

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 special, weekly residential school committed to supporting students between the ages of nine and 16+ who have a range of complex social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are currently 39 students on the school roll. There were 28 students boarding at the time of the inspection. The head of boarding has been in post for 14 years 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: 20 to 22 October 2021

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: 9 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The staff's love and care for the students at the school is tangible. They spoke with passion and pride about everything that the students have achieved during their time at the school. Staff have a highly developed understanding of the needs of every student at the school. They have a deep understanding of the impact of early years experiences on children's development and behaviour. Staff encourage positive change for students empathically and supportively.

Students talked about staff with affection, and the students and staff share deep, trusting relationships that have been built on their mutual respect for each other.

Students are proud of their community, and spoke about how important it was to support the more vulnerable members of their community.

While students inevitably push up against boundaries and question some rules, they also fully understand why these rules are in place. They value the fact that staff will always take time to explain the purpose of rules in the school, and they are able to reflect on the importance of safeguarding and the staff's duty of care to keep them safe.

The student voice is strongly promoted. Students benefit from a range of forums to raise their views and ideas about life at the school. They said they feel that their opinions are valued. They also appreciate that staff will always explain why something cannot happen if they are unable to deliver on students' requests.

The progress made by students is outstanding from some very difficult starting points. Students who have experienced significant early years trauma and neglect have been supported expertly to make positive changes in their life chances. The school is developing innovative ways of capturing progress both from an academic standpoint and a social, emotional and mental health standpoint. This demonstrates that students' academic and personal development at the school are impressive. Students often exceed expectations and there is a 'no limits' vision for students' futures. No students leave the school without a plan for training, further education or employment. A recent move to university for one student has been rightly celebrated, and it is hoped that this will inspire future students to aim high.

Success is celebrated and rewarded for all students, and there is a strong focus on inclusivity to support them to recognise how far they have come.

Extra-curricular life for students is rich and full. They have plenty of opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities in the school and in the community. The school has a goal to develop the students' sense of being part of the wider community, and there have been lots of recent initiatives offering students the

chance to engage in community fundraising, including a sale of their artwork at a local gallery, which they found very empowering.

There is a strong focus on developing independence, including travel training and dedicated independent-living skills training for the students as they approach adulthood.

The students' physical well-being and mental well-being are managed expertly. The input from the health team plays an important role in the excellent progress made by students. This team goes to great lengths to get all the information possible about students before they arrive. The staff's deep-level understanding of the emotional and psychological worlds of the students at the school is impressive, and informs the way in which they care for students.

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

Staff demonstrate a highly effective culture of safeguarding that is deeply embedded in all areas of practice. Leaders have invested time and energy in order to create very strong links with wider safeguarding networks. This ensures that any concerns are dealt with quickly. All necessary steps are taken to ensure the safety of students at the school.

Staff have a very clear understanding of safeguarding, and recognise their responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of students both at the school and at home. The work done by the safeguarding team to nurture links with parents and carers allows it to monitor the students' safety and well-being effectively when they are away from the school. There is also a strong culture of supporting families, which enables them to develop skills that they need to promote the safety and well-being of their children.

Students at the school feel safe and value the culture that encourages them to look out for each other. Excellent initiatives, such as the anti-bullying committee, place students at the heart of safeguarding practice at the school.

Students know exactly where to turn if they have any issues or concerns. Access to independent advice from sources outside of the core staff team is readily available, and students know how to seek advice and support for issues that they do not want to share with staff.

Individual risk is managed well with clear and coherent strategies that staff apply consistently and professionally across all departments in the school. Where concerns around risks to a child require escalation, this is done promptly and, once again, students benefit from the close links the school has with external safeguarding agencies.

The relationship, health and sex education curriculum supports students to explore sensitive issues around race, gender, identity and discrimination. This learning is supported by the care staff, so as to embed the culture of inclusivity and protection for vulnerable students at the school.

Behaviour management is a clear strength at the school. Staff work patiently and creatively with students to defuse potentially difficult incidents. When necessary, positive handling is managed sensitively and with absolute respect for students. Students spoke of a fair and supportive approach to the management of behaviour at the school. They understand that staff only use physical intervention when absolutely necessary, to protect them from harm.

All staff understand that previous trauma can influence how children view the world. Positive behaviour is promoted, and achievements are celebrated. When sanctions are applied, students have the opportunity to turn things around very quickly and have a fresh new start. This creates a culture of positivity, and reinforces the message that staff want to work with students to give them the best chance of success.

Staff support students to understand how to keep themselves safe online. Staff recognise the limits of their capacity to filter and monitor students' online access, so they place a strong emphasis on helping the students to develop the skills and insight they need to protect themselves in the virtual sphere.

Recruitment practice is very strong, and is well organised by the school manager. All necessary checks are undertaken to ensure that unsuitable people do not work in the school, which helps to keep students safe.

The safeguarding team provides the staff with excellent leadership that supports the strong culture of safety in the school. The team will also challenge and advocate for students when they have questions or concerns about decisions made that have an impact on their lives both in school and at home.

The staff's work well with the local authority designated safeguarding. The school often seeks external advice and support to ensure that it makes effective safeguarding decisions. When allegations have been made, investigatory work, recording and reporting have been first class.

Health and safety at the site are maintained to a high standard by a skilled and dedicated premises manager. This is evident in the high quality of decor and presentation around the site.

Students at the school come from a range of challenging backgrounds. The dedication of the staff and the time they spend on learning to understand the needs of students, and the risks that students face, pay dividends through the progress students make at the school. The staff's close work with families and outside

agencies to further the school's understanding of the students they care for is of exceptional quality.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The school's leaders clearly have great passion for their work, and are totally committed to the students and staff alike.

The quality, skills and experience of the leadership team is broad, and all members of the team deliver their roles to an extremely high standard. Their passion feeds through to all of the staff, who reflect on the quality of leadership with high levels of positive regard. This creates a unified sense of ownership and a whole-school drive for continuous improvement.

Oversight and self-assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school are strong and lead to the creation of ambitious action plans. The use of external professionals to oversee the school and offer their outside view of practice is welcomed and encouraged, and leads to further improvement.

Staff benefit from a support and welfare programme that makes them feel highly valued. Staff spoke highly of the consideration of their work-life balance, the focus on their emotional and psychological welfare and the excellent supervision and reflective support they get from line managers and clinical staff. This inspires the loyalty and commitment of staff, many of whom have worked at the school for several years. Retention rates and staff morale are high.

Leaders have also ensured that COVID-19 has had a limited effect on the quality of support, training and supervision of staff. Training compliancy rates are excellent, and staff feel that the leadership team has supported them expertly through an incredibly challenging and difficult year.

Leaders talked with great insight about how they support individual students to achieve the best outcomes possible. Access within the leadership to extensive skills and knowledge in the field of supporting students with social, emotional and mental health difficulties enables the development of tailored plans that support staff to deliver high-quality support to students.

Leaders consistently access research and information about best practice in the sector to influence and drive forward their plans for school improvement. Innovative practice is also shared. The headteacher sits on the special educational needs and disability development panel for the local authority, and is able to support improvement across all areas of practice within the borough.

Leaders are outward-looking and are keen to develop a wide network of support around students in their care.

Leaders are able to clearly identify the impact that the school has on the outcomes for students. These are monitored closely, and students remain in contact with the school, sometimes years after they have left. This enables leaders to understand/identify how students' time at the school has an impact on them.

The chair of governors is aspirational about what the students can achieve. She provides a good level of oversight and an appropriate level of scrutiny to ensure that high standards of care and student welfare are maintained.

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

Recommendation

- Ensure that the school is able to demonstrate that closed-circuit television surveillance is necessary to meet the needs of the individual/s, and is justified.(NMS 5.8)

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: SC050152

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Aaron Sherwood

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Helen Simmons, Social Care Inspector

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