

Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford School is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged seven to 16 years of age, with dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties. At the time of this inspection, there were 156 children attending the school. Of these, 58 use the boarding provision.

The boarding accommodation is provided in two areas on the school site, with a third boarding house in the local village. The head of boarding is new to the school since the last inspection.

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 March 2024

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 1 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarders enjoy their time at this school. They say the best thing about boarding is meeting new friends and getting to know them well. Boarders enjoy varied and interesting activities. During the evening, they use the school sports facilities, walk to the local shop or have movie nights. Older boarders have the opportunity to cook an evening meal. At weekends, those who stay benefit from planned excursions further afield. Leaders have a renewed focus on promoting healthy lifestyles across the school. New opportunities to complete a youth award programme have been introduced. Some of this focuses on older boarders supporting younger ones. This is in its early stages, but is improving relationships between the different ages. Many boarders pursue their own sporting goals, including training for cycling and a fundraising walk for charity.

Boarding staff know boarders well and speak about them with affection. They are aware of their needs and how to support them. Boarding staff identify the progress boarders make in areas such as leadership, maturity and expressing emotions safely. Regular house meetings offer boarders an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions directly to staff.

The food provision is well liked by boarders. They say the quality is good and that they enjoy the meals. Boarders have the opportunity to provide feedback about the food and to make requests. When reasonable, these are implemented. Meals are positive, communal occasions, when boarders can spend time with their friends and catch up about their day.

Boarders make social, emotional, developmental and academic progress. Through accessing specialist education they achieve good outcomes. Staff describe a 'whole-school' approach to supporting boarders to make progress. Boarders receive careers advice as part of the curriculum. This helps them to think about the careers they would enjoy in the future. Students progress to further education at college to study courses of interest, such as animal studies, catering, art and sports.

Boarders can personalise their sleeping spaces, and say they enjoy staying in the accommodation. Some redecoration has taken place in one boarding house, refurbishing the rooms ahead of a planned move at the end of the academic year. This has created a more welcoming space. However, some of the rooms in the senior boys accommodation do not have window coverings at all windows, and boarders said that it can take some time for repairs to be made.

Medication is stored securely and administered safely. Regular audits identify errors that occur, which are then investigated. However, in one medication room there is a list of the boarders and the medication they take. While this serves as a reminder for staff, it is visible to any boarder in the room when the cabinet is open. As a result, not all students receive appropriate privacy for their personal information.

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

Staff have a good understanding of the potential risks children may be exposed to and why children who board may be more vulnerable. Staff are vigilant to identify concerns or changes in behaviour and share these with the pastoral team. The response to safeguarding concerns is robust, with appropriate referrals made to local authority safeguarding teams when needed.

When safeguarding concerns have arisen for one boarder in particular, leaders have identified the concern and taken action to reduce risk. This includes additional support, meetings with family and referrals to the local authority. However, the decision-making process around how the risk was considered in relation to other boarders' vulnerability was not well demonstrated.

There is high expectation on boarders' behaviour and clear processes staff follow when behaviour does not meet these expectations. Boarders understand what is required of them. Boarders are kind and caring towards each other. They look out for their peers and report any worries they may have. The pastoral team responds quickly to concerns. This is supported by an effective information management system, which staff confidently use to monitor and analyse any trends or patterns.

Safer recruitment practice is embedded, and the single central register is well maintained.

There are good arrangements in place to monitor health and safety and to ensure that all necessary checks and assessments are carried out. Fire drills take place regularly.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The school has undergone a further period of change, with both the headteacher and the head of boarding changing. The return of the former head has provided stability during this period. The new head of boarding has relevant experience and has built a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. As head of the pastoral team, he has effective oversight of the whole school, with a necessary focus on boarders. Leaders are ambitious for boarders and celebrate the exceptional outcomes they achieve at this school.

A committed team of boarding staff support boarders and enjoy seeing the progress they make. They meet regularly to discuss which boarders they are worried about and to plan activities or improvements to the service. Boarding staff have regular personal development meetings. These explore their relationships with boarders and staff practice. Boarding staff receive training that is relevant to the role, helping them to best support boarders.

An independent visitor regularly visits the school, spending time with boarders and school staff. The visitor identifies areas for improvement and holds the school to

account when actions are not taken quickly enough. The proprietor is part of key leadership meetings and uses the advisory board to ensure that there is effective oversight.

Feedback from parents is mixed. The majority of parents who provided feedback feel that staff keep their children safe and care for them. They value the caring and supportive environments created by boarding staff. Parents say that communication about boarding as a whole is improving. However, they feel they do not always get enough communication about how their children are. Some parents feel that activities could be improved or better structured. Leaders have introduced a new parent forum. This aims to improve feedback opportunities for parents, and to involve them in consultations.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that there are clear records to show the rationale for decision-making in relation to safety planning.
- School leaders should ensure timely repairs to allow sufficient window cover for all sleeping areas.
- School leaders should ensure that expectations around communication with parents are clear with regard to how and when boarding staff will keep in touch.

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: SC039141

Headteacher/teacher in charge: David King

Type of school: Residential special school

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