

# The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 140 pupils aged between seven and 16 years. The school currently has 50 children, who stay for between one and four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for children who have moderate learning difficulties and associated disabilities, such as speech and language disorders, autism spectrum disorders and behavioural difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 19 to 21 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 **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 November 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children's learning and development are significantly enhanced by the residential provision.
- Safeguarding procedures are comprehensively understood and embedded throughout the school.
- Children relish their time in the provision and talk animatedly about their experiences.
- The school provides stability and security for children who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.
- The staff team goes above and beyond to offer children wide-ranging experiences and new opportunities.
- The partnership with parents and carers is established and effective, and continues to grow.
- The school staff and residential staff work together seamlessly to provide holistic care for children.
- Ambitious and innovative leadership continues to drive the school forward, achieving outstanding and beyond.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Consider enabling children to take an active part in the serving of food at evening meals.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The children absolutely relish being 'in-house', and positively thrive in the residential provision. There is a waiting list of children who are keen to stay in residence. This includes children who have complex difficulties and health conditions, and rarely stay away from home or spend time with peers outside school. The school provides a welcoming and safe haven for children to try new experiences and develop valuable life skills.

The added value of the residential provision significantly improves children's attainment and attendance in school. Children develop a wide range of independence skills, extend their friendship groups and increase their self-confidence.

Children's emotional growth and social development is mapped using a bespoke system that helps staff to identify areas for improvement and ensure that children progress in these areas.

The residential provision is at the heart of the school. Residential staff are deployed in school each week to ensure a consistent approach to children's learning. The staff work collaboratively; there is a seamless approach to children's education and care. This approach enhances children's progress and improves their experiences. The benefits are measurable in children's attainment. Reading levels increase comparatively by eight months. Staff plan and support children's learning to suit their learning styles. A pen-pal exchange with another school encourages children to write for a purpose and develop fine motor skills. A member of staff who is responsible for phonics works with the literacy lead in school to ensure that homework methods are consistent. Numeracy and budgeting skills are used on shopping trips to account for spending. Children's learning is routinely supported in-house and is reinforced through a number of activities. One parent said, 'The school really understands the diagnoses she has. She is making a lot more progress. She wasn't confident in English, now she likes to read, and she gets a merit.'

Children are busy and benefit from a stimulating and varied range of activities each evening. They enjoy walks, swimming, celebration meals, fishing and numerous outings and trips further afield. An inclusive and can-do approach ensures that all children are included. A residential trip was made accessible for a child who needs to be given overnight assistance by the staff? The flexible and innovative staff overcame barriers and provided the required equipment and support to monitor the child safely. This enabled all children to enjoy new and rich experiences.

The food is freshly prepared by an exceptional catering team that goes above and beyond expectations. The service is flexible and responsive to the residential routine. Children willingly try new foods. One child said, 'The food here is delicious'; and a member of staff described the catering team as 'phenomenal'. Children eat around

the table and thoroughly enjoy their meals. However, the serving of food is mainly done by staff. This process is slow and generates waiting times when children could be more actively involved.

The clean, comfortable accommodation is designed by taking into account the children's choices and input. The houses are welcoming, cosy and orderly. Children's photographs and achievements adorn the walls, giving the children a sense of accomplishment and belonging.

The relationships with families, carers and professionals are established and effective. Feedback from families and carers is overwhelmingly positive. Their comments included:

- 'This school has nailed it. It's brilliant.'
- 'I have nothing to say but praise for the school'
- 'Totally impressed and proud of the school.'

A social worker said, 'The residential school is the most important part of his [the child's] care.'

Children are prepared well for further education and adult life. There are ample opportunities for volunteering, earning money and helping younger children. Accredited systems recognise their efforts. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Young Leaders' Scheme provide opportunities that enhance children's experiences, hone their skills and broaden their life chances.

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

There is an overwhelming sense of respect, fairness and individual support in the residential houses. Children benefit hugely from the stability and security that residence provides. They thrive in the inclusive and safe environment.

Behaviour is excellent. Children are welcoming, helpful and respectful. Occasional difficulties are managed sensitively by skilled staff. The whole-school approach promotes consistency. House expectations are clearly set out and staff use positive reinforcement, rewards and incentives. These approaches have successfully reduced the number of incidents. Identified risks are managed well by a coordinated team. Good, concise records categorise risk, inform practice and guide staff in keeping children safe.

Incidents and allegations are managed very well under the direction of safeguarding professionals. Following an investigation into an allegation, the designated officer noted how well an incident that led to an allegation was managed. The incident involved a child leaving the school site. Staff actions reflected the risk management

plan in a responsive and professional manner to ensure that the child was guided away from danger. This is the only occasion when a child has left the site. There are no incidents of bullying and no concerns about children being sexually exploited or radicalised by extremism. Staff benefit from annual safeguarding training and remain vigilant and alert in monitoring children's welfare.

Children are helped to understand the risks associated with gaming and social media. Internet risks are carefully monitored by information technology filters. The school provides online safety training for children every three years. Staff have identified an appealing game that builds a profile of intelligence to gauge children's vulnerabilities. The game collects data to inform the staff about potential hooks and risks to individual children. This provides a preventative approach to online safety, based on the staff's research and understanding of the children's abilities.

The shared responsibility for safeguarding children is deeply embedded throughout the school. Designated staff provide a central point for sharing concerns about children. Referrals are followed up swiftly and the responsive staff represent the school at professionals' meetings. A new electronic recording system alerts all relevant staff about any child who presents with a concern. Daily handovers include the sharing of changes in appearance, changes in behaviours and feedback from residential staff, families and carers. Safeguarding policies reflect all recent changes to legislation and are shared with staff. Electronic monitoring systems flag when staff need to read new policies or require training updates. These comprehensive systems ensure that all staff have up-to-date knowledge and regular training for their role in protecting vulnerable children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The school is led by a highly efficient and effective headteacher who is supported by the senior management team. Leadership of the school focuses on helping children to make consistent progress. This ethos is shared throughout the school, and is underpinned by established systems that support a whole-school approach to the holistic care of children.

The best resource in the residential provision is the staff. One member of staff said, 'Team morale is the best it's ever been. We are very lucky to have an amazing team. Nothing is too much trouble.' The team has excelled in developing resources, practice and environments to improve children's learning and their residential experience. Each member of staff is dedicated and conscientious. Considered and careful staff deployment blends age, gender and experience beneficially. This gives children excellent adult role models who provide examples of cooperation, negotiation and communication. The headteacher described the staff as 'an absolutely awesome team'.

Research underpins all improvements and change. Staff compile an evidence-based approach to requests for resources and funding. The use of local networks, charitable

funds and regular training ensures that the residential provision continues to offer rich and exciting experiences for children.

The headteacher leads an ambitious and energised approach to continuous improvement. This has made a marked difference to learning outcomes, inclusion and the high standard of accommodation. Developmental plans are shared and whole-school objectives link to staff performance management. Staff are highly valued and actively involved in these plans. The staff are extremely proud of their achievements and the difference that they make to children's lives. Staff exude enthusiasm and professionalism. They strive to overcome barriers and ensure that children gain from rounded and stimulating experiences.

Monitoring systems are rigorous. An external visitor and trustees regularly monitor the school, with additional scrutiny from a separate independent consultant. The school has achieved the World Class Schools Quality Mark. This quality marker demonstrates that the school provides children who face socio-economic barriers with exceptional preparation for their adult lives and further education'. Extensive evidential work underpins the quality marks and maintain outstanding provision.

The partnership with parents continues to grow. Innovative schemes encourage parental involvement and participation. An accredited Families First award was achieved in 2016. Opportunities for families and carers, including social evenings, summer school and parent cafe, provide ample time to socialise and network. Parents spoken to said that they feel very much listened to. One parent said, 'I would use the phrase "a breath of fresh air" when describing the school's approach to parents.'

Overall, there is a continued drive to develop and improve the school that is highly successful in improving outcomes and experiences for children.

## **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:** SC024573

**Headteacher:** Sally Garrett

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector



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