

Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This school is maintained by a local authority. The School offers day and residential provision for children and young people aged between 4 and 19, who have been diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, and have severe and complex learning difficulties. All pupils will have their main area of need within Communication and Interaction. At the time of the inspection, there were 97 students on roll and 13 residential students. The residential provision is situated on the school site.

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: 13 to 15 October 2021

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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: 1 to 3 October 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The staff's exceptional dedication and commitment enable students to make considerable progress and expand their experience of the world. This significantly increases their quality of life and their opportunities for the future.

Students who are sometimes fearful and anxious about the world around them become more relaxed and better able to engage with others and with their learning. This is a consequence of having dedicated staff who care about them and seek to connect with their inner worlds. The students become more trusting of others and more confident in their own abilities, and their communication becomes more effective.

The staff have an excellent understanding of the students' changing needs and vulnerabilities as they move between the school and care settings. This is due to the high level of communication between staff, and the successful integration of these settings. This enables good continuity of care and nurturance of students, as well as consistency in meeting their emotional needs. This joined-up approach enriches students' residential experience and supports their progress.

Staff know the students very well and understand their needs. They take exceptional measures to gain and gauge the students' wishes and feelings, showing respect for their individuality. This is particularly evident at mealtimes, when the students' preferences are sought and responded to. This shows students that they are valued and enhances their feelings of worth.

Key staff have dedicated considerable time and effort to developing an effective recording and reporting tool that enables the students' behaviour to be monitored and better understood. This exceptional work enables staff to reduce restrictive measures and helps make the environment in which the students can thrive.

Meticulous attention is paid to the health and well-being needs of the students. Staff work closely with parents and carers and external professionals to ensure that these needs are met effectively. Careful monitoring identifies whether or not interventions and treatment are having the desired effect. This helps the students to make the most of their learning and recreational opportunities.

Students are provided with a wide range of activities and opportunities that help them to prepare for their futures. In addition to activities and practice that help to develop daily living skills, they also have opportunities to develop social skills and have fun. These activities, together with those that take them into the community, expand their experience of the world, and increase their life opportunities.

Parents spoke very highly of the care that their children receive, and the excellent progress that they make. One spoke of the deep trust that they have in staff to be sensitive to their child's needs and to do their best for him.

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

Good staffing levels, attention to detail and a secure and well-maintained environment help to keep students safe. Staff are attentive to students' needs and supervise them closely. This reduces the potential for accidents and harmful behaviours and helps students to feel safe and secure. Unsurprisingly, students do not go missing from this provision.

The students' environment is, however, not over-restrictive, and students are given appropriate freedom to explore and expand their interests and abilities within the safe and secure environment maintained by staff, both on and off the school premises. This increases their awareness of risks and hazards and makes them more able to keep themselves safe.

Leadership and oversight of safeguarding practice are strong. Monitoring of safeguarding measures, as well as any specific concerns about students, is close and sustained. All staff can readily record any concerns about a student on a centralised system that immediately alerts senior managers to potential safeguarding issues.

The staff have access to clear plans and assessments that guide them and help them to understand the students' needs and behaviours. This enables staff to promote positive behaviour and reduce or avoid incidents that might unsettle students or make them unsafe.

For residential students, the need to apply restrictive measures is only occasional. Furthermore, when such measures are applied, they are necessary and proportionate. These incidents are recorded and reviewed comprehensively, and staff are given effective support to reflect on incidents and to consider if they could have been avoided. Leaders are focused on achieving the maximum possible reduction in restrictive practice across the whole school. This approach contributes to the building of a positive environment in which children can flourish.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have successfully focused on maintaining stability and continuity for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has required significant dedication and goodwill from staff, in particular when it has been necessary to cover the absence of key members of staff due to ongoing ill-health. However, this means that some plans for improvement and development have stalled and several key staff have excessive workloads. This leaves the service vulnerable to a lowering of standards and limits actions for improvement.

Leaders and managers are experienced and highly focused on the well-being and progress of the students. They receive strong oversight and support from the governing body, and the current strengths, weaknesses and priorities for the school are clearly understood. The relationships between leaders and managers and the governing body are mutually respectful and productive.

Recruitment practice is safe, and appointed staff follow an effective induction programme. Residential staff receive regular supervision that feeds into an effective, target-driven annual appraisal system. Staff spoke very positively about the support they receive and the well-established teamworking ethic of residential workers.

No breaches of the national minimum standards were found, but several areas for improvement were identified. These include a more targeted approach to the development of students' independence skills; a more targeted approach to improving and shaping behaviours that are likely to limit students' life opportunities; and workloads and job descriptions of key staff that enable improvement projects to continue and allow sufficient space for their continued professional development. Leaders and staff were unanimous in their recognition that the appointment of an in-house occupational therapist would enhance the support that students need. However, this is beyond the school's immediate control.

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

Recommendations

- Further develop tools and practice that will help students to achieve their potential for independence and increase their life opportunities effectively.
- Review the job descriptions and workloads of key positions to ensure that improvement projects can continue, continued professional development is enabled and succession planning can be improved.
- The provider (the local authority) to support the school to improve students' access to occupational therapy.

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: SC023693

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Paula Miller

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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