

# Valence School

Valence School, Westerham Road, Westerham, Kent TN16 1QN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this residential special school**

Valence School is a maintained residential special school. The school caters for students with physical disabilities and complex medical needs. Currently, 35 students aged 13 and over, stay in seven of the eight residential bungalows. Residential students board from Monday to Friday. The residential accommodation is situated in the school grounds.

The residential manager has worked at the school for almost 20 years and has the appropriate experience and qualifications.

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

### **Inspection dates: 14 to 16 March 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:** 1 March 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Students make exceptional and sustained progress from their starting points, because of the excellent-quality support that they receive from the residential staff. The highly ambitious, committed and creative staff team understands the students' individual needs and enables this progress. The students' quality of life and future opportunities are enhanced as a direct result of their stays at this exceptionally nurturing, stimulating and learning-orientated residential provision.

Relationships between students and staff are consistently strong. Students feel comfortable in the care of the staff. They know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset. Students flourish, developing friendships and social skills. The students have genuine affection for each other. During the inspection, students were seen supporting each other with physical tasks and communication. The students empower each other, boosting their sense of pride and self-esteem.

Students are provided with exciting opportunities, such as visits to top rugby matches and London attractions. Forward-thinking and enthusiastic staff are committed to furthering students' social experiences. Creative planning introduces the students to a wide range of local activities that help to broaden their experience of the world around them.

The school's learning pathway approach is embedded throughout the residential setting. Students are allocated one of three pathways, which meets their intellectual, physical, social and emotional needs. Independence is fully encouraged, and staff are exceptionally kind and considered in their approach. Students are continually, yet sensitively, prompted to problem-solve and be as self-sufficient as they can. Achievements are widely celebrated and demonstrate the impressive impact that the school has on the students.

Staff have a good awareness of the 'preparation for adulthood' toolkit that is being used for students. There is clear understanding regarding how this toolkit links into the actions stated in students' education, health and care plans. Provision of care and support is highly individualised to ensure that individual needs are consistently worked towards. There is a whole-school approach to developing the students' potential.

Students working towards GCSEs are actively supported by residential staff to undertake revision. Time is also dedicated in residence to completing homework. This supports the students' academic progression.

Students experience well-organised inductions to the residential provision. Introductions are planned between the student, their family and residential staff at a

pace that is right for the student. As a result, these introductions are consistently successful.

Students are exceptionally well supported when their time comes to leave the school. During leavers' week, there are barbecues, community trips and leavers' assemblies. The students' prom is held at the nearby golf club, with a grand fireworks finale. Such activities provide students with a positive ending to their time at the school.

Feedback from parents is unreservedly positive. Parents said that their children are happy and excited to come to the residential setting, with students often asking if they can have more nights here. One parent said that her child 'would live here full time if he could, he's living his best life'.

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

Safeguarding students remains a high priority in the school and the residential provision. Comprehensive safeguarding training ensures that exceptional safeguarding practices are embedded throughout the school. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Concerns are reported effectively and followed up with appropriate agencies to ensure that students are protected from harm.

The members of the senior management team are the designated safeguarding leads for the school. Monitoring of safeguarding is meticulous. Safeguarding reports and presentations provide governors with comprehensive reviews of safeguarding data over the previous two terms. This adds another level of scrutiny and review to ensure that residential students are safe, and their well-being is fully considered.

Exemplary monitoring and routine checks ensure that the physical environment is in excellent condition. The range and quality of specialised equipment available for students is astounding. The school employs nurses and therapists who work in partnership with the school staff. When safely possible, therapy tasks are delegated to trained school staff. Consequently, there are several skilled staff who can care for and support the students in school.

Students are provided with excellent opportunities to discuss their views, feelings and wishes. Regular student meetings are held, where a variety of subjects central to students' lives are discussed. An ex-pupil of the school fills the role of the independent person. She visits the residential setting regularly and the students are confident to raise concerns with her. The governors and an independent visitor also undertake detailed monitoring visits, which involve talking with students. Therefore, there are a wide range of adults who the students know and can talk to.

Highly effective risk assessments ensure that staff are well informed and consistent in how they support the students with their independence, behaviour and health. Any use of the internet and social media is assessed, and safety measures put in place. The school's newsletters also share information and internet links with parents, to

help them keep their children safe on social media. Students take part in role-play scenarios with the staff, to aid their understanding of how to respond to unsafe or difficult situations that they might face in the community. Consequently, students' awareness of risks and how to manage them increases.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The vice principal, who oversees the residential setting, is inspirational and has extremely high aspirations for the students. The vice principal and the residential care manager are ambitious in promoting positive experiences for all the students at the school and in the residential provision. The impact on the students and their families is profound.

Leaders and managers have exceptionally positive relationships with parents and professionals.

The management team has a comprehensive knowledge of the students. The team is insightful and understands the students' plans. Case records are clear, providing exceptional examples of the students' achievements.

Leaders and managers are strong advocates for the students. The vice principal will challenge external professionals when she feels the actions being taken are not in the best interests of the students. On occasions, this support has been extended to students who no longer attend the school.

Staff said that they are listened to and supported. Managers are reported to be visible and approachable. Termly supervisions are of a high quality. Staff's performance is reviewed annually to ensure continued professional development. Wide-ranging, high-quality training equips the staff extremely well to meet the students' needs. Development opportunities demonstrate the school's commitment and investment in staff's professional development. As a result, the staff feel valued.

There is a comprehensive, two-year development plan for the residential provision. It clearly details the strategies for the next two years for residential enhancement and is used to drive improvements.

External and internal monitoring arrangements are exceptionally rigorous. Leaders and managers make good use of external monitoring visits by an independent visitor and governors. This external monitoring is undertaken to an excellent standard and provides comprehensive and objective scrutiny of the quality of care. Meticulous monitoring supports leaders and managers in their understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the residential provision. Any actions taken in response to this monitoring further enhances the high-quality care that the children receive.

## **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:** SC041791

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Roland Gooding/Lisa Kavanagh

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Rachel Watkinson, Social Care Inspector (lead)  
Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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