

Orchard Manor School

Orchard Manor School, John Nash Drive, Dawlish, Devon EX7 9SF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Orchard Manor School provides education for 201 children aged 3 to 19 years and weekly residential care for up to 20 children. It specialises in providing education and care to children with complex communication and interaction difficulties, autism and learning needs.

The school is part of the Special Partnership Trust. At the time of this inspection, six children were living at the school in two homes located within the school grounds.

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

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 July 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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 previous inspection: 28 June 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children enjoy their residential experience and make exceptional progress because their health, education, well-being and independence skills are prioritised by the adults who care for them. Their outcomes have significantly improved since they moved to stay here. The children say that they feel they really belong, and they can trust the adults who are caring for them. The tremendous progress that children have made is as a direct result, not only of the skills, knowledge and experience of the staff, but also due to their impressive hard work and commitment to the children.

The children told the inspector that they enjoy staying here and that they get on well with the adults who care for them. They said that they like their bedrooms, which are personalised, and they have nice food to eat. Children do lots of fun activities. During the three days of the inspection, they enjoyed playing football, going swimming and visiting a local park. Children also access local activities, such as construction club or Army cadets. One child has completed the Ten Tors Jubilee Challenge and another child went on a holiday abroad.

The children are provided with excellent levels of care and respond well to the routines and boundaries in place for them. They attend school regularly and are making exceptionally good progress with their levels of independence. Staff encourage children to be more active and to make healthy choices about food. They are involved in preparing meals and are learning how to do their own laundry. Children are supported to apply for jobs or to gain new skills. This important level of support reassures them that they have adults who care for them and helps them to make progress.

The children benefit from having consistent levels of care from a very stable and experienced staff team. Many of the staff have worked in the school for a long time and know the children very well. The staff are very skilled and knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of the children's emotional, health and care needs. Parents provided positive feedback about the impact that the residential school has had on their child. They said that they had been really impressed by the levels of nurture and care that their children receive.

The residential houses are very clean, spacious and well maintained. They have a homely feel that enables children to feel relaxed and at ease. There are comfortable sofas in the lounge and spacious dining areas so the children can enjoy meals together with staff. There is plenty of space for all the children to socialise, and space for quiet time when this is needed. The garden areas have been developed so they are bright and cheerful, with flowers growing and a pixie garden. There is play equipment for children to use, and a barbecue area for outdoor dining.

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

The children say that they feel safe when they stay here. They have good relationships with the adults who care for them. They can talk to them if they are feeling worried or anxious about something. The staff work hard to tackle any risks that children are experiencing to reduce risk and to help ensure their safety. They talk to children openly about any worries for their safety and help them to develop the skills to be safer in their local community. This important level of support means that any risks to children are being identified and reduced over time.

When safeguarding concerns arise, they are managed well. There have not been any episodes of children going missing and there has been no need for any physical interventions. Staff work hard to identify potential safeguarding concerns and take prompt action to reduce these. When one unexpected event happened in the community during the inspection, this was well managed by staff to ensure that children were safe and protected from the potential impact of this.

Communication with education staff, families, social workers and other professionals is timely and effective in helping to keep children safe and to promote their welfare. When children move between the residential setting and the school, the meet and greet arrangements are effective and they provide children with a strong level of consistent support. This arrangement means that there is a team around each child whose members are all working together; this helps to keep children safe.

When children move into the residential provision, clear plans are identified to help them manage this transition successfully. The staff work together with families, social workers and other professionals to plan the needs of each child carefully. There is also careful consideration of the support that children might need to be able to live together safely. One parent commented that the residential team had welcomed and listened with care and attention to their views and as a result they feel their child is in the house that is most suited their needs.

The staff work hard to develop children's level of independence and resilience, so that they can move on to function safely as young adults. This has included supporting children to use public transport appropriately and with confidence and helping them to manage any changes when trains are cancelled. This level of support has meant that children are now able to use public transport independently to travel between their family homes and the residential school. They support children well to gain skills with caring for themselves, and so they can move on to college and employment. This support does not currently include important conversations with all children about healthy relationships, consent and sexual health.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the time of the last inspection, the child focused and pro-active approach of leaders means that standards of care and safeguarding for children have not only been maintained, but further strengthened. Their reflective approach means that while there are some areas in which practice could be stronger or more consistent, they are aware of these and action to tackle them is underway.

The senior leadership team has continued to meet the national minimum standards successfully. They have developed clear plans for improving the care that children receive. There is a positive level of reflection and learning taking place that helps managers and staff to develop their skills and practice. The leadership team has a good understanding of what is working well in the residential provision, and of those areas that need to be improved.

A key strength of the leadership team is their commitment to, and achievement in, ensuring that there is a stable and skilled group of staff who are caring for the children. There are regular opportunities provided for staff to meet so they can discuss and share knowledge, challenges, and best practice. The staff are also provided with opportunities to complete specialist training and they are encouraged to develop their skills as potential future leaders. Staff say that they feel valued and well supported by their managers. They speak positively about their roles and how they can support the children.

The members of the leadership team are active in sharing their knowledge, skills and practice with other schools. They have supported one school to further develop their practice to improve children's experiences and progress there. Leaders have also met with other schools so that they are all able to learn from their practice. This sharing of practice, skills and knowledge means that leaders and managers across the trust are working hard to improve the lives of many children. Leaders are reflective about care planning and are developing revised care planning documents aimed at ensuring that children's voices are even more strongly heard throughout the records that are held about them.

The leadership team works in partnership with people who are important to the children. They have regular contact with families, social workers and other professionals. There is clear evidence of senior leaders working in partnership with families and the local authority to develop agreed plans for children. This proactive commitment to working in partnership makes a positive difference for the quality of care and safeguarding children receive.

When new staff are recruited, safer recruitment processes are followed. However, leaders and managers have not considered the good practice guidance in 'Keeping children safe in education' regarding regularly reviewing any safeguarding checks and updates for longer-standing employees.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should further consider the guidance given in 'Keeping children safe in education' regarding Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks being repeated and using the DBS update service.
- School leaders should ensure that staff explore sexual health and healthy relationships with children to further embed the learning from personal, social, health and economic education lessons in school.

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: SC003895

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Nicola Jones

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Inspector

Sarah Sheffield, Social Care Inspector

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