

# Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

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

Bowden House School is a weekly residential school supporting children between the ages of nine and 18 who have a range of complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are currently 39 children on the school roll. There were 25 children boarding at the time of the inspection.

The school was inspected at the same time as the social care provision. A separate report is available to see the findings of that inspection. The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### **Inspection dates: 7 to 9 November 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:** 11 October 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Comprehensive planning supports children and their parents or carers when children first join the residential provision. Children's initial plans capture essential information to help make moves a success and lead to effective placement planning for the children throughout their stay. Plans are reviewed termly to track and inform children's targets. This work is carried out in collaboration with the team around the child and is child focused.

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. For example, they achieve positive exam results, which give them future opportunities in further education.

Relationships between staff and children are strong. Children feel able to speak to staff about any concerns that they have. There is a mentoring and anti-bullying committee. Senior leaders are acutely aware of the fact that bullying does and can happen, and they take a proactive approach to tackling this. Children feel safe and that they can talk to staff about any worries or concerns.

The children are supported by staff who genuinely care about them. Staff are committed to ensuring that children have positive experiences and make great progress. Staff are proud of children's achievements and enjoy watching them 'grow'. Many children go on to further education, learn to travel independently and gain life skills. One child commented, 'I wouldn't have made the progress that I have without the support from the staff at the school.'

Sensitive consideration is given to children who may not arrive fully prepared for school. For example, staff ensure that children have a freshly pressed and washed school uniform waiting for them when they arrive. Staff also provide sports equipment, such as football boots, when required. Consequently, children feel cared for, are more confident and feel part of their peer group.

The staff proactively ensure that children's health needs are met. There are strong links between health professionals and the school, supported by the student and family co-ordinator. For many children, the staff take an active lead in arranging routine health appointments that may have been missed in the family home. The children and staff are also supported by the school's on site specialist child and adolescent mental health practitioner, who provides extensive support when needed.

Outreach activities are provided for the children during the school holidays to ensure that they have continued opportunities while away from the school. For many children, this gives them the chance to be active and maintain the positive relationships that they have with the staff. Staff arrange the activities in their holiday break, going above and beyond to offer outstanding care to children.

The home environment is personalised, and bedrooms are reflective of children's personalities. The housekeeping team ensures that the accommodation is warm, clean and well maintained. There are pictures of the children and staff on the walls, and children's bedrooms are well equipped and comfortable. A reading room with sensory equipment has been provided for the younger children. This is a calm and nurturing space that they love spending time in.

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

Senior leaders have sound safeguarding knowledge. They have recently attended training for their safeguarding lead roles. There is effective communication between all senior leaders responsible for safeguarding and a 'one school' approach to ensure that children are protected. Leaders have effective working relationships with the local authority designated officer. Senior leaders consult with them when concerns arise and take swift action to investigate any concerns if this is required.

The staff and senior leaders know the children well and respond to early signs of concern. They make appropriate referrals and seek guidance and support from other professionals. For example, when concerns have been raised about child exploitation, early help has been provided. A joined-up approach involving all professionals ensured swift support for the child.

Senior leaders ensure that there is a rigorous approach when recruiting new staff. The children are actively and meaningfully involved in recruitment. These processes ensure that only suitably vetted staff are employed.

Restraint is only used as a last resort. Mediation work is carried out following any incidents. Staff feel supported by senior leaders and each other when they face challenging incidents.

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

Communication between staff, senior leaders, children and their wider networks is a particular strength. There is a daily handover between residential and school staff to ensure that both teams are responsive to how children are feeling. Parents and carers receive a weekly call from their child's mentor to update them on their child's week, including their progress and experiences. Staff meet weekly to plan the week ahead and reflect on the previous week.

Senior leaders have built strong and collaborative relationships with other professionals to support the care, safety and well-being of the children. This includes regular work with the local policing team, which has an excellent working relationship with the staff and the children. A child told the inspector, 'I feel confident staff are doing the right thing for the pupils, and safeguarding is key to that.'

All staff have had their knowledge tested about recent updates to safeguarding guidance. Staff are confident in their responsibilities and collectively describe how they safeguard children. Professional development is an important part of staff progression. Opportunities have also been created for staff to step into senior roles.

The staff team are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of working at the provision. They feel supported by senior leaders and their colleagues. Staff benefit from regular supervision sessions and group discussion time. There are regular opportunities for training and continual professional development, and staff attend well-being days. These ensure that staff feel valued and are supported to offer exceptional care to children.

Oversight and monitoring arrangements are generally very strong. However, the current independent visitor is not sufficiently independent (as they have other responsibilities in the school). Furthermore, the visitor does not always go to the residential provision, and reports completed do not fully explore all the areas required, including how children's views are gathered. This has not had a negative impact on the quality of care that children receive. Leaders recognise this as an area for further development while valuing the work carried out by the chair of governors in this role.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Points for improvement**

- Leaders should ensure that the arrangements for the independent visitor are reviewed to ensure that the appointment is independent of any other responsibilities within the school. Additionally, the monitoring visit reports should reflect all of the criteria set out in the national minimum standards.

### **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:** SC050152

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Neil Wells

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Sara Stoker, Social Care Inspector

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