

Ratcliffe School

Ratcliffe Special School, John Nash Drive, Dawlish, Devon EX7 9RZ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The residential special school is a local authority provision for children, irrespective of gender, who are aged between five and 16 years. It is federated with a neighbouring residential special school. The children have communication and social development needs and many of them have been identified as having autistic spectrum disorders. The school provides a flexible residential service for 21 children between Monday and Thursday. The school has four residential houses on the same campus. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2016.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 November 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 14 September 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Not all national minimum standards (NMS) are met, and areas for improvement were identified at this inspection.
- Leaders, managers and governors did not deal as meticulously with one safeguarding concern involving a member of staff as they had with other concerns.
- An incident where a child was injured when restraint was used was not reported immediately as a safeguarding concern. The written record of the incident does not provide an accurate account of what happened and the child was not spoken to following the event.
- Safeguarding concerns raised by residential care staff in their supervision sessions are not referred on to the head of care as required.
- Leaders and managers do not challenge the local authority when it does not provide independent return home interviews after incidents where children have gone missing.
- Electronic surveillance systems are used throughout the children's living accommodation. These systems are not individually risk assessed to determine whether each child requires this level of monitoring.
- Two residential care staff have not gained the required residential childcare qualification and care staff are not provided with all of the training that they require to support a child's emerging needs.
- Additional work is needed to strengthen the vetting process of new staff.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Children make good progress in developing practical skills for adult life. Residential children have good opportunities to progress at school.
- Children benefit from regular opportunities to increase their social skills and emotional development.
- Children enjoy a good and varied programme of activities and residential trips.
- Children enjoy their time at the residential provision. Children's families provided positive feedback about the children's experiences.
- Residential staff care about the children and have good relationships with them. Because of the quality of these relationships, residential care staff manage children's behaviour effectively.
- Leaders and managers have addressed the national minimum standards that were not met at the previous inspection.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 5.8: Any use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on children's privacy.
- 11.1: The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 12.5: All children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) within 24 hours incidents of restraint, including reasonable force, they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by.
- 13.2: There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff.
- 15.6: The school's procedures are compatible with the local runaway and missing from home and care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where the school is located. Where children placed out of authority go missing, the head of care (or school equivalent) follows the local RMFHC protocol and complies with and makes staff aware of any other processes required by the placing authority.
- 19.2: All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these standards hold these qualifications or begin working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all national minimum standards are met.
- Ensure that safeguarding concerns raised by staff during supervision sessions are referred to the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- Provide staff with the required training to support a child's emerging needs.
- Ensure that recruitment records confirm that discrepancies on an individual's application form have been rigorously explored.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Not all national minimum standards are met and areas that would improve the children's experiences have been identified at this inspection. Shortfalls in how effectively leaders and managers protect children mean that their overall experiences are not consistently good.

The quality of the residential accommodation varies in each of the four houses. Some houses have been redecorated and modernised more recently than others. Residential care staff carry two-way radios and display policy information throughout the houses. Neither of these practices are in keeping with providing children with a homely environment.

All residential houses have closed-circuit television cameras in the corridors outside the bedrooms and door sensors on every bedroom door. These practices are not individually risk assessed to determine whether each child needs them and therefore they infringe on the children's privacy.

Residential staff care about the children, and can demonstrate that children benefit from staying at the residential provision. A family member told staff about what has changed for them since their child started staying at the residential provision, and said 'It has mended our family'. Another child's self-confidence has significantly improved. The child now has friends and is captain of some of the school's teams.

Residential care staff provide children with lots of fun opportunities; activities are well-planned and varied. Children take part in structured evening activities such as playing football, art and craft groups, and going to the cinema. Together with day pupils, residential children have benefited from residential trips to Poland and France, and have undertaken the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards and the Ten Tors Challenge. Environmental pursuits are encouraged. Children make bird boxes and use cameras to watch nesting birds, as well as helping to keep bees and produce honey. A child told the inspector that, 'I do lots of fun things here and always have a nice time'.

At school, residential children make marginally more progress across the core subjects than day pupils and on average have a higher school attendance rate. Residential children learn life and social skills that contribute to preparing them for adulthood. The school uses a recognised programme across the school day that is continued during residential time to support children's development in these areas. Using information from the school's monitoring system, leaders and managers can demonstrate that this programme has developed the social skills of those children who attend the residential provision.

Children benefit from regular opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills. Daily tutorials are focused on the children's well-being, and on helping them to

develop resilience. Lessons also provide children with the opportunity to discuss important issues, such as mental health awareness, sexual health and relationships, and using the internet safely. Children access therapeutic support as required from a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist, and through alternative therapies. Leaders and managers use pupil premium funds well to extend this range of opportunities further.

Children's views are gathered by their key workers, who then meet regularly with teaching staff to discuss children's plans and their progress. Children take part in house meetings to choose their activities and dinner menus. They personalise their bedrooms and bring favourite belongings from home.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Leaders and managers do not ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are always in accordance with statutory requirements for promoting children's welfare. The majority of allegations or suspicions of harm are reported to the Designated Officer in good time, but not all. Child protection records of the referrals made are clear and retained on file.

On one occasion, the school's designated safeguarding lead did not immediately refer an injury sustained by a child during a restraint to external agencies. In addition, the member of staff who performed the restraint was involved in the initial review of the restraint as well as the decision about the type of investigation needed, and subsequently contacted the parents of the injured child.

This particular incident was not treated with the same rigour or timeliness as other child protection concerns and allegations managed by the school. The school did not make an immediate decision as to whether the member of staff should remain in work during the investigation, despite advice from the Designated Officer. In this case the member of staff remained at work for 12 days before action was taken. In addition, the member of staff returned to work 20 days before the safeguarding governor held a meeting with them to discuss learning from the incident.

The written record of this incident does not provide an accurate reflection of either the member of staff's or the child's actions. The child was not given an opportunity after the incident, and before senior leaders excluded him, to tell managers how he felt about what had happened.

During the inspection, school staff raised concerns with inspectors about this incident and its subsequent investigation. Ofsted passed this information to the local authority, which identified several shortcomings in procedures.

Leaders and managers do not challenge the placing authority when independent return to home interviews are not offered or arranged after incidents of children

going missing from the residential provision. Therefore, information is not available to leaders and managers so that it can inform the plans that protect children and help them to identify strategies to reduce the chance of them going missing again.

Residential care staff manage children's behaviour effectively. They have good relationships with the children and know them well. During residential time there is a noticeable focus on de-escalating situations and work is clearly in train to reduce the need to restrain children.

The school's recruitment procedures for selecting and vetting new staff are adequate, but could be improved. Candidates are not currently required to state when they completed full-time education, which weakens leaders and managers ability to assess a candidate's full employment history. In addition, more detailed recording at interviews is required in order to demonstrate that leaders and managers have explored any disparities in a candidate's application.

Risk assessments address children's known vulnerabilities and health needs. Children receive help and support in managing their feelings and realising their personal wishes safely. Children are protected from bullying and discriminatory behaviours. Residential care staff respond with clear boundaries regarding what is safe and acceptable. They talk to the children and seek to understand the triggers for their behaviour. A good example of this related to concerns that a day pupil was taking biscuits from a delivery lorry. Staff explored the reasons for this behaviour and found that he was coming to school without having had breakfast. Staff acted quickly and the child is now joining one of the residential houses for breakfast.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Leadership and management require improvement. Leaders and managers have failed to meet five national minimum standards at this inspection.

There is a period of change at the school and staff told inspectors that information about their options is not clear. Residential care staff also said that that they would like to be more involved in the children's care across the school day, and do not always feel that their role is valued by education staff.

Residential care staff are not provided with all the training that they require to support a child's emerging needs. In addition, two care staff have not completed the required residential childcare qualification; however, they are in the process of doing so.

Residential care staff receive regular supervision and any performance issues are followed up in subsequent professional guidance meetings. However, important safeguarding issues that staff raise with their line managers during supervision meetings are not always referred on to the head of care as required.

Staff appropriately involve children and their families in planning the move into the school residential provision. First, staff meet with the family to discuss the child's needs. Children can then visit for a half day and families are encouraged to help personalise the child's new bedroom. Staff carefully assess the needs of children before they move in, to gain an understanding of the risks associated with each child and whether their needs can be met in the school.

Families have recently provided the school with very positive feedback about their children's time staying at the residential provision. The families who replied to the school's survey all stated that their children are happy, feel safe and enjoy their residential time. A parent who spoke directly with the inspectors also confirmed this view.

Leaders and managers have addressed the national minimum standards that were not met at the previous inspection. As a result, children's individual care plans and risk assessments have improved, and now provide staff with sufficient information about how to care for the children. Staffing levels during the evening remain the same as at the last inspection, but day pupils who were staying for teatime visits no longer do so. This has reduced the pressure on residential care staff. The school's governors now complete unannounced visits of the residential provision, and produce reports for leaders and managers of their observations.

Residential care staff communicate well with parents, social workers and other professionals. The school hosts open events to promote the residential provision and these are attended by families and local authority representatives.

Residential care staff work in accordance with the residential provision's statement of principles and purpose. Staff provide an environment for residential children which promotes a good sense of community and positively encourages them to achieve socially as well as academically.

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: SC003895

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Mark Rose

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01626 862 939

Email address: mrose@dawlish-ratcliffe.devon.sch.uk

Inspectors

Guy Mammatt, social care inspector
Polly Soper, social care inspector



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Store Street
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