

Ash Field Academy

Ash Field School, Broad Avenue, Leicester LE5 4PY

Inspection dates

23/02/2016 to 25/02/2016

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding 1

Quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the boarding provision is outstanding because

- Leadership and management are strong. Highly effective monitoring and management oversight identifies and acts promptly to address areas of weakness. Confident and inspirational managers lead the delivery of an extremely high quality of care, and continually seek out ways to develop the service further.
- A notable strength is the relaxed and very happy atmosphere in the residential part of the school. The fun element comes naturally to staff, and is clearly very beneficial for children and young people, who speak very positively about their residential experiences. Comments include: 'I really enjoy staying', 'I like staying over with my friends' and 'I really like my bed and the sports club.'
- Pupils engage in a wide range of exciting activities. Examples include a holiday to the seaside, a weekly trip to a local dance group, a weekly sports group run by sports professionals and arts and crafts and music activities.
- Individual needs and abilities are supported to an exceedingly high standard. The facilities and equipment provided ensure that pupils are able to access all areas and activities, regardless of individual disabilities. Pupils are very confident in the care that they receive, and have trusted relationships with staff.
- Pupils' safety and well-being are central within residential arrangements, and every safeguarding concern is responded to promptly and appropriately. All staff, including leaders and governors, have undertaken a range of safeguarding training.
- Pupils make significant progress. Parents report that they have noted excellent

progress with behaviour, independence, self-confidence and maturity. Comments include: 'I have been so surprised by what xx (child) can now do by themselves.'

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with the independent visitor towards reporting being more evaluative in relation to the quality of care and safeguarding arrangements.
- Ensure that individual written plans include all aspects of individual pupils' needs. Plans should set out how the service will support and monitor identified needs, including areas such as emotional well-being.

Information about this inspection

One inspector conducted a three-day inspection, announced on the morning of the first day. The inspector visited the residential accommodation, and made observations of the care and support received by pupils. The inspector reviewed a selection of policies, procedures, files and records. Discussions with pupils and care staff took place throughout the inspection. The inspector met with the leadership and management team, a group of parents and spoke with professionals working closely with the service.

Inspection team

Mary Timms

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

This is an academy residential special school with 134 pupils. The residential area is a dedicated secure wing within the main school. Up to 18 pupils can sleep in nine bedrooms.

Pupils have learning and/or physical disabilities and associated sensory and health needs. There are currently 37 boys and girls using the residential service for between one and four nights a week. A few pupils stay for an extended school day, which includes tea and subsequent activities in the residential area, before going home.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2015.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Highly effective leadership and management ensure that pupils receive consistently excellent care. Sufficient numbers of committed staff ensure that pupils are happy and receive a high standard of personally tailored care. Staff are experienced, well trained and are clearly very passionate about their roles and responsibilities.

The focus on driving up standards and progression for individual pupils is an outstanding feature of this service. Research into care planning for children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, commissioned by the school in 2015, looked at good practice within the sector. The conclusions from this research inform current practice and service development. Rigorous management monitoring processes support continuous improvements across the school. Sixty per cent of pupils using the residential service from 2015-16 were reaching above their expected attainment levels for personal development and progress compared with 37% of day pupils. Physical intervention is not used within the school.

The inclusive approach to planning and support for social time and activities, is a particular strength. Observations were made of pupils with diverse disabilities and additional needs, taking great pleasure from playing football-based team games together.

Pupils' views are proactively sought through relaxed interactions, for example through school council meetings and surveys. It is evident that pupils' views are valued and acted on without delay. For example, when they asked for additional activities, these were swiftly arranged.

Pupils value their time at the school. They speak very positively about the staff; confirming that they feel cared for and listened to. They speak with excitement about their friendships, and reflect on how much they enjoy the 'sleep-over' experience. Parents are also very positive about the benefits of the residential experience for their child. Comments include: 'I can't believe how independent xx (child) has become' and 'The staff are all really good. Communication is excellent, I am always updated about my child, and they are just like family.'

Quality of care and support

Outstanding

The recent redecoration of residential areas and the addition of new flooring means that children and young people stay in an improving environment. Parents reflect positively about the recent introduction of promoting a more personalised space for pupils, who are encouraged to bring pictures or personal items for each residential stay. This means that they feel comfortable when staying away from their home. Development plans are in place to upgrade the toilets. This demonstrates a commitment and programme of works to support the provision of a pleasant and high-quality living area.

Care planning broadly reflects individuals' needs, relating to diagnosed disabilities and individual health care needs. While no concerns were identified that needs have been unmet, an area for further improvement is to broaden written plans to include all identified needs, including welfare and emotional well-being. Staff prioritise physical and health care needs, and have an excellent understanding of pupils' individual needs. Highly effective partnerships working internally between school and residential teams and with health professionals and parents ensure excellent care and support for a very broad range of health and care needs. Strong links with multi-disciplinary health care services support physical, emotional and psychological needs effectively. A range of professionals support and guide the manner in which health needs are supported during school and time in residential, including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and dieticians. This means that changing and evolving health needs are addressed promptly and effectively. Parents and health professionals are very confident in the arrangements for managing medication. While parents retain the primary responsibility for medication, staff work closely and effectively with them to meet individual needs.

Regardless of pupils' individual disabilities, staff have high aspirations for them. Their residential experience is arranged to offer an extension to the school curriculum. The same individual plans and targets used in school are promoted during less structured time and through exciting and relaxing activities. Self-esteem and confidence greatly improve through the promotion of personal independence. Progress for some is reducing staff support with personal care. For others, it is smaller steps such as improved eye contact and, for others, learning cooking skills. Staff readily praise success and new achievements. A culture of praise within the whole school encourages and recognises success by awarding certificates of achievement during school assemblies.

The catering arrangements support a diverse range of dietary needs. Menu planning is monitored by an external service that reviews menus against school standards for nutritional content and balance. Pupils have learnt about growing and harvesting foods by planting a range of fruit and vegetables in the residential garden. Pupils spoke with excitement about the 'strawberries being the best'.

Staff work creatively to provide stimulating and exciting activities. For example, there have been residential trips to the seaside and sports and art groups are run during residential time. A broad range of activities, toys and sensory specific items are provided that pupils are supported and encouraged to use. As a result, self-esteem grows and pupils are happy and stimulated. Pupils have trusting and very positive relationships with the staff. Their every need is understood and because staff know pupils so well, they note quickly if pupils appear unwell or show anxiety.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The safety and well-being of children and young people are at the forefront of care arrangements. The risk of harm to pupils is reduced through the well-managed implementation of risk reduction strategies, in relation to known and potential hazards. Children say that they feel safe and are comfortable talking to the staff if they had a worry. Parents are very confident in the arrangements to keep their child safe. Comments from involved professionals show that they have the highest regard for the manner in which pupils are safeguarded.

Safeguarding practice is excellent. Managers ensure that staff understand their role and responsibilities in the protection of pupils, and that they have up-to-date knowledge of current issues, such as internet safety. Refresher training reflects the latest developments in statutory and local guidance, regulation, legislation and covers areas specific to the service, such as the provision of personal care.

Staff understand their duty to report immediately on any concerns, and an inventive system of flagging ensures that any level of safeguarding concern is drawn immediately to the attention of managers. Three notifications have been made to the local authority since the last inspection, each relating to concerns outside of the school. There have been no events of children going missing while staying on a residential placement. This is because of the very close supervision of pupils and the effective use of risk-management strategies.

A safe and well-maintained living environment is provided. Trained and competent staff assist children and young people with the use of additional equipment, such as hoists and specialist bathing equipment. Fire safety arrangements are robust, and are appropriate for the vulnerability of pupils attending this school. Detailed records demonstrate the rigorous monitoring of fire safety arrangements.

Effective recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that unsuitable adults do not work with children and young people. Visitors and volunteers are fully supervised at all times.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

The management team has a focused vision and shared commitment for continual improvement in the school and residential provision. The well-managed operation of short residential opportunities supports the school curriculum by providing imaginative and social experiences which promote personal development. The very experienced management team lead by example and set high expectations of the staff. Leaders and managers know each pupil well and monitor their individual progress across all areas of the school. A recent evaluation of progress made by pupils accessing residential stays has informed service development and confirmed a range of benefits from using the residential opportunities.

Leaders and managers ensure that all areas of the school work seamlessly together. Communication is highly effective and ensures a smooth transition for pupils from school to residential and return to school the following morning. Effective monitoring by the management team and board of governors drives forward service development. Independent visits are undertaken and reports are provided to the school principal. While reporting reflects pupils' experiences, an area for further improvement is for more evaluation of findings to be included within the independent visitors report. A range of meetings take place between governors, managers, school and residential staff. Because of the excellent communication and scrutiny of arrangements, the quality of care is maintained at a consistently high level. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively into practice, are kept under review and are updated as and when necessary.

Parents speak highly of the management of the service. They are very confident in leaders and managers and in the residential service. Several parents reflected how the excellent work undertaken has helped with their own care of their child. Comments from parents show that they receive excellent feedback on all aspects of their child's residential experience. No complaints have been received about the residential service since the last inspection.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

| Judgement | Description |
|----------------------|--|
| Outstanding | A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced. |
| Good | A school providing effective services, which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for, and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. |
| Requires improvement | A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good. |
| Inadequate | A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 138094 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC006451 |
| DfE registration number | |

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

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| Type of school | Residential special school |
| Number of boarders on roll | 37 |
| Gender of boarders | Mixed |
| Age range of boarders | 4 to 19 |
| Headteacher | Jane Booth |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 03/03/2015 |
| Telephone number | 0116 273 7151 |
| Email address | jbooth@ashfield.leicester.sch.uk |

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