

Swalcliffe Park School

Swalcliffe, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX15 5EP

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This residential special school accommodates young people for up to 42 weeks of the year. It provides education and residential care for up to 44 children and young people, aged from 11 to 19. Boys on the autistic spectrum (mainly with Asperger syndrome) live in each of the four houses. The provider is a registered charity.

This was the school's first inspection following its re-registration as a residential special school. It was last inspected as a children's home on 30 March 2017, when it was judged to be 'outstanding'.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 September 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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.

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Evidence-based research has been used to create a whole-school approach to meeting the needs of children and young people and to constantly develop practice.
- The emphasis placed on improving the quality of life experienced by children, and their families, produces significant improvements for all.
- Consultation with children and their families results in tangible changes in provision and practice.
- As one parent said, the school has 'given children aspirations when they did not used to think they were good at anything before'.
- Leaders and managers have an excellent grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have plans in place to build on the former and address the latter.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Impact risk assessments are not recorded in ways that show the rationale behind decisions made as to which residential house children are placed in or how potential risks will be addressed.
- Residential care plans do not adequately reflect the care plans for children who are looked after by a local authority.
- Key-work session records can be limited, having uninformative answers to specific questions asked and lacking actions that arise from the discussion.

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

Recommendations

- The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. (NMS 6.3)

In particular, impact risk assessments completed prior to admission to a specific house should include sufficient detail and clarity to demonstrate all potential risks have been considered and addressed.

- The school produces a written placement plan and where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. (NMS 21.1)
- Every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to supply the information to the child), and add personal statements or statements correcting errors. (NMS 22.1)

In particular, key-work session records should detail any outcomes or actions arising from the session and be reviewed at subsequent ones as appropriate.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The exceptional quality of children's and young people's placements arises out of particular strengths of the school. The first is the value that managers and staff place on each boy's quality of life (and that of his family). This includes the children's experience of care and attainment of personal goals. Many of the children spoken to thought that they were doing better in this school than anywhere they had been before. One child said that this was because 'They [the staff in the school] "get" autism. They find out what you need and help you do it.'

Central to this is the high level of consultation with boys and their parents to gather their views about what is going well or not for them and measuring this over time. Questionnaires about children's quality of life have an excellent level of take-up. They provide managers with a wealth of information that they use to focus on the help that individual children need and to understand what strategic changes might have a beneficial impact across the school.

Managers have successfully integrated therapeutic provision into both the education and residential aspects of school life. This has had a valuable impact on many children and young people; one child described how 'An entire burden has been taken off me. [What happened] doesn't impede my actions anymore and I have no more trust issues. I can do things now I didn't used to.'

A further strength is the quality of the relationships that staff forge with boys and their parents. This creates an environment in which children address anxieties and difficult previous experiences knowing that they have the support of people who 'believe in them'. They can then meet the challenges of education, of relating to other people and managing their lives more successfully. Families describe an excellent rapport with managers and staff; one family member said, 'The more open we are with the problems, the more helpful they have been with us. At some of the most challenging moments, they have been supportive, strong and adapted things very quickly.'

The combination of such positive relationships and detailed knowledge of children leads to a culture of staff not allowing any barrier to get in the way of doing what is best for those they have responsibility for. One consequence is that boys have developed their individual interests, from Duke of Edinburgh's Awards to football commentary.

The residential houses are relaxed, friendly places where staff cultivate a nurturing atmosphere and encourage everyone to show care and respect for each other. As a result, children and young people often acquire greater confidence and develop friendships, sometimes for the first time.

Parents recounted how children's lives have been transformed here, with several saying that their sons had achieved 'so much more than we expected'.

Thorough assessments ensure that the school only admits those children who are most likely to benefit from the approach taken and who will be compatible with those already attending and living here. Transitions into and from the residential provision are meticulously managed. One parent said that the time spent to make sure that the move was right 'was incredible'.

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

Although managers and staff make thorough assessments before a child moves into the school, decisions about which house he will live in, based on his impact on those already living there and their impact on him, are not well documented.

Ongoing risk assessments are formatted to describe concerns and to lead to strategies that staff can use to ameliorate them. Staff are occasionally concerned to avoid raising children's sensitivities and so adjust what they write, but in doing so do not give enough information to alert colleagues to the actual issues. Assessments do not routinely address the vulnerability of children to criminal exploitation.

Children and young people feel safe and report 'next to no bullying' in the residential provision.

Few children are looked after by a local authority but when they are, staff attend all reviews and chase paperwork when it has not been made available. Such documentation does not always become incorporated into residential care plans. As a result, there is a potential for staff not to systematically follow actions arising from looked after children reviews.

Staff review care plans with children and young people as part of fortnightly key-work sessions. Boys' comments are regularly recorded but are most often limited to merely indicating agreement rather than an actual contribution to planning. Key-work recording is of patchy quality, with a tendency to be perfunctory, and does not include outcomes or actions arising. This means that staff do not routinely review progress with children and actions may be overlooked.

Safer recruitment practice goes beyond the requirements of 'keeping children safe in education' and the organisation makes every effort to prevent unsuitable people coming to work in the school.

Staff members asked were very clear about the process to follow if they had safeguarding concerns and who to approach inside and outside the organisation if they believed managers were not acting to protect children. There is a strong culture of any member of staff being able to challenge safeguarding practice; one member of staff said that the head of care invited them to 'hold me accountable' if he did not follow up agreed actions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Managers and staff are passionate in their drive to help children and young people to succeed. Leaders, including senior managers and governors, have given a great deal of thought to the criteria used to measure success and have focused on the quality of life experienced by pupils and families.

Evidence-based research has informed how the school is organised and the approach taken to working with children who have autistic spectrum disorders. The school is now contributing to international research in the field and senior staff have presented the school's pioneering work at conferences in the UK and abroad.

Leaders have made strategic changes, including the creation of new posts and developing training, to translate the vision into practice. Information collected from children, young people and their families has been used to target resources to address the issues that are of greatest importance to them, such as the management of anxiety. There are several examples of how children have benefited as a result.

The school is expanding the key-worker role so that every child, not just those in boarding, has such a worker and developing the role to be more central in the coordination of education and therapy as well as residential care. Staff are well supported in their roles and feel empowered to make a difference to children's lives and to the running of the school.

The independent visitor appointed by the governors has not been present at times when most boys are in boarding and has not made unannounced visits. This, and shortfalls in the quality of reports, has led the school to commission a new visitor, who has yet to start in the role.

Care plans incorporate placement plans, individual risk assessments, behaviour support plans and individualised young people's guides. This makes them very lengthy documents and unwieldy to navigate. Following the introduction of a new computerised system, children and young people do not have easy access to them, but plans are in hand to give each boy access to his own file electronically.

Formal processes for children and young people to take part in the running of the school work extremely well. Boys see the school council as effective and gave examples of changes made following suggestions that they have put forward.

Managers and staff have developed positive relationships with other professionals, such as child and adolescent mental health teams and placing authorities. Parents spoken to said that the school is extremely responsive to their needs, particularly for those who live at a considerable distance. The care of their children is truly collaborative and has had a remarkable impact, enhancing the lives of children and families alike.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: 1266836

Headteacher/Teacher in charge: Mr Kiran Hingorani

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01295 780 302

Email address: khingorani@swalcliffepark.co.uk

Inspector(s)

Chris Peel, social care inspector (lead)
Jennie Christopher, social care inspector



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