

# The Caldecott School

Station Road, Smeeth, Ashford, Kent TN25 6PW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This is a non-maintained special school which provides a service for day and residential children between the ages of 7 and 16 years of age. It is a school for children who experience social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties and who may also have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism. The residential provision can accommodate up to 10 children. At the time of this inspection, there were 2 children in residence.

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

### Inspection dates: 27 and 28 January 2026

**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:** 26 November 2024

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children have warm and positive relationships with the staff in the residential provision. They clearly feel safe and valued and seek staff out to spend time with. Children see the spaces as their own and freely move around, picking activities in the different rooms, or choosing who they want to spend time with. Children make consistent progress through staying at the residential provision and benefit from a joined-up approach between residential and school staff. Daily catch-ups with parents and carers promote consistency for children when they are at home for weekends and holidays.

Children learn about things that are important to them as identified in their care plans. One-to-one sessions allow children to explore their emotions, learn new skills and manage challenging situations or feelings as well as share their ideas. Sessions often linked to their current targets show how children have progressed in many areas, including learning independence skills and how to navigate socially confusing situations.

Children's views are readily sought in a variety of topics in the residential area. Weekly meetings include a Name My Thoughts section where children get to talk about their week at school and any concerns they may have. They also look at 'What's the best thing that happened that week?' These meetings are child focused and use symbols to help them express choices and share their feelings.

Joint working is a particular strength of the residential provision. Parents, foster carers and social workers are consistently positive about the support and communication they have with the residential provision. Daily emails to parents mean that there is constant understanding of children's needs and aids with consistency of approach. The head of boarding remains in contact with children and families during school holidays in a supportive role but also to show that the children are still held in mind. This contributes to the feeling of belonging and promotes consistency of care for children. Parents comment on the positive impact the residential provision has had on their child, including them being able to regulate and manage their distress more effectively than they were previously able to.

When children move on from the school, they benefit from particularly good support from the residential staff. This included a member of staff not leaving their role until the child had moved on to make sure they saw through the full experience and were there to support the child to move on to their next placement and settle there. There have been no new children move into the residential provision since the last inspection. Referrals are thoroughly considered as to whether the children's needs can be met and how they will get on with children already using the service. This reduces the likelihood of children having unsuccessful placements.

Children learn about healthy lifestyles, including trying different foods, physical activities and managing emotions. Processes for administering and storing medication have been adapted since last inspection, with more checks to reduce the risk of medication errors occurring.

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

Children show they feel safe in the residential provision through their actions and confidence when talking to the staff who look after them. They spend time talking about their day on return from school, meaning they have space to relax for the evening.

Staff know the children well and recognise when they are becoming anxious, upset or distressed. They help and support them at key times that are known to cause anxiety, such as transition between school time and home time. Routines are embedded, meaning that if a child is becoming upset staff are able to divert to planned activities such as sensory circuits or a nice warm bath to relax and reset.

Staff understand the organisation's processes for how to report any safeguarding concerns or worries, including escalation to senior leaders or externally if needed. Joint working with the local authority designated officer is effective. Leaders and managers are confident in reporting concerns and follow guidance from safeguarding professionals. When necessary, they refer on to other specialist services when children may be at risk, should this be from exploitation, online grooming or radicalisation.

Processes are in place to reduce the risk of children encountering unsuitable people while online, and there is a great deal of work done to support children with their friendships and communication that they may have via social media.

Staff support children well when they are upset or distressed, seeking to find out what they are concerned about and using agreed strategies to help them calm. Reports of incidents are factual and based on the use of zones of regulation, explaining where they feel the child was at throughout the incident. This provides consistency as well as insight for other staff and the child. There is limited use of physical intervention, and when it is used children are supported to reflect and consider how staff can help them in the future. Children engage well in these conversations and have learned positive reflective strategies over time.

Staff are consistent in working with children through the use of multidisciplinary team meetings, which include the therapist. This helps create predictable environments for children where they know what is expected of them and how the staff will respond.

Safer recruitment practice is followed, meaning that children are not being cared for by unsuitable people. Gaps noted at the last inspection with regard to the recruitment of governors have been rectified, with updates to policies and practice.

The home is undergoing some refurbishment of bedrooms and corridors. The fire doors are being replaced, leaving some unsightly exposed plaster currently, but the areas that have been upgraded look homely and well finished. Bathrooms have been updated to a high standard, including LED bathtubs. The layout of the home creates an institutionalised feel. However, staff work hard to make it warm and spacious, and there is a lot of equipment and spaces for children to relax and spend time alone or in groups. Some areas are looking worn, and some areas require a more thorough cleaning regime.

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

Leaders and managers within the school have a strong understanding of the progress children are making and the impact of the support and care provided to children. Regular evaluations and reviews of children's progress show a significant reduction in incidents.

Staff undertake a wide range of training, including how to support and protect children with specific needs. However, there has not been specific training in some of the children's diagnosed conditions, the organisation's therapeutic ethos or on the impact of early childhood experiences which may lead to trauma. Additionally, some longer-standing members of staff do not have up-to-date online safety training.

Team meetings are used to share the children's progress and areas for development, as well as to discuss the children's views and wishes. This demonstrates the genuine involvement of children in the running of the residential provision. Additionally, staff have regular supervision which they say is a useful space for reflection and consolidating learning.

The governor for the residential provision has many years' experience of working in residential childcare, and as a result he has a strong oversight of safeguarding and health and safety. He provides constructive feedback and evaluation of the service, to identify strengths and areas for further development. The governor's termly reports provide oversight of the residential provision and highlight the positive practice and impact this has on the children. The independent person's reports are thorough and provide strong oversight and evaluation of the residential provision. The visitor is a valuable critical friend, highlighting areas for improvement while recognising where good practice is taking place.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- Senior leaders should ensure that staff have training in the school's therapeutic ethos and approaches.
- Senior leaders should ensure that staff have training in children's specific diagnosed conditions.
- Senior leaders should ensure that the residential provision is thoroughly cleaned and well maintained.

### **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:** 1276600

**Headteacher:** Stacey McShane

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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