

Chalk Hill Academy

Cats Lane, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2SF

Assurance visit

Information about this residential special school

Chalk Hill is a residential special academy for boys aged between eight and 14 who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream school.

The school is in a residential area of Sudbury, Suffolk. There are 30 pupils on roll, and up to 12 children can access the residential provision each weekday night.

The head of the residential provision has been in post since 2015. She holds a diploma in social work and a registered manager's award at level 4. She is currently undertaking a relevant level 5 qualification.

The last residential inspection was in April 2019.

Visit dates: 6 to 7 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 30 April 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The residential provision closed in March 2020 in response to COVID-19 restrictions and reopened in September 2020. However, the residential provision closed again for two days in September due to staff shortages linked to staff who were self-isolating.

The residential capacity has been reduced from 12 children to three children a night to maintain safe distancing measures.

One child said that he is glad to be back at school and seeing his friends. He was able to explain about his 'bubble' and understands the restrictive measures. Another child said that it is strange staying at the school with the reduced numbers and that he misses all the other boys. Staff ensure that the children have plenty to do to occupy them and to reduce their anxieties.

The children have continued to have secure relationships with staff. Staff have remained in contact with children during lockdown and the school holidays. Staff have visited children's homes, using safe visiting protocols. They have taken food parcels to vulnerable children and delivered school work. This has helped to ensure that children are safe and well and that they have been able to continue their education remotely.

Staff understand children's social, emotional and mental health needs in relation to COVID-19 and the school closures. The staff understand the anxiety that some children may have returning to school. A clear transition plan for children returning to stay in the residential provision was well thought out and implemented. This provided support to children who felt anxious.

Staff involve children in planning activities during their stay. The children have visited a local farm, been to the park and enjoyed swimming. These activities provided the children with social and leisure experiences that they had not been able to access during lockdown.

The safety of children

The staff used an effective process to identify children's vulnerability and needs. Once identified, the staff planned home visits accordingly. The staff have

implemented effective risk assessments for each child. These assessments identify triggers and de-escalation techniques that help children to manage and reduce risk-taking behaviours.

Residential staff have set clear boundaries and guidelines. These have helped children to feel safe and secure while staying away from home. Children understand the consequences of not sticking to these boundaries. School staff and residential staff work closely together, and this ensures that the children understand the expectations.

The school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL) works closely with the academy's safeguarding officer. The staff were able to report any safeguarding concerns to the DSL during lockdown and these were appropriately referred to social workers or other professionals.

Leaders and managers

The school's staff have placed the well-being of children at the centre of their practice during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 restrictions, senior leaders kept the day school open for most of the time. They considered the needs of the most vulnerable children and balanced these with guidelines and any parental concerns. Risk assessments, action plans and a flexible school curriculum were used to support children educationally and keep them safe.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the school has remained adequately staffed. The use of the residential staff in school and the closing of residential provision have meant that children's education has not been overly disrupted.

Staff have undertaken extra training during lockdown, including managing trauma. This has supported them to have a better understanding of the anxieties and concerns that the children have faced during lockdown.

Since becoming part of an academy, the headteacher and senior leaders have held weekly video meetings with other schools in the academy group. This has supported the transition to academy status and enables good practice to be shared.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC024594

Headteacher: Graham Alcock

Inspector

Trish Palmer, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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