

Ash Field Academy

Ash Field School, Broad Avenue, Leicester LE5 4PY

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an academy school with 163 pupils. The residential provision is a dedicated area in the main school, and caters for up to 18 children at any time. Children are aged eight to 19. Children have physical disabilities and/or complex health conditions, as well as associated communication, sensory and learning needs. Children usually access the residential service for one or two nights a week.

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.

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 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 **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: 17 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thoroughly enjoy their residential experience because they spend time with their friends and have enriching new experiences. Children learn valuable skills while having fun. They are given opportunities to take part in activities that would otherwise not be available to them because of their disabilities. For example, children have enjoyed a 'sleepover' and watching films with their friends. Some children are supported to shop for and cook their own meals as part of a well-structured independence package. A child said: 'They make you feel more grown-up, not having to rely on your parents.'

Children love the wide range of activities that are available to them. Staff plan activities very well. As a result, all children, regardless of their disabilities, can enjoy activities together. Children hugely value the fact that staff go to such lengths to ensure that every child can participate in the same activities as their friends. Staff link with external community projects very well to provide enriching activities. For example, professional sports coaches have delivered bespoke activities. Some children have been on a residential holiday, and some have been into the community to participate in cultural celebrations, such as Diwali.

Parents are equally enthusiastic about the residential provision. They have seen significant improvement in their children's confidence, life skills, social skills and ability to build positive relationships with their peers. Parents are impressed and sometimes surprised by the progress their children make in the residential provision.

Staff have very effective strategies to enable children to give their views. Children have their say about all aspects of the service, including the way that they are cared for. Children are also given choices, such as who they share a bedroom with. Staff make very careful decisions about shared bedroom arrangements. This means that children feel comfortable and that their rights are fully promoted.

When the residential facility was closed during the pandemic, staff used this time to research and improve their knowledge in a number of areas. This work has resulted in clear improvements in practice. For example, staff used research about how the pandemic affected children's social and self-care skills to create an assessment tool. This was used when children returned to the provision and ensured that they were able to target work to meet the changed needs of children. Staff also researched strategies to encourage children to have a balanced, healthy diet. This work has had a direct positive impact on one child in particular. Because dietary issues were addressed, the child was able to participate in the residential holiday, which she thoroughly enjoyed.

Care planning is very effective. Staff and managers make sure that they secure all the information that they need to provide high-quality care. Staff know the needs,

wishes and preferences of children extremely well. They make sure that they gather very clear information from families.

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

Strong safeguarding practice means that children are kept safe. Staff have a good understanding of how to protect children. Because safeguarding training is so effective, staff are confident to address any safeguarding issues that might emerge.

Staff go above and beyond to ensure the safety of children. For example, leaders strongly advocate for children, including assertively challenging other agencies to ensure that children's safeguarding needs are fully addressed. Because managers are so proactive and determined, children are protected.

Staff are very responsive to any emerging risks. For example, during one lockdown period when the service was not operating, staff came together at short notice to reopen the service so that a child could be accommodated in an emergency situation. The determination of staff to protect and care for the child meant that they were able to respond quickly and deliver an essential service to the child.

Staff form nurturing and warm relationships with children. For example, a child was able to confide in staff when they were worried. This meant that information could be shared with safeguarding agencies and the child could be protected. The child became significantly safer as a result.

Parents valued the practical and emotional support that they received from staff during lockdown periods. Staff visited children at their family home, making sure that parents felt less isolated and had a support network.

Children's behaviour is exemplary because staff instil the positive values and ethos of the school. Staff communicate their expectations of behaviour clearly. As a result, children know the rules and boundaries, and adhere to them. Because behaviour is so well managed, the residential provision is a calm and nurturing environment. This means that children feel safe and secure.

Children are well informed about school practice around COVID-19 procedures. They are provided with clear guidance about personal safety in a way that is suited to their level of understanding.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is led by a long-standing, very experienced and qualified head of residential care. She is ably supported by the highly effective senior leadership team and her deputy managers. The skilled, assertive and confident management team ensures that the residential provision operates to the highest standards.

The staff team is also established, experienced, well qualified and confident. This means that the team is able to meet each child's needs very well while also making sure that children have fun. Staff are highly motivated and committed. The way in which they reopened the residential provision at short notice when the residential provision was closed is a good example of how staff adapt quickly and put the needs of children first.

Staff can access an excellent range of training and development opportunities. Essential training is supplemented with additional, specialist training. Managers empower staff to develop their own knowledge and skills through research and other developmental activities. Team meetings are used well to deliver updated guidance to staff.

Effective monitoring of the residential provision ensures that the service continually improves its offer to children. Governors regularly visit the residential provision, providing strong support and constructive challenge. Although the feedback that governors give to staff and managers does generate improvement, their written reports do not fully adhere to the expectations set out in the national minimum standards.

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

Recommendation

- Ensure that governors' reports include the items set out in standard 20. (NMS 20.2)

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: SC006451

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Jennifer Eshelby

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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