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, 38 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: 5 to 7 March 2025

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: 12 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students make exceptional progress. Some have recently successfully moved onto college and are reported to be doing very well. The pace of transitions, both into and out of the residential provision, is led by the student and in close liaison with parents/carers. This ensures that students settle into boarding successfully.

Students are highly regarded by the staff team and are provided with a welcoming environment, which is tailored to each of their needs. Staff speak proudly of each student's achievements and are keen to celebrate them. This gives students a sense of self-worth and confidence to learn new skills.

Students are happy and settled in the boarding provision. They enjoy spending time with each other as well as with the staff.

The relationships between staff and students are empathic and demonstrate kindness, acceptance, understanding and fun. Staff respect the students and are always keen to capture their views, wishes and feelings to inform future care planning, but also to ensure that students are given the opportunity to enjoy their chosen activities. Students have autonomy over their day-to-day living as well as planning for future day trips and adventures.

Preparation for adulthood is key to the progress being made by students across the board. Working closely with education colleagues, students are provided with a programme that is suited to their individual needs and abilities, which enables them to learn the independent living skills needed for their future. This has provided new opportunities for students, including gaining work experience in the school's shop in the local village.

Students are provided with the support of an independent person, who has personal experience of being a resident of the boarding provision. This is invaluable to students, particularly those who are preparing to move on to further education.

Relationships between the school and the professional network and the student's parents/family members are transparent and mutually supportive. Inspectors received positive feedback from family members and external professionals. One parent said, 'My child would not be where they are today without Valence.'

Students with highly complex health needs receive excellent, well-coordinated care. They benefit from a health team that is highly skilled and responsive to every student's needs. The school trains staff to care effectively for students and to better understand their individual needs.

Students receive a highly specialist, child-centred response to their therapeutic needs. This helps them to become more independent, more effective communicators and develop greater self-esteem.

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

Safeguarding systems are robust. Safeguarding is overseen by a fastidious leadership team, with additional, well-informed oversight provided by the governing body. Staff have a clear understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Any concerns are appropriately escalated. Staff are transparent in their practice, enabling parents and social workers to feel well informed without any undue delay.

Staff embed learning around safeguarding into all aspects of the curriculum and residential life. For instance, recent programmes of focus have been around International Women's Day, women's rights and Safer Internet Day. This supports students to learn how to keep themselves safe and helps them as they move on to more independent settings.

Physical intervention has only been used once this year, which was necessary to safeguard the student and others. Incident reports, in general, are thorough, with potential triggers identified. They describe what staff have done to try to de-escalate the situation. Risk assessments clearly document how best to support each student. Reviews with the student provide an opportunity to reflect and gain an understanding post-incident.

Students do not often complain. When they do, they are responded to swiftly, using their chosen method of communication. The open culture in boarding means that staff report any concerns in a timely fashion, which ensures that the needs of the students are always prioritised. Parental complaints are also dealt with fairly and in line with school policy.

The health and safety of students and staff are managed very well. All reasonable care is taken to ensure that all areas of compliance are met and any required actions are completed. There are excellent systems in place to ensure that the effective maintenance of facilities supports positive experiences for students.

Processes for recruiting and vetting new staff are thorough and consistent, ensuring that safer recruitment principles are adhered to, and that staff are well suited to working with students. While there is frequent use of agency staff, there are sufficient checks in place to ensure that they are also suitably vetted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A culture of positivity and high aspirations for all permeates throughout the school, which helps the students to have clear aspirations for their futures. Staff fully

understand and take pride in adopting this shared vision and celebrate students' achievements with them.

The transition from the previous principal to the new principal has been described by one parent as seamless, and that the school is still operating 'at as fabulous a level as it always has done'.

Leaders continue to strive for ongoing improvements that help students to have great experiences during their time as boarders. Plans are ambitious and remain focused on the needs and outcomes for students. There are clear plans in place to support these developments, and additional scrutiny from an independent visitor provides opportunities for further development.

Managers set high expectations for the care to be provided to students and manage these through oversight of all aspects of practice and careful monitoring of students' progress. Quality assurance is completed within timescales. Documentation is regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant and is shared across the team.

Managers are able to identify the areas of strength in the residential provision, and show pride when showcasing what they and the staff do well. They are equally able to reflect on areas for development and take a proactive approach to develop these areas.

Staff feel well supported and describe a positive work culture in which they are happy to come to work. They benefit from regular supervision that helps them to reflect on and adapt their own practice. They have regular training that supports them to feel confident in recognising and supporting students' complex needs.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are promoted across the school. The staff team ensures that students are enabled to celebrate cultural differences as well as gaining an understanding of different religious beliefs.

The collective knowledge, skills and experience of the whole team are impressive, as is the commitment for wanting students to progress, enjoy and achieve their optimal goals.

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: Matthew Strange

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01959 562156

Email address: mstrange@valence.kent.sch.uk

Inspectors

Emma Haskell, Social Care Regulatory Inspector (Lead)
Jay Shekleton, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025