

Unsted Park School

Castle Care Group, United Regional Office, Munstead Heath Road, Godalming, Surrey
GU7 1UW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school provides specialist education and care to children and young people aged from seven to 19 years with high functioning autism, Asperger syndrome and associated disorders. There are currently 83 students on the school roll. Five students were boarding at the time of the inspection. The head of boarding has been in post for 14 months and has a relevant qualification as required by the national minimum standards.

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: 30 November to 2 December 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 14 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students say the best thing about living at the school is the quality of their relationships with staff. They demonstrate trust and confidence in the staff's ability to keep them safe and to provide a positive experience of living at the school. One student said, 'This is like my second family and I love staying here.'

Staff know the students extremely well and have developed effective ways of working with students to bring about positive and, in some cases, transformative change.

Students are supported in their education and benefit from close partnership working between boarding and education staff. Extra-curricular activity enhances the students' learning experience and ensures that they have a rounded and full life while at school.

Students have an active voice and there are some good examples of students being involved in the creation of their own plans and assessments. There are also mechanisms to obtain students' feedback, including regular meetings and key-work sessions with staff. However, it is not always clear from these records how the students' voice is acted on and how results are fed back to them.

There is a strong focus on developing independence and self-reliance for students. They clearly enjoy this. Inspectors witnessed examples of this, including a dining activity, students talking about shopping and cooking for themselves. Students can go off site unaccompanied when it is assessed that this is safe, and students complete a range of independent activities, such as laundry and cleaning.

The health and well-being of students is well supported. Skilled and well-trained staff support students to manage their own medication requirements. An experienced clinical psychologist undertakes direct work with students and provides support for staff to help them to find strategies that promote students' social and emotional development.

Carefully recruited staff are well trained and benefit from a comprehensive induction. Staff demonstrate that they understand the needs of the students in their care.

Overall, students benefit greatly from their time at the school. They move on positively when they leave and there are many examples of positive outcomes where students have gone on to live independently, go to university and to lead successful lives as adults.

Inspectors found that students' learning is promoted well with strong links between the school and residential provision.

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

Students feel safe and well cared for. Staff have the necessary skills and experience to safeguard students effectively. Staff are able to recognise the specific vulnerabilities of the students they care for. Strategies to support students who display risk-taking behaviours, including self-harm, are generally well informed and effective.

A student who displayed serious and deeply entrenched self-harming behaviours, with some suicidal ideation, was expertly supported to manage and significantly reduce incidents of self-harm. The student has now successfully moved from the service and is making excellent progress in an adult setting.

Students speak about the quality of trusting, positive relationships with staff. This ensures that they can seek out support and advice when they have concerns or anxieties about their safety and well-being.

Students' risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated following significant incidents. However, there is some inconsistency in the overall quality of individual risk assessment which would benefit from better oversight by leaders.

Staff are able to identify specific students who they have supported to reduce risk-taking behaviours. A student who is currently declining in mood and expressing some thoughts of self-harm has been quickly identified for additional support, and staff have already implemented additional strategies to keep them safe.

Students rarely leave the site without permission. However, staff have prepared missing persons 'grab files' that they can use to provide the police with all relevant information about a student in the event they leave the site without authorisation. The missing-persons policy is clear and complies with all relevant statutory guidance. Staff take all necessary actions to ensure the safety of students who leave the site without permission.

Students are encouraged, wherever possible, to participate in the creation of their own risk management plans. Staff gave examples of times where students have been able to challenge and amend records that they did not feel accurately reflected their level of risk. In a small number of cases, behaviour support plans did not always reflect known risks, and staff would benefit from clearer written guidance to ensure that they always know the best ways to work with students when they are presenting more risky behaviours.

Staff have developed their knowledge regarding preventing bullying and discrimination. Following the last assurance visit, work has been done to improve staff's understanding of online safety and the risks to students of exploitation. Students are actively challenged by staff if they express inappropriate language around race, gender or sexuality. Incident records do not always include all actions

taken, outcomes and evaluations of any interventions. Therefore, there is some inconsistency between verbal reporting and written records.

Students who present with some very complex behaviours are well supported by staff. Staff demonstrate a strong desire to really understand the behaviour of students in the context of their life experiences and their diagnosis. As a result, staff work patiently and creatively to support students to make excellent progress in overcoming any challenges.

Physical intervention is seldom used and is only used as a last resort to prevent self-injurious behaviour.

Staff support students to form positive relationships with peers. They challenge appropriately when students say or do things that could emotionally or physically cause harm to others. As a result, students live in a peaceful and safe space where they feel at home.

The school has good-quality safer recruitment practices which ensure that staff are suitable to work with vulnerable students.

The safeguarding network at the school is effective in keeping students safe. Incidents that relate to the safeguarding of students are acted on quickly. Staff are confident and trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The designated safeguarding lead and senior staff have a good understanding of how the school's safeguarding processes fit within the wider network of safeguarding support. Reporting to external agencies is timely and appropriate.

Risks are managed well in the environment and aim to minimise unnecessary restrictions to personal choice. However, with the complex nature of some students' behaviours, it is not always possible to avoid some restrictions. When this is the case, the reasons for the restrictions are carefully explained to the students affected.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders at the school are rightfully proud of the positive and supportive environment that they have created for students. They have a well-developed understanding of their roles and high expectations for the quality of care and support that students receive.

Leaders ensure that staff receive all the appropriate training and professional skills development that they need to provide an effective service for students. Staff value the training and support on offer. Staff are looking forward to the return of more face-to-face training opportunities. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, training compliance rates for staff have remained high. Staff benefit from

a clear and thorough induction which supports them to develop the skills they need to work with students and to understand the ethos of the school.

Staff say that they feel well supported by open and thoughtful senior staff. They feel that they have a voice and can raise concerns or questions about their working environment and practice. There is a strong commitment from staff to the students and to the school. This is reflected by the long length of service of many of the staff. This in turn promotes consistency for students for whom this predictability and familiarity with staff is so important.

Managers exercise strong oversight of practice and make good use of both internal and external monitoring and review systems. The organisation also benefits from a quality assurance team which provides constructive feedback with the aim to drive forward service improvement.

Leaders display a reflective and deeply engaged approach to their work. They draw on lessons learned from previous issues or incidents to enhance practice and improve service provision. Leaders have worked hard to meet targets set in their previous action plans. Requirements from the previous assurance visit have been met. This has led to improvements in safeguarding practice, enhanced training for staff, particularly with regard to online safety, and parents reporting positively on the quality of communication with boarding staff.

Leaders display a well-developed understanding of the individual needs of students. The head of care has a clear vision about the direction she wishes the service to go. She has made some very positive changes to the home environment to make it more homely.

Leaders ensure that progress for students is celebrated and valued by the team, and they can identify many examples of positive outcomes for students. However, mechanisms for highlighting these successes and recording all the positive outcomes for students are underdeveloped.

The head of care feels well supported by the head of the school. She receives regular and effective supervision. She has also benefited from the organisation's leadership and management training and is soon to complete her level 5 training.

Parents and professionals report positively on the quality of care and support for their children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that there is a consistent approach to the overall quality of risk assessment with strong oversight by leaders. Staff would benefit from clear strategies to ensure that they know the best ways to work with students when they present risky behaviours. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 6.3)
- The registered person should ensure that incident records include all actions taken, along with outcomes and evaluations of any interventions. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 12.6)
- The registered person should ensure that leaders and staff benefit from clearer mechanisms for demonstrating to students how their voice can really make a difference. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 17.1)
- The registered person should ensure that leaders develop effective mechanisms for highlighting the successes and progress of students. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 22.1)

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: SC363144

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Daniel Goldstraw

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Inspectors

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Matt Nicholls, Social Care Inspector

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