

Charlton Park Academy

Charlton Park Road, London SE7 8HX

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This residential special school is commissioned by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and provides 234 places to students aged 11 to 19. During weekdays and term-time only, the school provides up to 11 residential places in single bedrooms in the residential unit, Mulberry Tree House. Currently, a total of 17 students use this service for short breaks. There were four children using the service on each day of this inspection. The facility became operational in April 2021.

An interim head of care joined the setting in June 2021. She is currently supported by a senior house parent.

This inspection was conducted on site and involved meetings with children, staff and parents. A staff questionnaire was also shared for those staff who were not working but wished to contribute their views.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 October 2021

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 previous inspection: 21 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy their short breaks. The new bespoke boarding house allows children to have their own bedroom and enjoy easy access to the specialist resources of the school. Children particularly enjoy art, a foot spa, music, access to the school's sensory room and spending time with their friends.

The short-break provision is an extremely important source of support to families. Parents spoken to during the inspection expressed their immense appreciation of the service. Parents are amazed by the progress achieved by their children, for example, learning to perform basic personal care for the first time.

Children enjoy the support of a dedicated and passionate staff team. The inspector observed warm and caring interactions between staff and children. Staff limit the number of children each evening to preserve a warm 'family style atmosphere' in boarding. One child proudly showed the inspector his freshly painted mug which he had made in a pottery class.

Children's behaviour is excellent. Despite the complex needs of children, there has been no use of restraint since the last inspection. Staff use their close relationships with children to recognise when they are experiencing difficulties both medically and behaviourally. Staff recognise key indicators such as a change in facial shape or anxious movements and respond quickly and effectively.

Effective target setting supports children's good levels of progress. Staff work in partnership with parents and teachers to set clear and achievable goals for children. For example, one child is now enjoying improved sleep as staff have reduced her reliance on her iPad computer during her evening routine.

The voice of children is heard loudly. Staff make use of technology such as an 'eye gaze' and a 'talking mat'. These devices allow children to express themselves and their needs, where previously it was not possible. At present, the boarding provision is lacking a formal student body, which would allow children to express their views in a more structured setting.

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

There is a strong safeguarding culture in boarding. Staff are guided by a principle of 'it could happen here', and have a keen awareness of children's vulnerabilities. Staff make use of the school's 'my concern' system and report any issues such as unexplained bruises or marks. These are swiftly addressed by the designated safeguarding lead.

Staff worked extremely hard to support children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The boarding provision remained open during the lockdown period. Staff visited children

at home to provide food parcels and educational materials when it was deemed too risky for children to access boarding. Therapeutic provision was provided online, which helped to reduce children's isolation.

Staff gently encourage children to take safe and managed risks to develop their independence skills. A child was gently cajoled to reduce her reliance on her wheelchair and focus on using her walker. This helped her to develop her physical coordination and self-esteem.

In general, care plans and risk assessments carefully record and chart progress. However, one child's risk assessment failed to accurately reflect the child's legal status, which posed possible difficulties for staff when considering the holder of parental responsibility.

The school's professional network helps to support children. For example, the school's dietician oversees the weekly menu and the occupational therapist advised staff on the most appropriate bed for a child. Other professionals, such as the school's physiotherapist, work with boarding staff to ensure that they follow treatment plans during the school day. This provides a holistic package of care and helps to support good levels of progress.

Children benefit from well-planned and individualised induction programmes. Staff encourage children to treat their bedroom as a 'home from home' and personalise them with pictures and their favourite bedding. Staff ensure safeguards used at home such as pulse detectors and seizure-detecting mattresses are provided. This ensures children's complex medical needs are met.

Partnership work with parents is a major strength and was recently recognised by a national award. Staff ensure that parents receive a full summary of their child's progress following each overnight stay. In addition, staff support parents by providing a support group and assisting with access to benefits, improved housing and charity support.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The boarding provision continues to seek a permanent head of care. An interim head of care plans to leave the setting in December 2021 when a permanent successor is recruited. She is an experienced practitioner who is highly respected by staff and children. She is supported by a senior member of staff who has worked in the school for over 26 years.

Leaders acknowledge that the absence of a permanent head of care has caused some uncertainty within the staff team.

Leaders have been central to the planning and construction of the new boarding house. Rigorous oversight ensures that the boarding house is safe and well

maintained. Repairs are prompt and all necessary health and safety risk assessments are adhered to.

Leaders are ambitious and are continually exploring new means of improving boarding. They recently obtained a government grant to provide additional reading materials and are currently exploring the possibility of expanding the therapeutic support to the boarding house. This ensures the ongoing development of boarding.

Staff morale is positive. One staff member commented, 'I am extremely proud to work in a team that works so hard for children.' Staff report strong levels of supervision and training. However, the impact of performance appraisal is limited by the absence of any feedback from staff or children.

The admissions process is rigorous. Leaders carefully assess children within the school setting and ensure that staff are trained to meet the needs of children prior to considering an admission. Induction plans are guided by the wishes and feelings of children and their parents. This ensures children are well prepared to take the significant step of spending a first night away from home.

Leaders advocate effectively for children. Leaders successfully challenged a placing authority decision to move a child away from her home address. This challenge focused on the importance of preserving the child's cultural heritage and support network. The child is now successfully placed within the local area and progressing well at the school and in boarding.

Independent oversight is effective. The boarding provision benefits from an experienced visitor who works in close partnership with leaders to present consistent challenge and new approaches. Leaders respond effectively to any recommendations.

Safer recruitment procedures help to protect children from the risk of unsuitable adults working with them. All appropriate checks are carried out.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that performance appraisals consider using feedback from boarders and other professionals to offer a more comprehensive assessment of performance.
- The registered person should ensure that all risk assessments are kept up to date with important information such as the legal status of children.
- The registered person should ensure that the boarding provision develops a student voice to allow for the wishes and feelings of children to be heard more clearly.

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: SC044128

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mark Dale-Emberton

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Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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