Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford school is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged seven to 16 years of age, with dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, there were 122 children attending the school. Of these, 36 are boarders.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	**good**
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 18 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of the inspection, 36 boarders were accessing the boarding houses at the school. The inspectors spent time talking with some of the boarders and observed their interactions with their peers and house parents.

Boarders appeared happy, content and relaxed around the school and in their boarding homes. Boarders enjoy the company of their peers, and they show respect, kindness and tolerance towards each other. Elder boarders 'look out' for younger boarders and they model positive behaviours. Some boarders have developed close bonds, and their relationships are meaningful to them. They look forward to spending time together while boarding.

Boarders show warm regard towards their house parents. One boarder described their house parent as 'top notch' and another boarder said their residential provision felt like 'home from home'. Boarders share bedrooms, but they have clearly defined spaces that they personalise with photographs, drawings, teddies, toys and bedding. Communal spaces have been thoughtfully decorated, creating inviting and cosy spaces for boarders to relax in. The school ensures that boarders have varied and nutritious diets.

Boarding staff support boarders to make progress from their individual starting points. For example, boarders who stay at the school achieve better educational outcomes than day pupils. Boarders also make tangible progress in relation to their emotional, social and psychological well-being. However, their boarding records do not entirely reflect this. Additionally, boarding staff do not routinely review children's progress. Leaders are taking steps to address this. However, there has been a lack of consistency.

After school, boarders are encouraged to participate in evening activities. This includes football, using the climbing wall, swimming, movie nights and baking. Generally, there is a good level of engagement from boarders. The school offers varied enrichment activities for boarders that take place in England and abroad, for example cycling challenges, visiting Kenya to complete charity work and going to New York for sports purposes.

Leaders are proactive in supporting boarders to prepare for their futures. This includes a new initiative that allows elder boarders to live semi-independently, encouraging them to take increased responsibility for their routines, chores and homework. Leaders are also considering how technology could reduce boarders' reliance on readers and scribes. They understand that better use of technology could improve boarders' prospects in higher education and employment.

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

The boarding houses are relatively settled and there are limited behavioural concerns. House parents have a good understanding of boarders' needs and vulnerabilities. Boarders and their parents trust leaders and confide in them if they have concerns. For example, they have made disclosures about self-harm, bullying and online safety. Leaders respond appropriately, instilling confidence in parents and boarders.

The pastoral team and safeguarding team are available to support boarders who are struggling with their psychological well-being. Boarders are welcome to drop in for chats with the pastoral team. Alternatively, more targeted support can be delivered through planned sessions. This includes emotional literacy: putting feelings into words and friendship building. If needed, the pastoral team refers boarders to specialist services.

When there are concerns for children's safety and well-being, the safeguarding lead liaises with the local authority to share and explore information. When necessary, she escalates concerns to the multi-agency safeguarding hub. The safeguarding team follows advice provided by the local authority. However, on one occasion, agreed actions were not entirely followed through.

Behaviour incidents are managed well by leaders. The behaviour policy stipulates that a staged approach should be used to address inappropriate behaviour. However, leaders are cautious about this, understanding the importance of context, mitigating factors and negative influences outside of boarders' control.

There has been an isolated incident of a physical altercation between a boarder and a day pupil. A teacher intervened to keep the children safe; this was necessary and proportionate. There have been no concerns about boarders leaving the school without permission or going missing.

The safeguarding lead has a good understanding of mechanisms used to keep children safe. For example, she keeps a record of low-level concerns and consults with the local authority about thresholds for decision-making. Boarding staff have a good understanding of their reporting obligations. Consequently, they respond appropriately if they witness low-level concerns. They also self-refer, demonstrating critically reflective practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders are interested in listening to pupils' views and they have therefore developed a student voice council. As part of this initiative, house parents encouraged boarders to appoint representatives to share their views and wishes linked to boarding. Leaders have also established a parent focus group that meets formally to discuss ideas to improve the school. This has positively impacted boarding experiences.

Since the last inspection, leaders have restructured the safeguarding team and redefined senior roles. They have ensured that personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) teachers are working closely with boarding staff to allow for continuation of education in boarding houses. There is also a greater focus on boarders' independence and preparing them for transitions.

Boarding staff receive training that helps them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. They use their training to skilfully navigate conversations with boarders about important subjects, such as online safety and how to respond if the school experiences a critical incident.

Leaders have effective monitoring and review systems in place that enable them to have good oversight of the boarding provision. This includes monthly meetings and steering groups. Leaders use these meetings to share information, offer constructive challenge and to agree actions. The proprietor, safeguarding adviser and independent person also provide an additional layer of scrutiny.

Overall, leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the boarding provision. However, there was an oversight in relation to lone working risk assessments for house parents. Formal complaints are a rarity, but when they do occur, leaders create space for parents to share their concerns and help them to understand why specific decisions have been made.

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

Recommendations

- School leaders should ensure that lone working risk assessments are extended to include house parents.
- School leaders should ensure that they continue to improve 'social independence plans' for boarders.
- School leaders should ensure that boarding staff formally review boarders' progress in accordance with their 'social independence plans'.
- School leaders should ensure that recording-keeping is strengthened to avoid gaps in information.

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: SC039141

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