

Ash Field Academy

Ash Field School, Broad Avenue, Leicester LE5 4PY

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an academy school with 165 pupils. The residential provision is a dedicated area in the main school and caters for up to 18 children at any time. Children in the residential provision are aged eight to 19. Children have physical disabilities and/or complex health conditions, as well as associated communication, sensory and learning needs. Children usually access the residential service for one or two nights a week.

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

Inspection dates: 17 - 19 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: 25 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thoroughly enjoy their residential experience. They enjoy meeting up with their friends and having a 'sleepover'. This is something they often can't do at home. A parent said: 'It's her favourite bit of school [staying at the school].' The children are caring and empathetic towards each other. They are inspirational in the way they care for others when they have high needs themselves. The children learn new skills which help them to become more independent, both at school and in their homes.

Some children have complex healthcare needs. Healthcare is meticulously and carefully managed to ensure that staff can provide children with the best healthcare while they are at the school. This includes daily access to specialist qualified nurses and a range of other healthcare professionals that the children rely on. Staff have training to ensure that they can manage children's health competently. This ranges from enteral feeding to epilepsy awareness.

Children have demonstrated genuine passion for the residential provision and have advocated for it strongly in a local authority funding review. This takes confidence and a strong belief in what they are saying. The school has empowered children by giving them the confidence and self-belief to speak out. Children initially wrote to the principal asking why they were not being consulted. The principal wrote to the local authority to ask if they could consult with children as well as their parents, carers and staff. Consequently, representatives from the local authority met with children. Children prepared speeches and were outspoken during the meeting. One child said: "'Resi' keeps us motivated to do things that we haven't been able to do before. It helps our emotional needs as well as education, our well-being, which then helps us to learn how to cope. It's like a second family. That's what makes 'Resi' stand out.'

Children make exceptional progress in their life skills, their ability to socialise with peers, developing confidence, self-worth, careers and their behaviour and attitudes. A parent said: 'They have brought my son on in leaps and bounds. Hygiene wise, communication, behaviour, they are a fantastic group. They are consistent with the routine I have at home.' Individual children's goals are linked to school goals and the children's education, health and care plan (EHCP). The children's progress is carefully tracked. Some children leaving school are preparing for adulthood by participating in work experience. Some children are being considered for apprenticeship schemes.

Children's views, wishes and feelings are central to the residential provision and how it is managed. The pupil voice meetings are just one aspect of how children express their views. The requests from children that are carried out are called 'You said, we did' and many requests from children have been taken seriously and implemented. However, minutes from these meetings do not detail whether feedback to children has been given about any requests that could not be actioned and why.

Children thoroughly enjoy the activities offered. There are weekly activities such as dance, games and sport. Dance and sport are facilitated by external professionals such as a sports coach from a local rugby team. Activities are differentiated to meet each child's needs. Staff provide appropriate but sensitive support to the children. Although all the activities are educationally focused, helping children with their movement, life skills, decision-making and general education is the main aim, and to have fun.

The information about the child (the care plan) is stored within a folder that travels around the school with the child, from class to the residential provision. The information is from a range of sources including parents and healthcare professionals. Information is well organised and easy to read. Staff have access to the most up-to-date information about each child and this helps them to provide excellent care.

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

The safety of children is a high priority in the school. It is a strong part of the culture of the school. Leaders and managers ensure that staff are highly trained and that they report any concerns, no matter how small. Children and their families are very well supported, which helps to keep children safe. Staff work effectively and collaboratively with a wide range of other professionals to ensure children's safety and well-being.

The residential provision is highly staffed. This helps to always keep children safe. There is always a designated safeguarding lead or member of staff who sleep in the residential provision, as well as three staff who remain awake all night to respond to children during the night. However, formal monitoring of the overnight provision is not yet carried out.

Children know how to make a complaint, but have not made any formal complaints. They have had a few grumbles, which have been dealt with immediately, for example opening a window when children have felt too warm, or providing extra blankets if children feel cold in bed.

Children are exceptionally well behaved. They are polite and helpful. There have been no incidents within the residential provision since the last inspection. Children do not go missing from the school. They choose to attend the residential provision and thoroughly enjoy the experience. Parents say that their children are safe and that they trust the staff team. This is reiterated by children.

Risk management is carefully considered to ensure that children remain safe. For example, activities are carefully risk assessed. The head of care will be attending a youth club in the local community because it is being considered for another weekly activity. She wants to make sure that the club is suitable for the children and that any risks are mitigated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership and management team is fully committed and passionate about providing outstanding care, education and support for children and their families.

Leaders and managers continue to inspire and motivate staff to work to their very best with the children. Children's confidence and self-esteem has been highly developed because of excellent leadership and management. For example, children have voiced their views within a consultation meeting for a funding review of the residential provision.

Research continues to be a strength of this school. Recent research has included looking at important issues such as children moving on into employment and communication with children who are unable to communicate in the usual ways. This has already had a positive impact on practice to ensure that children have the best life chances when they leave the school.

Staff receive excellent training opportunities to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to meet the complex needs of the children they care for.

The trustees are highly committed to the residential provision and can express the importance of the provision for children and their families. They have a thorough understanding of the service and how they wish to strengthen the provision further. They are fully supportive of the ethos of the residential provision. The trustees are concerned about the current funding review and fully endorse the activities within the provision to put forward a case for the provision to remain open.

The trustee with responsibility for safeguarding is also the chair. This demonstrates the importance attached to this pivotal role. The safeguarding trustee takes her role very seriously and has a thorough understanding of the role the school plays in keeping children safe.

Staff are dedicated to supporting the children's health and well-being, but also ensuring they have a fun experience. Staff know the children very well and this helps them to understand those who are unable to verbally communicate. Most staff are qualified and very experienced. They say that they care about the children, and this is plainly evident.

Staff are very well supported in their roles. There are weekly meetings with a member of the senior leadership team for managers and termly team meetings for staff. However, the minutes of the team meetings do not suggest that safeguarding children is discussed as a rolling agenda item. This is a missed opportunity to discuss the safety of children, although this is discussed in many other forums.

Staff work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that care and practice is consistent across the home and the residential provision. Parents and carers are

positive about the residential provision. They feel that the provision strongly benefits their children. Any suggestions for improvement have been acted on quickly. They say that their children love the residential experience and have made exceptional progress. A carer said: 'He was up early this morning and ready to go to residential.' Communication with parents and carers is excellent.

The independent visitor is known by the children. She produces a very detailed report with clear actions for consideration. The report is in depth and evaluative. This helps leaders and managers to continually improve the residential provision offered to children.

The funding review has been an anxious time for children, staff, parents and carers. They all expressed concern that the residential provision will be closed. A carer said: 'If this place shuts, then families will hit crisis point. For a lot of parents, it's a lifeline.' A child said: 'When I walk into "Resi", it's joyful and jolly. When you go in you instantly feel calm, safe, start to feel at home. The staff are lovely. You get to do activities and you get to chill out and express how you feel. When you walk in, it's a heart-warming place to be. You know you'll be in safe hands and have a good time.'

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

- In addition to the 'You said, we did' board, consider providing children with feedback about any requests they have made that staff are unable to fulfil and why. (Linked to NMS 18)
- Consider monitoring care during the night to ensure that leaders have a good understanding of the care that is given during this time. (Linked to NMS 2)
- Consider including discussions about safeguarding children at every team meeting. (Linked to NMS 13)

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: SC006451

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Jenny Eshelby

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Inspector

Joanne Vyas, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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