

# Stone Bay School

Stone Bay Special School, 70 Stone Road, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1EB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This school is maintained by a local authority. It offers day and residential provision for children aged between 4 and 19 who have been diagnosed with autism and have severe and complex learning difficulties.

Children stay in the residential provision on weekdays during term time. They return to their families at weekends.

At the time of this inspection, there were 110 children on the school roll. Of these, 12 children were accessing the weekly boarding provision.

The inspector only inspected the social care residential provision at this school. The school uses the term 'pupils', and this is how children are referred to in this report.

### Inspection dates: 9 and 10 December 2025

**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 last inspection:** 11 February 2025

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Pupils receive care from a skilled and loving team of staff who have comprehensive knowledge of their individual needs. Staff work collaboratively across the school to make sure that pupils receive a truly 24-hour curriculum during their stay. Pupils are thriving as a result of this consistent care.

As well as making progress educationally, pupils are making progress in their emotional and social wellbeing. Leaders have recognised this as an important area of development for pupils. For some pupils, progress has been life-changing. Pupils who have been out of school for years have been able to go to school every day and re-engage in learning, and have built positive relationships with peers.

Pupils are offered a wide range of activities. They have access to a dedicated indoor sensory space and a purpose-built playground, or they can make use of quiet spaces if they wish to have some time and space away from others. Alongside this, a small farming area has been created to help pupils to learn how to care for animals. Pupils enjoy coming to this space, collecting eggs and taking care of the animals every day.

Staff have a sound understanding of pupils' individual health needs. For pupils with specific medical conditions, such as epilepsy, staff receive regular training and updates. Clear protocols for administering medication are in place, and staff understand their responsibilities. Leaders strengthen oversight by commissioning the local school nurse to visit regularly, to carry out checks and to provide guidance. Any gaps identified are addressed immediately, although no gaps have been significant. This robust system ensures that pupils receive the support that they need and that medication errors do not occur.

Pupils are supported by a dedicated therapy team which is led by an experienced educational psychologist. This team includes a wide range of therapists, to ensure that all needs can be met. Through ongoing assessment and review, the team has identified new techniques for helping pupils to communicate, resulting in pupils developing a far bigger vocabulary and a better way of communicating. Staff, families and pupils have all been consulted and then trained in using a particular communication tool; this has resulted in positive outcomes for pupils, not only in their educational attainment but also in developing friendships and taking part in different activities.

Pupils can express their views in a variety of ways. As well as communicating with staff in the home, there are regular school council meetings. Pupils are encouraged to attend and the number wanting to be involved has doubled since the last inspection. There have been several changes made as a result of pupil suggestions, including improved playground equipment, sensory spaces and choices for bedroom colours and for meals.

Parents spoke positively about the experiences that their children have had when staying at the school, and how well the staff have supported them. They confirmed that communication is good and that the ability for the children to stay at the school during the week helps parents to maintain and prolong their care for their children at other times.

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

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and to understand the risks that they may face. Staff make sure that pupils understand key messages, such as who to approach if they feel unsafe or worried. Pupils are familiar with the school's safeguarding procedures, including the use of different coloured lanyards, and understand what these mean. The school provides a child-friendly version of its safeguarding policy so that pupils know what they should expect from staff.

Safeguarding is a priority for staff. Staff use their positive relationships with pupils to identify changes in behaviour. Residential and education staff work together to create detailed plans to ensure that pupils experience consistent responses throughout their day. This joined-up approach has significantly reduced the number of incidents.

Leaders are successfully changing the school's approach to behaviour by using language that promotes wellbeing. They view behaviour as an integral part of pupils' overall welfare. Staff use comprehensive wellbeing plans to respond effectively to concerns about pupils' physical health, emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

Safer recruitment practices are robust. Leaders maintain detailed monitoring and oversight of all checks. Retrospective checks have been completed for long-standing staff to ensure their ongoing suitability. A comprehensive single central record is in place and is regularly reviewed by leaders and governors. This helps to ensure that all staff working in the school remain suitable.

When concerns are raised about staff conduct, leaders consult effectively with external safeguarding professionals to seek advice on action to be taken. Any advice is always followed, and leaders are quick to use these incidents as opportunities to upskill staff.

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

Leaders are highly aspirational and, in line with the school's values, are creating a culture of 'evolving excellence' for both staff and pupils. Since the last inspection, an experienced residential manager has been appointed. Staff have acknowledged her immediate impact, creating an open door culture in which support is of the highest standard.

Staff feel proud to work in the school. One staff member commented, 'I am grateful every day to be part of the school. It's more than just a workplace, it's a place where lives are changed, confidence is built and children are given the chance to shine in their own unique way.'

Pupils are at the heart of all decision-making and leaders have taken creative steps to make sure that success can be achieved. This has included making changes to the building to enable bedrooms to be modified and new lounge areas to be created, and developing an on-site flat that parents can use.

Leaders are focused on continuous development and on helping everyone to achieve excellence. To ensure that staff have the necessary skills to care for the pupils, there is ongoing weekly training. All training is based on research and leaders have been specific about only wanting the best for their staff. Staff feel valued and, as a result, remain in their roles, with many staff having worked at the school for many years.

Leaders have an exceptionally strong knowledge of what is happening in the school. Alongside comprehensive self-evaluation and monitoring systems, leaders have used external agencies to evaluate the school's successes, challenges and their responses to them. This, combined with regular visits by a dedicated independent visitor and a standard 3 visitor, allows leaders to assure themselves that the care pupils receive is of the highest standard and truly helps pupils to succeed.

Leaders are supported by an experienced governing body, whose members regularly visit the residential part of the school. These visits include discussions with staff and leaders, as well as time spent with pupils. Governors have a good knowledge of what residential pupils should experience and are confident to challenge, should they have any concerns.

## **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:** SC023693

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Jane Hatwell

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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