

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 provides care for residential pupils for up to 42 weeks of the year. It provides education and residential care for up to 32 resident pupils, aged from 10 to 19, who are on the autistic spectrum and have broadly average cognitive ability. There are currently 28 pupils, all admitted as boys, living in the four houses. The provider is a registered charity.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 March 2022

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.

Date of previous inspection: 11 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The school's overarching approach is to improve pupils' quality of life. All staff are determinedly focused on enhancing children's experiences and future prospects. Staff also support families so that they have a better home life and many parents report that their relationship with their children has improved beyond expectations.

The quality of individualised care and support provided to residential pupils is unsurpassed. The impact of the home on the progress and experiences of children has been huge. As a result, there are many examples of pupils making extraordinary progress. These include one young person working in a medical field he originally had a fear of, another is the youngest ever to qualify as an instructor in their favoured sport, several have offers of or places at university and many pupils are attending education and socialising for the first time in many years.

Pupils, parents and professionals rightly attribute much of this transformation to their placement here. One residential student said, 'I owe everything to this school.' Parents wrote, 'This school has transformed my son's life. His residential placement has changed him dramatically. He now enjoys life as opposed to enduring it.' And a social worker commented, 'The school has given [name of child] predictability and security and so he can manage his anxiety levels.'

Staff seek children's views, often creatively, and take them into account. Each pupil's rights and identity are respected without exception and are exceptionally provided for. As a result, most children gain a sense of agency, personal responsibility and confidence.

Almost everyone inspectors spoke to mentioned the role of the key worker, which is central to this model of working. These staff have a meticulous understanding of their key children and of how to tailor support to meet their needs. In many cases, this relationship lasts throughout a pupil's time at the school and becomes 'special', as one student described it. Parents praised their child's key worker in terms of communication, sharing of information and ideas, and an understanding of the issues of having a child with an autistic spectrum condition.

There is a strong emphasis on a multidisciplinary approach. Education, residential and therapeutic provision dovetail to achieve the best outcomes for children. This is exemplified by how therapists are regularly seen in the houses, working into the evenings. As a result, there are plenty of opportunities for them to provide advice or explore strategies with staff and children in an informal setting. Pupils' experience is not of being referred to a therapist but of speaking to a known adult who is in the best position to help them with a particular issue. This contributes to the exceptional progress pupils make in their emotional, social and psychological well-being and, as a result, their educational achievements.

Children and families are thoroughly prepared for moves into, and eventually out of, the residential provision. Their futures are addressed from the point of admission, with every support provided for pupils to gain as much independence as possible and be confident in moving on. This support continues well after pupils leave if they want to receive it and maximises the potential for students to continue the progress they have made at the school and to make a success of their lives.

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

Staff manage situations and behaviour exceptionally well. They look for the reasons that might have given rise to difficulties. They work with pupils to help them manage such situations and find strategies that work for them. This work is non-judgemental, which contributes to pupils being open to examining their feelings and behaviours within a secure relationship and setting.

Relationships between the pupils are positive and adults work to enhance each child's ability to form friendships. One pupil said that the low level bullying they experienced when they first arrived could not happen today because staff are more nurturing and aware. As a result, many pupils have begun to socialise for the first time in their lives.

Managers and leaders identify and manage risks presented to or by pupils to help them become safer. They take appropriate action to protect children, for example responding swiftly on the rare occasions a pupil goes missing. All adults are well aware of how they should address safeguarding concerns, including extremism. However, there are weaknesses in the recording of allegations because documents do not always provide a clear audit trail of how staff managed a situation, or the rationale for any decisions made. This makes it difficult to evidence that leaders acted appropriately, such as, in one instance, whether the advice of the local authority designated officer was followed.

Safety plans are in place to safeguard children effectively who display significant vulnerabilities. Leaders ensure that staff make records of individual pupil's risks. This is good practice and in addition to what is required for residential special schools. However, assessments do not cover all known areas of risk and adults do not always update them following a serious incident. This means colleagues may not be informed about current risks and how to mitigate them.

One family member summed up the school's work in this area by commenting, 'It is so well run and meticulous to safeguarding and student welfare that it gives us parents the reassurance that their child is in the best possible environment.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers demonstrate an exceedingly ambitious vision for the school, the residential provision and for individual pupils. They ensure that everyone has high expectations for what all children can achieve. This results in a whole-school

approach that successfully focuses on improving pupils' quality of life and that of their families.

Senior leaders draw on, and contribute to, research into creating an environment that enables children who have autism spectrum disorder to thrive. This includes the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on pupils and their families and what helped them. Findings and good practice are disseminated through articles, conferences and on a dedicated website, free to other settings. This assists pupils at the school to make remarkable progress and adds to the sector's body of knowledge on how to promote good outcomes for many others too.

Governors are well placed to oversee the work of the residential provision, having an extensive knowledge of the work being done through their own observations, informative reports from an independent visitor and expert advice from independently appointed experts. They have an excellent, open relationship with senior managers, with mutual respect of each other's roles. The governing body's scrutiny is therefore effective in assisting the drive for continual improvement.

Leaders are always looking for better ways of meeting their objectives and have a clear school improvement plan. This has specific aims and actions which senior managers continually review. The school's goals are often creatively met, such as that to communicate meaningfully with students. This has resulted in a project to provide short animations that explain policies such as safeguarding and fire safety.

Managers and team leaders provide an excellent supportive environment for staff through well-structured supervision and thorough induction and training programmes. Adults in the residential provision report very high levels of job satisfaction and, as a result, staff retention is excellent. The continuity of care this affords promotes a level of trust children rarely experience in residential settings. For instance, some pupils have had the same key worker for eight years.

The promotion of tolerance and equality is embedded in the culture of the school and the practice of all the staff. They sensitively support each individual pupil's identity, often gathering information about gender, sexuality or faith with them, or assisting religious practice by participating with those who observe such practices. More widely, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are explored with pupils, giving them a greater appreciation of diverse backgrounds. This creates an environment in which children value themselves and others around them.

Pupils' views and participation are central to how the school runs and have produced tangible improvements, such as new catering arrangements and a more sustainable approach to energy and waste. As a result, children know that their opinions matter and that they can make a positive change to their environment. This sometimes leads to voicing views elsewhere with more confidence too.

All members of staff inspectors spoke to were enthusiastic about the role they had and many gave wonderful examples of the impact they or their teams had had on the lives of children. The result, as one said, is a setting in which, 'pupils believe that they can learn and be successful. They know they are making progress; we know they are making progress and their families know too.'

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

Recommendations

- Individual risk assessments should address any known vulnerabilities children may have effectively and in a timely manner. They should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure staff are informed about what current risks are and how to mitigate against them.
- There must be evidence that an appropriate member of the safeguarding team has followed up the outcome of a referral quickly and that appropriate action has been taken. Records need to clearly state what a child has said and what the advice of a local authority designated officer has been, so that the rationale for action taken is evident.

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: 1266836

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rob Piner

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Chris Peel, Social Care Inspector (lead)
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