

Vale of Evesham School

Vale of Evesham School, Four Pools Lane, Evesham, Worcestershire WR11 1BN
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is an academy and is directly responsible to a governing body. Vale of Evesham School provides education for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. The school caters for 190 pupils in total. The residential service operates from Monday to Friday, and can accommodate up to 15 students. There were 14 children and young people receiving a service at the time of the inspection and their age range was nine to 18 years. The school's last inspection was in March 2017.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 February 2018

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: 13 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children and young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives.
- Staff ensure that children and young people are enabled to express their views, wishes and feelings, and that these are acted on.
- Managers and staff keep children and young people extremely safe.
- Leadership is exceptional.
- Managers and staff have high aspirations for children and young people, and continually drive improvement in the quality of care provided.
- Partnership working with other agencies is excellent.
- Children, young people, staff and parents are extremely positive about the service and the care that staff provide.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Improve the quality of governors' reports on their visits to the residential setting.

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

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of governors' reports on their visits to the residential setting.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people make significant progress from their starting points in different aspects of their development.

Parents are extremely positive about the care provided for their children. They identify and value the exceptional progress made by their children. Parents thoroughly enjoy the opportunities that they have to meet other parents and share the experiences and progress of their children. For example, a recent quiz evening was organised by children and young people, with support from staff. All children and young people were involved in setting questions and making videos which celebrate the skills, qualities and individuality of each child and young person.

The residential provision offers a vibrant and nurturing environment where children and young people can continue to work on their educational and social targets. They are included in the day-to-day running of their residential suites. Daily meetings facilitate smooth transitions to and from school, and help children and young people to express their views about the plans for the evening ahead.

Children and young people have chosen new furniture for the three residential suites. They thoroughly enjoyed the shopping trips. They helped to assemble the furniture and show great pride and investment in the homely and well-maintained environment.

Creative and personalised displays add to the vibrancy of the residential setting. Photographs and symbols provide excellent information about the running of each residential suite. They show children's and young people's achievements. Children and young people constantly use these visual references to express their needs and views. Children and young people are surrounded by positive memorabilia, which increases their self-esteem, sense of pride and motivation to try more new activities.

Nurture is a key strength of the staff team. Parents are reassured and confident because they understand that staff provide individualised care for their children. Parents' comments included: 'He has such a strong rapport with [member of staff], she is like a second mum to him and I don't mind that as I know he is really cared for.' These high-quality relationships are replicated between the children and young people. They make positive friendships with peers and look out for each other. Some children and young people have made their first friendships. This is made possible because of staff support. Children and young people develop, and begin to understand, qualities such as kindness, sharing and tolerance. This contributes to their social skills and the quality of their relationships with others.

Communication with children and young people remains a key strength of the staff team and this continues to improve. Sign language is now a consistent tool for all

children, young people and staff. Structured training, both for care and education staff, means that all staff use core sign language in conjunction with symbols and pictures. Children and young people are able to express their views and feel more understood because of this excellent development. Their anxieties decrease and their behaviours improve as they feel more empowered.

Children and young people are given mentoring roles to support their peers. One young person is the chairperson of the children's forum, and will mentor the next chairperson. Another young person is a signing champion and is incredibly pleased about how she supports other children to use sign and symbol language. A third young person has become the mentor for children and young people who are new to the residential setting. She shines with pride and shows a great sense of responsibility as she speaks about her new role and the child she is helping to settle in.

Children and young people have access to a wide range of activities. They are able to use the school facilities after school. These include the gym, the school field and the playground. The residential suites have excellent resources for arts, crafts, reading, messy play, puzzles and other activities. Children and young people enjoy spending time with each other, socialising, relaxing and watching their favourite films. They also enjoy a range of other activities, including horse riding, swimming, bowling and going to farms, parks, and soft-play and activity centres. They become more confident and outgoing as they try new activities.

Children's and young people's health needs are exceptionally well met. This is because leaders and staff prioritise children's and young people's emotional and mental health. For example, liaison between parents, staff and child mental health agencies ensures that different support options, including medication, are thoroughly explored. Some young people now enjoy the benefits of their improved behaviour due to changes to their medication.

Mealtimes are a social event. Children and young people thoroughly enjoy the nutritious meals. Consistent use of sign language and symbols ensures that children and young people can make informed choices about meals. The catering staff respond well to individual needs, likes and dislikes. Children's and young people's manners are impeccable and a credit to the school.

Children and young people develop excellent independence skills. Young people enjoy cooking their own meals, and are immensely proud of their efforts. They enjoy the responsibility that they have for managing their personal hygiene and doing their own washing. They become more mature and develop excellent teamwork skills as they help around the residential suites, cook with each other and decide on group activities. The recent introduction of a formal award programme to help young people to develop skills for learning, work and life, means that young people gain meaningful qualifications as they achieve their goals.

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

Children and young people thrive in this setting because of the support that they receive from staff. This is underpinned by excellent care planning, risk assessments and behaviour management strategies.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are implemented throughout the school effectively. The safeguarding framework is robust due to outstanding liaison with children's and young people's parents, social workers and the local authority's safeguarding team.

Partnership working with parents and education staff ensures that the needs of each child and young person are individually identified and sensitively met. Staff attention to detail is outstanding, both in terms of written records and staff practice.

Children's and young people's plans and records are shared with them. Their personal profiles are displayed on their bedroom doors. Children and young people made reference to these profiles throughout the inspection. The profiles empower children and young people to share information about themselves. They fully understand the support that they should receive from staff, and are therefore able to express their views about when and how this support is provided.

The headteacher works in partnership with the local authority's designated officer in order to investigate concerns about staff practice. His investigatory work is fastidious and shows a high regard for the safety of children and young people.

Behaviour management strategies are exceptional because staff understand children and young people extremely well. Staff promote children's and young people's strengths and consistently reinforce positive qualities and behaviours. Staff are patient and measured in their approach. Each young person's individual anxieties, communication needs and behavioural challenges are fully understood and uniquely managed.

Close monitoring of patterns and trends enables leaders to have an in-depth understanding of incidents. Physical intervention is seldom used. Records of all incidents are detailed. The records include pictures, signs and symbols. This ensures that children and young people of all abilities can give feedback on how staff manage their behaviour.

Excellent compatibility assessments are central to the admissions process. Children and young people live harmoniously and there are no concerns about bullying.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leadership is outstanding. The managers and staff team have a measured and

strategic approach to monitoring and driving improvement. Development plans set clear, child-focused objectives.

Parents appreciate the strong leadership and the commitment of staff, and see the improvements that these bring. Parents' comments included: 'It is never "we have got enough", it is always "what else can we have?"'

All of the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection have been met. Medication procedures have been thoroughly reviewed and improvements in recording are reinforced through high-quality staff training. Recruitment procedures have also improved. Senior leaders now seek greater detail in relation to second references. When previous employers are only willing to give brief details, a third reference is obtained. The streamlining of children's and young people's files now provides staff with easy access to information. No young people have left the residential provision since the last inspection, but senior leaders continue to liaise with parents on how transition planning can be better improved in the future.

Other improvements since the last inspection include the development of a 'welcome to residential' video; new furniture chosen by children and young people; further developments in communication systems; and a more structured programme for developing independence skills.

Senior leaders and staff are innovative and work hard to create new opportunities for children and young people. New schemes include young people doing voluntary work. For example, some young people have visited a retirement home. Senior leaders and staff are already looking to extend this experience, and exploring other community resources that young people can access.

Some children and young people experience their first holidays as a result of the efforts of staff. The staff's commitment to their role is unquestionable and all-embracing. For example, staff have maintained contact with one young person who is currently ill and unable to attend the residential setting. Regular telephone calls keep the young person informed about what is happening, and provide him with important support.

Children and young people are looked after by a team of experienced and well-trained staff. The care provided is excellent because staff practice is built on a firm foundation of well-understood policies and procedures, which are consistently reinforced through effective training and focused team meetings.

The outstanding nature of partnership working with parents is demonstrated by parents' comments which included: 'Communication is phenomenal. They [staff] spot the smallest things and always ring me to check it out. Also when things really work well, staff ring me to see if it might work at home. It is just like one big family unit to be honest.'

Independent monitoring visit reports are completed by a representative from another school. Reports are detailed and provide senior leaders with good direction regarding further areas for improvement. For example, one young person has had a friend to visit for dinner as a result of recommendations made by the independent visitor.

Internal monitoring systems are equally robust. The continued progress of children and young people is celebrated in the head of care's written reports. His attendance at all the governors' meetings demonstrates how the residential service is held in high esteem in the overall operation of the school.

Governors visit the residential provision. However, the usefulness of these visits has declined. Governors' reports, while celebrating the strengths of the setting, are brief and lack in-depth evaluation. Greater independent scrutiny will inform monitoring and provide a wider scope for improvement

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: SC043049

Head teacher/teacher in charge: Stephen Garside

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Elaine Cray, social care inspector



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