

# Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this residential special school**

This school is maintained by a local authority. It offers day and residential provision for children aged between four and 19 years who have been diagnosed with autism and have severe and complex learning difficulties.

Children only stay in the residential provision during term time and on weekdays. They return to their families at weekends.

At the time of this inspection, there were 112 children on the school roll. Of these, 13 children were accessing the weekly boarding residential provision.

The inspector only inspected the social care residential provision at this school.

### **Inspection dates: 11 to 13 February 2025**

**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 last inspection:** 27 February 2024

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children benefit from high-quality nurturing care from a consistent group of staff who understand their needs and know them well. Staff are attentive to children's needs. This helps children to feel safe and cared for, have fun and make progress.

When children come to stay in the residential provision, this is carefully planned to ensure that children cope well with the change and that staff can meet their needs. One parent described how she was 'amazed' at how quickly her daughter was able to settle in.

A particular strength of the service is the effort and care that staff put into supporting children who leave the residential setting. In one example, a staff member visited a prospective placement for the child. She worked closely with the parent to decorate the child's room and advocated strongly with the professional network to ensure that his new placement was able to meet his needs at the standards he deserved. Staff used social stories and photos of the child's new home to help him prepare for moving.

Parents consistently praise the way that staff work with them and speak highly of the standards of care provided to their children. One parent said, 'They (staff) absolutely love my child and treat her as their own. She is so happy when she goes to residential.'

Children are supported to develop their independence and reach their potential. This has a positive impact on their home life and levels of confidence and enhances their future life chances. One parent said that her child has developed more independence and is now helping to prepare food. Some children have a key fob that gives them wider access to the premises and outdoor space. This ensures that they are not unduly restricted by security measures that are necessary to keep some children safe.

Staff understand the communication needs of each child and use communication aids to help children to learn to express their views. One parent commented how their child is now able to use words to communicate, which they have previously been unable to do. Staff know the children well and anticipate their needs, but they also take care to listen to children and help them to make choices. Social stories, pictures and symbols are used well to help children to prepare for change and participate in decisions.

Children benefit from the support of a therapy team that offers a wide range of interventions to meet their individual needs. One child is learning to express himself through music therapy, which has helped him to manage his feelings better and has reduced incidents. The therapy team also provides staff with strategies to support children through play and inform them how best to use sensory equipment. In one

example, staff were able to support a child to learn boundaries relating to touch and personal space.

Children participate in a range of activities in the residential provision and in the local community. Trips out are well planned, and staff know what hazards to look out for. However, the individual risk assessments for these trips are not always explicit about how staff should intervene to overcome potential barriers for children in the community.

Children are generally healthy and enjoy healthy routines. Staff are creative in finding ways to help children to access routine appointments. Staff also support parents to ensure that children access medical reviews and ensure that any medication prescribed is benefiting children. However, written health plans for children do not reflect this excellent practice. Some potentially serious health risks are not clearly identified in health plans. The impact is mitigated by the fact that there is a consistent team of staff who know the children very well and understand their needs. In every instance that children have needed medical intervention, this has been identified and promptly accessed.

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

There is a healthy safeguarding culture in the residential setting, which is characterised by a competent, consistent team of staff who are caring, vigilant and understand areas of vulnerability for each child. There is excellent oversight and support to staff from team managers to ensure safe care practice.

The number of incidents of concern is very low. There are good systems in place to report concerns and a strong team of well-trained and knowledgeable safeguarding leads who understand how to respond to and escalate concerns if necessary. They work well in partnership with social workers and external safeguarding agencies.

The residential provision is a calm and structured environment, and serious behavioural incidents are rare. As a result, physical interventions are seldom used. When they are, there is good oversight from leaders and managers to ensure safe practice.

Children have trusting relationships with staff. Staff anticipate children's needs and intervene to prevent situations from escalating. Staff work with the therapy team to develop a range of creative strategies to help children learn how to express themselves in positive ways. Several parents and social workers commented that children have made progress in terms of reducing behaviours that challenge and learning to express themselves in more positive ways.

Staff carefully balance the need to keep children safe with the need to support children to take acceptable risks to develop their independence. Decisions relating to managing risk are well informed, and safety plans are clear and understood by all staff.

Good use of social stories and communication also helps children to feel safe and secure. Staff prepare children well for any potentially stressful events, which reduces moments of crisis and serious incidents.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders and managers are highly ambitious and want the best experiences and outcomes for children in their care. They model and promote strong core values that place children at the heart of the service.

The team leaders in each house also play a pivotal role due to their practice-led, child-focused and highly skilled oversight of care practice. This ensures that they understand children's lived experiences and can use this knowledge to inform their care and support.

Leaders and managers have good strategic oversight of the residential provision, and they know the children well. They make good use of feedback from comprehensive reports produced by the independent visitor to inform service development. Leaders and managers continuously look for ways to improve the service.

Many members of staff are long-serving, which helps to provide an experienced, consistent staff team to care for children. Staff morale is high, and they consistently praise the support that they receive from managers. Staff also highlight an inclusive culture and feel that their work and ideas are valued.

Leaders and managers have created a learning culture where staff are open to new ideas and have the freedom to develop creative approaches to find out what works best for each child. All staff receive core training and undertake additional training to help them understand the specific needs of the children.

Feedback from social workers and parents consistently praises the staff and managers for the way that they work in partnership with them to get the best outcomes for children.

Leaders, managers and governors work effectively across the school to ensure close working between the education and residential staff. Staff learn from each other and collaborate effectively to help children experience consistent approaches and well-considered support.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- Ensure that healthcare plans identify all health concerns for each child and provide clear guidance to staff on how to meet these needs and how to respond in an emergency.
- Ensure that risk assessments for activities identify any aspects of the external environment that may affect children. Plans should clearly outline how best to support children to learn how to cope with any hazards or situations that may cause them difficulties.

### **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:** SC023693

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Jane Hatwell

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## **Inspector**

Lee Kirwin, Social Care Inspector

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