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, 43 students aged 14 and over, stay in six of the eight residential bungalows. Residential students board from Monday to Friday. The residential accommodation is situated in the school grounds.

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

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 March 2024

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: 14 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students experience exceptionally well-planned care from a skilled and knowledgeable staff team. Staff truly understand students' needs and ensure that their care arrangements remain under constant review. Students respond well to this and make exceptional progress.

Staff support students to achieve and disability is not considered to be something that should limit their aspirations. Staff and leaders demonstrate creative solutions to ensure that all students continue to have opportunities. There are a wide range of activities available to students. These include trips to local shopping centres, the beach and local religious buildings. Students also enjoy sports like wheelchair rugby and tabletop cricket.

Staff understand students' complex health needs well. A truly multi-disciplinary team is available to support students including nurses, physio and occupational therapists, a speech and language therapist and a school counsellor. Any changes in students' health, emotions or behaviour are immediately responded to. Students' needs are re-assessed to ensure that plans and equipment are working effectively. Leaders also commission services from other health professionals when needed. For example, dentists and general practitioners offer regular onsite appointments making it easier for students to attend.

Innovative education plans and a positive culture mean that students make strong educational progress. The imbedded 'preparing for adulthood' programme has helped create a 24-hour curriculum. Students can recognise their targets and progress against them. For students who are taking GCSE exams, school and boarding staff work diligently together to create achievable exam processes. Students' personal care needs are well understood and appropriate gaps during exams are agreed, with staff being clear about their roles in this. Consequently, students complete their GCSE exams with success.

Boarding staff creatively plan work experience for students. Due to a lack of opportunities, the school have recently opened a charity shop. This provides students with a positive experience of work in a safe and supported way.

Students' views are well understood, and staff consistently offer them choices about what they want to do. There are regular meetings in the homes. These offer opportunities to discuss what it is like to live there, but also to discuss things such as online safety, how to keep safe, activity plans and meal choices for the week. Students are encouraged to lead these discussions and support their friends to take part. In addition, students can speak to an ex-student who is the school's independent visitor, and a governor who is responsible for the residential provision, both of whom are readily available.

Staff help students to understand their emotions and express how they are feeling. Leaders have introduced and developed the concept of trauma informed practice and helped staff, students and families to think about this in relation to disability. This has helped students and families to have a greater understanding of the impact that disability has had on them.

When students start to use the residential provision, their introductions are sensitively planned at a pace that is right for them. Staff create opportunities such as tea visits, overnight stays and preparatory visits to empty bungalows to help children understand the service and get to know the staff. This approach successfully prepares students and reduces their anxiety.

Staff work collaboratively with parents. Staff understand that working alongside parents is key to students having positive experiences. Parents shared that they are very happy with the care and attention that students receive while accessing the boarding provision and explained how this has helped students to grow and develop.

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

There is a strong safeguarding culture. Staff, leaders and students are all aware of their own responsibilities in creating an environment that is safe and inclusive for all. Leaders have high expectations and make sure that staff respond quickly and effectively to any concerns that are raised.

Staff speak confidently about the safeguarding support in the school. Alongside a duty manager on each shift, there is a qualified nurse and one of the senior team, in the role of designated safeguarding lead, available both day and night. This high level of oversight provides support from a health, care and safeguarding perspective. External safeguarding professionals are consulted with immediately when this is required.

The oversight of safeguarding extends to the governing body who play an active role. Reports to the governors are detailed and enable the designated safeguarding lead to understand trends, patterns and, most importantly, what action is being taken to reduce any concerns. Regular visits by the safeguarding governor ensure that there is robust oversight of incidents and leaders' practice.

Detailed risk assessments and guidance to staff about how to keep students safe is regularly reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team. This ensures that student safety remains paramount.

Students are clear about how to raise any concerns or frustrations. Staff consistently feedback to students who have raised things either individually or in 'you said we did' presentations. Consequently, students feel heard.

Relevant health and safety checks are completed, including checks of any specialist equipment and fire safety. Any actions that are identified are immediately responded to, ensuring the well-being of students, visitors and staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is led by a dedicated residential care manager and the vice principal. Both are highly aspirational for all students and have high expectations of what can be achieved. They lead by example and have helped staff to create a culture where students feel safe and where their complex needs are well understood and responded to.

Leaders and managers demonstrate an exceptional understanding of the progress that students make. Through robust monitoring, effective line management of staff and positive relationships with students, leaders are equipped to truly understand individual students' experiences.

As a result of their detailed monitoring processes, leaders are able to quickly respond to emerging concerns and provide guidance to staff, students and families. This has been demonstrated recently by the strong response to online safety and concerns over gaming. This work enabled students to develop a greater understanding of potential risks.

Staff are confident in the leadership of the school. They feel well supported and know exactly who they can report to if they have any concerns. All staff receive regular supervision that supports their development and allows them to reflect on their work.

Leaders are supported and challenged by an experienced and knowledgeable governing body. Key areas such as safeguarding, and the residential provision have a dedicated governor. Visits to the boarding provision happen regularly. Governors feedback their findings through regular, well attended meetings. Equally, if students raise any concerns or questions to governors, these are immediately shared with leaders, giving students another layer of support.

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:

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Mark Newington, social care inspector
Rebecca Fisher, social care inspector

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