

The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a maintained residential special school for 158 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses that are located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area in Lowestoft and caters for children with complex and moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

The head of care has been in post since May 2021. He has the necessary experience and is working towards a relevant qualification for the role.

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

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 January 2023

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 previous inspection: 2 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children at this school absolutely thrive. Children develop socially, emotionally and academically, making exceptional progress from their starting points. Children at this school beam with happiness and pride when in residence.

In November 2022, children's reading was recognised by an education charity as an area of excellence. Senior leaders listened to children's views and wishes about the texts available to them and made changes, which have led to increased literacy levels in the whole school. Residential staff help children to read in residence and this is built into the structure of evening activities. As a result, children's enjoyment of reading has flourished and their reading levels have improved.

Children's participation in bronze and silver Duke of Edinburgh awards is of clear and enduring benefit to children. The residential staff are the driving force behind the awards. Children's skill sets and confidence impressively improve because of their experiences in the Duke of Edinburgh activities. Activities consist of volunteering opportunities, outdoor education, team building and sporting activities, all of which are meticulously planned and carried out. Children have been on camping trips to Wales and Norfolk, learning new skills. One parent said, 'I never imagined my son would be able to sleep away from home, let alone sleep in a forest. Staying in residence has given him the confidence to go on a camping trip with friends.' Some children who have left the school have gone on to work towards the Duke of Edinburgh gold award in their further education settings. Children's participation in the award scheme has a profoundly positive impact on children's progress in a range of areas.

Staff teach children how to use sign language. This is incorporated into the children's after-school routines. This very inclusive practice enables children to communicate with other children in the school who have hearing loss. Additionally, this teaches children a new skill.

All children who left the school in July 2022 have maintained their further education courses. Transition planning for children in year 11 is exceptionally well coordinated and delivered. Staff consider the potential anxiety that children may face when they come to leave the school. Staff provide information for parents and carers about children's further education options. Staff also facilitate parents' evenings to discuss options. This increases families' awareness about available courses and reduces anxieties about the next steps when children move on.

The school has exceptionally strong links with the local community. As a result, children can access a broad range of opportunities to undertake work experience and increase their social skills. Special arrangements have been made with a local cafe for children to practise ordering and purchasing food and drink. Such opportunities

increase children's understanding, aid their development, and enable children to feel more connected to their local community.

Children's health needs related to speech and language are exceptionally well supported. Senior leaders have increased the staffing in the therapy team. The therapy team works towards improving children's functional language. Leaders have conducted a review of children's progress in language and communication since working with the therapy team. The review found that the functional language for each child has progressed. Senior leaders continually appraise and review what is working well and what needs to improve in the interests of the children. The development of the therapy team is a clear indicator of how effective appraisal and review have led to improved outcomes for children.

The residential staff are exceptionally nurturing, kind and committed to the children. Children benefit from the team's positive ethos and high standard of care. Children feel a sense of belonging in residence and have developed highly positive attachments to the residential staff.

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

Staff have highly effective systems to record, track and escalate safeguarding concerns. Low-level concerns are exceptionally well documented. Staff have a clear understanding that low-level concerns can lead to wider issues. Designated safeguarding leads progress and close concerns as appropriate. This enables targeted support to be requested at the right time for the right reasons. This is beneficial to children and their families. Staff are acutely aware of the issues that children are facing outside of school. Safeguarding leads are proactive and have, on several occasions, pre-empted wider concerns.

Senior leaders adapt their offer of residential availability to children who need additional support. This has led to children staying in residence for additional nights, sometimes with little notice. This support gives children consistency, a warm bed, good food, and an opportunity to experience nurturing relationships at a time when they have needed it most.

Senior leaders and staff have influence outside of the school that supports the needs of families. Staff have taken food parcels to families, provided holiday schemes to children in the summer holiday, and provided practical advice about behaviour, online safety and life skills to parents, who have appreciated this help.

Staff's approach to risk assessments is rigorous yet not risk averse. This ensures that children have access to a broad range of activities and that individual risks are suitably mitigated.

Children do not go missing from residence. The use of restraint has not been required in residence since 2019. Staff are exceptionally skilled at managing

behaviour. This ensures that children have positive interactions and experiences with other children.

Children unanimously said that bullying is not an issue in residence. All children were able to name an adult whom they trust to share concerns with. Group dynamic risks are managed exceptionally well. The robust planning for children to reside together ensures that conflict and the potential for incidents are sufficiently reduced.

The staff have exceptionally good links with the police. The police liaison officer regularly visits the school to provide sessions on knife crime, county lines and dangers online. Not only does this resource inform children's understanding, but it also improves children's perceptions of the police, which may have been previously negative.

Online safety is taken extremely seriously by education and residential staff. Online safety discussions are routinely held in residence. This complements the school curriculum exceptionally well. The personal, social, health and economic lead has conducted research on whether child-on-child abuse is a concern at the school. Findings suggest that this was not a concern. However, the staff are not complacent. Although they are confident that children can keep themselves safe online, they continue to look for ways to strengthen this understanding.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of care is exceptionally well respected by staff and has a clear focus on staff's well-being. Parents speak about the head of care with fondness, attributing the positive changes that they see in their children as a direct consequence of his warm leadership.

Leaders and managers have exceptionally high aspirations for children. They inspire children to do their very best in residence and school. The ambition that leaders and managers have for children has influence beyond the school, extending to families. One parent said, 'I would have never let my child use a kettle or toaster at home. Seeing how the residential staff safely managed it gave me the confidence to do it too.' Parents are confident in leaders' and managers' oversight and care.

Leaders and managers create a culture of aspiration and positivity. They have high expectations of their staff to change and improve the lives of the children who they are responsible for.

Leaders and managers fully understand the importance of collaborative working with other professionals to meet children's needs. Leaders and managers establish and maintain trusted relationships with other professionals. Leaders and managers tenaciously challenge other professionals if their actions or inaction are not in the best interests of children. This helps to keep children safe and minimises potential gaps in practice.

Leaders and managers have a clear vision for improvement that continues to evolve. Despite the residential provision being judged by Ofsted as outstanding since 2016, senior leaders are not complacent. They continually consider how to improve on the very high standards that are already firmly embedded. Senior leaders consistently seek continual external scrutiny and review. This helps to improve practice. Senior leaders use external feedback to exceptionally good effect. Changes to the curriculum and the offer of therapeutic support have improved in response to assessment and review. Senior leaders spend time in other residential and education provisions. As well as receiving external advice and counsel, senior leaders share their very high care and education practices with other professionals.

The school is part of national and local professional networks. Currently, all 18 leaders at the school are participating in an externally led initiative to build on and improve leadership skills. The head of care recently spent three days on external leadership training. This demonstrates the aspirational drive that leaders have to continually evolve their practice to be the best of the best. Additionally, this demonstrates the commitment that senior leaders have to professionally developing staff's skills.

Appraisal targets are clearly defined, highly aspirational and develop staff's skills professionally. This benefits staff and feeds into the wider aspirational culture of the school.

The school uses a variety of research-informed practices to enhance outcomes and improve the lived experience for children. As a result of the varying models in use, there have been notable improvements in children's behaviour and emotional well-being, speech, emotional understanding, and levels of confidence. Staff are exceptionally well attuned to children. Children feel that they are in a safe environment in which they can try new things, make mistakes without judgement, and make progress and develop.

Providers of external monitoring and the body of trustees have rich and diverse experiences in education and social care. Therefore, the advice, support and guidance available to the school are of extremely high quality. Senior leaders are highly motivated to improve and evolve. Having access to high-quality external scrutiny ensures that residence continually meets the very high expectations set.

Residence is maintained to an exceptionally high standard. Staff maximise the space they use to encourage children to continually learn and develop their potential. The notice boards in residence provide stimulating information that increases children's knowledge and awareness of aspects related to social and emotional learning. Messages about internet safety are abundant, yet the environment is maintained in a child-friendly way. The staff use characters that children are drawn to and superheroes to convey important messages. This draws children in and holds their attention to the important messages, supporting the 24-hour curriculum of the school.

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: SC024573

Headteacher: Sally Garrett

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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