

Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This school is maintained by a local authority. The school offers day and residential provision for children aged between four and 19 who have been diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder and have severe and complex learning needs.

There are currently 102 children on the school roll, of whom 12 access the weekly boarding residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 September 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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 last inspection: 12 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are looked after by staff who are deeply committed to providing them with high-quality and loving care. Children feel safe and secure and make exceptional progress as a result of their residential experience.

Across the school, there is a deep-rooted ethos of treating children with dignity and respect. Staff give children sensitive and nurturing support while allowing them the freedom to follow their daily routines in their own way. The result is a relaxed atmosphere enabling children to live up to staff's high expectations that they will do their very best.

Children's independence is fully promoted, and staff are committed to preparing children to live more independently in the future. Teaching practical skills to children is embedded into practice. Staff understand that life skills such as problem-solving and understanding emotions are just as important as practical skills. Staff speak with pride when describing the progress children have made.

Children make extremely good progress in relation to their communication skills. In one example, a child who found it difficult to tolerate being spoken to when they first arrived can now hold conversations with familiar staff. This child has made extraordinary progress as a result of the careful support he has received from a highly skilled and extremely experienced residential staff team.

Residential staff support children to engage in education and children make excellent progress from their starting points.

Staff make good use of the on-site facilities to ensure that children can participate in activities they find comforting and enjoyable. Staff also recognise the importance of ensuring that children have new experiences to expand their interests. Staff make the most of all opportunities to offer children community-based activities. When children participate in new activities, their success is celebrated and shared with their family.

Children's health needs are supported by staff through careful planning and liaison with children's families. They provide practical support to children's families at health appointments when this is needed. The staff team's deep level of understanding of the importance of sensitive, individualised support for children and their families is impressive.

Proactive steps are taken to work in partnership with children's families to ensure continuity of care. Parents speak very highly about the way managers and staff work collaboratively with them. One parent told the inspector, 'It feels like we are a team.'

Managers have recognised that, in some areas of the home, the decor is tired and in need of updating. Plans for redecoration are in place.

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

Children's safety and well-being are given high priority. Staff are attuned and responsive to the risks that are present for children individually and as a group.

Incidents of children being placed at risk of harm are extremely rare. Managers provide regular, meaningful opportunities to embed learning from staff safeguarding training to ensure that staff stay alert to the signs that children may be at risk of harm. For example, managers give staff safeguarding scenarios that help to test their knowledge; this helps to ensure that staff would respond appropriately to concerns so that children are kept safe. This also includes testing to check that staff know which external agencies they should approach if they had concerns about the safeguarding culture within the organisation.

Managers and staff understand that, when behavioural incidents occur, these are because a child is trying to communicate something. To reflect this positive approach, children's plans in relation to behaviour are referred to as well-being plans. This is a refreshing, progressive response to behaviour management.

Processes for managing health and safety matters and maintenance tasks are excellent. As a result, repairs are completed in a timely manner and the physical environment is safe and secure.

Safer recruitment practices are understood and implemented effectively. All necessary checks are in place to ensure that children are protected from unsuitable people working in the school.

Governors who have responsibility for safeguarding and the residential provision provide good oversight and scrutiny. This helps to ensure that children's safety and well-being are maintained.

Children are being cared for by staff who are attentive and familiar with each child's personality and needs. However, written plans are not always pulled together to provide a more streamlined record that can be relied upon. The impact of this shortfall is minor, given that staff know the children extremely well.

Transitions both into and out of the school are thoughtful and well managed. At the time of the inspection, a child was receiving respite care in response to a family emergency. Staff used the limited planning time they had available to gather essential information about how to meet the child's needs. The child has been very happy and settled. However, emergency short breaks are not currently included in the school's statement of principles and practice. This will need to be amended to

ensure that there are clear guidelines for staff to follow if the school intends to offer this type of provision in the future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A new headteacher has recently taken up the post at the school. She is being supported by senior leaders who are ambitious and have high aspirations for all the children. This includes the head of care, who is deeply committed to improving children's life chances.

Staff morale is high. Several staff described being part of the residential team as a 'privilege'. Retention rates are remarkable. The stability of the staff team allows children to thrive because staff build and maintain reliable, trusting relationships with them.

The head of care has high standards and is passionate in his efforts to be a good role model for the children and for the staff. Staff are unanimous in their praise for the support that they receive from leaders and managers. As a result, children receive high-quality care from highly motivated and caring staff.

Leaders and managers are committed to empowering children to have a say in the day-to-day running of the residential service.

The head of care gives high priority to working closely with other professionals. Feedback from children's social workers is very positive regarding communication and partnership working.

The head of care has excellent oversight of care practice. There is an embedded culture of welcoming feedback from external sources. Criticisms and comments about the service are seen as an opportunity to learn, reflect and improve.

All the national minimum standards are met.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that the decor of the residential provision is consistently maintained to provide a homely environment.
- School leaders should ensure that children's written plans are a reliable source of information that help staff to care for children and to keep them safe.
- School leaders should ensure that the statement of principles and practice is updated if there are changes to residential provision arrangements.

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: SC023693

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Jane Hatwell

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Helen Simmons, Social Care Inspector

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