

SC043049

Vale of Evesham School, Four Pools Lane, Evesham, Worcestershire WR11 1BN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is an academy and is responsible to a governing body. The school provides education for pupils with autism spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. The school caters for 206 pupils in total, including those in the nursery.

The boarding service operates from Monday to Friday, providing accommodation for up to 15 boys and girls across three suites. There were nine children registered to board at the time of the inspection, from Years 7 to 13.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 18 November 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 July 2021

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 5 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the monitoring visit in November 2020, increased national restrictions due to the pandemic meant that there was a period when children were unable to have residential stays. During this time, residential staff spent time in the school helping to ensure that the children who usually have residential stays were able to continue to access the day school during a time of reduced support to them and their families.

Children benefit from bespoke care and support from a consistent group of staff who know them and their needs well. A thoughtful and personalised approach to children's care helps to create a relaxed and comfortable environment where children enjoy their stays. For example, when children were able to resume boarding, staff made this special for them by freshly decorating each child's bedroom in the child's chosen colour.

Plans for children to join boarding give them time to become familiar with the environment and routines, through teatime visits and involvement in activities before they stay overnight. When children move on from boarding, staff work in partnership with parents, the child and relevant professionals to support positive endings. Memory books capture the range of experiences that children have had during their stays. A child-centred approach helps to reduce any anxieties that a child or family member may have during a time of change.

Children have positive mutual relationships with staff and with each other. Staff support children to use their preferred form of communication, including symbols, sign language and gestures, to share their wishes and feelings. An ethos of respect and kindness means that children are socially aware, polite and demonstrate good manners.

Mealtimes are orderly, sociable occasions. Children's dietary needs and likes and dislikes are known by staff and are routinely considered as an aspect of meal planning. Children take part in deciding the menus for the coming half-term, including choosing a meal. This supports children's involvement in their care and the development of social skills.

Staff work with children, their parents and school staff to identify individualised targets to support children's learning and develop their skills. For example, one child prepares his own packed lunch for school as part of his morning routine. Another child is learning how to wash her own hair. All children are encouraged by staff to help with day-to-day chores, including tidying up and taking washing to the laundry, to develop essential life skills.

Despite reduced opportunities for community activities during the pandemic, children have been well supported by staff to enjoy their stays, through taking part in a range of activities including art and crafts, forest school and cooking. A weekly cultural

learning activity helps children to explore the differences between people through art and music. Involvement in fundraising events for charity connects children to the wider community and supports their understanding of social responsibility. When national restrictions eased, staff seized the opportunity to extend children's experiences and build their confidence and emotional well-being through trips to a theme park, Blenheim Palace and the beach.

Children have their own bedroom and the residential accommodation is clean. However, children are unable to lock their bedroom door should they wish to. This limits children's opportunity to take responsibility for their own privacy.

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

Personalised and regularly reviewed plans ensure that staff remain alert to any risks posed to or by children and the agreed measures to reduce the risk of harm. A programme of face-to-face learning is planned for residential staff throughout the autumn term to complement annual safeguarding training. This covers a range of areas relevant to protecting children and promoting their welfare. Clear safeguarding procedures and safeguarding training ensure that staff have clear guidance to support them in keeping children safe.

The headteacher and the pastoral coordinator provide oversight, support and constructive challenge to the head of care to ensure that when concerns arise in relation to the welfare of a child these are managed appropriately. Concerns about children's safety and welfare are referred to the relevant agencies and effective partnership working has helped reduce the risk of significant harm to children. One concern about the practice of a staff member was managed in accordance with the advice of the designated officer.

Staff model good behaviour and, combined with a calm and nurturing approach, this supports children to behave well. This means that situations when staff have needed to restrain children for their safety are rare. Reviews of children's plans following significant events ensure that staff are clear about how to respond to children's individual needs.

Staff are aware of and sensitive to children's health needs. Systems for the safe storage and administration of medication are clear. When children have specific medical needs, staff receive dedicated training to ensure that they have the required skills to respond to these safely and in accordance with the child's plans. Medication is administered to the children in a respectful and dignified way that involves children and personalises their healthcare according to their needs.

Termly 'Our Voice' forums ensure that children are involved in influencing the development of boarding, including children recently renaming the residential suites and designing new logos. Visits to children by an independent advocate and direct work with staff raise and reinforce children's understanding of how to share their views, including any concerns that they have about their welfare.

There are clear arrangements in place to ensure the good maintenance and safety of the premises. The curiosity of senior leaders meant that potential issues relating to fire safety were identified and measures were agreed. This vigilance safeguarded those using the premises prior to scheduled building works taking place over the summer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Senior leaders and the governing body have a clear focus on the quality of boarding provision. Regular monitoring, combined with the advice of an independent social worker and regular visits by an independent person, means that senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths of the service and areas for development.

The support of teaching assistants enhances the development of the integrated approach between boarding and school. Leaders are determined that planned improvements that were curtailed by the pandemic will be realised in the new academic year. These include plans for further integration between school and boarding, including the use of evidence for learning.

Staff say that they are well supported in their roles and that communication within the team is good. Records show that staff receive regular training and they are supported through supervision and team meetings. In addition, since the last inspection, managers have made time for reflective supervision discussions with staff to help identify good practice and any areas for development. Both the headteacher and the head of care have demonstrated their commitment to the future development of boarding by undertaking qualifications relevant to the leadership and management of residential care for children.

Parents are generally positive about the care that their children receive. Parents describe the help provided by staff to co-ordinate additional support through partner agencies as being particularly beneficial to them and their families. A general comment from an unknown parent about improving communication was shared with the headteacher by the inspectors.

All staff involved in the recruitment process for staff have been trained in safer recruitment and there are clear processes in place to ensure that new staff are safely recruited. However, quality assurance processes have not identified shortfalls in recruitment records for some existing staff. For example, an inspector found gaps in the employment histories of three members of staff employed for some time. A lack of diligence in fully reviewing the recruitment records of existing staff means that unsuitable people may be employed to care for children. The headteacher took immediate action to address these shortfalls during the inspection.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 14.1)

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that children can take responsibility for their own privacy through being able to lock their bedrooms.

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: SC043049

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rachel Perks

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Alison Cooper, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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