

Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Bowden House School is a weekly residential school supporting children between the ages of nine and 18 who have a range of complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are currently 33 children on the school roll. There were 27 children boarding at the time of the inspection.

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

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 October 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

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 last inspection: 20 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Staff care deeply about the children. The relentless vigilance and reliability of staff mean that children make exceptional progress physically, emotionally, socially and educationally.

Children have achieved some fantastic outcomes this year. They have excelled in their education and made huge strides in their personal development. This has resulted in improved life chances, with children having successful moves into higher education.

Children say that staff are helpful and supportive. They identify adults as people they trust and would approach confidently with any concerns or worries. One child said, 'The head is always positive and smiling when he comes around the school. He is easy to talk to and caring.'

Children with complex health needs such as diabetes and other life-changing medical conditions receive excellent care and support. Children benefit from the support of a skilled and passionate health lead who provides them with lots of opportunities to talk about their health and well-being.

The school has recruited a full-time child and adolescent mental health worker to enable children to get access to support quickly. The worker provides guidance and advice to the staff on effective strategies and support for individual children, as well as providing staff with enhanced mental health training. They have also developed strong links with external services. This enables children to get fast track access to relevant specialist services to support their mental health.

Staff set clear goals and targets for children each term and they track progress against these goals closely. Staff ensure that all the achievements of children are recognised and celebrated. Leaders recently introduced the 'Bowden cube', which enables children to track their progress visually by using a simple colour-coding scheme.

Parents are regularly updated on targets and progress, with half-termly reports. Children are placed at the heart of these reviews, having an input and taking an active role in decisions about their lives and futures.

The school is built on extensive grounds which provide children with access to a wide range of sports and recreational facilities.

The boarding provision is immaculately maintained by a dedicated team of domestic staff. Children's houses reflect their personalities and celebrate the uniqueness of each child.

Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own environment and they take great pride in keeping their bedrooms tidy and clean. The children's bedrooms are full of highly personal touches which strongly reflect their personal interests.

Staff promote a strong culture of mutual respect and trust. A staff member said: 'Bowden House is a remarkable place to work. The boys we educate and care for are remarkable too. These are children who have had such a difficult start in life and everyone, education, care, support, therapy and estates staff, always places the boys at the heart of everything they do.'

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

Safeguarding is given high priority by the senior leadership team and the governors, who work together to ensure that high-quality exemplary practice is embedded into every aspect of school life.

Children have often had complex starts in life and are highly vulnerable to risk, including criminal and sexual exploitation. They are kept safe by staff who have a deep understanding of their needs. Staff not only support the safeguarding of the children but are also acutely aware of their vulnerabilities when they return to their home communities.

Children say they feel safe, and parents express absolute trust in the school. Staff develop close relationships with families, which adds an additional level of safety. Staff are in close contact with parents. They visit children's family homes regularly and have a comprehensive understanding of children's backgrounds and family circumstances.

Staff form effective partnerships with safeguarding agencies and the police. This enables staff to have an awareness of emerging risks in the community. Staff take rapid action whenever concerns are raised, to ensure that risks are minimised.

Staff advocate well for the children to ensure that additional support from specialist agencies is secured.

Staff also provide strong examples of family work that has helped parents to provide more effective support for their children, including, in some cases, supporting their ability and resilience in managing behaviour. This has a direct impact on the safety and security of children at home.

Staff at the school recently led an initiative to produce child-friendly information on exploitation, internet safety and child-on-child abuse. This has been highly successful and led to the materials created being disseminated across a number of other schools.

Staff manage children with complex behaviours skilfully, with great warmth and care. Staff implement effective de-escalation strategies. This minimises the need to engage in restrictive holds to control children's behaviour. Staff ensure that, in cases when children are held for their own safety or the safety of others, incidents are recorded clearly.

One parent said, 'Staff are skilled at managing children's behaviour in a way that supports growth and development and avoids punishment.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The senior leadership team demonstrates an exceptional passion and commitment to continual improvement. The head of student welfare provides inspirational leadership to her team which ensures that students received high quality care and support throughout their time at the school.

The headteacher has many years of experience. This enables him to have a well-developed insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As a result, the headteacher and the senior leadership team have created bold and ambitious development plans that cover all areas of the school.

The headteacher ensures that he maintains a strong presence and visibility. He is ably supported by a strong senior leadership team which meets regularly to find solutions to any challenges or concerns. Senior leaders attend weekly safeguarding meetings. The headteacher also ensures that all incident records, safeguarding reports and significant event records come to him for oversight, analysis and feedback to staff.

Parents praise the headteacher for his support and engagement. The headteacher carries out regular 'check-ins' with parents to keep in touch with how they are experiencing the school and he supports them effectively with any concerns or worries they may have.

Communication and partnership working with external professionals are excellent. Professionals praised the participation of staff in important meetings relating to children, valuing their professional expertise and input. The headteacher ascribes much of the success of the school to the strength of their relationships with families and professionals. Nurturing these relationships ensures that children receive coherent and consistent care across all areas of their lives.

Staff speak passionately about the quality of support and supervision. Staff say there is genuine focus on their well-being. Initiatives such as whole-team well-being days, free sports massage and access to counselling contribute to positive mental health for the staff.

The school has a staff charter that places work-life balance at its heart. Staff benefit from a wide range of forums to discuss practice and to explore any emotional impact

of their work. The headteacher is a strong advocate of reflective practice and ensures that this is promoted in individual supervisions and staff meetings.

The school has launched a range of initiatives to tackle racism, homophobia and bullying. Children lead on an anti-bullying committee. The staff have also benefited from external expertise to explore issues around sexuality and identity. Staff work hard to create opportunities to engage with children and create dialogue around these issues. The headteacher gave examples where headway had been made with children of dual heritage or those who identify as non-binary, with them now being confident to express themselves in a safe environment.

Children say they have a voice and are able to identify many ways in which they contribute to the development of the school, including through the school council, food council and the anti-bullying group.

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: SC050152

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Aaron Sherwood

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Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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