

Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Valence School is a maintained residential special school. The school caters for pupils who have physical disabilities and complex medical needs. Currently, 34 students between the ages of 11 and 20 stay in six of the eight bungalows provided for residential care. Accommodation is situated within the grounds of the 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: 1 to 3 March 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: 28 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The staff have high aspirations for the students. As a result, students make good progress. Their achievements are captured through a range of methods, such as photographs on their electronic devices, daily logs and within communication systems carried with them. The student's achievements are shared and celebrated with residential staff, education staff and their parents.

A learning pathway based on the children's educational goals has been introduced in the residential setting. This is a new initiative, which is under review, but it has been successful in achieving a seamless learning environment between the school and residential setting.

Students enjoy socialising with each other. One student said, 'I love it here – the social side – as I see these guys [the other students].' Opportunities to mix between the bungalows enhances the residential experience. Students enjoy helping each other and supporting their more vulnerable friends. All the students were involved in 'World Book Day' and dressed up enthusiastically as characters in books.

The individual student's voice is encouraged and staff continually consult with each of them. The students are able to choose who undertakes their personal care or help them with meals. They are also enabled to make decisions about which college they will attend when they leave. The staff help children to learn to be independent. Some students are supported to attend college or travel independently to the setting. For other children, their achievements may be smaller steps, such as making choices. Every child is seen as unique and with individual targets.

The staff's approach to meeting students' cultural needs, and supporting them to accept themselves, is a strength. One student has been involved in timetabling her religious practice. Other children choose which country's customs and meals they want to learn about during cultural evenings.

Children's access to the community has been affected due to the complex health needs of children. This was because of the various lockdowns and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there have been some recent outings to the theatre, local farm and shops. There are plans in place to continue these activities and support the residential experience of students.

The multi-disciplinary team considers the needs of residential students and whether these can be met within the school and residential setting. Parents and children visit prior to the child staying. Meetings are held within six weeks to ensure that the child has settled in and is working to the agreed targets.

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

Safeguarding practice is strong. The members of the senior management team are also the designated safeguarding leads for the school and have a good oversight of practice and procedures. Managers refer relevant concerns to the appropriate safeguarding professionals in the local authority. This ensures that there is compliance with statutory procedures and the sharing of information with key professionals.

All staff understand the threshold for physical intervention. Staff have not needed to use restraint in the residential setting since the last inspection. Staff use children's communication methods or verbal prompts to defuse situations. Incidents are rare and there have been no behaviours needing the use of sanctions. Similarly, there have been no reports of bullying or students going missing from the residential provision. This is a reflection of how much the children enjoy being here.

The children's risk assessments are shared with them. Where students are able to, staff agree strategies to help students reduce their behaviours which may cause themselves harm.

Medication errors are reported and recorded to ensure that there is learning from any such incident. Any actions or action needed, can occur immediately. Senior managers create an open learning environment. An agreement regarding referrals and consultancy with the local authority designated officer provides clarity and transparency.

Complaints are recorded effectively. Each complaint receives a written response from managers and the lessons are incorporated into updated policies and procedures. The members of the senior management team ensure that the process is fair and that recording is transparent. All complainants are informed of the outcome and their responses are recorded.

The children have the necessary levels of supervision in line with their care plans. Any use of social media is assessed and safety measures are put in place. The children who can use social media safely are able to do so.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The vice-principal oversees the residential setting. This has been a challenging time due to the impact of COVID-19 on the staff and students. Leaders and managers remain focused on the welfare of the students. They are ambitious and support staff to provide a good standard of care.

The leaders and managers know the students well. If they need to make changes to who is working in each home, they only do so after fully considering the needs of the students. They also consult with children to ensure that they are fully informed.

However, at times, the continuity of care has been affected. While this is kept to a minimum, this does have an impact on the children's relationships with staff who are not their usual carers.

Monitoring by the governors is effective. They attend multi-disciplinary safeguarding meetings and act as critical friends in order to improve the service. The governor responsible for safeguarding has recently met with the independent visitor. This further enhances the governors' awareness of the residential service's strengths and areas to develop. Rigorous recruitment processes minimise the potential for unsuitable adults to be working with students.

Leaders and managers have a range of systems in place to ensure that they are able to check quality. For example, regular checks of the bungalows take place and leaders are visible to all students and staff. Similarly, the visits from the independent visitor provide oversight and an additional layer of quality checking. However, managers' monitoring of supervision is not yet fully effective. Staff have regular supervision but this is not always consistent. The quality of recording can sometimes lack direction and development for staff. This means that some staff do not have the oversight and guidance to achieve and grow in their role.

Due to the pandemic, and the residential service being closed for several months during this time, not all staff have been able to complete their level 3 qualification. Leaders and managers are acutely aware of this and are ensuring that all staff achieve the necessary qualifications. However, all staff have completed the mandatory training.

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 standard(s) for residential special schools:

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. This specifically refers to ensuring that all aspects of staff supervision are monitored effectively and quality assured. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 13.4)

Recommendations

- Ensure that all residential staff who need to complete the level 3 qualification are supported to achieve this award.
- Continue to review staffing sufficiency and ensure that there is always continuity of care for residential students.

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: SC041791

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Roland Gooding

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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