

Langham Oaks

School Road, Langham, Colchester, Essex CO4 5PA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Langham Oaks is a residential special school with academy status located in a rural village near Colchester.

There are 79 students at the school, of whom 22 board. The school can accommodate 28 students in the residential provision for between one and four nights per week. The school caters for students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The residential manager has been in post for four months. He has the necessary experience and qualification for the role.

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

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 May 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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 12 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students' well-being and happiness is enhanced by staying in residence. One student said, 'Residence is like a home from home.' Another student said, 'Residential staff are like my second family. I love staying in residence.'

Staff tailor the varied and fun activities to the students' preferences. Activities include golf, swimming, bowling, outdoor gyms, football, coast trips and many other exciting trips. Students say that the broad choice of activities is one of the main highlights of staying in residence. Students, staff and parents say that there is a definite improvement in students' social skills and understanding because of staying in residence.

Staff know the students exceptionally well. Staff have excellent de-escalation skills, which enable them to support students to maintain good levels of behaviour in residence. The staff are fun, supportive and caring. Interactions between the staff and students are filled with warmth. The sound of laughter is frequently heard when staff and students are together. Students benefit from high supervision ratios, which give the students quality time with and attention from staff.

Overall, parents highly praise residence. Communication between families and residential staff is good. Some parents said that the positive impact of staying in residence has helped to strengthen their relationship with their children. Students' confidence and independence improves because of staying in residence. Staff encourage students' independence through activities such as cooking, laundry tasks and road safety awareness, and giving them opportunities to interact by growing their social networks.

Students' academic attainment and overall attendance at school is higher than that of students who do not board.

The dynamics in the student group are largely harmonious. This is because of effective planning regarding which students stay in the residential provision.

Students know how to make a complaint, but seldom do. They are confident that staff address issues that arise. Students say that staff do not tolerate bullying. This helps the students to feel safe in residence.

The school has good links with the community. Engagement in community activities broadens students' social understanding and gives them a sense of belonging in the community.

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

The lead designated safeguarding officer has excellent oversight of the child protection referrals. Consequently, referrals are made promptly. On occasion, this has led to some students and their families receiving support from external agencies.

Staff understand the importance of recording low-level concerns collectively, as these could indicate that a student requires targeted support. The school works with the local authority's safeguarding body proactively and collaboratively. The school has, on occasion, increased its residential offer when a child's safety has been of concern. This support to social care partners is excellent. These types of interventions increase students' safety and demonstrate good partnership working.

Referrals made to the local area designated officer (LADO) have been made promptly. The headteacher works collaboratively with the LADO to ensure that appropriate process and procedure are followed. The headteacher acts on advice given by the LADO and ensures that any internal investigations are thorough. Consequently, students are safeguarded and only suitable staff remain working at the school.

The director responsible for safeguarding has good oversight of the safeguarding concerns relating to residential children. She provides good support to the lead designated safeguarding officer, which enables him to reflect on and improve his practice. A range of auditing and reporting processes enables leaders and managers to have full oversight of concerns. As a result, the senior leadership team has a good understanding of what support students are receiving and what support students need. Students' safety is at the centre of staff practice.

Staff rarely apply sanctions. They are acutely aware that positive relationships with students help them to build trust and make students feel safe. Staff use their positive relationships to support students in crisis to good effect.

No students have been missing from residence. Since the last inspection, one restraint has taken place in residence. The restraint was reasonable and proportionate.

Staff understand that students' unwanted behaviour results from a combination of factors. Staff strive to understand these factors to support the students more effectively.

The school works collaboratively with the police. The school's police liaison officer said, 'I have been into the school on multiple occasions. These have been for both positive engagements as well as inputs to individuals identified by the school. The inputs are educational and aim to divert the young person from criminal and/or anti-social behaviour.' These good support networks encourage students to have a positive view of the police.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

A new head of care was appointed in January 2022. Although the head of care has a vision for how the residential provision can be improved, this has yet to be realised. Several shortfalls have been identified relating to the effectiveness of leaders and managers.

All but one of the shortfalls identified at the last inspection have been addressed. Improvements have been made relating to safeguarding, safer recruitment and the provision of supervision to the head of care.

Information provided in some of the care plans is insufficient, lacks detail and is generic. This shortfall was identified at the last inspection. Students' cultural, religious and racial needs information recorded in the care plans is exactly the same for all students. This fails to give staff relevant information about each student's background. Consequently, opportunities are missed to have an informed understanding about the students' lives.

Risk assessments lack specific guidance on how to reduce harm and some are generic. Staff spoken with were aware of the students' risks and how to manage these; however, the records do not reflect this level of understanding.

Sanction records fail to document the effectiveness of the sanction. This shortfall has not been identified during management monitoring. Failure to document the effectiveness prevents staff from having an overview of which behaviour management methods are effective and which are not. There has been no repeated sanction. Therefore, this lack of oversight has not affected students' experiences.

Leaders and managers have failed to make sufficient records of the students' views and wishes. This does not enable effective monitoring of how students have been responded to.

Leaders and managers have failed to provide self-harm awareness training to staff. Although students with self-harming behaviours have been supported well by staff, opportunities have been missed to improve the staff team's knowledge and awareness of self-harm.

Residential staff are provided with some training in online safety; however, this could be strengthened. School staff receive child exploitation and online protection training, yet residential staff do not.

Some staff have not been provided with supervision or appraisal in line with the school's policy. This has led to some staff feeling unsupported by the senior leadership team. Opportunities are missed to provide support to staff and give them feedback on their practice.

A restraint record that involved the headteacher was monitored by a junior member of the senior leadership team and not someone senior to the headteacher. The restraint was reasonable and proportionate. However, the monitoring was compromised by the lack of objective scrutiny.

The head of care spent the first few weeks of his appointment solely getting to know students and going out on activities with them. Consequently, the head of care has built positive relationships with the students in residence.

The monitoring reports provided by the independent visitor have led to several improvements in the provision of care and support in residence.

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:

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. In particular, ensure staff have training in self-harm awareness, improve the quality of training provided to staff in online safety, monitor the effectiveness and quality of risk assessment and ensure that sufficient record is made of the students' wishes and feelings. (NMS 13.4)
- The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate. In particular, ensure sanctions are monitored for their effectiveness, restraint records involving the headteacher are monitored by the headteacher's superior for impartiality and objectivity, supervisions and appraisals are held in line with the school policy and that the quality and effectiveness of care plans are monitored. (NMS 13.8)

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: 1213822

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Simon Dawson

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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