

# Vale of Evesham School

Vale of Evesham School, Four Pools Lane, Evesham, Worcestershire WR11 1BN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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

The school is an academy and is responsible to a governing body. The school is an all-age generic special school, taking pupils from the age of 2 to 19 with cognition and learning needs and pupils with autism. The school has 184 pupils on roll, with a weekly residential provision, Blossom House.

The boarding service operates from Monday to Friday and provides care and accommodation for up to 15 boys and girls across three suites. There were nine children boarding at the time of the inspection.

The head of care holds appropriate qualifications. She remains on site from Monday to Friday to support the care of children and have oversight of the boarding provision.

### **Inspection dates: 26 to 28 September 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:** 19 October 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children make good progress while in residence. There are clear targets in place to enable staff to support children and to monitor progress. Leaders work hard to make continuous improvements to make this more effective. This demonstrates that leaders and staff are focused on developing new systems to support children to make ongoing progress.

Children have built strong relationships with the adults who care for them. Relationships between the staff and children are warm, affectionate and loving. Staff are child-centred and supportive of children's individual needs. They respond to children sensitively and with compassion, as well as providing consistent, individualised support. This helps children to build trust and feel safe and relaxed in their surroundings.

Children move between residence and school seamlessly. Staff work well with education staff to ensure that children have good transitions. Staff from both sides of the school communicate well with each other and handovers are clear and detailed.

Staff regularly seek children's views so they can act on their wishes. For example, children meet regularly and talk about menu choices. Staff pass these to the kitchen staff, who arrange menus so children can eat the foods that they enjoy. The kitchen staff involve themselves in children's care. They spend time with children setting up breakfast. The new catering manager also held a pizza-making activity with children to get to know them better. She considered all dietary requirements, so that everyone could take part. This contributes to the overall care children receive from all staff.

Staff work hard to support children to develop their individual independence skills. For some children, this may mean learning how to make their choice of snacks, for others, this involves them doing chores, such as laundry. Staff have high aspirations for children and want to help children to achieve.

The residential environment is homely and warm. Children's belongings fill the space, and children's artwork and certificates are on display. Books and games are easily accessible and soft furnishings help to maintain a nurturing feel. Children personalise their bedrooms in ways that meet their needs and staff help them keep them tidy. However, plans to upgrade areas of the home, including children's bedroom doors, have not yet come to fruition. This means that children who are ready to have more control of their privacy and the security of their room are not yet able to develop this.

Staff understand children's individual communication needs. Staff spend time getting to know children and to understand their views. Staff listen to the children's views and act on the choices they make. Staff are creative and use a range of resources to

find out children's wishes and feelings. For example, choice boards are used to encourage children to communicate.

Children are actively encouraged to develop all their interests. Staff identify and nurture these well. Staff carefully consider how activities can help children's development, as well as having an emphasis on children enjoying themselves. For example, children regularly attend forest school where they learn outdoor skills.

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

Leaders ensure that there is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. Safeguarding procedures are clear and staff know the processes to follow if any concerns arise. This includes working with external professionals. This contributes to an all-round effective safeguarding approach.

Leaders take allegations seriously. They ensure detailed investigations are carried out. As a result, leaders are confident that staff working with children are safe to do so.

Staff ensure that the environment is safe for children to live in. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks to assess whether there are any hazards to children. Children take part in regular fire drills. They all have personal emergency evacuation plans so staff know how to safely evacuate them in an emergency.

Staff provide constant care and supervision to children. Consequently, there are no incidents of children going missing from the school and no concerns about exploitation while children are at school. Leaders ensure staff receive training in these areas and learn about local risks, because children who are weekly boarders spend time in the local community. Staff have regular safeguarding training and discuss their learning and understanding of safeguarding practices in their supervision sessions. This ensures that safeguarding practice is strong and remains a priority. Staff know the children very well and are confident they would notice indicators of abuse or other difficulties. This adds a further layer of protection for children.

Leaders have clear systems for training in the administration of medication. Staff understand and use the school's procedures well. Medication errors are very rare. When staff make errors, these are quickly identified and staff seek medical support and monitor children as needed. Leaders help staff learn from these incidents, which contributes to medication errors being so infrequent.

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

Committed leaders are child-centred and want the best for children. They are extremely ambitious for children. The head of care is suitably qualified, experienced and knowledgeable. She has the complete confidence of staff. Leaders have introduced a deputy head of care to support with operational management. This means that oversight has improved, and the school meets its stated aims and objectives well. Leaders consider the residential suites as an integral part of the school. The school senior leadership team takes joint ownership of the provision of this service.

Monitoring of the care that staff provide in residence is comprehensive. There is a skilled and experienced independent visitor. Governors and senior leaders also visit regularly and provide a supportive listening service for children. Governors are supportive and positively challenging. They have confidence in the care children receive. These visits all help staff to consider any areas for improvement, as well as celebrating successes. These measures contribute to the positive environment children live in.

The school has detailed policies to guide staff. They mostly relate to the specific difficulties that the children at the school may have. Unfortunately, some do not take account of the unique element of the residential environment. This means that some guidance is not as strong as it could be. In addition, the statement of boarding principles and practice is not reviewed adequately to ensure it includes all required areas. These shortfalls mean that staff and parents do not have all the necessary information easily available. However, this does not impact on the quality of care that children receive.

Staff feel supported by leaders. They have access to regular supervision and leaders are available for advice or guidance. New staff have access to a good induction that helps them settle into their work. All staff have access to training, as well as joint discussions about children with other professionals in the school. This all adds to staff feeling able to provide nurturing, supportive care that helps children build their independence and develop as individuals.

Parents have confidence in the school and the care that their children receive. Staff communicate frequently with parents and adapt this to suit the families. Staff use online messaging and phone calls to keep families up to date. Families really appreciate this. One parent told the inspector, 'I love the way they love our children. You can feel it. I wouldn't want my child to live anywhere else.'

## **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 statement is published on the school's website and is reviewed annually and updated where required. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 1.4)
- The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 2.4)
- Good quality sleeping accommodation is provided for children. It is well organised and responsive to children's needs and is managed with ongoing assessments of risk (which should be documented) and the findings acted upon to reduce risk for all children. Accommodation gives children appropriate privacy, taking into account sex, age and any individual needs. Where children share a bedroom, they are able to express a preference about who they share with. To minimise disruption the school should aim to avoid mixing accommodation arrangements for children on longer placements and those on short breaks. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 9.1)

### **Point for improvement**

- The leadership team should ensure that all relevant policies reflect the residential element of the school and the most recent national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## **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:** SC043049

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Tina Partridge

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01386 443367

**Email address:** [tina.partridge@valeofeveshamschool.org](mailto:tina.partridge@valeofeveshamschool.org)

## **Inspectors**

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Marianne Grandfield, Social Care Inspector

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