

# High Close School

Barnardo's, High Close School, High Close, Wiltshire Road, Wokingham, Berkshire  
RG40 1TT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

High Close School is a non-maintained special school operated by a national charity. It provides for both day and residential pupils, aged from seven to 18 years. Up to 21 weekly residential students are accommodated in three residential units on the school site. The school accommodates children who have education, health and care plans arising from social, emotional and mental health difficulties and speech, language and communication needs.

At the time of this inspection, 16 children were accessing the residential provision. Residential pupils have requested that their individual houses are referred to as units, as detailed throughout this report.

### Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 2023

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 18 October 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Students who have recently started living in the residential provision have already started to make progress. Diligent planning has ensured that these children fitted into their residential unit seamlessly. They have developed good relationships with the children already living there and are learning to cook and improve their self-care skills.

Students who have accessed the residential provision for longer have made significant progress from their starting points as a result of the skills they have learned. For example, one child told the inspector: 'I will leave knowing I can live independently and go to college by myself.' One child has continued to live in a residential unit but attends the local college. Parents are consistently positive about the difference the school has made to their child's education and life. They say that there is an open approach, and that staff treat each child as an individual, which makes them feel safe. One parent stated that the school had 'saved their child's life'.

Residential students are listened to through a variety of ways. For example, they have been consulted on how they would like to refer to where they live and agreed on 'units' instead of 'homes'.

Key-work sessions, which are highly individualised, are valued by the residential students. They are used to check the child's understanding of information shared and support them to put into practice what they have learned. The continually evolving and developing independence programme means that residential students are not only learning how to manage the practical aspects of their lives once they reach adulthood, but also how to manage relationships and people who have different views and belief from them.

Children are educated and actively involved in learning about different cultures, identities, abilities, beliefs and celebrations. Students have recently set up a LGBTQ+ group. This gives residential students a forum to safely explore topics in a non-judgemental space.

There is a strong sense of community in which residential students share warm relationships, not only with each other but also with staff. Residential students often visit other units and spend time with their friends and play games. Residential students enjoy a wide range of activities. They have fun, make friends and enjoy trying out new things.

Staff are thoughtful in the way they help children move into the residential provision. They work closely with parents and other professionals to make sure that children's individual needs are fully understood. One parent said: 'They are working with me and [my child] so it is right for them; communication is great.'

Residential children are helped and guided to understand healthy lifestyles and what this means for them. They have bespoke packages and emotional well-being support from the therapy team. The integrated approach means that all staff who work with the children throughout the school know how best to support each child across the day.

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

Residential students are comfortable in their surroundings and confidently approach staff with any worries or concerns, including those students who have only started living in the residential provision this term. The school seeks children's views on safety through an annual survey. In the most recent survey, children overwhelmingly stated that they felt safe in the school and residential units.

Staff know the residential students well and are acutely aware of each of their vulnerabilities. They support them in a highly individualised way to understand how they are at risk, and how to disengage from damaging friendships and relationships. Staff understand the processes to report any safeguarding and child protection concerns, including how to escalate concerns outside of the school and the wider organisation. Staff confidently use the computer-based reporting tool, and the safeguarding leads are meticulous in reporting concerns to partner agencies and following up on the actions identified.

Staff understand and apply the home's therapeutic approaches to care. This enables them to support residential students who are in crisis and to de-escalate situations that could lead to serious behavioural incidents.

Staff support residential students to learn coping strategies to manage their feelings and emotions in a way that reduces the risk of behavioural incidents occurring. The strategies staff use for promoting positive behaviour are clearly set out in behaviour plans so that staff, parents and residential students have a shared understanding and can work together to encourage positive behaviours. Children learn to live together and understand and tolerate differences.

Successes are celebrated and residential students strive to achieve as a result. In one residential unit, students and staff share praise using a 'positivity jar', where the comments are beautifully displayed in frames.

Individual risks for the residential students are identified and understood. Risk assessments focus on what children can learn and how they can develop, rather than restricting what they are able to do.

The building and grounds are regularly monitored for any areas that require maintenance and regular fire drills teach children what to do in the event of an emergency.

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

The residential provision is run by a very experienced head of care who is highly aspirational for the children who stay at the school. The leader and managers across the school lead by example, meaning that the staff team also shares their ambitious approach to ensure that children achieve to the best of their abilities.

Joint working is a particular strength of the school, with the children moving seamlessly through the school day and into the residential provision in the evenings. Staff liaise well throughout the day and some staff support children across the whole day. This means that children have consistent care, and they know what is expected of them. Staff work with partner agencies and, where necessary, challenge and escalate concerns regarding other agencies. As a result, children benefit from the best possible experiences while at the school.

Leaders and managers know the progress the children are making, and plans are regularly updated and reviewed alongside any changes and new targets being set. The detail within the plans shows how they are individualised and tailored to each student. The manner in which they are written can be clinical at times, and about the child rather than for them. However, this does not detract from the high level of detail to ensure that children are cared for in line with their needs.

Staff benefit from a range of training to meet the children's needs. They are enthusiastic about the training they do online, in person and with the therapy team. Leaders monitor what staff have learned and test their knowledge through quizzes, meetings and in supervision. Staff say they feel well supported by the managers and can approach them with any concerns they may have.

Oversight and monitoring of the quality of care and of practice are meticulous and the layers of monitoring mean that concerns are quickly noted and swiftly remedied. Reports by the independent visitor are clear and provide a good level of evaluation and challenge. Governance across the school is an improving area. However, new governors are yet to have formal training for their roles in order to ensure that they can provide the required level of scrutiny.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- Senior leaders should ensure that the new governors have suitable external training for the role.
- Senior leaders should ensure that children's plans are written in a child-friendly way.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and residential students 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:** SC011327

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Wendy Gosling

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Hannah Cox, Social Care Inspector

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