

Farney Close School

Bolney Court, Crossways, Bolney, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5RD

Assurance visit

Information about this residential special school

This is an independent residential special school which provides weekly boarding. The children and young people who attend are aged from nine to 18 years and are experiencing a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The school is approved to accommodate 72 children and young people. At the time of inspection, 45 were on roll.

The term young people is used throughout this report as this is the term used by the school.

Visit dates: 29 to 30 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 24 September 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be 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 whole care team works together to nurture young people's progress in all areas of their development. One parent said that, '[Her child] would not manage anywhere else because the staff have such a good understanding of the challenges that he faces.' Another parent commented very positively on the sensitive and discreet ways that staff supported her child who was experiencing incontinence.

Leaders and managers have further developed their admissions process. A member of staff is now in charge of admissions, and parents commented very positively on their contact with this person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have worked hard to support young people and to let them know what to expect when they arrive; this has helped most young people to settle in quickly.

The school's specialist services, such as the school nurse and therapists, are well integrated into young people's support networks. These services make a real difference to young people's well-being. The school nurse, for example, supports staff and also monitors medication practice to ensure that medications are administered safely. The school nurse also contributes to the admissions processes so that young people's health needs are understood and met. She identifies staff training needs and monitors young people's health needs.

Parents and professionals praised the support given to young people and their families during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic. One parent said that during this time the staff had remained in regular contact with her and her child. The staff had listened to any difficulties the parent was experiencing and always strived to support her to get these resolved.

The staff regularly seek young people's views in various ways. For example, twice-termly forums, surveys and house meetings are in place. The feedback systems for young people to understand how their views are taken into account, however, are weak. Young people, and staff, could not clearly tell inspectors what had changed at the school because of what young people say. The minutes of forum meetings did not consistently show how young people's views had influenced practice.

The safety of children

Staff know and follow safeguarding procedures appropriately. Safeguarding policies are reviewed and shared with the team as necessary. A local authority safeguarding team commented positively about how the staff work effectively in partnership with them.

Managers know about, and act effectively on, the wider issues relating to young people's safety. For example, they referred a family to get help from a placing local authority appropriately. However, staff did not demonstrate that they have good knowledge about how children's experience of trauma may impact on children's safety and well-being. However, the clinical team are supporting staff to develop their skills and competency in working with young people who have experienced trauma. Managers also have a detailed training plan which increases staff understanding of these issues.

Young people's risk assessments identify risks well. Risk management strategies are routinely recorded and updated. However, some risk management strategies are not well defined. Discussions with staff, young people and parents indicate that, in practice, staff manage risks well, and managers have planned training to help staff to write clearer risk management strategies.

Staff have improved their approach and planning to inform them of which young people can safely live together in each residential house. The head of care now has a regularly updated programme of assessing which young people share bedrooms. As a result, children's welfare at night is more carefully considered and protected.

Leaders and managers have reviewed the CCTV policy. Its use is agreed with all relevant parents and professionals when young people first arrive at the school. However, there is no clear procedure for reviewing whether the use of CCTV continues to be necessary. This is especially important as CCTV is used in children's bedroom corridors. The absence of regular review runs the risk that the use of CCTV may unnecessarily compromise the privacy of young people.

Incident records provide good levels of detail about what occurred and how the staff responded. Recording in relation to wider learning and actions to reduce incidents is fragmented and not readily accessible for review. This potentially undermines the ability of leaders and managers to have clear oversight and to ensure that agreed actions are put into practice.

The incidence of bullying has decreased since the last inspection. Records of how incidents of bullying are managed are clear and comprehensive. The records show that staff take effective action actions help to reduce the likelihood that bullying will continue. However, two young people said that they were not confident that staff would take their concerns seriously. Leaders and managers responded appropriately to this concern and are investigating this further.

Leaders and managers

Leaders and managers have a vision for how care and education can work together to support young people's progress effectively. They responded well to the wide range of concerns raised at the school's last inspection. They now make more time for senior managers to reflect together on what is happening in the school. This has resulted in all of the shortfalls identified at the last inspection being met.

Staff morale has improved. Staff say that they now feel well supported by senior managers. Managers have listened to staff's views and worked with them to create a better career structure for residential staff. The new structure clarifies job roles, responsibilities and rewards.

The frequency and quality of supervision have improved significantly. Supervision records provide clear evidence of the discussions and agreed actions. Senior managers have implemented a good system to monitor and quality-assure that these improvements continue.

There is an effective staff development programme. Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have a wider range of systems to identify effectively the knowledge and skills that the staff team needs to support young people. For example, supervisors have had individual training about supervision, and some senior staff have a mentor.

Managers are working with other schools to learn and develop good practice. This thoughtful approach to staff development and learning has been especially helpful in making sure that training opportunities continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leaders and managers have better oversight of the quality of care practice and the experiences of children. Governors now highlight in their reports how they are providing constructive challenge to improve practice. The six-monthly reviews of how the residential service meets the national minimum standards are now regularly completed. The leadership team acknowledges that monitoring continues to be an area for development to ensure that it is fully embedded in every area of practice.

Social workers speak highly of how the staff work with the team around the young person. They say that the staff keep in regular contact with them, provide clear written reports on young people's progress and attend all planning meetings. One social worker commented that: '[Name of young person] has come on leaps and bounds since he was placed at the school. My working relationship with the school is positive and I am kept well informed.'

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

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers should check that all staff work in accordance with their anti-bullying policy and respond appropriately to any young person who indicates that they are being bullied. Leaders and managers should also review whether all young people feel able to report concerns about bullying.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that they review how well young people's views are used to inform all areas of residential practice, including how well young people know how their views are being taken into consideration.

- Leaders and managers should put systems in place to ensure that any use of CCTV remains necessary. Leaders and managers should also ensure that agreements for CCTV use are regularly reviewed with young people, parents and professionals.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that records of all incidents and issues of concern are easily accessible, so that a full record of the issue, actions taken, and conclusion are readily available.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC014513

Principal: Sara Hack

Inspectors

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector
Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector
Andy Whippey, Social Care HMI

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