

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford School is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged from seven to 19 years of age, who have dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties. At the time of this inspection, there were 150 children attending this school. Of these children, 53 were using the boarding provision. Most boarders stay a full week at school, some include weekends, and some have flexible arrangements.

The boarding accommodation is provided in three areas on the school site, with a fourth house for younger boys located in the nearby village. Additional services include one host family for sixth form boarders. The co-heads of boarding have been appointed since the last inspection and both have relevant qualifications as required.

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: 18 to 20 January 2022

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: 8 October 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Boarders receive an outstanding level of pastoral care. Boarders feel accepted, understood, and valued at this school, enabling them to make substantial progress. Boarders are happy and enjoy their residential experience, naming their houseparents as people they particularly like and can approach with any worries. Parents report overwhelming praise for the boarding provision. One parent said, 'I can't speak highly enough of my child's boarding experience. Most importantly, he is cared for in a safe and homely environment with staff who go above and beyond to make boarding as homely, supportive and fun as possible'.

Leaders and managers responded very well to the challenges from COVID-19, and this has been recognised with a national award. Boarding continued as much as possible during the pandemic and, when boarders were unable to be at school, pastoral support was continued through regular telephone and video calls. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and lost learning, parents were consulted on a proposal to restructure the school. Year 8 is now included in the prep school to provide an extra year of social and emotional support. This model is reflected in boarding houses for prep and senior boarders.

Boarders enjoy staying at school where they feel safe and can take part in numerous activities. At evenings and weekends a broad range of things to do are provided, from using the many resources within the school grounds to the extreme of the Three Peaks Challenge. Some boarders say that they don't like 'no tech Tuesdays'; however, these evenings have led to children playing board games and to increased social interaction. Engagement in the community is encouraged with membership of sports clubs and volunteering with litter picking in the village and beach cleaning further afield. Boarders and their parents commented on how much each child looks forward to boarding.

Boarders make exceptional progress both in their social and emotional well-being, and academically. The high levels of pastoral support enable boarders to thrive and to grow in confidence. During inspection older boarders were supported individually when they received their mock exam results. Collaborative working between school and boarding staff ensures that communication is effective to meet the needs of each boarder. Successful mock exam results, and the positive outcomes of GCSEs leading to college places for those who have left the school, are a tribute to the outstanding level of support provided to boarders.

Boarding houses are comfortable environments in which boarders can personalise their space and contribute to the development of each house. Two of the houses are older properties requiring regular maintenance and refurbishment. However, they do provide comfortable and suitable accommodation. Boarders say they would like better showers however, overall, they like their boarding houses. Fantastic artwork

created by the boarders decorates the walls. Some boarders have hung wallpaper, renovated old furniture, and grown houseplants. This level of engagement in the boarding environment contributes to a sense of pride and respect.

Consultation is strong in this school through surveys, school councils and boarding house meetings. In addition, the positive relationships between boarders and staff enable open communication. Changes have occurred in the choice of activities and food. Girls can now wear trousers and a social club has been established to discuss diversity and sexuality.

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) fulfils her responsibilities to an excellent standard and is supported well by a pastoral team. The DSL ensures that all school staff are extremely well informed through training that reflects national research and studies to ensure current themes are addressed. The DSL checks out the level of understanding of safeguarding that staff have gained from training by arranging quizzes and discussions. Staff are challenged to consider, could this safeguarding concern happen here.

As an independent school, leaders and managers recognise it is essential that there are established and supportive links with other agencies. The DSL has regular communication with social care teams and the headteacher is a member of the local authority's board that supports those at risk from all forms of extremism. Although the school normally consults well with the local authority designated officer, one safeguarding incident was dealt with by the school without consultation and therefore not in line with statutory guidance. There was no negative impact on this occasion, however, such failings have the potential to limit the school's effectiveness in managing safeguarding concerns. This oversight has been addressed by amending policies and procedures, staff training, and the completion of a review process to prevent such failings happening again.

Staff take time to get to know the boarders and to understand their personal and learning needs. Specialist advice and support is available from a range of professionals such as a counsellor, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist and emotional literacy support assistants. Leaders and managers have increased the number of these specialist roles in recognition of the value they have in supporting boarders with their emotional well-being. Consequently, data gathered shows a significant decrease in incidents of boarders becoming upset or distressed since additional pastoral support has been available.

The behaviour of boarders is exceptionally well managed with clear boundaries and expectations. Older boarders are engaged in a programme of discussion on conflict resolution. A shift in the behaviour support policy has been successful through introducing praise and rewards and removing punitive measures. While negative points may still be given, support is provided to enable boarders to work towards

gaining sufficient positive points to outweigh the negative ones. Success and acts of kindness are celebrated with certificates and rewards. As a result, unacceptable behaviour is minimal.

Open discussions about bullying versus banter enable students to reconsider how their comments may be perceived. The appointment of bullying ambassadors gives boarders an opportunity to report any concerns to a peer as an alternative to an adult. Consultation with parents and boarders led to a review of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) delivered across the school. In response, a research-informed model has been implemented that recognises the importance of the emotional and mental health of children being fundamental to learning, relationships and life. This PSHE model extends to parents and boarding staff to enable a collaborative approach in the support of boarders.

The successful implementation of a management information system ensures that safeguarding concerns, medical information, and behaviour are recorded centrally and monitored. Such records contribute to effective communication across the school.

Risk management is strong. Clear and effective systems to monitor fire safety, and health and safety, ensure that risks are managed extremely well to provide a safe environment. Boarders are encouraged to take measured risks having been provided with instruction and information on how to keep themselves safe. For example, using the climbing wall, off-site trips and activities, and using technology.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are ambitious for all students. Since the last inspection, investment in additional staffing, has strengthened support available to all children in the school and in particular the pastoral care of boarders. The two new co-heads of boarding bring a wealth of experience between them from boarding, teaching and the management of residential care. A dedicated person to manage health and medication enables boarding staff to be released from this duty. This means that staff have more time to concentrate on their boarding responsibilities and ultimately be more available to boarders. The school counsellor has increased her availability and the pastoral team has grown to be present more during the school day and in boarding time.

Boarders benefit from a stable staff team that provides warmth and consistency in its care and support. All school staff are recognised for their contribution to the holistic approach to boarding; this includes those in catering, cleaning, laundry, grounds, and maintenance. Training for all staff occurs at the start of term and recently this has included safeguarding, fire safety and diversity.

Communication is a strength of this school. Parents are regularly consulted on prospective changes and through the school's website. They have access to excellent training and information to support their child. Creative newsletters share what the

boarders have been doing and, with the help of new software, some boarders have designed posters to raise issues such as, 'no to bullying' and safe use of technology.

Leaders and managers are progressive and forward thinking. New initiatives are introduced with a period of review to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the school. An additional layer of monitoring has been introduced in response to an oversight of the delay in reporting to an external agency. Leaders and managers are reflective. When there are incidents or complaints there is a review of practice and procedures. Such matters are taken seriously, and consideration given to any lessons learned. There are no complaints about the boarding provision.

Leaders and managers have strengthened the monitoring of the boarding provision through including in-depth assessments by experienced professionals in safeguarding, and health and safety matters. This level of quality assurance is an indicator of the proprietor's commitment to continual development and goes above and beyond the requirement as listed in the national minimum standards. However, with so many reports, it is not always evident where the areas specific to boarding are reported.

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

Recommendations

- The proprietor should ensure that the decor of the residential provision is consistently maintained to promote a homely environment and to adhere to the programme of refurbishment.
- The proprietor should ensure that the records of any monitoring visits reflect all the areas listed in NMS 20, in one report.

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: SC039141

Headteacher: David King

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01980 621020

Email address: headspa@appleford.wilts.sch.uk

Inspectors

Clare Davies, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Clare Nixon, Social Care Inspector

Justine Hosking, 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 <http://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: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2022