

# 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 responsible to a governing body. The school provides education for pupils who have autism spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. The school caters for 193 pupils in total, including the nursery. The boarding service, which operates from Monday to Friday, accommodates up to 15 children. There were 15 children registered to board at the time of the inspection from year groups 7 to 13.

**Inspection dates:** 5 to 7 November 2019

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected and their welfare is not safeguarded.

**Date of previous inspection:** 4 December 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

This was an aligned inspection that took place at the same time as an education inspection.

There are serious, widespread failings in safeguarding children across the residential provision. Despite this, there are positives within the service; children are attending school and making progress. However, these positives are undermined by the shortfalls in the help and protection that children receive, and the leadership and management of residence.

Despite the large size of the residential provision, it has a homely feel. Communal areas are clean and comfortable, and in general are furnished and decorated to a good standard.

Children who were spoken with during the inspection all have positive stories of their residential stays. They said that they could share any concerns with trusted adults. Staff gain children's views and opinions through children's forums. Children benefit from this inclusive approach.

Children spoke of how much they enjoyed the range of activities offered, especially the residential trips. Feedback from parents and external professionals was positive.

Meeting all national minimum standards (NMS) is a requirement of this academy's funding agreement. This school has failed to comply with all NMS and has been referred to the relevant regional schools commissioner to consider further action.

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

There are serious and widespread failures in how children's care has been managed at a strategic level. The managerial oversight to safeguard children is inadequate.

Senior managers have failed to implement a strong safeguarding culture in the school, particularly regarding the safe recruitment of staff. Two residential staff have significant gaps in their recruitment records. A prospective new member of staff in the school was dishonest on their application for their role. When the prospective new member of staff informed senior leaders that they had a criminal caution from the police, an assessment of risk was undertaken by management staff who were not qualified to do so. As a result, the member of staff started employment without sufficient safeguards in place. Further to this, the school's single central record for the staff was missing essential information. These shortfalls increase the potential for inappropriate and unsafe people to gain employment in the school and this means that children are potentially placed at unknown and unassessed risk.

Designated safeguarding leads have failed to follow procedures that are designed to keep children safe. A member of staff was charged by police after being involved in a violent incident in public. Disciplinary proceedings were commenced, and the member of staff resigned from their post. Managers did not ensure that a referral was made to the Disclosure and Barring Service following this safeguarding concern. Again, managers failed to take comprehensive action to safeguard children.

Leaders and managers have failed to promote children's safety. There has been a failure by managers to identify and address fire safety concerns. For example, during the inspection, fire doors were propped open and two fire doors did not close properly. Fire doors that fail to close properly present a risk to children and staff in the event of a fire.

Residential staff understand and respond appropriately to children's health needs. However, medication is not stored in line with the school's medication policy. This means that staff, and indeed, children, could access medication that they should not have access to. This includes controlled medication. This is a serious shortfall that could have significant consequences if a child were to access this medication.

Children have their own rooms and can decorate them as they wish with their own belongings. The layout of the residential provision means that some children's bedroom doors open into communal areas. Some of the children have extremely complex needs which can manifest in behaviours that are unpredictable and difficult to manage. There are no risk assessments to decide which rooms children are allocated. Such assessments could mitigate and reduce risks to all the children.

The overall impact of these shortfalls is that children are not adequately helped and/or protected.

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

There have been recent changes in the senior leadership at the school. The headteacher left before the start of the academic year and the head of care assumed the role of designated safeguarding lead. A new headteacher started working two days a week at the school in November 2019 and will commence the role fulltime in January 2020.

Staff are provided with training to support them in their roles. The head of care provides residential staff with regular opportunities to discuss their practice in formal meetings. However, this support is not offered to the head of care, who has had no recorded supervisions since the last inspection. This is despite newly taking on the significant responsibility for safeguarding. Furthermore, none of the staff spoken with have had an annual appraisal of their work. Failure to provide supervision and appraisals for staff means that they are not provided with routine direction in their work and professional development.

It is the role of one of the school governors to oversee the residential service. This

role includes meeting with the head of care to consider the quality of care provided in the residential provision. Although the head of care has submitted reports about the quality of care to the governors, these reports have failed to reflect many of the safeguarding concerns identified during this inspection.

The same governor is one of two independent visitors who visit the school each half term. The independent visitor reports have provided some level of challenge to senior managers. Despite this challenge, the senior leadership team has failed to take any action to address weaknesses in the provision and quality of care raised in these reports. This, along with managers not acting to remedy issues raised in the reports, renders these reports of little value and does not improve the experiences or safety of children.

Children's case files and care plans are generally well written and give an accurate account of children's needs. However, some information in children's files, such as what medication they take, is out of date. Not updating records about the medication a child takes demonstrates a failure to take appropriate account of a child's health needs and could compromise their well-being.

Staff de-escalate difficult behaviours well and physical interventions are used rarely. Not all staff who work in the school are employed by the school, for example the school nurse and speech and language therapists. These staff have not received training about how to restrain children. Mitigation of the risks in having untrained staff being involved in physical interventions with children has not been appropriately assessed. This places both staff and children at unnecessary risk.

When children display difficult and unwanted behaviours, staff have the option of implementing a measure of control or a sanction. Such measures of control are proportionate but lack management oversight to assess if their use was effective. This does not ensure that reflection and review take place to lessen the potential for these incidents to reoccur.

## **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 standards for residential special schools:

- All medication is safely and securely stored and proper records are kept of its administration. Prescribed medicines are given only to the children to whom they are prescribed. Children allowed to self-medicate are assessed as sufficiently responsible to do so. (National minimum standard 3.8)
- Accommodation is suitably furnished and of sufficient size for the number, needs and ages of children accommodated, with appropriate protection and separation between girls and boys, age groups and accommodation for adults. Bedding is clean and suitable, and is sufficiently warm. (National minimum standard 5.5)
- The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured. (National minimum standard 6.2)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. (National minimum standard 7.1)
- 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. (National minimum standard 11.1)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (National minimum standard 13.4)
- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (National minimum standard 14.1)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (National minimum standard 19.6)

### **Recommendations**

- Measures of control require analysis, commentary and oversight.
- Standard 20 visits require management analysis, commentary and oversight.
- Ensure that all boarding records are accurate and up to date.
- Consideration is given to training any staff who are not directly employed by the school in dealing with incidents of challenging behaviour.

## **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:** SC043049

**Headteacher:** Rachel Perks

**Acting Headteacher:** Nicky Sentance

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Ricky D'Arcy, social care inspector



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