

Farney Close School

Bolney Court, Crossways, Bolney, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5RD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This independent residential special school provides weekly boarding. The children who attend are aged from nine to 18 and have a range of social and emotional difficulties.

The school can accommodate up to 72 children. At the time of this inspection, 42 children were on roll for residential care.

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

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 29 September to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

The term 'young people' is used throughout this report because this is the term used by the school when talking about children.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 January 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 24 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people receive good-quality, comprehensive and individualised care from skilled staff who know them well. Young people's day-to-day care needs are consistently met, and in-house specialist services, such as medical and therapeutic services, are readily available when required. This high level of care contributes to a culture that supports the young people to engage with their learning and to make progress.

Leaders and staff liaise with parents and external professionals to best understand and address factors that may adversely affect the young people's learning and care. This helps the young people to engage and make best use of the wide range of opportunities offered by the school.

Staff are ambitious for the young people and are thoughtful about their individual needs. Staff speak highly of the young people and with clear affection. Young people benefit from a wide range of activities that develop their interests and expand their experience of the world. This helps the young people to develop their social skills and prepare for adult life.

Understanding the wishes and feelings of the young people matters to leaders and staff. Staff use a range of methods to gather the views of young people, including surveys, a school forum and regular house meetings. Staff were observed responding positively to the requests and suggestions of the young people, and with sensitivity and patience to those requests that were unreasonable or impractical. The staff's practice in seeking and responding to the young people's wishes and feelings helps young people to feel valued, encourages initiative and develops leadership abilities.

Young people speak positively about the school and their residential experience. They show familiarity and comfort within the daily routines and structures of the school, and very positive relationships with staff were observed. This provides the young people with an environment in which they feel secure and settled and, as a result, this enhances their learning. However, some inconsistencies were identified in the handover practice between school and residential staff. This can undermine smooth transitions between the two settings for the young people.

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

Young people are kept safe by staff who are well informed and alert to risks. This includes the risk of harm and exploitation that exists in the virtual world and in the community. Staff respond effectively to protect the young people from harm and to minimise this when incidents occur. There is a whole-school programme in place to educate the young people about the typical risks they may face online and in the community and to equip them to deal effectively with these. This means that young people are increasingly able to understand how to keep themselves safe.

Young people have access to the large grounds and surroundings with trees and waterways. This environment provides wide opportunities for learning and recreation. Leaders and staff show good understanding of the associated risks and hazards of the site. A specialist appointment has been made to raise standards, and significant improvements have been achieved in the way that health and safety issues are monitored and managed. This enables the staff and young people to make full use of the site safely.

Leaders are focused on reducing, with the aim of eliminating, the need to use all but the lightest form of physical intervention in the residential settings. The analysis of all incidents across both school and residential settings informs their practice in this regard and progress is being achieved. Strong staff practice in behaviour management was observed by inspectors. Sanctions were applied effectively and appropriately to reduce unwanted behaviours. The staff's recording of circumstances preceding incidents currently lacks detail. This is a missed opportunity to fully explore any potential triggers that may have occurred for the young person. In addition, some shortfalls were identified in the support provided to staff and the recording of this following incidents of physical intervention.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A strong response to the changing demands of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased teamworking in the leadership team. The safety, well-being and best possible progress of the young people have remained at the forefront of decision-making. This child-focused approach has contributed to the young people's well-being and progress during the pandemic.

Leaders have made several key specialist staff appointments to drive further improvement and the development of services and facilities for the young people. These include appointments in the health services, human resource management, health and safety practice and site development. This represents a significant commitment by leaders to increase student numbers and provide the best possible learning and residential experience for the young people. The expansion of staff structures and activities has, however, led to some shortfalls in the managerial oversight and support of some services relating to health, administration and staff recruitment. Currently, there is also no single, clear statement that describes the ethos and philosophy of the school, to inform the reader of how and why things are done.

The board of governors maintains scrutiny of all the key areas of operation of the school and holds school leaders to account for any identified shortfalls. The board provides valued support for the strategic development of the school and the making of key decisions.

The staff in the residential settings are well supported through a sound induction programme, regular supervision and ongoing training. Staff speak very positively about their roles and the support that they receive. Leaders have been able to maintain staffing sufficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the challenges of this. The residential provision is operating with lower occupancy while leaders are focused on staff recruitment to enable a safe increase in the number of residential places. This considered approach ensures that the young people are kept safe and have a positive residential experience.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They clearly prioritise the order in which shortfalls are addressed, with the safety and well-being of the young people always being placed first. There has been clear and meaningful response to all the recommendations made at the previous assurance visit. These related to improving anti-bullying practice, ensuring that the young people know how their views are being responded to, clear guidance for use of CCTV, and improved recording of incidents.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- A suitable statement of the school's principles and practice to be known as the statement of purpose is available to parents and staff, is made known to young people through an appropriate method of communication and is seen to work in practice. The statement describes the overall purpose of the school and describes any theoretical or therapeutic model underpinning the practice of the school. It also explains the ethos and philosophy of the school and provides an outline of provision for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 1.1)
- All young people and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) within 24 hours of incidents of restraint, including reasonable force, they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 12.5)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 13.4)
- There is a written agreement between the school and any person over 16 not employed by the school but living in the same premises as young people (for example, members of staff households). This specifies the terms of their accommodation, guidance on contact with young people, their responsibilities to supervise their visitors, and notice that accommodation may cease to be provided if there is evidence that they are unsuitable to have regular contact with young people. They must be required to notify an unrelated designated senior member of staff if they are charged with, or convicted of, any offence. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 14.3)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that leaders and managers actively challenge when the responses from other services are not effective.
- The registered person should ensure that hygiene standards for food storage are uniform across all residential provisions.
- The registered person should ensure that effective links between the academic and residential staff are maintained through clear and consistent handover procedures.

- The registered person should ensure that records of restraint include full information of events preceding the need for restraint.

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: SC014513

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sara Hack

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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