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, 32 students aged 14 and over stay in 6 of the 8 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: 24 to 26 February 2026

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: 5 March 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students benefit from warm, nurturing and highly individualised care that enables them to feel safe, confident and valued. Accommodation is thoughtfully designed, with personalised bedrooms that help students to develop a strong sense of belonging. Shared hub areas provide structured opportunities for students to practise independence skills in a supportive environment.

Staff know students exceptionally well and provide targeted support that builds confidence, communication and self-reliance. Students are helped to understand routines, manage transitions and develop the skills that they need for adulthood. Staff work closely with students to navigate daily living tasks and to help them to develop emotional regulation strategies. This consistent, attuned support enables students to make meaningful progress in their independence.

Each student has a detailed, personalised plan that reflects their needs, strengths and vulnerabilities. Staff use these plans effectively to guide practice. When students' health needs change, staff respond promptly and adapt plans to ensure safety and continuity of care.

Students benefit from a strong, well-coordinated multidisciplinary approach. The nursing team provides high-quality medication training and responsive health support. The occupational therapy service has strengthened its offer through communication groups and joint working with residential and education teams. This integrated approach ensures that students receive consistent, holistic support.

Staff create a calm, predictable and emotionally secure environment. Their warm, patient and reassuring approach helps students to feel safe and able to express themselves.

Students enjoy their time as boarders and speak positively about the staff who understand them and help them to grow in confidence. One student said, 'The school has my heart.' Weekly house meetings and a range of communication methods ensure that students' views are heard and acted upon.

Students are encouraged to explore new experiences, both within the residential setting and in the community. They take part in activities that promote physical fitness, social interaction and personal interests.

Staff advocate strongly for students' rights and independence, supporting them to practise skills in real-life situations such as shopping, travel and community participation.

An independent listener and visitor provide additional layers of oversight and support, ensuring that students always have someone outside the staff team to talk to. This strengthens safeguarding and reinforces students' sense of being listened to and protected.

Overall, students make strong progress because they are cared for by staff who are skilled, reflective and deeply committed to promoting their independence, wellbeing and quality of life.

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

Students live in a safe, well-supervised environment where staff understand their individual needs and vulnerabilities. Personal emergency evacuation plans are detailed and ensure that staff know exactly how to support each student safely in an emergency. This contributes to a culture where safety is embedded in daily practice.

Safeguarding is overseen effectively by leaders and governors. Concerns are escalated promptly and appropriately, and staff work closely with external professionals, including police, ambulance services, specialist teams and the local authority designated officer to ensure that students receive coordinated, wraparound support.

Parents and social workers report feeling well informed and reassured that issues are addressed without delay.

There have been no significant incidents since the last inspection. Physical intervention has been used only twice, both involving momentary deactivation of a wheelchair for safety. These interventions were proportionate, brief and used only when de-escalation strategies were unsuccessful or when there was an immediate risk of harm. Records are clear, and senior leaders maintain oversight, ensuring that learning is identified and embedded. Staff interpret behaviour as communication and use this understanding to strengthen relationships and to build trust.

Online safety is a notable strength. Leaders recognise the rapidly changing risks associated with technology, including artificial intelligence, and provide students with regular guidance on how to keep themselves safe. This support extends to families through weekly newsletters, ensuring consistency of messages between home and school.

Recruitment processes are robust and follow safer recruitment requirements, helping to ensure that only well-vetted, suitable adults work with students.

Overall, safeguarding practice is strong, well-coordinated and deeply embedded across the school. Students are protected by staff who are vigilant, knowledgeable and committed to their welfare.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is led by an ambitious and creative senior leadership team who are determined to secure the best possible outcomes for every student. Leaders have a clear vision for the service and work collaboratively with external agencies to ensure that students receive coordinated, high-quality support. Their commitment to continuous improvement is evident in the strong systems, reflective culture and high expectations that run throughout the provision.

Staff describe a supportive and well-organised working environment where communication is strong and routines are consistent. Relationships between staff and students are warm and respectful, and staff demonstrate a deep understanding of each student's needs. They promote independence and provide calm, attuned responses that help students to feel safe and understood.

Training is comprehensive and well planned. All staff complete mandatory induction and refresher training, alongside specialist input from onsite nursing staff. Staff feel confident in their roles and know how to report concerns or access support. Leaders ensure that training is responsive to emerging needs and that staff are equipped to deliver safe, individualised care.

Students make evident progress in their confidence, independence and social skills. Senior leaders know students well and use this knowledge to make informed decisions about staffing, routines and personalised support. Rota planning is thoughtful and takes account of students' medical, physical and emotional needs.

Governors provide effective strategic oversight. They understand the complex communication needs and diagnoses of students and meet regularly with leaders to scrutinise practice. Their support for the principal and senior leadership team is purposeful and informed, contributing to a culture of accountability and improvement.

Feedback from parents and professionals is consistently positive. Families feel involved in their child's care and value the strong relationships and clear communication from staff. One parent said, 'I don't know if my child would have survived without them.' External professionals describe staff as going 'above and beyond' to meet students' needs, ensuring that they feel safe, valued and included.

Leaders take a holistic view of each student, considering their medical, social, emotional and mental health needs when planning care. This ensures that students receive consistent, well-coordinated support that promotes their wellbeing and independence.

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

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Inspectors

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