

Alfriston School

Alfriston School, Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire HP9 2TS

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Alfriston School is a day and weekly boarding special school for girls aged 11 to 18 with moderate learning difficulties. The school may also help girls to overcome emotional difficulties and minor mobility and sensory disabilities. Boarders stay at the school for three nights each week, from Monday to Thursday.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 March 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 last inspection: 25 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time in boarding. They have access to a wide range of activities that are not available to them when they are at home. Parents, social workers and pupils all acknowledge how significant it is for them to be able to spend time making and having friends and developing social and independence skills.

Boarding staff create an environment where pupils feel cared for and they can continue to learn. Pupils have trusting relationships with staff. They know who they can talk to about any issues or challenges that they may have. Staff ensure that they are available to them when they need support.

Parents are full of praise for the experiences their children have in boarding and how they manage any concerns there. They are clear that pupils grow in their confidence and ability to communicate. Parents say that they never worry about pupils when they are in boarding.

Leaders have developed a unique curriculum and transition plan that allows pupils to progress. This results in detailed care plans that are based on education, health and care plan targets. This gives pupils a truly bespoke education and care experience, and it is clear to see the progress that they make.

Pupils' emotional needs and progress are well understood. As well as the team immediately supporting pupils, there is a devoted well-being team comprised of therapy professionals from different backgrounds. The well-being team links with safeguarding leads to ensure that any concerns can be quickly responded to.

Boarding is an extension to the school day and pupils are constantly encouraged to develop independence skills. They also have fun. Pupils talk fondly about games they play, time at youth club and opportunities to practise cooking, and some pupils were able to go on a recent skiing trip.

Pupils' views are well considered in boarding. Weekly meetings and good daily communication allow pupils to truly feel that they contribute to what happens when they are there. Choices were offered throughout the inspection, especially in relation to food. Pupils expressed some uncertainty about the impact of the new catering company.

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

Risks are well understood and identified throughout the school. There is a good response from senior leaders to make sure that risks are identified and, when significant, are responded to with a detailed safety plan.

However, it is evident that some of the information in safety plans is not routinely shared with the staff working directly with the children. Recent known risks regarding self-harm have not been included in the written risk plans in boarding. Despite this, staff demonstrate a good knowledge of pupils' behaviour and care for them with consistent boundaries and expectations. This has resulted in staff caring for a group of pupils whose behaviour is managed well without the necessity for restraint or the risk of going missing from the home.

Children do not have access to the internet through their devices in school but they are taught about online risks. Good pastoral work in school and work with parents ensures that pupils are well educated to know these risks when they do have access to devices.

Since the last inspection, a revised system to check health and safety has been introduced. This has provided a far greater oversight of checks and ensures that any identified actions are resolved in good timescales.

Robust recruitment procedures ensure that staff go through a thorough vetting process to make sure that they are suitable. Leaders have high expectations of who is good enough to work with the girls in boarding.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders across the school and in boarding have high aspirations for the pupils who stay. There is an expectation that the boarding experience is an extension of the school day and therefore pupils are encouraged to increase their skills while also enjoying themselves.

The needs of pupils are well understood and staff advocate exceptionally well on behalf of pupils if there are concerns. There are good examples of the school holding external professionals to account to make sure that decisions are taken in the best interests of pupils. This has supported pupils to make positive progress.

Senior leaders ensure that they are very available to the staff in boarding. One of the senior leaders is regularly either on call to boarding staff or working alongside them, which provides good oversight. Regular staff meetings and 'check-ins', as well as detailed appraisals, give staff direction in their work. Staff in boarding receive regular supervision. However, this has not extended to the head of residential, who has not had termly supervision.

The governing body has good oversight of boarding, making regular visits and producing an action plan following each visit. Action plans have been quickly followed up, with action taken to rectify any issues raised. Senior leaders believed this was a suitable replacement for an independent visitor. However, this does not replace the need for independent monitoring.

Leaders and managers promote equality and diversity well across the school. When one pupil changed how they wish to be known, this was well understood and respected by peers and staff. However, staff would benefit from specific training in relation to gender identity issues. The curriculum allows for all pupils to succeed, no matter what their starting point, and there is a good degree of appropriate challenge to the pupils to support them to succeed.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The governing body, trustees, or proprietor of the school appoint a representative who is independent of the leadership and management of the school to visit the residential provision six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 3.1)
- All staff have access to relevant support and advice for their role. They also have at least termly supervision and a formal annual appraisal of their performance. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 26.6)

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure all information in relation to risk is shared with the team working in boarding.
- School leaders should ensure that staff receive training relevant to the needs of pupils.

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: SC023097

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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