

Ramsden Hall School

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

Inspection dates	01/03/2016 to 03/03/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Young people benefit from being in residential care. Staff and managers know the young people well and are familiar with their emotional and developmental milestones. They follow robust admission procedures which link a young person's residential objectives with their educational needs.
- Staff have excellent relationships with young people. They speak about them knowledgeably and fondly. They encourage young people to express their feelings, to develop social skills and to reduce negative incidents. Young people feel more in control and gain confidence that they can manage their behaviour.
- Staff and managers place the safety of young people at the heart of their planning. They protect young people through careful planning and consistently encourage young people to be self-aware. Risks are constantly reviewed and matched with suitable management strategies.
- Staff and managers are highly skilled in working in partnership. They liaise with educational staff, parents and other specialist professionals. Feedback is extremely positive about the quality of care provided.
- Families feel that staff can be trusted to support and encourage young people, even when they are challenging. Parents have great respect for the commitment shown by the team. They comment that young people are happier and more willing to help out at home.
- Young people are supported to develop independent skills and staff take every opportunity to consolidate their learning. Lessons learned in school and in the residential setting are applied to activities in the community. As a result, they learn to view the future with more confidence.
- Leaders and managers work together very closely. They monitor both individual targets and trends in behaviour and educational attainment. They take immense pride in the achievement of staff and young people but also have an ambitious plan for further improvement.

- One shortfall against the minimum standards has been identified during the inspection that residential staff had not been receiving regular recorded supervision.
- Points for improvement include ensuring that senior residential staff need to ensure that staff receive regular supervision and review the quality and consistency of recording in case files. Staff also need time to concentrate on key worker responsibilities with particular reference to ensuring that recording is evaluative and reflects the individual personalities of the young people.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Ensure that all staff have access to support and advice for their role. They should also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)

Points for Improvement

- Ensure that senior residential staff have the time they need to review adequately the residential provision, to develop and supervise the staff team and ensure consistency of recording.
- Ensure that staff have the time they need to deliver recording on case files which is evaluative and reflects young people's individual progress and personalities.

Information about this inspection

This inspection took place within two hours of announcement and looked at all three residential flats. Inspection activity included meeting young people, joining them at mealtimes and after school in their flats. Young people took the inspector on a tour of the accommodation. Staff were observed in handover meetings and joined the inspector for a discussion. Inspectors spent time with the residential management teams and the headteacher. Case files, staff recruitment files and school policies were scrutinised. In addition, there were interviews with key medical and administrative staff, external professionals and parents. There were no responses recorded on Parent View.

Inspection team

Fiona Littlefield

Lead social care inspector

Kristen Judd

Regulatory inspection manager

Full Report

Information about this school

Ramsden Hall School is a maintained residential special school for 60 male pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Billericay with residential accommodation in three flats; 24 pupils reside at the school for between one and three nights a week. The school caters for pupils with a statement of special educational needs who have complex needs. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Young people benefit from consistent relationships with staff, who are purposeful and creative. Staff are confident in their authority, can defuse moments of potential conflict and can create a settled environment. Young people learn to relax and benefit from the calm atmosphere.

Young people learn to get along with one another. Staff work with them to reflect on their behaviour, to reduce negative incidents and to reach their behavioural milestones. Staff are committed to ensuring that the views of young people are taken into account. Young people appreciate this. They know that their views will be listened to and, as a result, their self-esteem is enhanced. The mother of one young person said: 'Tonight he is out with friends. That's real progress as he would never socialise before as he never had confidence. He enjoys himself now.'

Staff and managers have implemented comprehensive admission procedures. They work alongside the young people's families to identify risk, vulnerabilities and to match these risks and vulnerabilities with management strategies. Keyworkers review their progress regularly, emphasising the need to reflect on their actions and to improve their behaviour. Young people learn to control themselves better and this enhances their self-esteem.

Safeguarding is central to the ethos and culture of the school. For instance, young people benefit from a plethora of activities, including some in the community. At the beginning of each evening, young people and staff get together to confirm that young people are ready and that arrangements are secure. Each activity is assessed in terms of risks and each young person has their own behaviour management plan. Staff are robust in their approach with young people, spelling out consequences. For instance, one young person can make himself unsafe while out on trips. His keyworker has been clear with him that he will have to return to the accommodation if he cannot control himself safely.

Staff and managers are ambitious for young people. They see the purpose of residential care as supporting young people to learn in school and acquiring skills that will support them as they approach adult life. A parent of one young person said: 'Staff are great and always work with me. He can still have his tantrums but they are so much better. He is more able to control himself. He used to absolutely hate school but now he loves it and really engages.'

Leaders and managers are young-people focused and provide strong leadership for a well-established and committed staff team.

The quality of care and support

Good

Young people make progress because they are cared for by staff who know their needs well and who speak about them with empathy and fondness.

Staff and managers view residential services as a critical tool in helping young people to reach their educational and behavioural milestones. If a young person is considering staying in residential care, staff and managers prepare for this carefully. Managers visit the family at home to develop clear and detailed risk assessments and care plans that are linked with educational needs. For instance, one young person needed to develop concentration and attention in school, so his residential targets were to encourage him to play board games with staff and to take part in the reading challenge. Young people will be shown round the flats and spend extended evenings with the other boys so that they get to know the routines. As a result, young people start their stays positively.

Young people stay in one of three flats in the residential side of the school. They can personalise their bedrooms and learn some basic domestic skills, making drinks and light snacks or sorting out their laundry. They are expected to keep their bedrooms tidy and neat. As a result, they learn to take pride in their environment.

Staff and managers join young people for meals in the canteen. The quality of the food is excellent. Staff encourage young people to try different foods and they clearly enjoy the social interaction with adults and each other. The young people can be volatile on occasion, but staff are skilled at containing their behaviour. Young people know what is expected and gain confidence from this approach.

Young people make progress because staff place the young people's wishes and feelings at the centre of their practice. Each young person has an allocated key worker who reviews their care plans with them. This work is generally good but could benefit from more evaluation and reflection on current issues so that it remains up to date. Currently residential staff are expected to work in the school during the day and cannot always devote adequate time to ensuring improvement and consistency in recording.

The parents of young people speak highly of the support and guidance that staff and managers provide. Staff maintain a relationship through regular weekly contacts and surveys. The mother of one young person said: 'They always work with me and keep me informed. Everyone helps there. It is a feeling of belonging.'

Staff are creative and purposeful in arranging a range of activities that young people will enjoy. Some staff have special interests, such as archery and sailing, and can offer young people experiences in these sports. Other staff can offer fishing or camping trips, so young people have access to an unusually wide range of activities in the evenings and holidays. Each activity is linked to learning objectives such as developing social skills and making friends. The impact of this integrated approach can be dramatic. The parent of one young person said: 'He was frozen emotionally and didn't want to show his feelings. Now he feels able to enjoy his life. He has a sense of direction and ambition.'

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Young people are safe and feel safe. They know how to complain and are confident that staff will respond promptly. They may not always be completely satisfied with the conclusion but are clear about the reasons for the decision. For instance, some young people are elected to represent their flats in monthly school councils where they meet with the residential management team. They cover subjects such as activities and new equipment, and staff are adept at reinforcing messages such as the importance of e-safety. Consequently, while they may crave internet access, they cooperate with parental controls and hand in their phones to staff in the evenings.

There have not been any child protection concerns about young people while in residential care. However, staff and managers remain vigilant and respond immediately to any referrals. Consequently, professionals who have contact with the school express their confidence. One said: 'The managers are amongst the best I have worked with. Safety is their first priority and their communication is excellent.'

Young people trust staff and managers. For instance, they will comment that while bullying does occur occasionally, it is not tolerated. Two young people commented that the senior team and headteacher were 'firm but fair'. If they are worried they are clear that they can go to any member of staff who would sort it out. This message is repeated consistently in weekly school assemblies and daily residential meetings.

Each young person has a recent assessment where risks are matched with management strategies and de-escalation techniques. Individual targets are linked to their educational plans and spell out the progress that they need to make. For instance, one young person who was known to have violent outbursts was encouraged to read and gradually develop a better vocabulary and emotional understanding. Staff would engage him in discussion and he learned to express himself better when he needed to negotiate. This resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of negative incidents and a very high level of attendance.

Staff promote positive behaviour and young people know exactly what is expected of them. Educational and boarding staff work together closely throughout the day to track individual progress and award points for achievements in their personal targets. Young people respond very positively to this system, where the emphasis is on earning rewards and privileges through commitment and consistency. Occasionally staff use sanctions such as banning young people from activities or ICT for a limited period as a response to poor behaviour. This is effective: young people learn to control their behaviour and gain confidence as a result.

All members of staff in the school feel that they have a valuable role to play in helping young people feel safe and secure. The school nurse works closely with young people, their families, academic and residential staff to provide effective healthcare.

Administrative staff work closely to ensure that the premises are maintained in good order and that appropriate safety checks are routinely observed. Managers have now taken action so that all staff have complete and appropriate recruitment checks. This means that young people are safeguarded.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Requires improvement

The residential provision is managed by a committed and well-established management team, which is part of the school's senior leadership team. Managers are passionate and ambitious and work together very closely to scrutinise incidents and developments and ensure that action is prompt and effective. An external monitoring board provides an additional level of scrutiny and review. One senior external manager commented: 'There is still a lot to do but managers in residential have embraced our comments as a friendly challenge. I am mightily impressed.'

The school development plan includes an ambitious programme for the residential service. This positive approach is reflected in the growing sense of confidence that staff refer to throughout the school. One member of staff said: 'It has been so much better this year. The whole school is calmer. Young people choose to come to boarding: they like things to be crystal clear and know what is expected.'

The head of care reviews care plans each term. In addition, the senior management team provides evidence of the impact that residential care can have on a young person's progress. For instance, young people who have accessed residential care have very high levels of attendance, exceed their targets across the academic curriculum and record a significant reduction in negative incidents. Young people benefit from this highly integrated approach and the impact is greater the longer that young people attend. One external professional said: 'Young people feel safe, they feel they belong to something. The leadership team is effective and insightful so they don't take behaviour at face value, and look for history and triggers.'

The team of care staff are made up of long-standing staff who work closely together. All staff are qualified to national qualification level three. Managers prioritise training around safeguarding which is renewed regularly. Staff say that they are well supported by their managers and are well equipped to care for young people effectively. Managers prioritise staff professional development and annual appraisals are well established. However, staff have not been supervised regularly and this represents a shortfall in the national minimum standards. In addition, senior staff continue to cover shifts. This limits the time that they can devote to developing the residential team through staff meetings and improving performance by monitoring the quality of recording.

The residential provision maintains the required policies. An independent visitor comes to the school regularly and opportunities are given to young people to talk to the visitor in groups and in private. This provides another layer of external scrutiny and challenge that stimulates ongoing improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	115449
Social care unique reference number	SC018026
DfE registration number	881/7021

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	24
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Gary Walker
Date of previous boarding inspection	13 January 2015
Telephone number	01277 624580; school mobile 07710 372150
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