

Alfriston School

Alfriston School, Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 2TS

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Alfriston School is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls with moderate learning difficulties in the age range 11 to 18 years. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. Twelve of the pupils were boarders at the time of inspection. Boarders stay at the school for three nights during each week, from Monday to Thursday.

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.

We last visited this setting on 3 March 2021 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school during this monitoring visit.

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 January 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 12 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy staying in the residential provision and make good progress as a result of their time there. There are consistently positive examples of how the residential staff support children to have good experiences that make a difference to their lives. Children are welcomed and prepared well for boarding and settle quickly.

Children have trusting relationships with staff who know them well. The children confidently discuss what is happening in their lives and they make good, and sometimes excellent, progress as a result. A child told the inspector about how to speak with her so that she understood what was being said. This was an important development as the child's confidence had recently eroded, and being able to speak up for herself was a goal she was working on.

The newly introduced children's meetings are led and managed by staff. This is a missed opportunity to further support children to develop their leadership skills and to actively steer group discussion about their boarding experiences. However, lively discussion occurs during the meetings and children's views are listened to and acted on by staff.

Children's health needs are understood, monitored and promoted well. The recently introduced weekly meetings between the well-being and boarding teams are working well. These meetings formalise the ways in which the boarding team works with other teams in the school to meet children's needs. The staff are attentive to children's health needs and are sensitive in the way they support children to stay healthy. Staff work with the wider professional network to ensure that any concerns about the children's health are addressed.

Activities are well organised and support children to develop their independence skills and friendships. The head of care is developing even greater choice of activities as COVID-19 restrictions ease. The value of children attending externally organised social activities is viewed as a fundamental opportunity for the children to learn how to manage social situations in the community. Activities provided, therefore, work well with the school's overall aims to increase children's long-term abilities to be part of a local community.

Planning and support for children's independence skills positively improve children's life skills. A parent praised the head of care's decision to let her child move to the independence flat, saying this had really helped her child's motivation to be more organised. This parent noted that her child was able to apply her new skills at home and this has made a positive difference.

Parents comment positively on how boarding staff support them and their children, especially during the COVID-19 restrictions. One parent said that, since the pandemic restrictions, the residential staff chatted to her child on the telephone every week for

an hour. This was the highlight of her child's week. The parent added that she 'did not feel stranded' when caring for her child at home. If she needed something, the boarding staff were always there to help. The head of care is currently developing a weekly communication system with parents so that they get more regular information about how their child has coped each week.

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

Strong and effective safeguarding means that even low-level concerns are quickly identified and reported appropriately. Leaders and managers act on concerns sensitively. Managers are able to take into account complex equality and children's rights issues when considering potential safeguarding concerns. Staff safeguarding training is regular and helpful. As a result, staff across the school understand safeguarding issues. They effectively take safeguarding into account within their roles and responsibilities.

Staff know the children well and understand how to help them manage their emotions and behaviours. Consequently, physical restraint is seldom used throughout the school and no incidents of restraint occurred in boarding.

There is a new business manager for the school. In a short time, she has identified a number of areas for improvement in health and safety. For example, she has streamlined recording systems so that health and safety information is easy to find.

The business manager's review found that records about the action taken in response to a fire risk assessment were not clearly evidenced. This is being rectified and a detailed plan has been implemented to address all outstanding issues. However, the inspector identified other health and safety concerns such as cleaning products that should be locked away being left out. All issues were dealt with during the inspection and no child was harmed as a result. Nevertheless, this indicates that some managers and staff are not meeting their responsibilities under health and safety legislation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There has been a high level of change and uncertainty about the future of the boarding provision. This has placed additional pressures on leaders and managers which have hindered their ability to implement the boarding development plan. The concerns about the future of the boarding provision have now been resolved and development plans are underway. For instance, the boarding areas of the school are beginning to look worn and could be more homely. Governors are aware of this and are developing a programme of work to update the environment.

Despite these challenges, leaders and managers have been able to maintain the good quality of care for children, and provide an environment where the staff flourish and have a strong sense of teamwork. They have also continued to make innovative

changes, for example the implementation of a new living skills assessment, which will soon be fully integrated into the boarding service.

The school governors regularly visit the boarding service unannounced and provide detailed reviews which scrutinise the quality of service well. An in-depth review of the boarding provision is being completed, which is resulting in greater clarity about how the education department and boarding service work together.

There are, however, examples where the details within records that the staff keep do not reflect the good, and sometimes excellent, practice that is taking place. For example, records sometimes lack detail such as dates and names of authors. Children's risk assessments do not always fully record all the actions staff should take to mitigate the risk. These omissions are not always identified when records are monitored. In practice, staff know what to do to keep children safe.

Boarding staff regularly discuss and consider how their support is making a difference to children. However, this is not captured well in children's records. This makes it difficult for managers to track children's progress.

Supervision and training are well organised and support the staff to have the right knowledge and skills to meet children's needs. Changes to the well-being team have improved the staff welfare systems, such as external supervision for senior staff. Staff are trained in areas that enable them to meet the specific needs of the children. For example, staff undertake significant training in speech and language development and this helps them to support children to communicate effectively.

Staff work well with other agencies and challenge them if they consider children's needs are not being met, or their future is not being planned for appropriately. Social workers report that communication between the boarding staff and professionals is good.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities in relation to health and safety and monitor that the staff are carrying these out appropriately. (NMS 6.2)

Points of improvement

- The registered person should change the format of weekly boarding meetings so that these are more child led.
- The registered person should ensure that staff debriefing sessions following incidents of restraint are recorded.
- The registered person should ensure that omissions in records are consistently identified and rectified.

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: SC023097

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Jinna Male

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01494 673740

Email address: office@alfristonschool.com

Inspector

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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