

# The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 151 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area in Lowestoft and caters for children with moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders, autism spectrum disorders and behavioural difficulties. The last residential inspection took place in January 2020.

The head of care has been in post since May 2021. He has the necessary experience and is working towards a relevant qualification for the role.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 2 to 4 November 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:** 21 January 2020

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

The residential provision is outstanding. There is noticeable progress in reading and independence skills for those children who stay in residence. Some of the children only reside for one night a week, yet still show increased signs of progress. This demonstrates the extremely positive impact that the residential provision has on children. This impact will make a significant difference to them in adulthood and prepare them to be as independent as possible. Children understand the difference that staying in residence has made to them. One child said, 'I could not talk until I came here. I could not say a word, and now I can talk.'

Exceptional improvements have been made to the bedrooms in residence. Children can choose themed rooms to stay in that have their own en-suite bathroom. Children helped to choose the designs for the rooms and were fully involved in their creation. The children said that they loved the new rooms, with popular favourites such as the hulk room. The rooms are stimulating, homely and vibrant.

The children benefit from a new outdoor gym and a multi-use game area. These are excellent resources that the children enjoy using. Staff are fun, vibrant and child focused. They play alongside the children and are attuned to their needs. This fosters positive relationships. Staff provide exciting opportunities for the children through a variety of activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on all children's access to education. However, the school has gone above and beyond expectations to minimise children missing out on education. Residence remained open for some children as the school staff understood the detrimental impact that the loss of such a provision would have on them. Those with identified needs were given intensive support at a time of great uncertainty. This had a stabilising effect on children and their families. Educational attainment for students is extraordinary. Opportunities for children to access a varied curriculum are exceptional.

Parents are extremely positive about the school. They view residence as an enriching element to their children's experience at school. Parents spoken with during the inspection unanimously said that staying in residence develops their children's independence and social skills. One parent said that education can be isolating for children and families who require specialist support; however, attending the school had made it less isolating. Social workers are highly complimentary about the school and the positive impact that staying in residence has on their children.

Staff are highly inclusive and show a great awareness of their interactions and how these are received by children. The staff work tirelessly to increase children's emotional and social understanding. The staff are patient in their interactions with children with cognitive delay and communication difficulties. Staff do not rush the

children to convey what they mean; they allow them to take time. The children copy this and are extremely patient in their interactions with their peers. Children are encouraged to use sign language in residence. This helps children with communication difficulties to feel included and gives other children an additional skill.

Staff are sensitive in their approach to helping the children to understand subjects such as personal hygiene. This minimises the potential for children's embarrassment while educating them about self-care.

The school provides opportunities and experiences that children would not access if they did not attend the school. The staff do not allow health needs, communication difficulties and associated disabilities to prevent children from having equality of opportunity in all that the school offers. The school strongly promotes an inclusive culture.

Children's participation in the Duke of Edinburgh awards are fully encouraged by residential staff. The award scheme provides children with enriched opportunities, increases their self-worth, and gives them skills that support their emotional, social and physical development. Many children spoke proudly about their accomplishments in gaining Duke of Edinburgh awards.

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

Safeguarding processes and procedures are meticulously carried out by effectively trained and skilled staff. Electronic systems to record safeguarding concerns are expertly used. Staff are fully aware that even the smallest of concerns can lead to significant safeguarding issues. Staff demonstrate acute professional curiosity, which has led to children receiving the essential support that they need. Safeguarding measures are outstanding. Staff go above and beyond expectations to support children when safeguarding concerns are identified. Staff provide intensive targeted support to children to keep them safe and raise their awareness of potential harm.

The pupil family support lead is a clear asset to the school. She works tirelessly to keep children safe. She works effectively with families and constantly promotes children's rights and inclusion.

The school has a clear emphasis and targeted focus on keeping children safe online. The staff use a variety of interventions, both in school and residence, to continually educate children on how to keep themselves safe online. As a result, children can identify a number of potential dangers when using the internet.

Staying in residence helps children to be kind to each other, to care about each other and to do good for one another.

Staff understand the importance of educating children, appropriate to their age and stage of development, about healthy and harmful relationships, consent and sexual

health. A broad curriculum is provided to the children in school via personal, social and health education lessons and in residence. The residential lead for social, emotional aspects of learning provides sessions for the children that complement their learning in school.

Staff assess risk effectively; consequently, incidents in residence rarely occur. No children have been missing from school and the use of restraint has not been necessary in residence for the past three years. Staff are highly skilled at providing behavioural boundaries. They use de-escalation techniques to good effect and are aware that low-level behaviours can quickly escalate if not addressed.

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

In May 2021, a new head of care was appointed from the residential team. The change of head of care has been managed with minimal disruption to the children. The head of care is respected by his staff team and praised by them for his support. He has made a positive start to his appointment and is clearly well liked by the children. The headteacher is tenacious, ambitious, driven and insightful. She inspires children and staff alike to reach their full potential.

External monitoring provides objective scrutiny, which drives improvements in the already high standards of residential provision. The independent person, who undertakes external monitoring, takes full account of the children's views, wishes and feelings, and has established a good rapport with the children. Therefore, the children feel that they can confide in her. Additionally, an independent listener spends time with the children and is another person with whom children can share their concerns.

Staff said that they value supervision and feel that it provides a good blend of managerial support and professional development. Staff are accountable for their work and motivated to continually drive improvements in residence.

The professional development of staff is excellent. Opportunities to visit other residential schools have been taken up by all residential staff. These are excellent opportunities to look at alternative practices and share ideas. One staff member is being supported by the school to achieve a teaching qualification. The quality of professional development increases staff's opportunities to progress.

Complaints are infrequent but when they arise they are dealt with professionally and in line with the school's policy. During the management of complaints, staff ensure that the children are at the forefront of their decision-making.

Collaboration with other agencies, partners and schools is maximised. The leaders and staff understand the benefits of collaborative working and use this not only to their advantage but to share their knowledge and understanding to the benefit of others. The school has a positive and far-reaching impact on external colleagues in specialist education. The school networks with others to good effect on a local and

national scale. The school has recently been put forward as a nominee for a 'World Class School' award.

Leaders and managers are undertaking research in sexual harassment at school, the findings of which will be shared with parents. Although sexual harassment is not a concern for the school at present, leaders are keen to ensure that a whole-school approach is adopted to promote a culture in which sexual harassment is readily identified and addressed.

## **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:** SC024573

**Headteacher:** Sally Garrett

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector



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