

St Piers Residential Special School

St Piers Lane, Lingfield, Surrey RH7 6PW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Piers School is a non-maintained special school for pupils aged between five and 19 years of age who have neurological conditions such as epilepsy and autism. Pupils may also have associated conditions such as learning and communication difficulties.

There are currently 61 children on the school roll, of whom 21 access the residential provision. The operations manager for children's residential services (head of care) is part of the school's senior leadership team. In recent months, the school has moved from offering termly boarding to offering weekly boarding, with some provision for children to stay at the school at weekends.

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

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 July 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	requires improvement to be good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 14 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children experience well-planned care from staff who are attentive and familiar with each child's personality and needs. Interactions between children and staff are warm and nurturing. As a result, children develop positive relationships with staff and make good progress. Meaningful joint working between the care, health and education teams provides an effective wraparound service.

Children are treated with dignity and respect, and their views are valued. Staff are familiar with each child's methods of communication and enable children to influence decisions about the day-to-day running of the home. There is a particular focus on helping children to make choices about the food that they eat and the activities that they do. However, in some of the residential areas, there are signs, symbols and pictures which are not consistent with those which children use in the school environment. This has the potential to cause confusion for children.

Staff support children to engage in education and children make good progress from their starting points. During the times when children's health needs affect their ability to attend school, teaching staff provide learning opportunities in the residential areas. Children's education goals are understood by the residential staff, and they help children to achieve them. When children make progress towards their goals outside school time, the residential staff share successes with the education team. This ensures that all the children's achievements are noted and celebrated.

A skilled, multidisciplinary healthcare team is focused on improving health outcomes for children. Healthcare professionals give children individualised support and provide expert input into children's plans, for example in relation to seizure management. They also provide good-quality training to the residential staff to ensure that they can competently carry out delegated health tasks. However, healthcare professionals do not keep a record of attendance at routine health appointments such as the dentist. This is despite the fact that several children's plans state that they are reluctant with teeth cleaning. As a result, residential staff do not always know when children last saw their dentist, and there is potential for a missed link between children's behaviour and the need for them to see an external healthcare professional.

Activities promote children's social and emotional development. Staff make good use of the excellent on-site facilities to ensure that children can participate in activities that they find comforting and enjoyable. Staff also recognise the importance of ensuring children have new experiences to expand their interests and learning. Staff make the most of all opportunities to offer children community-based activities.

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

Children's safety and well-being are priorities for staff. The designated safeguarding lead is extremely knowledgeable and is passionate in her efforts to ensure the safety

of the children. She provides staff with safeguarding training and information to ensure they stay alert to signs that children are at risk of harm.

Managers recognise the importance of learning from safeguarding incidents. They carry out thorough investigations, involving external safeguarding agencies when necessary. They ensure that any learning from incidents is shared with the wider staff team. This approach reduces the risk that potentially harmful situations will reoccur.

The systems for administering and recording medication promote safe practice. Members of staff from the health team provide bespoke medication training to residential staff to ensure that they are competent in all aspects of the medication administration process. As a result, medication errors are extremely rare.

Children have care plans and risk assessments which provide staff with an accurate description of children's current and most relevant risks. When behavioural incidents occur, behaviour support specialists support staff effectively to understand the reasons for children's behaviour. Regular multi-agency meetings provide opportunities for all professionals to agree the best strategies to care for children and keep them safe. The use of physical intervention is kept to a minimum and is used only as a last resort to keep children safe. However, records do not demonstrate that incidents are subject to scrutiny by managers.

Managers have recognised that monitoring of health and safety is compromised by confusing oversight arrangements. They have taken steps to address this and have introduced improved processes for recording health and safety matters and maintenance tasks. However, inspectors identified that the current arrangements are not sufficient to enable managers to be confident that the physical environment is safe and secure.

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

Leaders and managers are deeply committed to improving children's life chances. They have sound awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision.

During this inspection period, a high number of staff vacancies has led to leaders and managers making difficult decisions about the amount of boarding provision which can be offered to each child and their family. Leaders and managers have invested time and energy into careful planning to ensure that there are sufficient staff to provide safe care to children. Managers frequently cover rota gaps themselves. These measures have had a negative impact on their capacity to maintain good management monitoring and oversight of the residential provision, for example in relation to health and safety records.

A further shortfall in the monitoring systems relates to staff training records. The system for recording staff training attendance does not currently demonstrate that

staff have received training that is relevant to all the needs of the children that they are looking after. Staff are being offered a range of training courses to give them the knowledge and skills they need, but this is undermined by a shortfall in training records and means that managers cannot be reassured that all staff have had the required up-to-date training.

Some staff have not been receiving regular formal supervision. As a result, records do not demonstrate how managers are making sure that all staff know how to safely meet children's needs in line with their care plans and risk assessments. Overall, staff speak positively about the day-to-day support they receive from leaders and managers. However, some staff told inspectors that they feel that information-sharing could be improved.

Managers do not have effective systems to provide sufficient oversight and scrutiny to ensure best practice in relation to children's records. Although this is not currently having a direct impact on the quality of care or progress and experiences of children, recording needs to improve to underpin good practice.

Safe recruitment processes are understood and implemented by the manager and staff responsible for this area of practice. However, records of recruitment do not fully demonstrate the sound decision-making about whether staff have the knowledge and skills required. This shortfall in recording undermines an otherwise rigorous process which ensures that only suitable adults are employed to work in the residential provision. Therefore, a recommendation about records of job interviews made at the last inspection is repeated.

Managers ensure that there is effective and open communication with children's parents and with external professionals. Criticisms and comments about the service are seen as an opportunity to learn, reflect and improve. However, a recent complaint from a parent has not been managed in line with the school's complaints procedure. This has resulted in the parent not being confident that their voice has been heard.

Leaders and managers have recently introduced reflective practice sessions. Staff who have been part of these sessions told inspectors that they have had a positive effect on their emotional well-being.

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

Points for improvement

- Ensure that the residential accommodation is safe and secure. (NMS 5.1)
- Provide effective management monitoring and oversight to ensure that the standards are met. (NMS 13.1)
- Ensure that records of job interviews are more detailed. (NMS 14.1)
- Provide staff with regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)

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: 2601107

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Richard Gargon

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