

# St Piers Residential Special School

St Piers Lane, Lingfield, Surrey RH7 6PW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

St Piers School is set in a campus of over 60 acres in the Surrey countryside. The charity provides medical assessment, rehabilitation, care and education for children and young people whose lives have been adversely affected by epilepsy and other neurological conditions, including acquired brain injury resulting from accident or illness. A majority of pupils have additional needs, such as severe learning difficulties and/or autism, and a few have moderate learning difficulties.

The school is run by an integrated education governing body that reports to the charity's main trustee board. The operations manager for the residential homes (head of care) is part of the senior school leadership team. The school offers termly and weekly boarding with some flexi-boarding.

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.

This is the first inspection of the residential provision following a material change visit on 20 July 2020.

### Inspection dates: 14 to 16 September 2021

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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**Date of previous inspection:** N/A

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** N/A

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: Good**

Residential pupils receive a good standard of care and support from the staff, who understand and meet their needs. Interactions between residential pupils and staff are warm, affectionate and caring. Residential pupils enjoy staff attention and company.

Relationships are often formed over a number of years and so members of staff develop very good insight into the behaviours, needs and methods of communication which each residential pupil uses. Staff are responsive and sensitive to the residential pupils' behaviours and this creates an atmosphere of stability and safety for them.

There is close collaborative communication between the different disciplines of staff who work on site. This means that specific needs can be addressed promptly, for example prompt medical responses from nurses when there are concerns about a residential pupil's seizures or swift access to psychologists if staff need guidance about managing behaviour. Consequently, bespoke individual plans are cohesively made using the expertise readily available. These are then implemented to ensure that the residential pupils make progress and are kept safe.

Each residential pupil has specific goals aimed at their level of understanding and ability. Their progress is monitored closely and success celebrated and enjoyed by everyone. On occasions, medical conditions may impinge on their progress or even result in deterioration. These changes are known and assessed by everyone so that the residential pupil continues to be supported to the level they require.

Each residential pupil's preferred style of communication is known by the staff who care for them. Some residential pupils adapt their own communication methods and their uniqueness is understood. This means that every effort is made to ensure that the residential pupils can make their feelings and preferences known.

Residential pupils live in comfortable and well-maintained houses which have the adaptations they need to live as independently as possible. Each residential pupil can personalise their rooms. This helps them feel familiar with their surroundings and to feel that their houses are homely and welcoming.

Attendance at the on-site school is embedded into the daily routines of the residential pupils. Each residential pupil has an individualised routine to support their attendance and education. These can be adjusted to take into account the impact of illness and health conditions, such as epilepsy. Each residential pupil is supported to complete homework aimed at their level of understanding and ability.

The impact of COVID-19 on the residential pupils has been understood and reduced as much as possible. Strenuous efforts have been made to help residential pupils understand why measures are in place, such as the use of personal protection

equipment and the need to isolate from wider risks such as community outings where there may be large groups of people. Life stories have been used to help the residential pupils understand pandemic-related measures. The use of information technology has also been increased so that contact can be maintained with families to reassure the residential pupils and to lessen their feelings of isolation.

Activities have been varied using the resources on the large campus and staff have been inventive in widening the residential pupils' interests and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples include teddy bear parties, pyjama parties, trips to the on-site farm and themed food evenings.

Some of the residential pupils have interests which reflect their cognitive abilities but are often aimed at a level well below their chronological age. This is, for the majority of the residential pupils, appropriate and apt. However, during the inspection, it was not clear if there has been full consideration about differentiating activities for some children to make them more age-appropriate. This could be a missed opportunity to develop the residential pupils' interests and activities.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: Good**

Staff have an excellent understanding of the particularly high levels of vulnerability of the residential pupils due to their complex needs which mean they are often unable to identify risk themselves. Detailed risk assessments and carefully prepared care plans inform and guide staff on how to keep them safe. These are implemented in practice.

Support offered to residential pupils, especially during times when they may be upset and distressed, is very good. Staff know what strategies to implement and how each residential pupil's individual needs can be met. The staff's awareness of the impact of epilepsy, and how it can affect a residential pupil's behaviour and presentation, is particularly insightful. Consequently, situations are managed very well and residential pupils are kept safe and reassured.

Staff know what to do and whom to inform if there are concerns about a residential pupil's safety. Issues are shared with safeguarding agencies where necessary and good-quality records provide clear audit trails on how these have been resolved and addressed. Safeguarding professionals from the local authority report that communication and liaison with this service are good and that members of staff are willing to listen to advice and implement any changes to practice.

Incidents of physical intervention are rare. These are mainly in relation to staff guiding residential pupils away from situations which may be causing them distress. If physical intervention is used, it is recorded in line with regulations. It is then assessed by managers to ensure that the use is appropriate and also to consider whether strategies or care plans need to be adjusted.

All necessary background checks are carried out on staff before they commence employment. This ensures that only those with appropriate working histories are caring for the residential pupils. Records of job interviews are not always thorough and do not show how specific issues raised by applicants have been explored in any depth. While this does not undermine the safety of the recruitment process, it is a missed opportunity to explore an applicant's experiences and knowledge.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: Good**

Managers and leaders are ambitious and have high aspirations for the staff and residential pupils. They have clear plans for the development of the service and are aware of strengths and weaknesses and how to address these. There is an embedded culture of welcoming feedback from external sources. Criticisms and comments about the service are seen as an opportunity to learn, reflect and improve.

Residential pupils' needs are known and met to a good standard. Close cohesive multidisciplinary working means that every residential pupil has a bespoke care plan which promotes their safety, development and life experiences.

The staff team has been through a challenging time. Its members have experienced internal reorganisation of staff teams and have worked through the impact and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have shown strength and determination throughout this time and have maintained stability and consistent care for the residential pupils. As a result, residential pupils have maintained progress and continued to benefit from their time at the residential provision of the school.

All staff receive training which enables them to have the skills and knowledge to provide good care and support to the residential pupils, who all have complex needs. This programme includes carefully planned training regarding delegated health tasks and is individually planned for those residential pupils who need a particular level of care and support. This process is carefully thought through and skilfully delivered.

External professionals report a very good standard of communication and swift and transparent sharing of information. This underpins trust and helps to strengthen professional working relationships.

Some very positive comments have been made by parents of residential pupils. Examples include: 'Staff are very solution-focused with what he really likes and staff share information across departments within the school, which means all the staff are up to date and he does not have to repeat things.' One parent said: 'I have nothing but huge gratitude,' and another reported that 'their support has been incredible'.

The majority of residential pupils' files are mostly well organised and provide useful guidance and information to stakeholders and staff. However, some of the monitoring, to ensure that all documents are up to date and relevant, is inconsistent.

While this has not had an impact on the progress or well-being of any residential pupils, some information is out of date and needs reviewing.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that records of job interviews are more detailed.
- Consider how activities for some residential pupils can be more age-appropriate.
- Ensure that all residential pupils' records are up to date and relevant.

### **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:** 2601107

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Richard Gargon

Director of Integrated Care: Ms R Pardington

Head of Care: Ms A Ray

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01342 832243

**Email address:** [rpardington@youngepilepsy.org.uk](mailto:rpardington@youngepilepsy.org.uk)

## **Inspectors**

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

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