

Ramsden Hall Academy

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 from 10 to 16 who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school is based in a rural area on the outskirts of a large town.

There are 99 children on roll at the school. Of these, 30 children board on a flexible basis. The school can accommodate up to 40 children in the residential provision for between one and four nights per week. At the time of this inspection, 16 children were staying in the residential provision each night.

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

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

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 January 2025

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 last inspection: 9 May 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress because of the actions of the staff. The support children receive motivates them to do more and to achieve more. Children who lacked confidence and self-esteem before boarding are now confident to learn. The ongoing support and guidance from staff have helped the children to develop new skills and new ways of approaching the challenges they experience. As a result, children are more outgoing and have built networks to use for support when things go wrong.

The support that staff provide results in fantastic levels of improved school attendance. Residential staff use their positive relationships with children to encourage them to attend their lessons, and children's success in learning and development is celebrated. Opportunities for reading, learning and taking responsibility for actions are integrated into evening routines. For example, children have started to watch and discuss documentaries that offer a chance to think about real-life situations, which provides a counterbalance to their preference for electronic fantasy games.

Children enjoy an excellent range of activities with staff. They have opportunities to go ice skating and to experience theme parks, beach days and residential trips. There is a comprehensive programme of affordable activities, including bingo and sports, and children have opportunities to learn how to cook and look after themselves. The staff provide children with opportunities they might not otherwise experience. One child said, 'I love boarding. I get to be a child. I get to play.'

Children understand how to make best use of a rewards system that is in place to motivate them to make positive choices. They are incentivised to continue to expand and develop their skills and improve their relationships with other children.

Staff have high aspirations for the children and strive for them to achieve their goals, providing them with the support and resources they need to be successful. For example, two children have enjoyed work experience in gym settings and a primary school and are now considering their career options.

Staff appoint senior boarders and provide them with mentoring roles to help new children. This fosters a culture of camaraderie. Numerous examples of children supporting one another were seen during the inspection. For example, one child was helping a peer to learn how to use a pool cue, and another child was helping a peer to carry their suitcase upstairs. One child has helped to teach a peer how to ride a bike. Children have carried this learning and confidence into the world outside of school. For example, when a member of the public needed help, a child encouraged a group of people to stay back and allow a lifeguard to do their job in a public pool. These acts of kindness demonstrate how staff are helping children to support others

in need, as well as integrate into the community and become positive members of society.

One parent said, 'This is the first time my child has ever told me he loves going to school. He has made lots of friends in boarding and is learning to be patient, reflective and not reactive.'

Staff have championed planning moves and work experience opportunities for children who are leaving the school. When children leave, they receive touching, personalised messages from every member of boarding staff which capture something unique about the child. This demonstrates how children are valued by the adults who care for them. These messages serve as a positive reminder that with the right help and support, children can thrive and achieve.

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

Staff practice has resulted in sustained improvement to the children's lives. Highly effective planning, and implementation of risk management strategies, minimises risks inside and outside of the school. Risks relating to children are quickly identified and understood by staff. The early identification of need, and the help provided, has improved children's safety and well-being without the need to involve more formal child protection services.

There are prompt and clear responses to emerging safety concerns in the school community and in the children's lives outside of the school. For example, leaders, managers and staff act promptly to implement new safeguards to prevent children from going missing. As a result, incidents of children going missing are reducing in frequency.

Staff spend time with the children to help them to understand different ways to manage their emotions and communicate their feelings. Relationship-building is a core activity, and children come to see staff as a haven in times of trouble.

The designated safeguarding lead works closely with families and external agencies. Referrals are made to support children's safety and well-being when there are concerns. The designated safeguarding lead has worked hard to develop relationships with families, for example by reaching out and meeting them in more comfortable surroundings when there is a need to discuss matters of concern.

Children are involved in designing creative and effective strategies to de-escalate situations. Staff support and trust children to make correct decisions, which helps children to build the confidence and knowledge to manage tricky situations. Excellent practice was observed during inspection that showed how children are helped to cope with feelings of frustration.

The use of physical interventions has significantly reduced since the last inspection. Staff are attuned to children's needs and deliver well-timed, therapeutic approaches that support them when they are struggling to regulate their emotions. Staff teach children to be reflective and offer them ways to repair relationships through regular discussion. On two occasions, a corridor door has been locked, which has prevented children from exiting to other parts of the accommodation. While both incidents have been fully logged and reflected on, they have not been recorded as a restrictive practice. During the inspection, leaders began to revise the school behaviour support policy to address this.

There have been occasional incidents that have required consultation with local authorities. Incidents are managed well. Quick, decisive actions are taken to support all parties involved, which enables appropriate outcomes. Senior leaders are also consulted and offer advice and guidance to the leadership team. This demonstrates a joined-up approach to safeguarding matters.

Children rarely feel the need to raise concerns. When they do, matters are dealt with seriously by the headteacher and head of care. The child is consulted with and actions are taken to keep children safe. Leaders involve children in all aspects of their experience in the boarding provision when it comes to safety and security.

The headteacher and head of care carry out excellent safer recruitment practice. It is applied to all staff in all roles across the school. Effective interviewing provides a baseline of an individual's values and aptitudes and includes challenging questions that help leaders to understand candidates' experiences and intentions.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Overall, the leadership team has excellent levels of oversight of the provision. From the governors to the headteacher and the head of care, there is cohesion. The leadership team meets regularly and has clear agendas to tackle any areas of concern. Actions are clear, and measures are put in place quickly to deal with issues as they arise.

The headteacher and head of care use highly effective support mechanisms to help children and their families. Through ongoing consultation, outreach is offered to families in need and referrals are made to external agencies when families are struggling and need support. Parents said they feel supported. They feel that leaders help them when needed and communicate with them effectively.

Leaders have high expectations of the staff. They meet staff regularly to discuss all aspects of their experiences and support them to develop in their roles.

The headteacher and head of care lead by example. They collaborate closely with other schools to share and reflect on best practice, which enables support and improvement to take place.

Children have exceptionally well-planned and delivered introductions into residence. The head of care meets with families to gain an understanding of children's individual needs. Stays are arranged in consultation with the children. Leaders and managers then ensure that they systematically review the children's and families' experiences throughout the introduction process. This means that plans are adapted as needed to enable children to board at their own pace. This attention to detail is a signature of the school.

The staff and leaders in the school feel well supported and listened to by the headteacher. They say he is an available source of support for them when they need to discuss important matters.

The consistency provided by the head of care has been vital in the ongoing excellence delivered. Her relationship with the headteacher has developed over the time he has been in post, and they have successfully delivered continuously improving care and support to the staff team, the children and their families.

Governors know the setting well. They are attuned to the needs and challenges in the boarding. They participate in decision-making and have a strong presence. They take action when they feel this is necessary, such as improving the already thorough and detailed reports that the independent visitor completes.

There are no unmet standards from this inspection.

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

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that incidents are correctly classified when any form of restrictive practice is used so that they are included in the evaluation of all disciplinary measures.

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: Antony Clements

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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