the changes they have made, and these mirrored the views of the adults spoken to by the inspectors.

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

The standard of safeguarding and child protection practice is variable. Generally, senior leaders and residential care staff are familiar with the risks associated with each child's vulnerabilities and unsafe behaviours, but the strategies for mitigating against risk are not well developed. Insufficient consideration has been given to the allocation of sleeping accommodation and the potential for children to harm one another when staff are not directly supervising them, particularly overnight.

The strategies for reducing the potential for children to come to harm, contained in children's individual risk assessments, are not always implemented in practice. This is partly attributable to the risk assessments not being easily accessible to staff; consequently, staff are not always familiar with the measures that have been identified to keep children safe. Risk assessments are not routinely updated when there has been a serious incident or significant new information becomes available.

These shortfalls in the assessment and management of risk have not resulted in any children being harmed, but prompt action is required to ensure that children are kept safe in the future.

The care staff develop positive and supportive relationships with children in the residential houses. One child informed the inspectors that the best thing about the residential houses is that, 'there is always someone to talk to'. This is a strong protective factor as it ensures that children have the confidence to speak up about issues of concern. This mitigates against some of the other shortfalls in safeguarding practice.

Some children have experienced bullying from their peers in the residential setting.

These children have been able to share their concerns about this with care staff, but they do not express high levels of confidence in the ability of the staff team to take swift and effective action. In the school's 2018/19 pupil questionnaire, 19% of all children at the school said they had experienced bullying in the last few months. 25% of these children said the issue had been 'sort of' dealt with and 25% said the bullying had not been dealt with well. At the time of this inspection, the senior leadership team had not developed an effective strategy for addressing this issue.

No children have gone missing from the residential provision since the last inspection. This represents a significant achievement for some children who had an established history of going missing prior to being admitted to the residential provision. The vigilance of staff ensures that the whereabouts of children is known at all times, and that children who threaten to leave the school site are supported to make safer choices.

The use of physical restraint to keep children safe is proportionate, and is implemented by trained staff. However, records do not confirm that the children involved in a restraint consistently have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the incident with a member of staff. Similarly, staff debriefs following a physical intervention do not always occur. This is a missed opportunity for both children and staff to learn from the incident and identify strategies for avoiding the need for physical interventions in the future.

The staff are familiar with the procedures they should follow when they have concerns for a child's welfare. Concerns are promptly shared with the designated lead for safeguarding, and consultations or referrals to the relevant safeguarding agencies are appropriately made. This has resulted in some children and families receiving early help services from their local authorities. Generally, senior leaders communicate well with safeguarding professionals, although on one occasion the school failed to send a representative to a child protection conference.

Practice relating to the management of allegations made against staff has improved in recent months. This has been driven by the governor with responsibility for overseeing safeguarding practice. Practice would be further improved by senior leaders giving more consideration to whether any staff member could face a conflict of interest, when an allegation is made against a staff member.

The residential houses are well maintained. This minimises the potential for children to come to harm from avoidable accidents. However, the inspectors identified shortfalls relating to fire safety precautions. The recommendations made by the local fire service, following a visit to the school on 3 August 2019, had not all been acted on. In one of the residential houses, where there is greater fire risk, one of the two residential care workers had not completed the school's fire safety training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be

good

There have been a number of changes to the senior leadership team since the last inspection. A principal was appointed in April 2019, after occupying the role on a temporary basis several months. At the time of this inspection there were two interim principals covering for the absence of the new principal. An existing member of staff was promoted to the head of care role in June 2019. Some of these changes could not have been anticipated. This has impacted negatively on the overall effectiveness of the senior leadership team, which was judged as 'requires improvement' in December 2018.

Shortfalls remain in the systems for monitoring the quality of care being provided and the standard of safeguarding practice. The head of care has not always maintained oversight of serious incidents that have occurred in the residential houses, or evaluated the practice of the staff he manages. An internal audit to establish whether the national minimum standards for residential special schools were being met did not place sufficient emphasis on how well children are being helped and protected in the residential provision.

The senior leadership team acknowledges the weaknesses in monitoring systems and is beginning to review and replace these. However, these changes are not yet embedded in practice and the benefits have not yet become apparent.

Leaders and managers do not have a thorough understanding of the combined strengths and weaknesses of the residential care staff team. They have not identified the priority areas for professional development, although there is an acknowledgement that the effectiveness of the current staff training programme should be evaluated. The interim principal and governor with responsibility for safeguarding indicated an intention to provide staff with more classroom-based training on specific safeguarding topics, such as child sexual exploitation and internet safety.

The staff gave varying accounts of how well supported they are by leaders and managers. Some were encouraged by the approach now being taken by one of the interim principals, but other staff expressed the view that leaders and managers do not always recognise the emotional impact the work has on them. Not all staff receive regular supervision, and this is a missed opportunity for leaders and managers to clarify the support needs of the residential care staff.

There is an established admissions procedure, but leaders and managers do not always ensure that the information available to them contributes towards thorough admission planning. No records are kept of visits to the child in their home environment, prior to the child being admitted. Therefore, any information obtained at these visits is not available to reflect on when making decisions about how to meet the child's needs. In addition, leaders and managers cannot demonstrate that there is a detailed process for deciding which children would be suitably placed together.

Leaders and staff maintain good working relationships with professionals and appropriately share relevant information in a timely way. The majority of parents contacted by the inspectors during this inspection were positive, although some reported that there was room for improvement in relation to effective communication.

Since the last inspection, there has been an increased presence in the school from members of the governing body. A schedule of governors' visits to the residential houses has been developed. This increased level of scrutiny is beginning to have a positive impact, and many of the shortfalls found by the inspectors had already been identified by the senior leadership team. Despite this, there has been insufficient progress towards developing and implementing robust action plans to improve the quality of care being provided.

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:

- 5.1 Suitable sleeping accommodation is provided for children. It is well organised and managed with risk assessments undertaken and the findings acted upon to reduce risk for all children. Where children are aged 8 years or over, sleeping accommodation for boys is separate from sleeping accommodation for girls.
- 7.1 The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 11.1 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.
- 12.1 The school has and consistently implements a written policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed; and arrangements for searching children and their possessions.
- 12.6 A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force. Records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of reasonable force and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice.
- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.
- 13.9 The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate.
- 19.4 The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated if necessary.
- 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the healthcare plans for children who smoke cigarettes contain strategies for assisting the child to cease smoking.
- Ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to enable children to make private telephone calls where appropriate.
- Ensure that a record is kept of pre-admission visits to the child in their home environment and that the information gathered at these visits is used in the admission planning process.
- Ensure that staff receive appropriate levels of support to deal with the emotional impact of working with children who present challenging behaviour.

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: SC014513

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Emily Hopkins-Hayes

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

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