

Moor House School & College

Moor House School & College, Mill Lane, Oxted, Surrey RH8 9AQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Moor House School & College is a co-educational, non-maintained residential and day special school and registered charity. It provides specialist schooling and therapy for children and young people with speech and language difficulties. The school and college are leaders and specialists in developmental language disorder. At the time of inspection, there were 187 students on roll, with 56 residential students. There are 63 residential places that provide weekly boarding.

The headteacher has been in post since 2015.

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: 15 to 17 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: 25 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Residential students thrive in this school and college. All make significant and sometimes spectacular progress in their time here.

Careful and detailed pre-admission assessments ensure that staff from all the disciplines which work in the school and college are aware of each student's needs and are confident that they can be met. Subsequently, students are nurtured in a community where they are welcomed, feel safe and inherit the embedded culture of the school, in that they will succeed and enjoy their life at this school.

The stress of any transition process is identified and understood. Careful support, which includes that of peers, helps students either move to the school or college or prepare for life after they leave. For example, student-made videos explain to new students what life is like when they come to live at the school and what to expect when they go to college. This approach is both student centred and reassuring to those who may be worrying about the move.

Residential students' feedback is unanimously positive and reassuring. Some are able to make friends for the first time in their lives and can take part in enriching activities and experiences they had not been able to do prior to their arrival. They become accepted and valued members of their community. Parents report that their children see the school and college as a family and one student described his fellow residential students as 'brothers'.

Relationships between staff and all students are strong, warm and caring. Relationships have developed over a number of years and are meaningful and supportive. Staff know each student's strengths and vulnerabilities and offer sensitive and skilful support. Individual care plans are bespoke and developed using the wide knowledge available from all professionals who work in the school and college. The plans inform members of staff how they can best support each student and are implemented in practice.

Students report how they are more confident and how being at this school has helped them make friends and become independent. 'I couldn't speak when I first came here,' a student told an inspector. 'My child is proud of herself and her achievements,' a parent said. 'Staff catch up with you and cheer you up,' a student commented. 'They help you through your worries.' Feedback from surveys and from interviews with students and parents was full of praise and acknowledgment of the huge impact the care has had on every student.

The support that students receive in developing life skills and independence is exemplary. Staff consistently hold in mind each student's future and how to help them move on successfully towards this. Each student has an individual plan which

helps them to learn life skills, cope with challenges and to travel independently. Consequently, many go on to attend external college and gain employment. These achievements are remarkable when bearing in mind their starting points.

The emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly well considered and lessened. The managers developed an on-site testing station, with the process being carefully explained to the students and lateral flow tests being carried out each week. This innovative process has reassured students and promoted a safer environment for the wider school community.

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

Residential students' safety and well-being is at the centre of practice in this school and college. All members of staff, from across all disciplines, know the vulnerabilities and strengths of each student. As a result, students receive bespoke support, guidance and nurturing to enable them to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence to move forward to reach their potential in terms of being able to live as independently as possible.

Emotional safety is promoted to an excellent standard. Staff are alert to any situations or ongoing events which can affect a residential student's stability and well-being, and the support they receive is exemplary.

Staff swiftly recognise if there is an increase in risk to a residential student or if their behaviour indicates that they need more intense support. The concerns are shared with teams around each student which comprise staff from across the disciplines, such as residential staff, teacher, special teaching assistant, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and a psychotherapist. These groups are referred to as 'collaborative teams' and they meet weekly to discuss and assess what strategies and support need to be implemented. This results in carefully thought through and well-informed support based on each individual's needs and vulnerabilities.

Mutual respect and tolerance of difference is a significant strength in this school and college community. This leads to a culture where peers and staff will assist anyone who is struggling with situations and finding them a challenge. Behaviour observed by inspectors was excellent, with staff and students being polite and helpful to each other. There is an embedded culture of nurture and safety.

All students receive very careful and detailed education and advice in relation to e-safety. There is excellent understanding of each student's ability to understand the risks involved and staff design bespoke programmes aimed at developing their knowledge and confidence at a level commensurate with their understanding.

Any sanctions imposed in the residential provision are scrutinised by managers to ensure that they are fair and appropriate. There have been no incidents of restraint in the residential provision for a number of years.

All members of staff know what to do and who to inform if they have concerns about a student's well-being. External safeguarding professionals report that they receive information promptly so that safety plans can be put in place. This includes the raising of safeguarding concerns in the school that may have a broader impact on other children in the wider community or siblings of students who attend the school. It is very clear that all members of staff, including managers and leaders, are aware of their obligations to safeguard children and they understand what routes to follow if concerns arise.

Recruitment of new staff is diligently processed. Staff responsible for ensuring checks are carried out will challenge past employers if references are bland and do not answer specific questions, especially those questions related to safeguarding. This means that the quality of pre-employment monitoring and vetting is thorough and conscientious and ensures that only staff of suitable quality and character are employed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Residential students are guided and nurtured by a team of multi-disciplinary staff who work diligently and tirelessly to ensure they develop and progress to their full potential.

Leaders and managers, as well as governors, are ambitious for the students in their care and expect high levels of performance and quality at all levels. This sense of ambition is common across the school and college, with students' progress and safety being at the centre of service development and practice.

The leadership response to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic has been exemplary. Structure and support was offered to students who were unable to attend school during lockdowns, which enabled all to continue to make progress. Importantly, the demands and stresses this placed on families was identified and additional support given where it was needed.

After lockdown measures were eased, managers developed their own on-site testing station so that residential students could be tested and supported safely back into their boarding routine. This innovative support and diligent approach continues and ensures that students' safety regarding COVID-19 is constantly assessed and promoted.

The head of care scrutinises practice and provides strong leadership to her team. She is aware of any strengths and weaknesses and has clear plans for development of the service provided. For example, the structure for supervision and induction is undergoing review to improve the process for staff.

All staff are trained and knowledgeable about their roles. Their skills are crucial in helping the residential students overcome barriers and to develop their confidence

and life skills. All staff receive regular supervision and appraisal. The recording of supervision is not always consistent and at times progress on previous actions agreed has not been recorded. This minor shortfall has no impact on the welfare of the students.

An additional service offered by the school and college is the on-site research and development institute. This provides advice, training and expertise in helping professionals improve their service for children with a developmental language delay. This service offers guidance both nationally and internationally and provides research placements for speech and language therapy students from abroad. This approach encourages external review and underpins a willingness to share good practice.

Stakeholders, particularly parents of residential students, commend the level of communication from staff and the high standard of care their children receive. Praise for the school and the positive impact it has on student's lives abounds. 'We are so lucky our son is at Moor House,' a parent said. Another parent commented that, 'They nurture such excellent relationships between children and staff.'

Managers actively advocate on behalf of students and their families. They challenge local authorities if they feel not enough is being done to help the families who may be struggling. As a result, the school managers have ensured that additional help and support has been made available to students and their families in the community.

External scrutiny of the service provided is continuous. Governors and an independent visitor separately review the quality of care for residential students, with a view to ensuring that all feel safe, make progress and enjoy their boarding experience. The willingness to receive comments and criticism with a view to improve is commendable. 'It's like pushing against an open door,' was a comment made by a governor.

The head of care constructs action plans to address any shortfalls identified in reports made after 'Standard 20' visits. This means that practice is reviewed and assessed and that plans are put in place to account for any shortfalls. Consequently, there is no complacency and this service constantly looks for improvement.

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: SC013926

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Helen Middleton

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Paul Taylor, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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