

# The Ashley School Academy Trust

The Ashley School Academy Trust, Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This is a maintained residential special school for 168 pupils aged between seven and sixteen years. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses that are located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area in Lowestoft and caters for children with complex and moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders and autism.

The head of care has been in post since May 2021. He has a relevant qualification for the role.

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

### Inspection dates: 28 to 30 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:** 16 January 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Children love staying in residence at this school. They enjoy spending time with each other and with staff. Staff have extremely high aspirations for children and help them to make exceptional progress in different areas of their lives.

Residence is an integral part of the school. Staff in residence and the wider school, including parents, understand the importance of what it offers to children and how it helps them to learn new skills and become more independent. Staff have exceptional links with education staff, which helps children to make strong academic progress. Clear communication ensures that all staff have an excellent understanding of children's needs and are kept up to date as to what is going on for children in the different areas of the school. This includes a clear focus on helping children to improve their literacy. Staff read with children daily and work with their teachers to understand how best to help them. As well as helping children's reading and writing to improve, this has also helped some children to discover and develop a love of reading.

Residence staff help children to learn new skills which help to prepare them to live more independently. Staff are highly aspirational. They have an excellent understanding of the barriers that disabled children face. They use this knowledge to determinedly help the children to overcome them. Consequently, children are being provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Leaders, managers and staff are not complacent. They are always looking for ways to improve the quality of the provision and the experience of children. A new independence programme is being trialled for some children this year. This involves children budgeting and shopping independently, using public transport and cooking meals for themselves and staff. Children enjoy taking part in this, and they have developed new skills as a result. Parents said that children make exceptional progress in this area and pointed out numerous skills children have learned in residence that they now use at home.

Staff help children with their social relationships. Children love spending time in residence, with many saying they enjoy it because they get to spend time with their friends. Children who previously showed high levels of anxiety around staying away from home, now love taking part in the different activities. One child had previously struggled to build and maintain friendships. They now play an active role as part of their residence group, which has led to them having sleepovers with a friend outside of school. This is exceptional progress and further demonstrates that the benefits of residence for children extends beyond the school itself.

Staff in residence run a well-established Duke of Edinburgh awards programme. Children are completing bronze and silver awards and some children have gone on to work towards their gold award. The programme involves children undertaking voluntary work in the community, team-building and outdoor activities. This includes

children doing expeditions independent of staff. Children have huge pride in their achievements and say how much they enjoy working with their friends.

Children take part in a wide range of activities on site and in the community. These are well planned and managed and provide an excellent range of experiences for children, some of which they have not had the opportunity to take part in before. This includes overnight trips away on activity holidays, which children have thoroughly enjoyed.

Some children have complex health needs. Staff understand these extremely well and have effective systems in place to ensure that these are well met. Some children take significant amounts of medication. Systems for the administration of medication clearly show when medication is administered, and staff have training in this area. However, on one occasion, a discrepancy between instructions provided for administering medication from a child's doctor and what the child's parent had instructed was not picked up. Therefore, the discrepancy was not explored further by staff at that time. During the inspection, leaders made changes to systems to ensure that any such discrepancies are identified and checked.

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

Staff understand risks to children and safeguarding processes. Children feel safe in residence and staff ensure that they are kept safe. Risks experienced by children reduce because of the excellent service provided by staff and managers in residence.

Leaders, managers and staff are exceptionally flexible and child-centred when responding to changing circumstances and increasing risks. When there were concerns for one child at home, the local authority asked the school to offer the child a place in residence at short notice. Managers arranged this. The child was not aware in advance that they would be staying in residence. Despite the challenges, staff ensured that the child had everything they needed and that they were welcomed warmly to residence. This helped to ensure that a highly anxious time for the child turned into a positive one. Furthermore, the child is now flourishing in residence, playing an active role in activities and enjoying spending time with their friends.

Children's behaviour in residence is excellent. Staff manage any behavioural challenges skilfully and calmly, ensuring that they do not escalate. Some children have been involved in more significant behavioural incidents at school. However, they have not done so in residence. This is despite many children having not stayed away from family overnight before and demonstrates how settled children feel in residence. Staff set clear expectations of behaviour for children and use different tools to promote positive choices. This helps children to understand what positive behaviour is and recognises their achievements in this area.

Significant work takes place with children to help them stay safe online. Staff work alongside education staff to carry out this work, which ensures that what children is

taught in school then then followed up by residence staff. Work is delivered in a way that children find enjoyable, which helps them to engage. When there have been some concerns in relation to children's online behaviour, these have been followed up quickly and appropriately by staff.

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

Leaders and managers are extremely motivated to ensure that children receive the highest possible quality of care. These aspirations filter through to the staff team and this has an immensely positive affect on outcomes for children. Leaders continually seek to improve the experiences that children have, which has resulted in them maintaining the highest standards over an extended period.

Leaders and managers have built extremely strong and positive relationships with children's parents and carers as well as police and social workers. Parents said that communication is good, and they always know what children have been doing and what their future plans are. Excellent links with police and social workers have ensured that when their services have been required, they have been able to receive this support without delay.

Leaders and managers provide an extremely supportive environment for staff. Staff said the head of care and headteacher are both highly visible presences in residence and are always available to support them when needed. Regular high-quality supervision sessions and in-depth discussions at team meetings are used to consider how effectively staff are working with children and any areas where improvements can be made.

Leaders and managers actively seek and respond to children's views. Children know how to make complaints, although none have done so. Questionnaires have been used to gather children's views in several areas. Children engage well in this process and when they have identified things they feel could improve or activities they would like to take part in, managers have put these things in place. This helps to ensure that children know their views are valued.

There is highly effective internal and external monitoring of the residential provision. Governors are a visible presence in residence and value what it offers to children. They have an excellent understanding of issues that are faced and provide a strong level of scrutiny of the provision. External monitoring reports are detailed and highly effective. When areas for development are identified, the head of care responds to these without delay.

Leaders and managers ensure that inclusive partnerships enable the wider dissemination of areas of excellence. Externally, the head of care is part of a wider group of heads of care for residential schools. This allows him to learn from similar provisions as well as share examples of good practice to support the development of residential provisions in other schools. In addition, internally positive practice in residence is shared with the wider school. This has led to some ways of working to

support children's independence now being used with children in the wider school because of their success in residence.

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

### **Point for improvement**

- School leaders should ensure that there are systems in place to explore any discrepancies relating to the administration of medication.

### **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:** SC024573

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Thomas Ward

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Joe Matkar-Cox, Social Care Inspector

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