

Langham Oaks

School Road, Langham, Colchester, Essex CO4 5PA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Langham Oaks is a residential special school with academy status, located in a rural village near Colchester.

There are 74 students at the school, of whom 25 board. The school can accommodate 28 students in the residential provision for between one and four nights per week. The school caters for students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The residential manager has been in post since January 2022. He has the necessary experience and qualification for the role.

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

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 December 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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 effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 14 November 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of the inspection, seven children were staying in residence. All these children contributed to the inspection. Children say they enjoy their stays, make friends and build strong and trusting relationships with staff.

Children value a wide range of activities that enrich their school day. Children regularly participate in bike maintenance sessions, bike riding, countryside walks, kayaking and paddle boarding. There is a good range of sporting activities that are enjoyed by children. These opportunities improve children's well-being and cater for their interests. For many children, this provides them with experiences they have not had previously.

School leaders have improved the systems for planning, monitoring and reviewing the support provided to children. Children's placement plans are now detailed and reflect children's individual needs, preferences and daily routines. Staff follow these plans. Staff identify and work with children towards residential goals that are matched to children's education, health and care plans. As a result, children are now receiving more focused support and make measured progress with their social skills and ability to manage their emotions.

Children who stay in residence have improved attendance at school and increased ability to achieve their educational targets when compared to day students.

School leaders have considered children's views in relation to their time in residence well. Children participate in regular meetings to reflect on their experiences. Children complete termly surveys, and their views contribute to the school's improvement plan. When children have had concerns, they have been supported to make complaints and feel satisfied with school leaders' responses and actions.

School leaders have introduced a new life skills programme for children. This provides improved scope for supporting and monitoring children's progress in their independence skills. This work is in its infancy, but children are motivated and are beginning to make good progress in this area.

Families generally report good communication with the staff and recognise the progress children make at the school.

Children are invested in a new incentive and reward scheme that reinforces positive behaviour. This has had an encouraging effect. However, there is no policy in residence to guide staff on the implementation of the scheme or to monitor its effectiveness. This could lead to inconsistencies from staff that give children mixed messages.

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

Children's safety and welfare are given a high priority. Child protection concerns are shared appropriately with external agencies and parents. The designated safeguarding lead and deputies have strong oversight of safeguarding practice. They link with residential staff and school leaders to regularly discuss, monitor and action any emerging concerns.

Staff have a thorough understanding of risks to children and their individual needs. Staff are clear about the process of raising safeguarding concerns and know when to do so. Staff work with children to help them understand different risks and support them to understand how to stay safe.

Children feel secure and relaxed in residence. The dynamics between children are largely positive. On occasion, when there are disagreements or low-level conflicts between children, these are managed well by staff.

School leaders have improved the approach to making risk assessments. Children's risk assessments are now regularly reviewed and individualised. Staff follow clear guidance in relation to reducing areas of risk for children, including substance misuse, online safety, self-harm and exploitation.

Children's behaviour is good in residence. Staff successfully use de-escalation strategies to respond to children's emotions. Consequences are used infrequently and proportionately. No physical interventions have been necessary. The residential manager has overseen improvements in the depth of staff's recording of incidents. This has increased the quality of the residential manager's subsequent analysis of incidents to inform future behavioural support strategies for children.

The headteacher responds appropriately to any allegations against staff. Referrals are made to the local area designated officer promptly. Appropriate protective measures are put in place, and investigations are completed. However, records relating to investigations are poorly organised and do not fully capture the process or conclusions that led to the actions identified. Although this has not had an impact on children's safety, it does not assist effective monitoring of concerns over time.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential manager is qualified and experienced. He is calm, child-centred and considered in his approach. The residential manager is supported well by the headteacher and trust leaders.

The shortfalls identified at the previous inspection have all been successfully addressed. There are no unmet standards. School leaders have a clear action plan to support further development in the wider school and in residence. An independent visitor provides good-quality external monitoring that assists in improving the quality of care and support further.

School leaders have improved the communication links between education and residential staff. Handover systems are now more informative, and reporting systems have been further developed. This has ensured a more unified approach to children's support.

Staff are trained in a range of areas that enhance their skills. School leaders have developed monitoring systems to maintain more effective oversight of staff training. Previous staff training gaps have been addressed in physical intervention and responding to risks of exploitation. However, not all staff completed training in suicide ideation awareness promptly when this was identified as a priority in the school's internal quality audit. Additionally, further training in mental health awareness has not yet taken place. This has the potential to limit staff's ability to understand and respond to all of the individual and emerging needs of children.

Staff feel well supported by the residential manager. They receive regular supervision and annual appraisals to reflect on their practice and discuss children's needs. However, staff's annual appraisal objectives are not sufficiently identified or sufficiently challenging to contribute to their professional development. Additionally, part-time education staff who work in residence do not receive formal and recorded supervision from the residential manager.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should formalise, review and monitor the incentive and rewards policy for children in residence.
- School leaders should ensure that training in mental health awareness is sourced and attended by staff. They should also ensure that training identified as a priority to meet children's individual needs is completed by staff promptly.
- School leaders should ensure that internal investigations following allegations against staff are organised in a manner that assists effective monitoring.
- School leaders should ensure that part-time staff receive termly supervision and that all staff's annual appraisals identify annual objectives that support staff's continuing professional development.

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: 1213822

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Alan Wells

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector

Mark Anderton, Social Care Inspector

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