

Pencalenick Residential Special School

Pencalenick School, St Clement, Truro, Cornwall TR1 1TE

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Pencalenick School is an academy providing for 161 children with complex communication and learning disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. Twenty-three children from the age of 11 up to the age of 16 board at the school from Monday to Thursday. They may stay for up to four nights. The school is situated within a large country estate with extensive grounds, near the city of Truro. The boarding accommodation takes up part of two floors in the main school building. The Head of Boarding has been in post for 32 years and has relevant qualifications.

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 July 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: 22 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The quality of relationships between staff and residential pupils is fundamental in providing a positive experience to those children spending time in the residential provision. Residential pupils make significant progress in developing social and life skills as well as having a great time in this setting. Careful planning around which groups of residential pupils stay together allows them to develop meaningful friendships. The atmosphere created by staff with residential pupils is welcoming, friendly and great fun. There is a lot of laughter.

The residential provision is valued in this school. The added value for children of spending time socialising with peers and developing social, emotional and independence skills is significant and puts them at an advantage.

System are in place for residential pupils to achieve recognised awards for the development of personal, social and employability skills. Two courses operate at the moment, in independence skills and horticulture. Recent developments promote the evidence of skills developed and achieved in the boarding house contributing to school-based qualifications. Each child has a bespoke independence development plan which focuses on both practical skills and social/emotional development.

All residential pupils attend full-time education at the school. There is deliberately a clear distinction of expectations and purpose between the school and the boarding provision. Residential pupils are keen to stay overnight and several would live here if given the choice.

Residential pupils are encouraged to be as independent as possible. It is expected that they will be listened to and allowed to make choices. A wealth of activities are on offer and good use is made of the extensive grounds, which include a forest school, outside gym equipment and lots of opportunities for gaining horticultural skills. A favourite activity is enjoying food cooked outside, in an area developed with the help of residential pupils to include a fire pit, seating area and a pizza oven. A variety of community or outdoor activities are provided each evening. Staff are keen to provide first-time experiences.

Photographs provide residential pupils with a lasting memory of their time spent in the residential provision. Increasing use is made by stakeholders of the school Twitter account which celebrates positive outcomes and the successes made by pupils across the school setting.

Education, health and care plan review reports do not provide accurate detail of the progress and achievements made across the school provision by residential pupils.

Substantial investment has been made in providing updates and repairs to this Grade 2 listed building. Some areas of the residential setting are looking much more homely.

However, further investment is needed, in particular to update bathrooms and some bedrooms.

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

A stable and consistent staff team understands the specific needs and vulnerabilities of each residential pupil and is able to keep them safe. Residential pupils trust the staff, who are tuned into subtle changes in behaviour which may indicate anxiety or discontent and prompt staff to provide any additional support needed to residential pupils.

Residential pupils say they feel safe, and have an easy, mutually respectful relationship with the residential staff. Activity assessments avoid unnecessary risk while supporting age-appropriate risk taking which allows children to engage in new and exciting activities. Some staff have undertaken qualifications which allow them to safely provide activities in water and those associated with forest schools.

Behaviour management plans are only produced if needed. Each residential pupil has information documents which feature support needs. Sanctions are not used, as managers and staff feel they would have very little, if any, impact in changing behaviour. The use of physical restraint is not a characteristic of this provision.

All staff are childcare qualified. A wealth of both essential and specialist training is completed by staff, including up-to-date safeguarding training. Practice development to improve the safety of children is based on research. Following analysis of the Ofsted research around sexual harassment in schools, a contract and information around the use of devices with internet access has been produced for parents and residential pupils.

The use of monitoring and surveillance devices in the boarding provision lacks robust assessment and review. Their continuing use may not be necessary and has the potential to compromise the privacy and dignity of residential pupils.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The qualified head of care is a stalwart of the school and the residential provision. She has the support of a dedicated deputy and the confidence of other leaders and the staff team. The staff work as a team, using the skills of individuals to the benefit of children.

The service provided is accurately described in a recently updated statement of purpose. The strengths and weakness of the provision are understood by leaders and managers. A development plan is in place, which demonstrates a commitment to future investment and to continuous practice improvement.

The values expressed by the staff are child focused, friendly and respectful of pupils. There is a positive can-do attitude among the staff and an infectious zeal for making a difference to pupils' lives.

All adults in this provision demonstrate enthusiasm and high expectations for the pupils in their charge. Responses to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate a real commitment and a focus on making sure pupils are kept as safe as possible. Pupils continued to receive support when it was not possible to provide services on site. Residential staff rallied to work wherever they were needed. This included taking meals out to pupils, doing welfare checks and decorating the residential provision. Policies, practice and new ways of working were developed quickly to overcome the challenges of this pandemic.

Work in partnership with parents, school staff and other agencies supports progress and the use of newly acquired skills across the school and in pupils' homes. Parents, in particular, are pleasantly surprised by how much residential pupils do for themselves in this setting.

Staff benefit from regular supervision and the support of the manager and deputy. They feel included in decision-making and all say they enjoy their work.

Monitoring and oversight of the boarding provision has improved following the appointment of a new independent visitor. Residential pupils also have the advantage of oversight from a governor with responsibility for boarding, and visits from the headteacher and the chief executive officer of the academy.

It is hoped to replicate the successful outcomes for residential pupils in another residential special school which has just been acquired by the same academy.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- Any use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on children's privacy. In particular, ensure any monitoring or surveillance of children is subject to risk assessment and regular review. (NMS 5.8)

Points for improvement

- Continue to refurbish the residential provision to provide for a homely environment.
- Ensure that each child's education, health and care plan includes detail of progress and achievements made as a residential pupil.

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: SC041223

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Ruth Zimmerman

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector

Janice Hawtin, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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