

Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

Inspection dates	8 March 2016 to 10 March 2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Outstanding	1
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Residential pupils make excellent progress across all areas of their social, academic and personal development. They thrive within a nurturing environment, where their unique needs are understood, and that maximises their potential.
- Innovative communication methods give residential pupils a strong voice. They influence the day-to-day running of the school. Residential pupils are actively involved in setting their own goals and targets, and fundraising profits are used to support projects of their choosing.
- Residential pupils feel safe because staff are warm, understanding and respectful. Such practice fosters trusting relationships, staff are trained to recognise challenging behaviours as communication tools. They search for the message and rationale beneath the behaviours. This approach enriches residential pupils' development and supports their experience of being away from home.
- Parents and carers are reassured by sensitive admissions, care planning and leaving-school processes. They appreciate how well their child is known and understood by staff. Their comments included, '[pupil's name] loves it here... can't wait to come back after every school holiday!' and '[pupil's name] has grown so much. The progress is just amazing because the staff understand.'
- Strong safeguarding arrangements protect residential pupils from harm. As far as their needs and disabilities allow, they are enabled to take measured and appropriate risks in order to learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Outstanding leadership and effective management since the last inspection has embedded the changes introduced last year. A culture of working together across

all departments brings consistency and a collective goal to ensure that residential pupils achieve across all areas of their development.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Include a greater description of the discussions held during staff supervision meetings, and include safeguarding as a standing agenda item.
- Ensure that individual pupil risk assessments contain precise details of the actions for staff to follow to minimise the risks to pupils' safety and welfare.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of this inspection. Meetings were conducted with the headteacher, the head of care, residential care staff and department leads including, human resources, estates, therapies, teaching, parent liaison and catering. A governors' meeting was observed, and this was followed by an interview with the chair of the governing board. A full tour of the premises was made and meals were taken with residential pupils. Afternoon and evening activities were observed and joined, in order for residential pupils to be spoken with. Telephone contact was made with parents, carers and the local safeguarding team. Written and electronic records in relation to safeguarding, care planning, health, staff recruitment and school policies and procedural guidance were sampled.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood

lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Stone Bay School is a local authority maintained residential special school with 54 girls and boys aged 11 to 19, of whom 26 are weekly or fortnightly boarders. The school is situated in Broadstairs, Kent, and caters for young people with learning, behavioural and communication needs. A high percentage of students have autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The residential accommodation provides separate living areas for boys and girls, and all bedrooms are single occupancy. All residential accommodation is located on the school site, within or attached to the main school building. The school was last inspected in February 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Residential pupils enjoy their residential experience because they feel safe, valued and respected. Their comments included, 'I love staying at school with my friends' and 'I get the help I need to do more things for myself'. Those with significant communication difficulties express their views using various aids, and also through their behaviours, demonstrating their ease and enjoyment of the residential provision. Examples were observed of individuals initiating eye contact and cuddles, smiling, laughing and using their picture exchange communication system (PECS) to express themselves. Other residential pupils showed decreasing anxiety, they become more able to tolerate new environments or people. This is highly significant progress. Parents and carers commend the impact of such outcomes. They spoke about 'improved family life' and 'enjoying experiences we would not have tried before, as a direct result of my child's progress.'

Other examples demonstrate the school's flexible approach in meeting unforeseen crisis situations, with the very best interests of pupils at its heart. One family member said, 'At a family's worst ever time, this school stepped in, made a residential placement happen and gave [pupil's name] the care, understanding and love that they needed.' Such practice goes the extra mile for its pupils to ensure that they feel safe and cared for.

The rapid progress made by residential pupils is directly linked to the detailed and thorough admissions procedures. The school fully understands its own areas of expertise and offers placements based on thoughtful consideration of how well individual needs can be met. Consequently, groups of residential pupils staying together in their own living environments are well matched. Friendships are nurtured and enabled. Residential pupils learn to live alongside each other. Valuable life lessons, about tolerating and, eventually, embracing each other's differences, are learned. One residential pupil commented, 'I've made good friends here' and a member of staff said, 'these two can't verbalise their friendship but it is plain to see how well they get on.'

Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the unique needs, characteristics and personalities of the residential pupils. This is further enhanced by the operation of a well-run key-working system. Residential pupils spend regular and good quality time with their key workers. Trusting relationships develop, and this enables residential pupils to feel more secure in their surroundings. They grow in confidence and self-worth. They become more at ease in a world that is sometimes confusing for them. Staff demonstrate patience, tolerance and empathy through their daily care practices. One explained, 'When the environment is difficult or scary, it is sometimes impossible for [pupil's name] to cope. It is my job to help them to develop good coping skills and not to be so worried.'

Cohesive partnership working between residential and teaching teams provides residential pupils with consistent help, guidance and support. Ambitious social and personal aims and goals complement educational targets. Examples include practising the use of communication aids within the residential environment to use them later in school, and learning self-help skills which transfer into the classroom. Smoothly run morning routines ensure that residential pupils are very well prepared for the school day. Relaxed and happy individuals become active and eager learners.

An embedded care planning tool fully recognises residential pupils' areas of need and support. This leads into clear guidance, which directs staff as to how to support individuals' unique needs. Actively listening to residential pupils' views on their preferred ways of being helped and assisted

results in high quality care that maximises their chances of success. For example, a staff member said, 'If [pupil's name] wants to get dressed in a specific order, which may not seem particularly logical to us, that's fine. The emphasis is upon doing it themselves, as independently as possible.' Success rates in using this care planning model are so positive that the education team is currently exploring how to transfer it into the school setting.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential pupils are very well placed because initial assessment processes successfully explore whether the school is the right provision. Working together with parents, carers, other professionals and the prospective pupil starts from the first contact. New residential pupils are introduced at their own pace, often with a phased introduction, building up to overnight stays. They are ready and well prepared to start their residential experience. Allocated key workers strive to build effective relationships with families and carers through regular communication in the recipient's preferred ways, which could be by telephone, email or face to face. One family member said, 'His key worker has taken [pupil's name] to healthcare appointments on their day off, staff have gone over and above to support my child's transition to their new placement.'

Staff across all departments undertake communication training. This is integral to the induction and continued learning of all members of staff, to ensure that all pupils are understood. Members of the catering team said, 'I enjoy my chats with the pupils, I'm getting quite good with my signing and PECS!' and 'It's lovely when you see their confidence growing and they start to come and ask you for something independently.' This sense of pride and understanding in recognising pupils' progress typifies the celebratory ethos and value base of the whole school staff team.

Furthermore, it demonstrates the school's drive to secure feedback and involvement from all of its stakeholders, not least the day and residential pupils. Forums such as the pupil council encourage everyone to have a meaningful say in key decisions, such as fundraising, school uniform, choosing equipment and social events. The catering manager is a regular guest at the council meetings. Pupil feedback directly impacts on excellent quality menu planning.

Careful monitoring ensures that residential pupils' health and medical needs are sensitively supported. Clear healthcare plans describe current needs and how staff are to support them. Some residential pupils have additional mental and emotional health difficulties, for which external professionals are involved. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in this regard. For example, they help individuals to understand the importance of taking prescribed medicines, and they know how and what to look for in terms of the possible side effects of a new medication. One residential pupil stated, 'The staff always help me when I get down and upset. They let me talk about it.' For such pupils, it is this depth of knowledge about the individual, and how best to intervene, that makes such a positive impact upon their developing self-worth and confidence.

Staff deployment is carefully considered to ensure that residential pupils receive the support that they need to maximise their ability to join in and have fun with their peers after school. This is skilfully achieved within the resources available. Key working and evening activity plans demonstrated consideration of the needs of individuals as well as the group. Thoughtful shift planning ensures that 1-to-1 support levels are provided where needed, without being intrusive. Afternoons and evenings are busy. Time and resources are maximised to ensure that residential pupils are out in the local community, utilising school resources and equipment, practising their increasing independence or simply enjoying relaxing time playing games or crafts with their friends.

All such naturally occurring activities are diligently observed by staff, who are looking for signs of progress or indicators of difficulty. Examples include how an individual is coping with a stimulus or whether a pupil is using their PECS with less prompting. Consequently, annual reviews and care planning meetings are rich in evidence for discussions about how individuals are getting on. Such forums embrace the school's multi-disciplinary approach to successful care planning. Expertly coordinated by the pupil liaison manager, representatives from the residential, teaching and therapy teams collaborate with parents, carers and pupils to set and monitor appropriately challenging targets, aimed at enriching pupils' experiences and maximising their potential.

Notable improvements are continuing with regard to the quality of the residential accommodation. Planned and ongoing redecoration is refreshing communal areas with warm, inviting decor and furnishings. This is complemented by the meticulous approach of the premises manager who ensures that maintenance and repair requests are promptly dealt with. Residential pupils can choose to decorate and personalise their own bedrooms. Many bring in treasured personal items, while others elect not to. Staff explained, 'It's the most important room, their room. [It's] their safe space, so they have it how they want it.'

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Safe working practices are embedded, because all staff understand their own and others' safeguarding responsibilities. Within a relatively small environment, five suitably trained, designated safeguarding leads are further supported by the headteacher and the chair of the governing body, who have received the same level of training. Their combined knowledge and skill in recognising the potential welfare and safeguarding risks to residential pupils, reliably informs their collective good practice. Strong peer support also brings healthy professional challenge and debate. Consequently, safeguarding and welfare policies and procedures are regularly scrutinised and updated to reflect the changing needs of the pupils.

The school's behaviour management guidance is one such example. All staff are suitably trained in de-escalation and physical intervention techniques. This results in appropriate, individually tailored guidance for staff to implement. Consequently, the actual use of physical intervention is rare, because staff intervene quickly to distract and alleviate potentially difficult situations. Despite such success, senior leaders have continued to seek to improve practice by reviewing and updating behaviour management recording systems. A new tool is being piloted in an attempt to bring more precision and scrutiny when reviewing such incidents, to look for any patterns, trends or indicators that their use may, should or could have been avoided. A member of staff said, 'No one wants to physically restrain a child. It's not what we are about.'

All staff members spoken with were able to describe the school's safeguarding procedures accurately, and how they would use or have used them. They are also conversant with new updates and additions in respect of the school's 'Prevent' duty and how pupils and their families could be at risk of issues such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Overwhelmingly, staff understand the acute vulnerabilities of the residential pupils and work hard to equip them, as far as their disabilities allow, with the skills that they need to keep themselves safe. A staff member said, 'Stranger danger is a real worry, [child's name] is far too trusting.'

Residential pupils' individual and unique safeguarding risks are identified through the completion of written risk assessments. While these documents describe past and current concerns, some do not specifically instruct staff on the actions that they should take, either to minimise the risks or how to respond to risk-taking behaviour, such as self-harm. Dialogue with the current staff team is reassuring, in that such residential pupils are well known, and staff do understand the potential triggers and signs of concern. However, a rolling staff recruitment drive is ongoing and

new staff will not have this detailed understanding. A recommendation is made to review and amend this significant information.

Through its informative website and regular newsletters, staff, parents and carers have easy access to updated information, which includes links to the local safeguarding children board guidance. The school is committed to reminding everyone of their safeguarding duties. Beyond immediate or obvious safeguarding concerns and incidents, seemingly lesser examples, described by staff as 'niggles and worries', such as a pupil acting out of character, are also reported to the safeguarding leads. This practice typifies the school's commitment to promoting welfare as well as safety. Timely and appropriate decisions are made about whether to consult or refer to local authority children's services. In the case of concerns raised about potentially unsafe adults, referrals and consultations with the local authority designated officer have been appropriate over the years, but have not been necessary since the last inspection. Following a recommendation made at the previous inspection, staff recruitment procedures have been tightened further. Residential pupils are protected from potentially unsuitable adults as a direct result.

Well organised health and safety monitoring procedures keep the physical environment safe and secure. Housekeeping and maintenance staff maintain superb cleanliness and safe surroundings. Following a previous inspection recommendation, the school's use of security measures, including closed circuit cameras, is now widely known to residential pupils, parents and carers, and placing authority social workers. These measures do not impinge upon residential pupils' privacy and bring an added sense of protection and peace of mind for parents and carers. Similarly, the use of restrictive measures, such as coded doors and locked entrance gates, is regularly explored and reviewed in order to justify its continuing use.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The tireless energy and commitment of senior leaders to embed the positive changes brought about last year is commended. Solid infrastructures now guide all staff through the policies, procedures and systems that reliably support their practice. Their roles and responsibilities are explicit and understood. Staff comments included, 'I know exactly what is expected of me' and 'I am accountable for what I do, but I'm also very well supported.'

Heads of departments are empowered to make decisions within their own areas of responsibility and expertise. This creates an environment of sharing good practice and working towards a common goal. The positive experiences of residential pupils are everyone's concern. The school's mission statement headlines are reflected in every staff member's appraisal objectives to ensure that they consider how their own practice impacts upon the outcomes for the pupils. This method also reinforces the importance of team work and collaboration. The catering manager stated: 'My team can only provide an excellent service because of the input from the pupils and the staff. We know all about preferences, health needs and special dietary requirements because the communication here is excellent.'

Team leaders within the residential provision talk about their additional responsibilities with pride and enthusiasm. Their comments included, 'I am clear about what I can and cannot do. I'm rewarded for being creative and finding ways to be as effective as possible for the children' and 'We're all full of bright ideas here! It's very refreshing and a brilliant place to work.'

The goal of senior leaders to create a seamless link between the residential, teaching and therapy teams has been achieved. Every staff member is valued for the contribution they make: no role is seen to be more important than another. Staff across all departments talk about the 'open door' management practice of senior leaders. This is effectively balanced within a culture

that also challenges poor practice and staff development needs. Individual staff supervision meetings constantly explore individual learning needs, which result in additional training to enhance their skills and knowledge. Written supervision notes record areas of discussion, but some of these lack sufficient detail and they do not always fully capture the content of the meetings. This restricts senior managers' ability to review staff practice and development effectively over time. Where necessary, performance issues are proficiently addressed and managed.

The impact of this cultural shift is tangible. The energy and drive of the whole school team is commended by parents, whose comments included, 'The school is just fantastic' and 'My child is thriving here'.

Such positive regard is further demonstrated by the small number of complaints and concerns received by the school. Within a culture that actively seeks and encourages feedback, concerns and complaints are swiftly resolved and effectively used to aid the school's own learning and development. Long-standing staff said, 'It's the best the school has ever been' and 'I am so proud to work here with our fantastic children'. This positive culture is exemplified by the staff's additional work and commitment to improve the school continually. Examples include excellent progress in respect of the previous inspection recommendations, and raising in excess of £40,000, which has been used to fund projects agreed after pupil consultation.

Diligent monitoring systems are capturing the impact of the changes. For example, senior leaders can demonstrate a substantial reduction in staff absence, and this directly impacts upon school finances and the continuity of care for the residential pupils. Strong governance includes a good number of parent governors, who bring an added dimension of oversight and of holding senior leaders to account. In addition to regular governor meetings, the chair of the governing body has regular 1-to-1 meetings with the headteacher to ensure that a safeguarding focus is maintained.

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 exceeds the standard of good and results 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

Unique reference number	119056
Social care unique reference number	SC023693
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.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	26
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Mr Billy McInally
Date of previous boarding inspection	9 February 2015
Telephone number	01843 863421
Email address	mnash@stone-bay.kent.sch.uk

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