

Muntham House School

Barns Green, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 0NJ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Muntham House School is an all-through special school that provides boarding and day provision for boys aged 5 to 18. There are currently 98 students on the school roll. There were 24 students boarding at the time of the inspection. The head of care has been in post for 4 months and has a relevant qualification, as required by the national minimum standards.

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: 14 to 16 February 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: 10 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children benefit from a skilled and passionate workforce whose members clearly enjoy working at the school. Children make exceptional progress from very challenging starting points. Children with complex emotional and behavioural issues on entry have achieved excellent outcomes, including admission to university, access to employment and highly successful transitions into adulthood.

Children have a strong voice and feel confident to raise concerns with staff. The school council are proactive and give many examples of things they have been able to influence or change at the school. They feel their role in the life of school is valued, and they take seriously their role in representing the voice of students.

There are strong signs of excellent interdepartmental working. The integration of staff between school and boarding works well. Education staff provide cover at the boarding provision, and boarding staff have a role in supporting continuous learning for students. During the inspection a person, social, health and economic education teacher was visiting the boarding provision during the evening to talk to students informally about positive and safe relationships.

Students speak enthusiastically about the wide range of enrichment activities available at the school. Despite the additional pressures of COVID-19, the school has launched several successful initiatives, including a canine therapy centre, a brand new state of the art therapy hub and a small farm where students can learn about animal care, horticulture and sustainable agriculture.

Staff have a focused approach to supporting children towards independence. The school's 16 plus provision is a shining example, providing a safe and developmental pathway to adulthood that both empowers and enriches the lives of students. Students spoke proudly of their achievements, including work experience and academic success. Outreach is provided to students to give emotional and practical support as they make their way in the world of higher education and employment. Plans are also in place to offer opportunities for students to return to the school on work placements. A number of ex-students are already working in the staff team.

Feedback from families is exceptionally positive, with many praising the 'whole family' approach to support offered by the school. Some comments from parents include:

'My son struggled with his schooling his entire primary life. Before starting Muntham he was out of school for 2 years at home. He's really suffered. But since starting he has thrived at Muntham in all areas. The staff are so supportive and encouraging. They have literally changed my sons outlook on life for the best.'

And:

'Muntham is an exceptional school – if only all schools could be based on the Muntham model and extend the same level of care to their students. My son has absolutely thrived since joining the school and he is as enthusiastic and positive about the whole school experience as we are.'

The sense of community at the school is very strong. Children learn to reflect, developing empathy, understanding their place in the community and their responsibility to others.

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

Children at the school say they feel safe. Staff recognise the risks and vulnerabilities of the children they look after. Where children are identified as being at risk of harm, staff ensure that all relevant persons are informed and work in close partnership to ensure safe outcomes for children.

The introduction of a new system for recording information about students still requires some development, especially around the training of staff to use the systems effectively. This led to some inconsistency in the quality of record-keeping, particularly around risk assessment and incidents of physical intervention.

Children place great trust in the staff and can readily identify named people who they would approach with any concerns or worries. There were a number of the school's students who had very high levels of anxiety about their safety in relation to COVID-19. They were supported sensitively and skilfully to lower their anxiety, and this helped to ensure a rapid return when the school reopened.

Some children share sleeping accommodation. Risk considerations and decision-making processes around sharing accommodation are not clear and could be improved.

The frequency of students going missing from the school, the use of physical restraint and incidents are extremely low. This is down to skilful behaviour management by staff. The members of the team know and understand the children they work with. Staff are able to spot nuances of behaviour and known triggers, allowing them to divert or distract children before more serious incidents occur.

Discriminatory behaviours are challenged strongly, and the school has a respectful and inclusive culture. The school was recently recognised as a centre of excellence for inclusion, being awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark for work done to promote equality of opportunity for students.

Children respond positively to the calm approach of staff in delivering their care and education, and to the clear boundaries that staff set for conduct in the school. Staff manage the accommodation expertly, providing safe spaces for children to flourish.

Internet safety is a strong point for the school. Driven by a skilled and competent lead person, initiatives such as coffee mornings to support online safety education for parents during lockdown and accredited e-safety training for children embed a culture where children learn to keep themselves safe online. The school also promotes e-safety learning for younger children through play, helping them understand the risks of the internet.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is confident and assured in the processes around safeguarding children. The DSL is supported by a very knowledgeable staff team, whose members all recognise their place in wider networks of support for children.

Staff maintain good levels of health and safety practice, and the school is well-maintained. However, records demonstrating actions taken to meet any outcomes of external audits were not always clear, and there is a need to improve the quality of leadership oversight.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders at the school have been through a challenging two years since the last inspection. The demands of COVID-19 safety management, changes in leadership and significant structural developments at the school have led to a number of operational changes.

However, throughout this period, leadership has been exemplary. The principal has provided rock solid and skilled support to his senior leadership team at a time when the whole school community needed to feel safe and supported.

The interim Head of Care has done an excellent job in challenging circumstances. Staff cannot speak highly enough of how supported they feel and how much they value his skills, experience and knowledge.

Leaders are open about the challenges to recruitment in recent months. However, they are determined to wait for the right staff to apply, to ensure that quality is maintained. In the meantime, existing staff have gone above and beyond to ensure consistency of support for children. This reflects the value they feel senior leaders bestow on them. They reward the faith and loyalty of the leadership team with their own commitment to the ongoing growth and development of the school.

The principal has a bold and ambitious vision for the school. There is also a strong outward looking culture, with the school coordinating events and conferences for many other schools, giving free access to progress tracking tools and openly sharing best practice and school facilities.

Staff feel extremely well supported by the whole senior leadership team. They praise the culture of compassion and support at the school. Staff feel there is investment in

their training and professional development, and this results in high staff retention. This in turn creates consistency and stability for students at the school.

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

Recommendations

- Care staff should demonstrate clear risk assessment and processes around decision-making for students who share rooms. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 10, 5.1)
- Estates staff should provide a clear list of actions and outcomes following on from any fire or health and safety audits and demonstrate that works have been completed in a timely manner. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 11, 6.3)
- Leaders should ensure that debriefs for staff and children after any incident of restraint are recorded consistently. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 14, 12.5)
- Staff should receive additional training and support to ensure that they feel confident in using new record-keeping platforms and processes. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 15, 13.9)
- Managers should oversee all records of risk, incidents, and physical interventions to ensure a consistent approach by staff. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 15, 13.9)

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: SC014636

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Harry Anderson

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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