

Unsted Park School

Castle Care Group, United Regional Office, Munstead Heath Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1UW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school provides specialist education and care to children aged seven to 19 years with high functioning autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome and associated disorders. There are currently 83 students on the school roll.

Six students were staying at the residential provision at the time of the inspection. The head of residential care has been in post for two years and has a relevant qualification required by the national minimum standards.

Inspection dates: 31 January to 2 February 2023

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 previous inspection: 30 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are supported to make exceptional progress in their educational attainment and personal and social development. Many of them had been out of education for some time before their admission to the school. Staff have worked hard to create a safe, warm and supportive space at the school in which they thrive. One child said, 'It is like my second home.'

Children benefit from a spacious and well-appointed residential space that is filled with all the things they need to enjoy their recreation, as well as space for study when required. Staff perfectly balance the opportunities for social engagement and quiet time to unwind from the school day.

Staff encourage children to develop their independence. Children enjoy making their own weekly meal plans, going shopping, participating in cooking and personalising their living space. One parent said that their child has developed a range of independence skills that he had never displayed before and has really matured during his time at the school.

Staff work hard to maintain trusting relationships with every child. As a result, children are confident to raise concerns with the knowledge that staff will always act on them.

Staff are highly skilled and knowledgeable to meet children's broad range of needs. Plans are highly individualised and allow for careful monitoring and tracking of progress. Staff have created a new 'Unsted Journey' format, which provides pictorial and descriptive accounts of the children's progress through the school. Children have been able to take these with them and cherish them when they move on into their next stages of life.

Children feel heard. During the inspection, the inspector observed many examples of staff seeking out the views of children. Staff are quick to adapt the environment and their practice to ensure that they address children's wishes.

Staff instil the importance of education and how this is a golden door to success. This commitment is illustrated in the staff's dedication to supporting children to make positive moves into further and higher education.

In cases when staff recognise that they are unable to meet the additional complex needs of a child, they advocate for them tirelessly. This support has enabled children to move to services that can best meet their presenting needs.

Staff benefit from targeted research into the specific needs of children at the school. Staff seek out knowledge and advice from experts in the sector. Recent research

initiatives on trauma-informed practice, canine therapy, understanding attachment and eating disorders have all supported staff to achieve life-changing progress for the children in their care.

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

Skilled and knowledgeable staff ensure that children's safety and well-being are always paramount. Staff have a detailed understanding of children's specific risks. They use well-constructed risk assessments and risk management strategies to ensure that children with complex needs feel safe and supported throughout their time at the school. Plans are frequently and promptly updated to consider any changes in behaviour or presentation.

Staff give children a direct voice in the creation of their own risk plans. In one example, a child had been able to negotiate the terms of their own safety plan. This enabled them to re-engage in school life, maintaining a sense of personal autonomy while enabling staff to keep them safe.

An embedded pastoral care team has created some innovative and productive lines of communication with the student body. The use of QR codes around the school provides students with a rapid way to log any concerns or complaints with the school. When students raised concerns about the use of language around gender and sexuality by some students, pastoral staff created open forums for discussion and dialogue about these issues. This helped to create some strong links with external agencies, led to initiatives such as the formation of a school LGBTQ+ forum and enhanced the confidence of students in calling out negative stereotyping and poor behaviour.

Staff are skilled at managing any challenging or difficult behaviours constructively and creatively. This has reduced the need for any restrictive interventions in the residential provision to zero. Staff have a good understanding of wider safeguarding networks around the child, and they form strong partnerships with professionals and parents alike.

Staff take good advantage of the high-quality relationships they have with children to promote honest and open dialogue about risk. This has enabled children to learn to make safe choices, and they take this learning with them into their adult lives.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers demonstrate a quiet assuredness that they have created a special space for children in the residential provision. Through modelling their strong values and beliefs about effective care for children with complex needs, they have created a strong and effective team that shares their values.

Despite leaders having confidence in the quality of support that children receive, they are committed to continuous improvement. They seek out innovative and creative ways to improve the experience of children at the school.

Leaders demonstrate an incisive understanding of the individual needs of the children. They ensure that staff gain access to high-quality targeted training to enable them to meet those needs effectively.

Leaders use strong quantitative and qualitative analytical data to track children's progress through the school. This enables them to have a detailed understanding of what the school does well and allows for the creation of ambitious plans for improvement.

Leaders use internal and external monitoring processes well to ensure that they strive for continual progress. There is strong operational oversight of the school, and leaders work in close partnership with senior leaders in their parent organisation.

Staff praise the leaders highly and recognise the contribution they have made to an excellent team dynamic. Staff spoke with emotion about the quality of support they receive and the leaders excellent understanding of the pressures they face, in and out of work. This support promotes staff retention. This year, there have been cases of staff leaving and quickly returning to employment at the school because they cannot replicate this team dynamic in other roles. This, in turn, creates a stable and highly consistent environment for the children.

Leaders advocate passionately for children and are always willing to challenge constructively when required to secure the best outcomes for the children in their care.

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: SC363144

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Daniel Goldstraw

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Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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