

High Close School

Barnardos, High Close School, High Close, Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire
RG40 1TT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

High Close School is a non-maintained school operated by a national charity. It provides for both day and residential pupils, aged from seven to 18 years. Up to 21 weekly boarders are accommodated in three residential units on the school site.

The school accommodates children who have statements of special educational need arising from social, emotional and mental health difficulties and speech, language and communication needs.

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: 1 to 3 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	good
---	------

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: 17 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The boarding provision has a hugely positive impact on the children. They feel more confident and have improved ability to manage social relationships. Consequently, they feel more equipped for daily life. A parent said, 'My child is happy for the first time in her life. She has now managed to maintain a level of friendship with other young people.' A child said, 'I used to be horrible, and my behaviour was awful but now I am a school prefect.'

Children say that they trust and can approach any staff member about their difficulties or concerns. Staff go the extra mile for the children. One example is of a staff member who learned how to cut hair during the COVID-19 pandemic so that children with sensory issues around this were able to have their hair cut.

Pastoral care embodies all that a first-rate parent would do, with staff ready to provide sensitive support without judgement. Staff act as advocates when other services fall short. Their high aspirations are evident in their tenacity to ensure that they provide the best possible care for the children.

Children enjoy living in a safe supportive community where they can be with their friends. Children and their parents commented on how much each child looks forward to their weekly boarding. Children thrive and enjoy the varied activities that are of interest to them, engaging enthusiastically in the lively boarding community.

The monitoring and evidencing of the children's successes are examples of superb outcomes. The data gathered shows that the children who board achieve at better levels than their non-boarding peers. This adds 'extra value' to the boarding experience.

All staff have demonstrated their commitment to the children, putting their needs at the centre of practice. This meant that the school was able to stay open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff found alternative ways to support the children while keeping them as safe as possible. They kept the children updated whenever changes to guidelines were made, explaining clearly and in detail to meet the needs and understanding of each individual child. One child said, 'I know others have found it hard during the pandemic, but I have enjoyed this time, still being at school.'

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) fulfils her responsibilities as outlined in statutory guidance to an excellent standard. She is fully supported by a governor responsible for safeguarding who is an established, experienced and trained professional in the sector. This means that there is a strong safeguarding culture in the residential provision and wider school. The monitoring of the children's well-being

is an example of good practice. One child said, 'I like how safe I feel, and I like that I am surrounded by my friends at all times and get the support I need.'

Children benefit from a wraparound level of support. A range of professionals, including a counsellor/ therapist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist, are on hand to provide the necessary specialist advice and guidance for staff. Education and care staff diligently follow children's bespoke care plans to give them the individualised care that they need to meet their needs. Children are safe and enabled to make excellent progress in developing their self-awareness as well as their social and academic skills. One child is now able to process his thoughts and engage in therapy, from a starting point of causing severe damage to his environment.

Staff promote the children's safety and well-being to an excellent standard. There is prompt and effective communication with external safeguarding agencies when necessary. Prompt liaison with the police or with child protection services ensures that issues are addressed swiftly and decisively. The DSL keeps detailed chronologies that show the decision-making process.

Children treat each other and adults with respect. On occasion, children struggle to manage difficult feelings, but they are confident that the staff around them will intervene to keep them safe. Records of incidents of physical intervention are an exemplar of good practice, clearly showing what led to the incident, the de-escalation techniques and the details of the restraint. Staff and children reflect on the event and agree how to handle things in the future. The potential for a repeat incident is therefore minimised. This is resulting in the number of restraints, fixed-term exclusions and non-standard transitions decreasing.

Incidents of children going missing from school are rare. When an incident does occur, staff are well versed in the protocols to follow. This includes working with the police and other agencies to bring about a safe return. Staff follow up to consider the causes of why a child has gone missing. Their reflections and strategies are successful, with no repeated incidents.

On occasion, the roles of various leaders in the wider organisation and the school are unclear. The route for sharing key safeguarding reports from the corporate body with the head teacher, DSL and governing body has not been established. This means that the opportunity to share information from those working directly with the children is missed. It also means that the proprietor does not always create and oversee action plans effectively.

Senior leaders within the corporate body took a decision to investigate an anonymous complaint. They have not reviewed the progress of the fact-finding process in line with statutory guidance. Consequently, there has been drift and unnecessary delay. However, children are not deemed to be at risk as a result of this shortfall.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Children are cared for by a staff team that has the children's well-being and progress at the centre of their thoughts and practice. All staff are available to the children to provide support and advice. The highly motivated team is managed by unit managers who have extensive skills, training and experience. This means that the care is of the highest possible standard, with staff skilfully providing guidance, nurture and advice to the children daily. A staff member said, 'I like how organised the working environment is, while still being very homely for the children. It's very well balanced.' Another staff member said, 'Managers empower staff and reward initiative and innovation.'

Governance is strong. The governing board is made up of a range of professionals who have a variety of experience and skills. They take an active interest in the school, holding the principal to account and contributing to the school improvement plan. A safeguarding governor and a boarding governor add another level of oversight to the well-being and care of the children who board.

The senior leadership team is exceptional. Members are ambitious and confident, eager for professional dialogue and challenge to ultimately improve the outcomes for the children. They have won the support of their wider staff team, who are confident that they are leading them in the right direction.

Senior leaders use data to direct resources and advocate for any additional care for the children. In one example, senior leaders successfully challenged for an extra staff member to support a child. For the child, this meant that he no longer needed to resort to self-injurious behaviour and staff no longer needed to use any physical intervention.

Senior leaders have created a safe space called 'The Bridge'. This is a great initiative for children who are struggling and need an alternative curriculum. The Bridge creates a positive alternative to a fixed-term exclusion.

The boarding staff team is of exceptional calibre. Those staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of safeguarding issues, especially within the boarding context. They are well trained, motivated and supported. Staff are skilled at listening and responding to children, including those who are communicating through their behaviour. The leader of care ensures that the team has training relevant to the children's needs. This means that children benefit from exceptional care and support so that they can reach their full potential.

The family resource team, comprising a range of professionals including qualified social workers, works with families to ensure a consistent approach and provides additional support. The team carries on working during school holidays so that it is always accessible to families.

Staff build effective relationships with parents and professionals to keep the children's mental and emotional well-being at the centre of their practice. Consequently, children are healthy in this regard and make excellent progress. The care staff team and teachers work collaboratively and consistently to provide stability. They hold joint accountability to ensure that children are on a continual journey of learning and improvement in all aspects of their development.

This is a school where children are cared for by a team of competent professionals who work together to provide the children with the best possible care and outcomes. Children relish the opportunities that the boarding experience gives them, grasping all that this provides so that their weekly stays enhance their life opportunities.

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

Recommendations

- The proprietor should clarify the roles of school leaders, the corporate body and the governing body. In particular, in relation to the sharing of key safeguarding reports, corporate management safeguarding reviews and the oversight of action plans.
- The proprietor should monitor the progress of safeguarding cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible in a thorough and fair process.

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: SC011327

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mark Shears

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 0118 9785767

Email address: enquiries@highclose.org.uk

Inspectors

Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Kelly Monniot, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021