

## Unsted Park School

Castle Care Group, United Regional Office, Munstead Heath Road, Godalming,  
Surrey GU7 1UW

# Assurance visit

## Information about this residential special school

This is a residential special school for children and young people aged from seven to 19 years. The school provides day and residential provision for students with autistic spectrum disorder and associated conditions. The school can provide 24 residential placements overall. At the time of this visit, seven children were staying overnight at the school.

**Visit dates:** 9 to 10 December 2020

**Previous inspection date:** 14 November 2018

**Previous inspection judgement:** Good

## Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

### The care of children

Parents and children say that staff are kind and thoughtful about how to care for children who stay overnight at the school. One parent said that the staff 'go the extra mile' to understand and support her child well.

Children like the way the staff look after them. They say that the staff help them to get on well with other children who stay at the school during the week. One child said that the staff know her well. They anticipate how her feelings are likely to affect her and they support her in ways that reduce her anxieties.

The staff support children's progress effectively, especially in relation to their self-help skills and independence. A parent confirmed that the staff find different ways to help her child to develop greater self-confidence about her decisions. For example, her child successfully organised a trip for a group of children and staff, and was proud of this achievement.

The staff have improved their management of children's medication. They obtain written confirmation from the prescribing medical practitioner before administering any change to a child's medication. One child described the process in place to support her to administer her own medication. She was clear about what she would need to do to show that she could do this safely.

Children and parents say that they can easily keep in contact with each other when children stay overnight. They did note that there are some issues with the quality of the Wi-Fi, which can sometimes impede children's access. This issue has been raised with the school leadership team, which is working to rectify this as soon as possible.

Several parents reported in Ofsted's 2020 questionnaires that the staff do not always communicate effectively with them. During this visit, most parents reported that the staff communicate with them well. However, two concerns were noted during the visit about how long it takes the staff across the school to inform parents about incidents involving their child.

The staff write placement plans with children. This ensures that the plans have a very child-centred focus where a child's individuality and views are central to their care and support.

The school has a good range of professionals who support children's well-being and work well with the residential staff. The recently appointed psychologist visits the children after school in their residential to build relationships with them. She is available to residential staff to discuss children's plans and needs. The head of care

attends weekly pastoral meetings with all therapeutic staff and shares information from these meetings with the staff team.

### **The safety of children**

Children feel safe when they stay overnight at the school. They say that the staff know them well, manage difficult behaviour effectively and are usually able to stop arguments from escalating. Consequently, incidents rarely occur, and restraints are very infrequent. There have been no incidents since July 2019 of a child going missing from care during an overnight stay at the school. Leaders and managers have clear plans in place to manage an incident of a child going missing should this occur.

The staff, leaders and managers confidently describe what they will do if they have a safeguarding concern. Consequently, the recommendation raised at the previous inspection is met. The school's safeguarding lead officers regularly check the staff's understanding of safeguarding, for example by asking them to respond to a variety of scenarios which the staff might face.

Risks for one child are well known by the staff, who act to reduce the risk effectively. The assessments cover important areas for the child, which provides good guidance to staff about how to minimise and prevent risks. Risk assessing children's needs is kept under regular review and any restrictions because of a risk are agreed with the child, parent and professional network supporting the child.

The organisation has one safeguarding policy. This policy covers all the services it operates for adults and children across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The September 2020 edition is not up to date with all relevant issues about safeguarding children in England. The policy does not contain any information about a local authority's early help assessments and links to the Department for Education guidance which had been archived. Therefore, staff do not have up-to-date information to refer to when considering safeguarding concerns at this school.

Children report that no bullying occurs when they stay overnight. One child said that sometimes they bicker, but this is not bullying. Leaders and managers have improved staff's responses to concerns of bullying. They have made a senior member of the care staff responsible for monitoring bullying within the residential provision. This person has developed a good range of plans and records to reduce and respond to any incidents of bullying that may occur. The recommendation to improve staff's practice which was raised at the previous inspection is therefore met.

### **Leaders and managers**

Leaders and managers demonstrate that they place their focus on meeting children's needs and they support the staff to be able to meet these needs well. They demonstrate a good understanding of how to meet children's needs and use monitoring systems effectively to review the quality of care provided. They also

promote children's safety and have taken appropriate action to meet all the recommendations made at the last inspection.

Leaders and managers have responded well to the rapid changes needed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The children's plans have been updated to reflect COVID-19 issues. Parents are regularly updated about any changes the school makes in response to new government guidance. The staff support children to follow any restrictions which are in place because of COVID-19, such as social distancing.

The staff receive good support and helpful supervision. They feel able to raise concerns to anyone in the school and actively take part in regular team meetings which focus on children's needs. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, some staff needed to isolate at home. However, they continued to keep in contact with the school through team meetings.

Training opportunities have continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The staff talk confidently about how they support parents. Nevertheless, the staff have not received any training about working with parents of children who have a disability or guidance on how to refer families to a local authority if they have escalating concerns about a child's welfare.

The school have requested a material change to their registration to reduce the number of places for residential students. The arrangements have resulted in more classroom space being made available to the school. This does not impact on the residential experience for children. Staffing arrangements remain suitable, and there continues to be suitable communal space for children to socialise. All bedrooms have en suite facilities, therefore, there are appropriate numbers of toilets and showers.

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

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

- The registered person should ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. Training should keep them up to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflect the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the school. In particular, the school leadership team must ensure that the staff team: has up-to-date knowledge of online safety matters; develops guidance and information about how to refer a family for early help from a local authority. (Residential special schools, National minimum standards, 19.1)

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that the school leadership team reviews the school's safeguarding policy to ensure that it is accurate and provides staff with

relevant and constantly up-to-date information about how to safeguard children in England.

- The registered person should ensure that the school leadership team provides staff with formal training about how to work with parents whose child has a learning disability.
- The registered person should ensure that the school leadership team reviews parents' views on the quality of communication between themselves and school staff; especially in relation to how quickly they are told about incidents that their child is involved in.

## **Residential special school details**

**Unique reference number:** SC363144

**Headteacher:** Daniel Goldstraw

### **Inspector**

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

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