

# Bowden House School

Bowden House School, Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Bowden House School is a maintained local authority school. It provides education, care and accommodation for boys between the ages of nine and 16+ who present with a range of complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. These include characteristics on the autistic spectrum, ADHD and mild learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, there were 32 residential students. All the accommodation is on the school site.

**Inspection dates:** 4 to 6 March 2019

**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:** 24 January 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Highly experienced, skilled and knowledgeable leaders and managers have successfully developed a culture of high expectation. With enthusiasm and dedication, all staff strive to support students to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Implementing a 'whole school approach', education, care and therapeutic staff work collaboratively and cohesively to ensure that students receive intense, prompt and targeted individualised support. Consequently, students are making significant progress.
- Support for the students' emotional well-being is particularly strong and is integrated across all aspects of their school experience. Students are benefiting from this joint approach and are learning to self-regulate their emotions and manage their difficulties.
- Partnership working with the students' families is notably effective.
- The governing body provides robust scrutiny, challenge and oversight of the residential provision and safeguarding practices.
- Safeguarding the students is central to all the support provided by staff. Risks are skilfully and sensitively managed by staff.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- To provide staff with opportunities during individual supervision sessions to focus on specific safeguarding issues affecting students.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that safeguarding of students is discussed as a separate topic in individual staff supervision sessions.

## Inspection judgements

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

Working collaboratively with staff across the school, residential staff use their in-depth knowledge of each student to provide individualised, nurturing care and support. The positive experiences of students are directly related to the trusting relationships they form with residential staff, who have a genuine interest in their well-being and their development.

A parent commented that the residential provision, 'is a community, like a big family where the staff meet everyone's needs'. She added that her son's 'progress has been amazing. Staff have helped him become more independent, strong, able and confident.'

All staff understand that many of the students have had negative previous education experiences where their social, emotional and mental health difficulties have limited their progress. Consequently, there is a sharp focus across the school to provide intensive, targeted support for students to improve their emotional well-being and their ability to engage in the learning process and become confident learners.

The emotional well-being and intervention team includes psychologists, therapists and a counsellor. The team meets frequently and plays an important part in ensuring that students receive precise support to advance their social development, to promote their emotional well-being and to improve outcomes. This support is consistent across all aspects of the school, including the students' residential time.

Integral to the ethos of the school is a recognition of the importance of working closely with students' families to fully understand each student's specific needs and vulnerabilities. The student and family coordinator is crucial in this process and works with dedication and passion to ensure that staff have relevant information relating to individual students. This information sharing and effective communication enables staff to tailor their focused support sensitively to meet students' needs. When students are new to the school and residential life, communication with families is particularly effective in settling the students quickly and providing them with a sense of stability and security.

As students progress through the school they have opportunities to develop their independence and daily living skills. Programmes for developing these skills are particularly strong for post-16 students, with the aim of preparing them for the realities of adult life and developing skills to confidently make the move from the school and participate as successful members of society.

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

Strong and effective safeguarding measures protect students. All staff take their responsibility very seriously for ensuring the safety of students. Concerns are promptly reported by diligent and vigilant staff to the experienced team of designated safeguarding officers, who take appropriate action. Referrals are made to external safeguarding agencies, when necessary.

Residential staff understand each student's specific needs. They sensitively implement effective and well-considered risk management strategies for all students, including those with highly complex needs.

Relationships between the staff and students are extremely positive and are at the heart of behaviour management strategies. Structure, routines and clear boundaries help students develop a sense of safety and trust. Consequently, students respond to the support staff offer and make excellent progress.

Well-embedded communication systems enable managers to monitor students' experience and progress throughout the school day and during their residential time. They facilitate prompt and effective interventions when students are experiencing difficulties and distress. Staff are flexible and adaptable with an attitude of 'going the extra mile' to meet a student's needs, for example by personalising a student's timetable or planned activity at short notice to benefit the student. The excellent joint approach of all staff helps students learn how to self-regulate their emotions, manage their difficulties and take responsibility for their actions.

Due to the nature of some of the students' difficulties, there are times when staff resort to using physical intervention to keep the student and others safe. Staff are well trained, and all such incidents are closely monitored by managers and the governor responsible for safeguarding, to ensure safe practice. From a lessons learned perspective, managers are constantly looking at different strategies to improve the support for individual students and help them manage their behaviour more appropriately and effectively.

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

Ambitious and aspirational leadership is reflected in a culture of high expectation. The staff strive to support and motivate students to achieve to the best of their ability. Leaders and managers are markedly skilled, knowledgeable and competent. Led by a headteacher with a wealth of experience, senior leaders, managers and staff share a common purpose. Implementing a 'whole school approach', they help students manage their difficulties and improve their chance of success. Inherent in this approach is raising the students' sense of self-belief, and their expectations of what they can achieve in their future lives.

Embedded in the 'whole school approach' is the integration of education, care and therapeutic support for students with the aim of developing the students' positive attitude to learning. All staff are valued equally and respect each other's role in contributing to promoting the best outcomes for students. Cohesive working and a flexible approach to trying new support strategies results in students receiving appropriate and responsive assistance to advance their development.

The residential staff team undertakes a wide range of training to meet the complex needs of students, with a sharp focus on safeguarding them and promoting their well-being. Staff receive effective support through supervision, group supervision and informal support from managers, who staff report are approachable and available for advice and guidance. It is not evident that safeguarding is always addressed as a separate, focused topic in individual supervision sessions.

A strong governing body provides effective scrutiny, challenge and oversight of the residential provision. The knowledgeable, skilled and experienced chair of governors closely monitors safeguarding matters and regularly visits the residential provision. Comprehensive reports of these visits, with recommendations for improvement, assist leaders and managers in maintaining and continuously improving high standards of care.

## **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:** SC050152

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Gerry Crook

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Jan Hunnam, social care inspector





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