

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 conditions, 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 103 children at the school, of which 25 children board. The school can accommodate 40 children in the residential provision for between one and four nights per week.

The residential manager has been in post for over three years. She has the necessary experience and qualification for the role.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 June 2022

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: 14 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children who board love staying in residence. They have strong relationships with the staff. Interactions between the staff and children are extremely positive and, consequently, the children's behaviour in residence generally is very good.

Children who board have better attendance and attainment levels at school compared to the children who do not board. Being a residential child improves educational outcomes and has social and academic benefits. Children learn to make friends, have opportunities to positively engage in activities in the community and experience group living with children of similar ages.

Children are prepared well prior to boarding. They are provided with a welcome pack. Parents are provided with a residential handbook so that they know what to expect from their child's stay in residence. Children have their own induction to residence which is overseen by a member of the residential staff. These arrangements reassure parents, and comfort children who may be staying away from home for the first time.

Residential staff provide families with support at times of crisis. Staff help parents to access courses in autism spectrum conditions, guide parents on behavioural strategies and act as mediators when there have been difficulties related to children in the community or within family dynamics. Residential staff have a reach outside of the school which is an excellent source of support for the children and their families.

There are a good range of activities for children both on site and off site. Teaching staff support children's activities in the evenings, and this broadens the experiences that children have available to them in residence. Children are looking forward to the planned end-of-term holiday. The holiday will include activities such as beach trips, kayaking, archery, rifle shooting and visits to a theme park. Children who board who are in year 11 and nearing the end of their time at school are offered the opportunity to attend the holiday. This provides the children in year 11 with a positive end to their time at the school.

The reward system is well understood and used by staff and children. It does not have financial or physical rewards; instead, it encourages children to develop an understanding that feelings of pride and accomplishment are rewards in themselves. Children are eager to engage with the reward system and share their achievements with other children and staff.

Parents are pleased with the care that staff provide to their children. Parents said that communication from the staff is good. Parents value the weekly contact which gives them an update of their child's days. Staff have established positive relationships with children's families. One parent said the staff are 'heroes without capes'. Parents said that children's lives have been overwhelmingly improved since staying in the residential provision.

Older children have extra responsibilities such as making cold drinks for younger children. However, many activities that could develop the children's independence skills are undertaken by staff. Staff prepare fruit for the children to eat when they get home from school. Staff tidy the children's bedrooms and make their beds before and during their stays. Laundry duties are completed by staff. As a result, opportunities to support all the children to develop their independence are limited.

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is a positive ambassador for children. She is determined to keep children safe. Staff effectively and promptly record concerns. The system to record concerns allows information to be swiftly shared. Staff discuss safeguarding concerns in daily briefings. A team of six designated safeguarding officers means that there is good oversight and management of safeguarding concerns.

The DSL works proactively with external services such as other schools and social care. This strengthens safeguarding processes and procedures and enables staff to have a full understanding of the children. Staff are tenacious in their work to improve the safety of children. Staff have challenged social care partners when they have felt that their input was insufficient. The DSL has made repeated requests for support to social care. When this is denied, the DSL is not deterred in trying to get the help that children need to keep them safe.

Children's plans are clearly written. Risk assessments for children are detailed and contain known and emerging risks. These are regularly reviewed and updated following any incidents. The staff are informed about changes and discuss incidents during handovers. This helps staff to feel confident and to be consistent in their responses to children.

It is evident that residence is a positive factor for children who may be experiencing difficulties outside of the school. The staff team is adept at recording low-level concerns and is aware that such concerns can lead to a more worrying picture. The culmination of low-level concerns has, for some, led to additional support being accessed and outcomes being improved.

There have been no incidents of children going missing from residence. No restraints have been used since the last inspection. This indicates that children want to be in residence and that, overall, their behaviour is good.

A fire risk assessment carried out in August 2021 highlighted that not all fire doors in residence closed and made reference that staff should inform contractors of where to congregate in the event of a fire. During the tour of residence, two fire doors did not close and the inspectors were not informed of where to congregate in the event of a fire. In addition, one door was seen wedged open. This prevents the door from closing in the event of a fire. Although marked responses were recorded on the fire

risk assessment, there was insufficient information to show whether the required action had been taken. These shortfalls weaken measures to reduce risks in the event of a fire.

Children are provided with information to increase their awareness of the dangers of involvement in gang affiliation and county lines. Although some staff have undertaken training linked to these areas, it is not sufficient to increase staff's understanding about county lines and gang affiliation. As a result, some staff are not equipped to identify and act on concerns relating to these areas.

Residential staff are not provided with clear guidance on safe and appropriate use of personal mobile phones while working with children. This increases the potential for personal mobile phones to both be used and misused when in contact with children. Although no such incidents have taken place so far, this is a foreseeable risk.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The staff respect the head of care and feel exceptionally well supported by her. One member of staff said that in her 21 years of working she has never worked for such a good head of care.

Inductions are thorough and support staff in their roles. One new member of staff said that she has never experienced such a warm welcome or well-planned induction. These measures ensure that new staff are equipped with the information and support to help them to be effective in their roles.

The head of care is fully immersed in the children's care. She knows the children well and the children frequently seek her out to spend time with her.

Staff supervisions ensure that staff are well supported and are accountable for their actions. When there are concerns about staff practice, these are addressed directly by the head of care. This ensures that children receive good and improving experiences of care from the staff.

Residence is spacious and airy, and children's rooms are exceptionally well maintained.

Internal and external systems for monitoring the quality of care are good. This ensures that staff practice is maintained to a good standard and that children experience a good standard of care.

The two points for improvement made at the last inspection have been met. These related to safe opportunities for children to use the internet and the development of after-school and school council meetings.

Children are informed of who the independent person is and how to contact them. A handbook for parents states that the independent person will make planned and

unplanned visits usually once per half term to the school. However, they have not visited the school for over two years. This reduces children's capacity to share concerns with someone independent of the school.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. In particular, ensure that fire doors close, visitors to the school are made aware of the fire evacuation points, fire doors are not wedged open and that actions taken in response to the fire risk assessment are sufficiently recorded. (NMS 7.1)
- The school ensures that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. In particular, ensure that staff receive training in county lines and gang affiliation, and ensure that all staff are aware of and follow the school's policy on the use of mobile phones when they are working with children. (NMS 11.1)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff help children to develop their independence skills.
- The registered person should ensure that the independent person spends time in residence as is stated in the school's documentation.

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/teacher in charge: Emma Baker

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Rachel Watkinson, Social Care Inspector

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