

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Children benefit from regular opportunities to increase their social skills and emotional development.
- Children who stay in the school's residential provision out-perform the day pupils in measured progress of academic and social skills.
- The education and care teams work closely together to provide consistency. Learning through the school day is embedded and enriched through children staying in the residential provision.
- Residential staff care about the children and provide good-quality nurturing care and support. Children build trusting relationships with the staff. These relationships are the main reason the staff are able to manage very effectively the behaviour of the children, who feel safe to disclose to the staff anything that is worrying them.
- Leaders and managers have high aspirations for the children. The school's development plan clearly identifies how the school will continue to improve. The areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection are fully met.
- Feedback from children and parents is overwhelmingly positive. Both parents and children are able to identify how the residential provision is supporting children to improve social skills, manage their behaviour and make friends.
- Children benefit from the wide range of activities and opportunities available at the school. Activities take place in and out of the school. Children are able to participate in community groups and activities that further their social skills and community participation.
- The staff team is a stable and consistent team that is skilled, knowledgeable and well trained to care for the children.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Leaders and managers do not ensure that formal staff supervision takes place on a regular basis and is recorded.
- The staff frequently use 'walkie-talkie' radios. The use of this institutional type of equipment detracts from the otherwise homely and nurturing environment in the residential provision.
- The staff do not always ensure that information provided to the local authority safeguarding professionals is comprehensive enough to enable a safeguarding professional to robustly and accurately assess the need for safeguarding intervention. Not all of the staff state that the action they would take if a child makes a disclosure to them is in line with the school's safeguarding policy and procedure.

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:

- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the frequency and recording of formal supervision for the residential staff are improved.
- Ensure that the use of 'walkie talkie' radios is reviewed during residential time, in order to promote a homely environment.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from staying in the residential provision of the school. Data evidences the added value of boarding. The children who use the residential provision out-perform the day students academically and socially. Academic and residential staff work closely together on shared targets for children, to ensure that learning during the day is supported in the evenings and on weekends. Children learn social and emotional skills that help them develop and mature. One parent said: 'The improvement we have seen in our child is quite incredible.'

The staff succeed in establishing routines in the residential provision that run smoothly and consistently. The children respond positively to this continuity and predictability. They understand what is expected of them. This helps them to feel safe and settled. Children are encouraged by the staff to fully participate in the day-to-day running of the residential provision. Children are elected by other children to the school council. This forum welcomes ideas and suggestions from the children in how the school can improve. For example, children have given their ideas about how an old quarry area in the school grounds could be changed to a bike track. The staff act upon ideas. Actions are taken forward to the next meeting. If a suggestion cannot be acted upon then the reasons are given to the children so that they understand.

The staff are committed to the children and provide nurturing care. The children form trusting relationships with staff and feel safe to disclose if they are feeling worried or unsafe about anything. One child said: 'All the staff are very kind and helpful.' The staff use 'walkie-talkie' radios to communicate with each other across the large school site. These radios are prominently displayed and used by the residential staff, giving the staff an institutional appearance. The use of this equipment does detract from the otherwise homely and nurturing residential environment.

A strength of the residential provision is the wide range of activities provided for the children in the school and out in the community. Children can participate in a local scout group, and attend the cinema and sports activity centres. In the school, children enjoy walks, games, cookery, computer games and arts and crafts. Children are praised for their achievements and can earn tokens and certificates. This helps to raise their self-esteem and confidence.

Children comment about how much they enjoy the meals. Mealtimes are relaxed and sociable occasions where the staff and children eat together. A variety of choice of food is on offer at each mealtime, and the children are encouraged to help clean up. This helps them to learn new skills linked to independence and social skills.

Children's health needs are fully identified and met. The school employs a school

nurse who oversees the efficient administration of medication. The school employs a play therapist, and children can access local healthcare providers if necessary.

All children spoken with commented positively on their bedrooms. They always stay in the same room and are able to highly personalise their bedrooms, most of which are en-suite. The residential provision provides high-quality accommodation for the children. It is very well maintained and is clean and warm. The grounds are extensive and contain play equipment that the children enjoy using.

Transitions in and out of the school are well managed. Children are well supported to understand what is happening and what they can expect from staying in the residential provision. Visits and overnight stays are encouraged prior to a child coming to stay. One child said: 'They told me about all the cool things they have, like Wii and Xbox and having mugs of hot chocolate. I was given a tour of the bedrooms and stuff.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The staff do not always take rigorous action to ensure that allegations made to the staff by children are referred in accordance with statutory requirements for promoting children's welfare.

One child made an allegation against a parent. This allegation was referred to the local authority to investigate. The local authority stated that the referral did not meet their threshold, and took no further action. This is because managers failed to provide the full and necessary information in the referral. This information has since been provided and the local authority is now taking safeguarding action. The school staff are also working closely with the child and their family to provide effective support and parenting advice.

Two members of staff, during interviews with inspectors, failed to confirm that they would robustly follow the school's safeguarding procedures. One member of staff stated that if a child made an allegation against a parent, then in the first instance the school would contact the parent to find out more information. This action does not protect children and could mean that vital safeguarding evidence is lost.

Residential care staff manage the behaviour of the children effectively. All children spoken with said they feel safe when they stay in the residential provision at the school. The children benefit from the positive and trusting relationships they make with the staff. The use of restraint is reducing. When restraints are undertaken as a last resort in order to keep the children or others safe, they are for a minimum duration and with the least force necessary. Extensive analysis of the use of restraint is undertaken by managers. This data identifies any concerning trends or patterns with individual children and how alternative strategies could be used to prevent the

need for restraint.

The staff reward positive behaviour and support children to learn from any mistakes they make. The children can earn tokens for good behaviour, which they are able to spend in the school shop or exchange for vouchers. This strategy is effective in encouraging positive behaviour.

Parents and professionals comment positively about how, since starting at the school, their child's behaviour has improved. One parent said: 'He (her child) is a different boy to the one that arrived at the school in a positive way... He is now better at managing his temper and is less manipulative.' Another parent said:

'The residential accommodation has changed my son's life for the better... He was unable to attend mainstream school because of his violent and challenging behaviour. He now accesses education, has friends and functions appropriately in society. We could not function as a family without this residential placement.'

The school has a robust recruitment procedure that helps to ensure that only suitable people are employed at the school.

Comprehensive and up-to-date risk assessments are in place. These are regularly reviewed and updated in accordance with the changing care needs of the child. They give clear strategies for the staff to work with. This ensures consistency of approach by the staff. The children are allowed to take age-appropriate risks to support their learning and independence.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The staff report that they are well supervised and trained. Leaders and managers provide clear leadership and are well respected by the staff team. Formal supervision is planned to take place every half term. Records show that this does not always happen due to the staff being needed to spend time with the children. The deputy manager is reviewing the supervision system to ensure that the staff have non-contact time set aside for formal supervision.

The staff benefit from an extensive programme of training that ensures that they have the skills and knowledge they need to provide good-quality care for the children. Most staff have a level three qualification in care and the others are working towards it. Recently, the staff have received attachment training. Training in essential topics such as restraint, first aid and safeguarding is offered on a regular basis to ensure that the staff are up to date with this training.

Parents and professionals comment positively about the comprehensive and clear communication that they receive from the staff at the school. One parent said: 'We receive regular reports and are invited to parent days. We are regularly updated by

phone.'

Leaders and managers challenge other professionals if they believe that the best interests of a child are not being promoted. Recently, a placing authority planned to move a child away from the school against the child and their parent's wishes. The school supported the parent to challenge this decision and the child remained at the school. If it is believed that a child is inappropriately placed at the school, leaders and managers will support effectively a move to a different school, if this is in the best interests of the child.

Managers have produced a detailed development plan of how they intend to further improve the quality of care. This plan is informed by views of parents, the children and involved professionals. An independent visitor from another school visits to undertake quality monitoring. The governors are closely involved and will monitor and challenge the quality of care given to children in the residential provision. Both recommendations from the previous inspection are met.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC033089

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr D Kitts

Type of school: Residential special school

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