

Ramsden Hall Academy

Heath Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, Essex CM11 1HN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Ramsden Hall Academy is sponsored by the Parallel Learning Trust. It is a day and residential special school that caters for boys aged 10 to 16 with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Many of the boys have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders and communication difficulties. The school is based in a rural area on the outskirts of a large town.

There are 95 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently 16. Residential pupils can board between Monday and Friday for up to four nights.

The head of boarding has been in post for three years and has a relevant qualification as required by the NMS.

The residential accommodation is a new purpose-built building in the school grounds. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2019.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 September 2021

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: 11 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Strong relationships between staff and children are evident. Children have positive attachments and great rapport with the staff team. Established, experienced staff provide stability for children. This has reduced children's anxieties when staying away from home and helped them to manage their feelings and emotions.

Children who stay in the residential provision benefit from improved grades in English and mathematics compared to children who do not board. Fixed-term exclusions are significantly fewer for residential children. There is a positive impact socially, emotionally, behaviourally and educationally for residential children.

Staff have developed a positive partnership with children's parents and carers. Weekly handovers between staff and parents ensure that staff are aware of any changes that may affect children. The communication systems throughout the school are efficient and fully support children who may be experiencing difficulties.

Children, their parents and carers and social workers are unanimously positive about the benefits of the residential provision. Staying away from home has increased children's social connections and started to build their independence skills. Parents and carers have confidence in the staff. One parent said, 'I can't fault the staff. They back me up; I don't have to ask them for help. I am an overprotective parent and I feel very confident that the staff do lots of little things that they don't need to do.' Parents' confidence in the school helps to reduce children's anxieties.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, staff maintained regular contact with children who were not able to attend school. This provided support during isolated periods and maintained important links with the school staff. The number of children using the residential provision is low. COVID-19 restrictions have delayed the use of the residential provision. This has inevitably interrupted residential stays. However, the staff and children have quickly adapted; this has led to a seamless move to the new building.

The new purpose-built building offers facilities and space that cater for children's individual preferences. Children have been involved in the planning and development of the building project. Children and staff benefit from a contemporary, spacious and modern building with single bedrooms. Features include an American diner, cinema room, pool room and enclosed hard-court and grassed areas. These provide ample opportunities for children to enjoy fresh air, exercise and a variety of activities.

Children enjoy food that is home-cooked and presented well. Healthy options are carefully prepared to look fresh and appealing. Good presentation encourages children to eat fruit, vegetables and salads alongside their main meal choices. On their birthdays, children can choose the evening meal. Staff cater unobtrusively for

particular diets and preferences. Children try healthy options and build their confidence in trying new foods.

Residential council meetings take place regularly. Despite this, some meeting records show that children do not always share their views and wishes. These meetings would benefit from having greater staff structure to generate wider discussions.

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

Children benefit from an exciting range of trips and activities, including some risky activities such as swimming and ice-skating. Risk assessments identify the potential risks for each child and strategies to manage risks. Individual assessments enable children to experience new and different opportunities during their residential stays.

Staff encourage children to behave positively. Staff use a reward-point incentive scheme. Gaining points means that some children receive a special end-of-term trip or treat. Children understand the reward system and enjoy accumulating their points. Working towards reward incentives has helped to reduce unwanted behaviours.

Staff set general behavioural expectations and agreed rules during residential time. Although children are aware of the rules, opportunities are missed during residential meetings to remind children of the expectations and ethos of the school.

There are very few behavioural incidents. Residential stays are reviewed by staff on a daily basis and pupils may not be able to stay if they have experienced difficulties in the school day. Generally, children get on well with one another and respect one another's differences. The use of single bedrooms has resulted in settled evenings. Children settle well and are monitored carefully through the night by staff who provide them with reassurance.

Children have no internet access during residential time. This fails to provide them with learning and education about the safe use of social media and the internet. They do not experience using social media and internet-linked devices safely, which does not prepare them fully for independence.

There is one designated safeguarding lead and five deputy designated safeguarding leads. All school and residential staff are trained in safeguarding and all staff understand their individual responsibility to report and act on concerns. Established systems provide a clear procedure for reporting and referring concerns. Daily meetings enable designated safeguarding leads to exchange information and actively monitor children's well-being and welfare.

Children readily name staff with whom they can talk if they have a concern. The head of care maintains an energetic and active presence and she regularly spends evenings with the children. This helps children to know who to go to should they have any concerns.

The staff and wider team ensure that sound health and safety arrangements are maintained and that these assure the physical safety of children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of care is experienced and qualified for her role. She is very well respected by the staff and has positive relationships with children. She is at the heart of the residential provision. Children seek out the head of care for advice, company and affection. The head of care has an impressive presence and is part of children's lives. She is versatile and responsive to children's needs. The head of care combines playing happy games with ensuring that children are provided with safe care and advocated for.

Staff support children's families beyond the scope of residence. A family hub has recently been set up to support families that may be having difficulties. There is an appropriate focus on families. Staff understand that supporting the family is essential to supporting the children.

There is significant investment in the facilities, and the budgets made available enhance children's experiences of the school.

The head of care manages complaints well and in line with the school's policy. Complainants are fully updated on actions being taken in response to their complaint. Children receive child-friendly letters detailing the outcomes of complaints and the head of care ensures that children are satisfied with the outcomes.

All residential staff have the required training to fulfil their roles. Staff are beginning to undertake training in a trauma-perception programme. This has yet to be fully embedded. However, the staff have welcomed the training and said that their understanding of childhood trauma has increased.

The head of care leads a team of dedicated staff. She is highly respected by the care team and provides meaningful supervision to staff.

The head of care manages children's admission to residence effectively. This enables children to settle in successfully. Families are fully involved in the admission process. The format for induction to residence has led to parents establishing networks with one another. Without this format, the development of these relationships may not have been possible, due to the geographical distance that children live from the school and each other.

Independent monitoring systems are robust and provide external scrutiny of the residential provision. This supports the head of care's oversight of the residential provision. Internal monitoring systems are wide in scope and used effectively. This enables themes and trends to be identified and develops and improves the residential provision.

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

- The registered person should provide regular opportunities for children to use the internet and learn about internet safety.
- The registered person should develop meetings, including the school council and after-school meetings, to provide up-to-date information, reinforce behavioural expectations and promote positive relationships.

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: SC018026

Headteacher: Emma Baker

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector (lead)
Deirdra Keating, Social Care Inspector

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