

Vale of Evesham School

Vale of Evesham School, Four Pools Lane, Evesham, Worcestershire WR11 1BN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is an academy and is responsible to a governing body. The school is an all-age generic special school taking pupils from the age of 2 to 19 for cognition and learning and pupils with autism spectrum disorder. The school has 186 pupils on roll, with a weekly residential provision, Blossom House.

The boarding service operates from Monday to Friday and provides accommodation for up to 15 boys and girls across three suites. There were nine children boarding at the time of the inspection.

The head of care holds the appropriate qualification. She remains on site, Monday to Friday, to support the care of children and have oversight of the boarding provision.

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 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 July 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children staying in the residency are well cared for by a consistent team of staff who know them well. Staff are child focused and put children first. As a result, children have positive experiences and say that they like their stays.

Parents told inspectors that it is a fantastic provision and that staff aim high for the children. They said, 'They (staff) do not take away what parents do, they add to it.'

Staff have created a homely environment, which has recently had new carpets and furnishings. Children have their own bedrooms which they can personalise, and staff encourage children to bring things they want from home. Around the residency, staff display children's artwork and models from art and craft sessions. Leaders have consulted children and parents about allowing children privacy through bedroom door locks. However, further work is needed to fully explore the benefits and risks.

Staff go to great effort in making sure that children receive a 24-hour curriculum. There is good joined-up working with education in which children's targets are worked to in a consistent manner. Communication tools and behaviour plans are shared so that children receive consistency of care. As a result, children are settled and are progressing well.

Children's plans are individualised and include clear information about their daily routines and the areas that they need support with. A strength of this setting is that staff encourage children to do as much as they can for themselves, such as dressing, attending to their personal care routines, and carrying out tasks such as pouring drinks and buttering toast. Inspectors observed children helping each other and tidying up after themselves. However, leaders should consider how they can further develop independence in the residency. This would help children to fully develop their independence skills so that they are as well prepared as possible for the next stages of their lives.

Staff make sure that children are consulted about decisions being made. Children are involved in menu planning, activities, and, where appropriate, the bigger decisions about their lives. For example, when staff were taking children out for a meal, staff created a symbolised version of the menu so that all children could choose what they wanted.

Staff are creative and provide lots of activities in the residency and out in the community. Children are always busy but can if they wish do things away from the group. Inspectors observed the Halloween party. Staff and children had put lots of time and effort into this and had sorted decorations and costumes. Inspectors could see that families has been invited so that they could share this experience together.

Staff encourage friendships away from the school and help children to be part of the wider community. Children meet up with children from another residential school to participate in activities. This has led to some becoming pen pals. Children have also been involved in litter picking, card making, taking flowers to a care home and sponsoring a local dog charity. This reduces isolation and helps children to develop friendships and a sense of belonging.

Moves into the residency and when children leave are well planned. Consideration is given to each child's needs. In addition, there is good communication with parents, children and other professionals. Plans are reviewed and updated to ensure that children are receiving the best possible care, and the plans are still appropriate. As a result, moves to and from the residency are positive for children and they settle quickly.

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

Staff are knowledgeable about children and know them well. They are in tune with children and can pre-empt difficulties before they occur or escalate. As a result, there are few incidents.

Staff encourage children to have a voice and to be heard. There are visual reminders around the setting of how children can raise a complaint and who they can talk to. There are several visual prompts for children to use if they wish to communicate to staff how they are feeling. This enables children to inform staff about any concerns they have.

Children are kept safe from others who would want to take advantage of their vulnerability. Staff support children to safely use the internet and accompany them in the community.

When out in the community, staff have carried out robust risk assessments before any trip to make sure that the activity is suitable and there are sufficient staff. Children have not gone missing. However, if they were to go missing, plans are in place regarding the action staff need to take and who to report to.

Leaders and managers have prioritised safeguarding training for staff. They facilitate whole-school training, which has included making sure that all staff understand changes to legislation. This ensures that all staff are aware of their responsibilities to safeguard children.

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

Leaders and managers are child focused and committed to providing the best possible care to children. Children are at the centre of everything, and their needs are prioritised.

Leaders and managers are not always aware of the day-to-day staffing arrangements in the residency. For example, they were not aware that the head of care was living on site from Monday to Friday. Leaders have not put in place clear guidance regarding expectations when the head of care is not on duty but still on site. Furthermore, the hours worked by the head of care are not reflected on the rota.

On occasions, physical intervention is needed to keep children safe. This is only used when necessary and for the shortest possible time. However, on one occasion, the manager carried out a physical intervention and completed the manager's oversight for appropriateness. On two occasions, the person carrying out the intervention had also completed child debriefs. This practice does not give children an opportunity to discuss concerns with someone not involved in the intervention or allow independent oversight.

Staff use consequences to promote positive behaviours by children; however, these are not recorded in a way which allows management oversight. As a result, there is no management oversight of the appropriateness or effectiveness of the consequence. This may result in inappropriate consequences being used and limited learning opportunities for children.

There is written guidance regarding the action staff need to take to evacuate children in the event of a fire. However, inspectors noted during discussions with staff that there was some confusion about what to do when evacuating a child who refuses to leave the building. Written instructions, views from parents and verbal advice from leaders are conflicting. This lack of clarity could cause confusion in an emergency.

Staff receive a variety of training to meet the needs of the children. However, records do not clearly show what training staff have received or when. This does not enable leaders and managers to have a clear understanding of staff's skills.

Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment procedures when employing new staff. This has included identifying shortfalls in employment history. However, leaders have not always verified references with the person who provided the reference.

Staff feel well supported by the management team. They are complimentary about the head of care and say that they can go to her at any time. Staff receive regular supervision, and new staff have comprehensive inductions which include probation reviews.

The governors have a firm commitment to the school and ensuring that children have the best possible care. They carry out visits and monitoring of the residential provision and provide support to the headteacher and challenge to leaders at the school. This supports the improvements being made to the care being given to children.

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 fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 2.4)
- The school keeps a register which shows for each child resident at the school: the dates of admission and departure of each child; who was responsible for their placement in the school; where they were living/accommodated before arriving at the school; where they are living/accommodated on leaving the school; the placing authority and legal status (if applicable); and duty rosters recording the identities of the staff and other persons who actually worked at the school or with children from the school, by day and night. The above records are retained for at least five years from the date of the last entry. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 5.4)
- All children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) incidents of restraint they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by, where possible within 24 hours. Discussions should take account of the age of the child, their capacity and cognitive ability and communication needs, and the circumstances of the restraint. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 20.5)
- Senior leaders should monitor the use of restraint, take appropriate action to prevent the inappropriate use of restraint, and take effective action when inappropriate restraint has been used. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 20.7)
- Children have access to a range and choice of safe recreational areas, indoors and outdoors, and there are safe areas at school where children can be alone if they wish. Schools should ensure that there is appropriate separation of areas for staff and pupils' recreation and socialising. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 23.3)
- Schools operate safer recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 24.1)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children can take responsibility for their own privacy through being able to lock their bedrooms.
- The registered person should ensure that children have opportunities to further develop their independence skills within the residency.
- The registered person should ensure that verbal information about fire evacuation procedures is the same as the written instructions.
- The registered person should ensure that consequences are recorded and there is management oversight of the effectiveness and appropriateness of those consequences.
- The registered person should ensure that there are records which clearly show what training individual staff have received and when.

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: SC043049

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Tina Partridge

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Debbie Bond, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Louise Battersby, Social Care Inspector

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