Appleford School

Appleford School, Elston Lane, Shrewton, Salisbury SP3 4HL

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Appleford school is an independent special school with boarding provision for children aged seven to 16 years of age, who may have dyslexia and/or associated learning difficulties.

At the time of this inspection, there were 117 children attending the school. Of these, 28 are boarders. The inspectors spent time talking with boarders and observed their interactions with their peers and boarding staff.

The headteacher has been in post since 1 September 2026.

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 September 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: 14 October 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Summary of findings

Boarders make good progress at this school. They enjoy a strong sense of belonging, contribute to school life and take part in a wide range of activities. Effective support promotes their well-being, independence, resilience and academic achievement.

Boarders benefit from warm and supportive relationships with boarding staff. Overall, safeguarding arrangements are strong and promote boarder's safety and welfare. However, leaders have been slow to strengthen fire safety arrangements.

Leaders have a robust understanding of what it is like for boarders to stay at the school and they have aspirational plans for developing the provision. Most parents are positive about their child's boarding experience and their progress, particularly in relation to developing their independence, confidence and social skills.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarders make good progress at this school and benefit from a specialist provision that is tailored to their individual needs. Boarding provides children with valuable opportunities to make friends, expand their social circles and achieve well academically. Leaders monitor boarders' progress to ensure that targeted support is effective and responsive to their needs. Boarders are also helped to develop life skills and emotional resilience, which prepares them well for the next stage of their education and future lives.

Boarders are offered a varied range of activities and social opportunities. They are encouraged to share their views about how they spend their free time. Boarding staff promote active lifestyles through participation in sports and outdoor activities, while also providing opportunities for quieter activities, such as crafts and movie nights. This helps boarders to enjoy their time at the school, develop social skills and pursue their individual interests.

Boarders have a strong sense of belonging and are proud of their school and their achievements. Leaders and boarding staff foster a culture of inclusion and togetherness, where boarders feel valued as members of the school community. Boarders are also encouraged to participate in a range of charity fundraising activities, which helps them to develop a wider sense of social responsibility and citizenship.

Boarders have an active voice through the student and boarding councils, where they are encouraged to raise issues that are important to them. Boarders are confident in expressing their views and opinions, which reflects a positive culture where they are listened to and valued. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging boarders to speak up and contribute to decisions that affect their daily lives.

Boarder's health needs are managed effectively. Robust arrangements are in place for the safe storage, administration and recording of medication. Boarding staff work closely with families to ensure that boarders receive the support that they require. Boarders can access a range of internal support services, which are tailored to their needs. This ensures that boarders receive swift support that promotes their health, well-being and emotional development.

Most boarders say that the food is good and that they enjoy mealtimes, which are relaxed and sociable occasions. Boarders chat and laugh together, creating a warm and positive atmosphere. Most boarders say that they enjoy boarding, particularly the opportunity to develop friendships and do activities with their peers. They also value the care offered by boarding staff, including the simple but meaningful practice of being greeted each morning and wished goodnight each evening.

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

Boarding staff have developed positive and trusting relationships with boarders, and their interactions are warm, friendly and kind. This helps to create a nurturing environment where boarders feel safe and supported. Consistent boundaries provide boarders with clear expectations and structure. As a result, incidents are rare. Boarding staff recognise and praise positive behaviour, and when behavioural concerns arise, they use proportionate consequences to encourage boarders to reflect on their actions and make more positive choices in the future.

Effective partnership working supports boarder's safety and well-being. Positive working relationships with safeguarding partners and boarder's families helps to ensure co-ordinated and effective responses to safety concerns. A comprehensive training programme supports boarding staff to remain up to date with safeguarding practice, emerging risks and changes in guidance. This helps to ensure that boarding staff have the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to safeguarding concerns.

Leaders and boarding staff demonstrate a robust and realistic understanding of the online risks that boarders may be exposed to. Systems are in place to monitor boarder's online activity and protect them from harm. Boarding staff work collaboratively with families to promote online safety at school and at home. This helps to ensure consistent messages are given to boarders about how to stay safe online.

Robust systems are in place to support all members of staff to identify, report and monitor concerns about boarder's safety. These arrangements support staff to develop a clear understanding of the risks that boarders face and take prompt action when concerns arise. Boarders are confident in raising concerns about their own safety and the safety of others, and staff respond appropriately to the information that they receive. This helps to ensure that safeguarding concerns are recognised, assessed and addressed effectively.

There is a proactive and transparent approach to managing concerns about staff, with referrals being made to the local authority designated officer (LADO) when required. Concerns are investigated appropriately, and leaders take action to reduce the likelihood of similar concerns occurring in the future. However, records do not consistently provide a rationale when the decision is made not to consult the LADO or other relevant safeguarding agencies.

The accommodation for boarders is generally clean, tidy and well maintained. However, leaders have not taken swift action to improve fire safety arrangements. As a result, opportunities to reduce risk and promote the safety of boarders, boarding staff and visitors have been delayed. Action was taken during the inspection to strengthen fire safety arrangements.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The new headteacher is settling into their role and has aspirational plans for the continued development of the care and support provided to boarders. They are supported by an experienced and knowledgeable senior leadership team and advisory board, whose members are visible, involved in school life, and provide effective support and challenge. Senior leaders work collaboratively to maintain oversight of the provision and drive improvement. This leadership structure provides a secure foundation for ongoing development and promotes positive experiences and outcomes for boarders.

The head of boarding has a comprehensive oversight of the boarding provision. They promote regular communication between boarding staff to ensure a consistent approach to caring and supporting boarders. This fosters a strong sense of teamwork among boarding staff. The head of boarding is well integrated into the wider school and is part of the senior leadership team. This helps to provide boarders with seamless support across the whole school.

Boarding staff speak positively about their roles and say that they enjoy seeing boarders make progress and achieve their potential. Boarding staff say that they are well supported by leaders and their colleagues. As a result, they feel able to have open and honest discussions about their practice, with a focus on learning and development.

Boarding staff receive regular supervision that focuses on the individual needs of boarders and provides clear guidance to support their care. Boarding staff training needs are identified and regularly reviewed, which helps to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge required for their roles. Weekly team meetings provide opportunities to share information, reflect on practice and consider boarder's views and wishes.

Most parents are positive about the boarding provision and say that their children enjoy staying at the school. One parent described the boarding provision as a 'home away from home', while another said that their child's time at the school had been

'life changing'. Parents say that boarding staff help their children to make progress by encouraging independence, social skills, confidence and educational achievement. One parent raised concerns about the care their child receives and the quality of communication from boarding staff.

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

Recommendation

- School leaders should ensure that boarder's accommodation is maintained to a good standard and that any health and safety concerns are addressed promptly, so that boarders live and learn in a safe environment that promotes their welfare.

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: SC039141

Headteacher/teacher in charge: James Langan

Type of school: Residential special school

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