

Chalk Hill

Registered provider: SENDAT

Cats Lane, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2SF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Chalk Hill is a residential alternative provision academy for boys aged between eight and 14 years who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of permanent exclusion, from mainstream school.

The school is in a residential area of Sudbury, Suffolk. There are 21 pupils on roll, of whom 12 can use the residential provision. Six children are currently staying in the residential provision for four nights a week, and a further three pupils stay for evening visits.

The residential manager post is vacant and is currently occupied on an acting basis by a manager with appropriate experience and a relevant qualification.

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

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 January 2025

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	requires improvement to be good
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The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Date of last inspection: 18 September 2023

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy boarding at the school. They make progress socially and emotionally. There are good relationships between the children and the staff who look after them. However, these relationships are being affected by the levels of staff turnover.

Children's attendance at school has significantly increased for most boarders. Children who had not been in school for significant periods are now attending much more frequently. Residential staff also work in the school. This provides some degree of consistency between day school and the residential provision.

A member of staff has been given the responsibility of improving the residential provision's approach to the management of medication. They have had training and assess the competency of other staff to administer medication. Weekly audits of medication take place. These approaches reduce the likelihood of errors occurring and increase the potential for mistakes that do occur to be caught early.

Residential meetings take place. Staff ask children for their views. These views are considered when planning activities and mealtimes. Children can inform decisions about the personalisation of their bedrooms.

An independent person has been appointed by the school. However, they have not been able to visit the school on the monthly basis that they intended to. Leaders and managers are exploring alternative options to enable this to take place.

Children experience a good range of activities while in residential. There is a healthy mix of sporting and non-sporting activities on offer. Children say that they enjoy the fun activities. Parents say that their children look forward to attending the provision to take part in them.

One child has ceased staying in residential since the last inspection. They had a positive send off with a trip to a theme park, a gift of a football shirt with their name on and a memory book of photos.

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

The help and protection of children has improved since the last inspection. Safeguarding records have improved and there is clearer evidence of management oversight, challenge and scrutiny.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is now a standalone role, having previously been an additional role for the head of care. The DSL follows up safeguarding referrals. They are comfortable in professionally challenging other agencies when they do not feel that the response from those agencies is appropriate or in the best interests of children.

Leaders and managers have made improvements to ensure that the physical environment is safe. Fire doors in the residential provision have been replaced. The fire risk assessment has been updated and remedial action has taken place.

There have been no referrals to the local authority designated officer. Leaders and managers understand the concept of low-level concerns. Staff feel able to raise concerns about peers.

Behaviour in residence is generally good. Staff and families say that children have made progress in developing friendships and socially appropriate behaviours. Staff intervene gently, but effectively, when needed. Close monitoring of children has helped to ensure that bullying is not a significant concern.

There have been no incidents of physical intervention. Staff have been trained in its use but have been able to manage behaviour in residence without recourse to this. No children have gone missing from the residential provision.

Staff understand the risks that children experience. They understand what is expected of them to try to ensure that children are safe. Staff know when children need close monitoring. Staff are not risk averse. They are keen for children to experience new things and take measured risks.

Recruitment checks are completed. A clear plan is in place for future recruitment procedures. However, the current recording of recruitment checks is not as clear as it could be. For example, it is unclear what has been verified when reference checks have taken place. For a significant period during the inspection, leaders and managers were unaware as to whether appropriate references had been sought for a member of staff. Governors have noted this as an area that requires improvement.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There has been a change in the management of the residential provision since the last inspection. The new acting residential manager has led the residential provision in a way that has resulted in an improved overall judgement. He has ensured that children have received a good service, are enjoying their time in residential and making some progress. However, there are several areas of leadership and management in which further improvements are needed to ensure good leadership and management across the board.

There has been a lack of effective action in the recruitment of new staff. Despite a member of staff leaving in November 2024, the process of responding to that vacancy to ensure that there are enough staff to meet the offer set out in the statement of purpose has not been sufficient. Another staff member is due to leave imminently. This will mean that the small residential team will be at half strength. The failure to replace staff has contributed to other staff's anxiety, frustration and decisions to leave or to consider leaving.

Leaders and managers continue to work to a residential action plan following the last Ofsted inspections. Improvements have been made but some areas remain as work in progress, such as support for the residential manager. The manager has not received any additional training to assist him with the change in responsibilities, including training in carrying out supervisions. This is despite leaders' and managers' view that he has not had the opportunities to experience these management tasks as a deputy manager.

Staff do not consistently have supervision sessions. One member of staff has only had three supervisions since starting at the school in April 2024, whereas another member of staff, who started in May 2024, has had five sessions, despite having considerably more residential experience. The residential manager has only had two supervisions in the seven months since stepping up into the role. This infrequent supervision has contributed towards staff having mixed views on the support provided. Furthermore, supervisions do not always have a focus on children's experiences.

New members of staff raised concerns about the quality of the induction process. They said that it was not fit for purpose to equip them with the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles. Both referred to feeling 'dropped in at the deep end'. Leaders and managers acknowledge a need to reflect on this feedback and review the induction processes for the residential provision.

Staff have access to a good range of training opportunities. However, monitoring of staff training is not yet fully effective. Leaders and managers are not fully aware of which staff have completed which training. For example, during the inspection, it emerged that one member of staff had not completed important training relating to the needs of some of the children. This member of staff had not been allocated the training so had not been asked to do it. They subsequently completed this during the inspection. The potential impact of this was mitigated by the member of staff's prior experience. However, this was a coincidence, and oversight in this area needs to improve.

Leaders and managers have some awareness of the strengths and areas for development. The school has continued to receive visits from external residential managers. These are good quality, thorough and provide professional challenge. They have helped to contribute to some of the improvements seen at this inspection.

Feedback from families and observations from staff indicate that children are making progress because of attending the school. The difference that residential makes is more nuanced. Leaders and managers are in the process of exploring ways that they can better capture and understand the progress that children make in residential.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- School leaders should ensure that staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback.
- School leaders should review the induction process for residential staff to ensure that it is effective.
- School leaders should review recruitment processes for residential staff to identify ways to avoid significant delays in recruitment and to ensure that the provision can be properly staffed and resourced.
- School leaders should ensure that management oversight and record-keeping in respect of recruitment is robust and that records clearly indicate how the legitimacy of the source of any reference has been tested.
- School leaders should ensure that they review and monitor training records effectively so that they know whether staff have completed the necessary training.
- School leaders should ensure that the person in day-to-day charge of the residential provision receives the appropriate support, supervision and induction necessary to help guide and develop them.

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.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: 2640599

Headteacher: Nicki Jennings

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspector

Ashley Hinson, Social Care Inspector

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