

The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 140 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for children who have moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders, autism spectrum disorders and behavioural difficulties.

The residential provision was last inspected in September 2018.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 January 2020

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected Outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 19 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children absolutely thrive in the comforting and exciting residential provision. The provision enhances children's life opportunities. The children increase their attendance in education and their academic attainment and improve their independence skills and emotional and social skills. Some children come back to volunteer at the school and others have gone on to attend university and learn to drive. These achievements demonstrate the outstanding impact that the school has on children's lives.

The children enjoy being with the staff. The staff balance a relaxed, good-humoured rapport with excellent guidance and supervision. The relationships between the staff and the children are well considered, compassionate and established. These strong relationships underpin the core of the residential provision and are crucial to its success.

The staff show a genuine interest and delight in the children's academic progress. The English lead trains the residential staff to ensure a consistent approach. The children read to the staff every evening. Planned questions gauge and reinforce the children's understanding of books. The reading levels for residential children are enhanced and their literacy and speaking skills increase.

Intensive, individually tailored focus is placed on improving the children's independence. The children's residence targets include independence skills and are continually measured. This seamless approach encourages each child to succeed and builds their ability and confidence. The children take huge pride in the running of the houses. They acquire many valuable social and domestic skills that support their move towards adulthood.

The residential provision is highly popular with the children. The children who are established in the residential provision give positive testimonies and provide superb role models. This gives the residential provision a positive profile that makes it attractive to other potential boarders.

The staff hold a 'summer school' during the holidays, which was requested by parents. New children attend the summer school as part of a gradual introduction to the school and the staff team. This reduces the children's anxieties and alleviates some of the pressures placed on parents over the summer holidays.

The children thoroughly enjoy the exciting and varied range of activities. They have visited Snowdon and benefit from annual residential trips. These trips are highly inclusive. The staff work around any barriers to give the children equal opportunities and new experiences.

Clean, orderly and welcoming accommodation is designed with the children's choices and input. Many prompts and displays reflect the children's learning targets. This meaningful information includes house competitions, safety prevention work and

social media guidance. A 'proud cloud' display celebrates the children's efforts and achievements and boosts their self-esteem.

Menus balance appetising, healthy dishes with the children's firm favourites. Meticulous care is taken with each meal. The children's dietary requirements and individual choices are catered for unobtrusively. Evening mealtimes reflect relaxed and sociable family dining. The children show a superb understanding of table manners and turn-taking. They select healthy choices with few prompts from the staff.

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

The staff team goes above and beyond its remit to safeguard children both in and out of school. E-safety cafes provide the children and their families with advice and guidance regarding online safety. When appropriate, the staff enlist the support of relevant agencies to work jointly to manage identified risks and concerns related to the children. This provides a strong support network for the children and ensures that concerns are addressed comprehensively and quickly.

The staff record safeguarding concerns effectively. Intervention strategies are swiftly put in place and all avenues are exhausted to ensure that children are kept safe and that their well-being is supported.

The relationships forged with parents are strong and enduring. This enables honest and open conversations. The children's best interests are central to all decisions.

The children's behaviour is excellent. They show empathy for one another and can manage their behaviour well. There is a culture of care, acceptance and kindness throughout the school. The staff role model positive behaviours and work tirelessly to ensure that high standards are continually strived for and sustained.

Children confidently said that they feel safe in residence. Despite some children only spending a limited time in residence, they have a strong sense of permanence and belonging.

The staff training is exceptional. The staff are highly skilled and appropriately qualified in a variety of specialisms. This enables the staff to provide the children with well-informed advice, guidance and opportunities.

Safeguarding policies are subject to regular review and are shared with all the staff. All staff have received training in understanding county lines and criminal exploitation. However, these subject areas do not feature in the school's safeguarding policy.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An established and inspirational management team leads this highly successful school. The ambitious headteacher drives a culture of continuous improvement. The

head of care oversees the residential provision. Collectively, these leaders have successfully sustained outstanding outcomes for the children.

The residential provision is seamlessly woven into every aspect of school. The care staff, academic and pastoral staff routinely share information that enables the provision of holistic support to each child.

The staff team fully embraces the ethos of the school. The skilled and dedicated staff underpin the success of the residential provision. They work extremely hard to maintain a child-centred, solution-based approach that makes an enormous difference to children's lives.

The staff are encouraged to develop their unique skills and strengths. Each member of the care staff team has their expertise recognised. Specialised training and specific resources support their practice. This includes trauma-informed practice, literacy support, volunteering roles and social and emotional support. Trained and competent staff support and enhance the children's development. The staff team's wide-ranging skill base gives children the best chances to develop their potential and ultimately succeed.

The management team ensures that the staff are accountable and supported in their roles. The staff work exceptionally well together. Staff changes have been managed with minimal disruption to children. The interview and selection process involves the children, the existing staff and the senior leaders. This is an extremely comprehensive process and tests applicants' skills, knowledge and ability. The children's participation and views are fully influential in the selection process.

The senior managers follow a clear complaints procedure and diligently respond to any concerns raised. Investigations are thorough and responses and outcomes are provided within agreed timescales.

The children actively learn about the wider community. They participate in the local council's spring clean initiative. Local businesses sponsor the annual residential trip.

Intensive research leads to new initiatives and improvements. The senior leaders explore resources with care and consideration. The staff test and research areas of interest. There is a constant drive to improve and sustain new approaches that improve practice and ultimately improve the children's lives.

Electronic recording has replaced paper records. Purpose-built data management systems collect a wide range of information. These systems enable the staff to capture rich information and illustrate evidence of the children's progress. There are also improved electronic safeguarding systems that correlate concerns with actions. This provides the designated staff with an informed oversight of safeguarding procedures and processes. This system has improved the efficiency of responses to all safeguarding concerns.

The parents spoken with unanimously provided positive feedback, identifying how their children truly benefit from the residential provision. These benefits continue into the children's adult lives.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Consider updating the safeguarding policy to include information about criminal exploitation, county lines and gangs.

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: SC024573

Headteacher: Sally Garrett

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Lianne Bradford, social care inspector (lead)

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector

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