

Alfriston School

Alfriston School, Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 2TS

Inspection dates

03/03/2021 to 04/03/2021

Context of the inspection

This monitoring visit took place to assess whether the recommendations made at the last inspection in March 2019 have been addressed and to assess the standard of care and support to the residential pupils who use the boarding provision during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

National minimum standards

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

Inspection team

Paul Taylor
Mark Newington

Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Information about this school

The school is situated on the outskirts of Beaconsfield. It received academy status in March 2012, and has had a sports specialism since 2009. Alfriston School is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties in the age range 11–18 years. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. There are 157 pupils, of whom 17 are boarders residing for three nights during each week, from Monday to Thursday. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The boarding accommodation is situated on the first floor of the main school building. Older girls can experience semi-independent living in a small flat, accessed from the main boarding accommodation. The extensive school grounds provide sporting and recreational space for boarders to enjoy during the evenings.

School details

Unique reference number	137934
Social care unique reference number	SC023097
DfE registration number	825 7003

This monitoring visit 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.

Progress since the last inspection has been good. The recommendation made in relation to shortfalls in the record-keeping of fire checks has been fully addressed. A new member of staff has been appointed and has successfully implemented a system for regular audits of fire equipment to be carried out and recorded. This ensures that no checks are omitted and that fire systems are in safe working order. Additionally, this practice is underpinned by the residential pupils taking part in regular fire drills so that they know what to do in the event of the need to evacuate the building in an emergency.

A recommendation made at the last inspection that related to the need to improve the quality of supervision sessions between managers and residential staff has also been addressed. Records now reflect the content of what was discussed and ensures that practice and performance issues are recorded and action points agreed.

A good practice recommendation made at the last inspection in relation to recording the school council's role in interviewing new staff has not been addressed. This is because the recruitment process has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, residential pupils have not had the opportunity to take part in the recruitment process during this time. This constraint has been outside the school's management control. Therefore, progress can only be assessed once national guidelines relating to managing the risks associated with COVID-19 have been changed.

There has been commitment to continue to offer as much support as possible to families and residential pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a reduced residential provision on offer and, as a result, managers have prioritised a service to families and children who are assessed to be vulnerable. This effort has been highly valued. 'They're always there to help. The school has become a major part of our lives,' is a comment made by a parent. In addition to the residential provision, outreach support has also been given to pupils and families in their own homes. This ensures that they remain supported when they have not been able to attend the school site during lockdown and periods of COVID-19-related isolation.

Residential pupils thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience. 'I have laughed so much since I came here,' said one residential pupil. Despite lower numbers and some restrictions, members of staff have ensured that the residential pupils continue to enjoy enriching activities and that they also have opportunities to relax and maintain friendships.

The impact of COVID-19 has also been seen as an opportunity for residential pupils to improve upon and learn more life skills. For example, due to catering staff not being present, they have prepared and cooked meals for each other. They have also learned to understand the need for improved cleanliness and infection control during the pandemic. It is a credit to the staff that they have used a demanding situation as an opportunity for the residential pupils to learn and to increase their confidence and understanding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Residential pupils continue to receive well-thought-through support that is designed to meet their individual needs and to mitigate any risks and distress. This support is developed using the knowledge, skills and expertise available across the whole school community. As a result, residential pupils feel safe and cared for and make significant progress in managing their own anxieties and turmoil.

There have been regular visits from a governor in line with the requirements under standard 20. These have assessed that the boarding area is functioning well and that the reports also make recommendations where needed. In turn, the governor shares the information with other governors who scrutinise the boarding provision. This ensures that the residential pupils have opportunities to share their views with an independent person and that there is external scrutiny of the boarding.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the records of recruitment interviews reflect the discussions held. In addition, keep a record of the staff interviews carried out by the school council.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	17
Gender of boarders	Girls
Age range of boarders	11 to 18
Headteacher	Jinna Male
Date of previous boarding inspection	12/03/2019
Telephone number	01494 673740
Email address	jinna.male@alfristonschool.com

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