

# 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 with 189 pupils aged between seven and 16 years on roll. 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 residential accommodation is provided in two houses that are located on the school site. The total number of residential pupils is currently 44. Residential pupils can board between Monday and Friday for up to four nights.

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

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

### Inspection dates: 25 to 27 November 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:** 28 November 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Children thoroughly enjoy their stays in the residence. Staff invest in building close, trusting relationships with and between children. Staff are excellent models for children. They are mindful about demonstrating positive social and problem-solving skills that children see and learn from.

Managers make thoughtful decisions about when children stay and with who. A new risk assessment tool is used to consider how children's needs can be met in a group setting. This is considered alongside children's views and preferences. Children have overwhelmingly positive experiences while staying in the residential provision because of this careful planning. There are very low levels of disruption and there have been no instances of bullying.

Children have abundance of opportunities to try new and exciting experiences and activities. There is a sustained and tremendously positive impact on children's social and emotional well-being. A parent said, 'It is just like a big sleepover. [The children] can just be with their friends, and I know that they're safe.'

Twenty children have gained their bronze and silver Duke of Edinburgh awards since the last inspection. They have taken part in volunteering in the local community, adventure expedition walks and camping trips far away from home. Positive memories are thoughtfully captured through photo books and video footage that children view together with staff. Children receive endless praise and encouragement for their participation in pro-social activities that help them to build self-esteem and a sense of achievement. Awards evenings take place; these encourage children to celebrate themselves and each other.

Staff focus on children learning holistically. Social and independence skills are prioritised. Managers and staff have developed a new independence programme since the last inspection. Children have learned how to budget their money, plan for and prepare meals and have developed confidence in speaking to people in shops and the wider community. One parent said that they had previously worried their child would never be able to live alone, but they have learned so many independence skills since being in residence. Staff are attuned to each child's individual learning and communication needs. They adapt their approach to ensure that every child can practise new skills. These interventions are transformative in children's lives.

There are exceptionally strong links between staff and the school. This means that children experience continuity of care between school and residence. Teaching and care staff communicate throughout each day to provide a shared awareness of any small changes in children's emotional presentation or behaviour. Staff regularly take part in lessons to keep themselves up to date with children's educational progress. As a result, staff offer individualised support to children during their bedtime reading.

Children make exceptional progress in their literacy skills, which complements their learning in school.

Children's health needs are met during their stays. Children's plans include detailed information about their health needs and how to meet them. A new system helps staff to more easily and accurately record the administering of children's medication.

Children's mental health needs are fully considered; 11 children have taken part in a mental health course and received a qualification. Staff create opportunities for children to experience success and setbacks through day-to-day activities. Children speak positively about their accomplishments and build emotional resilience as a result.

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

Children said that they feel safe and supported when they stay at the residential provision. All parents spoken with were overwhelmingly positive about the care that children receive. One child said, 'I can speak to the staff, they are so nice and really listen to me.'

Safeguarding systems are highly effective in keeping children safe. Meetings between the designated safeguarding leads and the senior leadership team take place regularly. These meetings offer reflective discussions for all concerns and safeguarding matters. This sharing of information and ideas means that safeguarding is consistently monitored and acted on without delay.

Staff are confident in identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns. They are supported in their roles with comprehensive policies and procedures. Safeguarding training for staff is prioritised and includes an emphasis on recognising the increased vulnerabilities of disabled children. Staff have good understanding of these vulnerabilities and this helps them to keep children safe.

Children benefit from the close working relationships that staff have with a wide range of external professionals. Staff make referrals to charities and specialist services to support children and their families. This resourceful approach means that additional layers of support are provided. One parent said, 'The staff go above and beyond [expectations]. I can't praise them highly enough. They have saved my family.'

Staff help children to be safer online. Children take part in fun information sessions with staff. Children have produced a poster about practical steps to take if they are worried while online. Staff talk openly with children about their online activity and monitor concerns appropriately.

Children flourish from staff's approach to positive behaviour support. This is visible in the care and affection given to each child. Staff constantly praise children for their

achievements or for just being themselves. This helps children to develop strong levels of self-awareness and develop positive behaviour patterns.

Risk assessments and behaviour plans are detailed and tailored to each child. Staff understand the importance of routines for children and children know what to expect when they stay. This offers a predictable environment with clear boundaries. As a result, there have been no physical interventions or any incidents of children going missing since the last inspection.

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

The considerably experienced headteacher and head of care have high aspirations for children and are determined to help children become independent and reach their full potential. They work in partnership the independent visitor, governors, trustees and parents to continually improve the opportunities and experiences for children. Team morale is excellent and staff said that they feel supported by the leadership team.

Internal and external monitoring are comprehensive. Governors and trustees who are responsible for oversight of the residential provision are highly effective in their roles. They are knowledgeable and trained. They visit regularly and produce detailed reports following their visits. The reports include conversations with children to gather their views about their care. Any recommendations feed into the manager's detailed development plan that is continually reviewed and revised.

An independent person visits the school every half term to monitor the effectiveness of the residential provision. They provide informative reports that support leaders and managers to continually improve the provision. Leaders are committed to the independent scrutiny.

Staff benefit from regular appraisal and reflective supervision. The head of care has changed the supervision format to provide staff with the opportunity to reflect along with clear guidance and professional development. If staff have a special interest, managers source training. There is a literacy champion, communication champion, mental health champion and trauma champion. This means that children experience an environment that encourages learning, growth and emotional well-being. Staff are confident in the support that they receive and the responsiveness of leaders.

Staff are trained to meet the children's individual needs. All staff complete the school's mandatory training and specialist training that enhances their skills and practice. Staff are either qualified or working towards a relevant childcare qualification in timescales.

Since the last inspection, one staff member has left and one new staff member joined. Safer recruitment processes are followed.

The headteacher and head of care have met the point for improvement raised at the last inspection.

## **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:** Thomas Ward

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01502 565 439

**Email address:** office@ashleyschool.co.uk

## **Inspectors**

Mandy Start, Social Care Inspector

Natalie Day, Social Care Inspector

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