

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford School is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged from seven to 19 years of age, with dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties. At the time of this inspection, there were 156 children attending the school. Of these children, 63 use the boarding provision at the school. Most boarders stay a full week at school, some include weekends, and some have flexible arrangements. During the inspection, 35 boarders were away on a residential school trip.

The boarding accommodation is provided in three areas on the school site, with a fourth house for older boys just outside the school grounds. One sixth former lives with a host family. The co-heads of boarding are newly appointed since the last inspection. Both are awaiting sign off for the relevant certification.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 February 2023

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 good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 18 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarders receive warm and nurturing care from a staff team that knows them well. The passion staff have to support boarders shines through. Boarders enjoy their time at school, making strong friendships and enjoying the activities and opportunities available to them. Staff support boarders to develop links with the local community, such as in charity fundraisers. A life-skills programme has been restarted in boarding to develop skills around budgeting and planning for a meal. Boarders have enjoyed following this through to cook a dish of their choice. Boarders benefit from the education offered by the school. Last year's boarders achieved positive GCSE results, leading to further education opportunities.

Boarders express their views or seek to make changes through well-established school and boarding councils. Consultation with boarders around food choices has been reflected in changes to menus. Regular house meetings take place, which offer boarders further opportunities to have a say about the issues that are important to them. Boarders confidently share their views and make suggestions. However, it is not always clear how feedback about their suggestions is given to boarders.

The therapy team works collaboratively across the whole school to ensure that the needs of boarders are met. There is a whole-school ethos surrounding information relating to boarders, which leads to joint working on plans. However, as a result, these plans and documents can lack information that relates specifically to support in boarding.

Parents are positive about the support boarders receive. They describe staff as friendly, caring and supportive. They feel that their children are safe and well cared for. Parents identified that they would like to see more structure with the activities offered to boarders.

The boarding accommodation is of mixed quality. Some houses are homely and welcoming; however, one is in need of decorative attention. In one boarding house, the accommodation for the house parent is not sufficiently separate from the boarders. While this supports a homely feel, it gives the house parent very little personal space.

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

The understanding and identification of safeguarding concerns in the school are strengths. Staff receive regular, clear information to ensure that they understand policies and procedures. Leaders and managers have developed a positive safeguarding culture, encouraging staff to share any concerns they have. This results in swift action being taken if there are concerns about a member of staff's practice. Staff understand boarders and their individual needs, as well as the impact of

cumulative concerns. As a result, staff make referrals to relevant support or safeguarding agencies when needed.

Boarders said that they feel safe at the school, and can identify staff they can speak to if they have any worries. Boarders experience clear and consistent boundaries. Older boarders and their parents shared worries that the rules can be too restrictive. They said that they cannot do things others their age might, such as visit the local shop alone. Decisions taken by the school focus on safety concerns. However, there are missed opportunities to support boarders to take age-appropriate risks to prepare them for life beyond the school. The formal life-skills programme in place does not yet support this fully.

The management and oversight of health and safety in the boarding provision are good. When appropriate, specialist agencies are used to respond to actions needed. Regular fire drills and checks of firefighting equipment take place, which helps to protect children.

Safer recruitment processes are used to employ staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, new leadership is in place for both the school and boarding. All appointments have been promotions from within the school, ensuring continuity for boarders. The new headteacher is experienced in both safeguarding and boarding, bringing strong oversight of these areas. An experienced, long-standing staff team provides continuity of care for boarders. Boarding staff recognise the importance of their role in delivering stability for boarders. However, staff said that communication with them by leaders and managers could be improved. There have been a number of changes in a short space of time, and it is not clear that staff are always consulted and the impact on them considered.

Boarding staff have access to a wide range of introductory and awareness training courses. These provide staff with an insight into how to recognise and manage children's presenting needs. Boarding staff receive annual appraisals. Supervision of staff takes place. However, it does not currently offer them the opportunity to reflect on their practice and the needs of children. Team meetings take place weekly. The records of these show discussion held about boarders and their presenting needs. These meetings also celebrate boarders' successes, through identifying a 'boarder of the week'.

The proprietor maintains good oversight of the boarding provision. Monitoring reports completed by the advisory board show clear oversight of safeguarding and the views of boarders.

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:

- School leaders should ensure that there is suitable separation between the living areas for house parents and boarders. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 25.11)
- School leaders should ensure that staff are provided with the opportunity for reflective supervision which discusses the needs of boarders. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 26.6)

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that the decor of the residential provision is consistently maintained to promote a homely environment.
- School leaders should ensure that older boarders have opportunities to develop the social and emotional skills needed for adulthood.
- School leaders should ensure that there are clear and consistently used systems to feed back outcomes to boarders when their views have been sought.
- School leaders should consider how records and documents can better reflect the support needs for boarders when staying in the boarding provision.

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: SC039141

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Fiona Filkins

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Clare Nixson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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