

Holbrook School for Autism

Holbrook School for Autism, Port Way, Holbrook, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 0TE

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Holbrook School for Autism is a specialist school for children and young people with autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities. The age range of children and young people is from four to 19 years. The school now has academy status, from July 2018.

The residential service (Oak and Acorn) operates from Monday to Thursday in term-time. Currently, 28 children and young people use the service. Seven children and young people can reside at any one time in the residential provision. Each child or young person stays for one night per week.

Inspection dates: 29 June to 1 July 2021

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: 26 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The residential provision continues to develop well and provide a very good, high-quality service to children and their families.

The staff team thrives on exploring new and innovative ways of working with the children and their families. This has been particularly evident during the restrictions experienced during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Examples of this practice have included working with families during periods of closure, revising staff roles and reorganising children's stays so they and the staff were grouped together minimised the potential spread of COVID-19. As a result of staff support, children coped and adapted exceptionally well to these changes. The standard of care is exceptional and enables children who have complex or challenging needs to develop to their full potential.

Staff know children extremely well. Staff and children have consistently strong relationships. Staff use the strong relationships to encourage children to become increasingly independent. Children learn and develop new skills. This enhances children's enjoyment, teaches them how to socialise and is helping them to make progress in all areas of their development. Parents spoke proudly about their children and about how the children take their learning and development home, enhancing family life. One parent said, 'My son loves attending residential. The staff are amazing. They understand my son's needs and help him with his anxieties. As a parent, one of the most important things is for the staff to completely 'get' your child, and they excel at this.'

Several of the children do not communicate verbally. Staff ensure that all children can communicate their wishes using various communication systems and other methods, such as social stories. Children's ideas, wishes and feelings are harnessed well to improve their stays in residence. This provides children with an excellent experience while staying in residence.

Staff made good and creative use of the grounds and on-site facilities to minimise the disruption to children when access to the community was curtailed during COVID-19. This meant that children continued to have fun and enjoyable experiences, despite restrictions.

Staff encourage children to think of others by taking part in community projects, for example, litter picking and making message hearts for residents in a local home for older people who have been unable to receive visitors. This helps develop children's ability to empathise with others and enhance their relationship with the local community.

Children who commenced, ceased or left the school during the national lockdowns were unable to benefit from the usual good practice in managing these transitions. This has been adeptly managed by the staff who make the best use of technology to offer video calls and tours. This creative approach ensured that children and their families felt prepared and supported through these crucial periods in their lives.

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

There is a comprehensive approach to safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders, managers and staff prioritise the safety and welfare of children. They are always diligent and fully committed to keeping children safe.

Staff establish positive routines for children in the residential areas. The children respond well to routines. Children said that they feel safe when staying at the school. These sentiments are echoed by families. Staff work closely with the children to allow them to take well-managed risks. These include helping with cooking and household tasks, making hot drinks and taking responsibility for their own personal care. When families see their children's skills and confidence grow, this encourages them to replicate these activities at home. Consequently, children take risks that are well considered by adults, with the objective of increasing their confidence, self-esteem and skills. This is excellent.

Managers and staff have developed several measures to gauge how and where children feel the safest in school. A creative example is a survey asking children to identify areas within the school and residential areas where they feel safe or otherwise. Staff then identified areas where children felt less safe and took quick action to improve these areas.

Staff use their in-depth knowledge of the children to very good effect, to help them deescalate any potentially difficult situations. They support children to self-regulate their emotions. Therefore, the number of incidents involving the escalation of children's behaviour and the use of holds continue to be low because of the excellent behaviour management work taking place. This enhances children's feelings of being safe and well cared for in this school.

Children do not go missing from the school. Staff are aware of the correct protocols to follow should this occur. The diligence of staff in the planning and thought that go into organising activities reduces risk. This enables activities to occur without any difficulties. This enhances the benefit children gain from residential stays and help them attain their individual goals and targets.

Many children take regular medication. The medication storage and administering processes are rigorous. Children are actively involved in identifying their own medications. This is achieved through their picture being on all medication and logs. This helps children to understand why they need medication and get into the

routine of taking medication and empowers children to become confident in meeting their own healthcare needs.

Staff are constantly vigilant over the safety and well-being of children. The staff understand how to report any safeguarding concerns to the appropriate agencies. Indeed, there have been times when this has been required. This has ensured that children know they are listened to and enabled families to receive the additional support they need.

The school and the residential areas are in the process of a major refurbishment. This work is now nearing completion. Managers and staff undertook appropriate risk assessments and managed the work in a way that minimised any disruption to children's experiences and progress.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are very ambitious for children. They talk about the children's progress with a genuine pride. The care and dedication shown to the children are equally evident in the care and support for staff. The staff spoken to commended the leaders and wider organisation for the support offered to them during this difficult year.

Leaders reported that the periods of lock-down during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled staff to enhance their approaches to person-centred planning and further meet the complex needs of children. Staff expertly use their knowledge of the children and families to establish the best way to support children when they are staying in the school. Care staff have developed their knowledge and skills further by spending time in classes with children, during periods when residential provision was closed. This enabled education and care staff to learn what approaches work best in different scenarios with children.

Leaders and staff have further developed the use of electronic systems as a communication tool for children. This is innovative practice and is now enhancing communication between staff, parents and teachers. Parents are thrilled to receive instant messages and see pictures and footage of activities their children are participating in. This enables them to immediately see whether their child is happy, settled and achieving.

Children are making exceptional progress because of the way in which the team works with them, their families and education. This is leading to significant improvements in the children's lives. This includes meeting targets that could appear small to others but are exceptional given the children's starting points.

The leaders and managers are continuously assessing and revising what they offer to ensure that children always receive a very high-quality service. The independent person and governor visits and complete reports that are intended to improve the residential experiences of children. These reports and information from visits are

used to very good effect by leaders and managers, who seek new ways and ideas to improve the care, support and protection of children.

The staff team members are committed and long-term employees who work tirelessly to ensure that children receive the best care and have enjoyable stays. Staff help children to maximise potential and develop independence skills that will take them into adulthood.

The leaders are passionate advocates for the children and their families. They work with partner agencies to secure the appropriate services to meet the needs of children and their families.

The work of the staff team is underpinned by various theoretical approaches. This means that approaches to care are well informed, thoughtful and person-centred. Children's needs and progress remain central to all aspects of their care and education.

Children's plans are thorough and cover all aspects of the child's development. Involved professionals agree targets and goals for children. These are met through several routes, for example activities such as bike riding, which is fun, while developing gross motor skills. This incorporated learning is helping children to develop at a faster pace. Other positives emerge from children accessing the residential provision, such as improved speech and language development.

The work of staff, leaders and managers in the residential area is making a huge difference to children. Children are developing important and life-long skills. The work of the team demonstrates commitment, determination and excellent practice. This immensely helps children in all aspects of their lives.

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: SC058960

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Samuel Bayliss

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Inspector

Sonia Hay, Social Care Inspector

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