

Walton Hall

Walton Hall Special School, Walton, Eccleshall, STAFFORD, ST21 6JR

Inspection dates	25/09/2013 to 26/09/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Good	2
Quality of residential provision and care	Good	2
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- This school provides young people who use the residential provision with a very supportive, well-equipped, comfortable living environment that has benefited from investment and development within the limiting constraints of the existing school architecture.
- The quality of care, outcomes for young people, and safeguarding outcomes are very good. Young people confirm through their behaviour and demeanour that they feel safe and well cared for. Young people, the majority of parents and social workers confirm that the school is a safe place to be because the welfare of young people is placed at the centre of the school's practice.
- Improved staff practice and well-organised routines provide stability and a secure base for young people using the residential provision that maximises school attendance, promotes educational attainment and actively encourages social inclusion.
- The leadership and management and staff of the school provide good quality support for young people by consistently encouraging them to engage fully with the broad range of recreational and learning opportunities accessible to the school across year groups. Liaison with parents and placing authorities is very good with constructive feedback being encouraged to shape service improvement.
- Changes to the leadership, management and operational arrangements of the school introduced earlier in the school year are not as yet fully embedded in practice. As a result, there is some variation in some administrative monitoring and an on-going review of key documents, policies and procedures that do not adversely affect the quality of day-to-day care or positive outcomes for young people.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of this inspection, which was conducted over three days. The inspector met and spoke with students at the residential provision during this time. Key staff, including the interim executive headteacher and acting head of school, head of care, residential staff, school nurse, behaviour manager and maintenance team contributed to the inspection findings. On-line surveys, parents written feedback and scrutiny of the schools records supported the inspectors on-site observation of practice.

Inspection team

Julian Parker

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Walton Hall Community Special School is a maintained residential special school with 123 students on roll. It provides day and residential education for students aged 11 to 19 years who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities including aspects of autism, emotional and social behaviours and other complex needs. The revised boarding provision presently offers short stays of up to two nights per week, for 54 young people. The allocation of residential provision is reviewed every six months based on individual need.

The school is located in a rural part of Staffordshire and serves children placed by the local authority. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings sited within the school's grounds. Goldstone House is a purpose-built unit offering accommodation to girls. The Old Hall is a Victorian listed building that provides two, mixed gender residential floors, and accommodation for school and communal rooms on the ground floor. The residential provision was last inspected in March 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that where the service being provided exceeds that stated in the Statement of Purpose that the rationale for this enhanced practice is clear and identified by making clear reference to this within case review records.
- Ensure that the records of staff training maintained for residential staff are up to date and accurately reflect learning opportunities provided and attended.
- Fully embed the changes to residential practice and recording introduced from September 2013.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. They form meaningful relationships with their carers and peers. Group and individual recreational activities enable them to develop self-esteem, form attachments and improve social skills that improve their inclusion and acceptance both in, and out of school.

Young people benefit from their residential experience and enjoy the care they receive from well-motivated and skilled staff. They have support and encouragement to engage in on-site and community-based activities that always have a learning element. For example, an organised visit to the park teaches young people how to care for each other, be aware of stranger danger and safely play in a public setting. By having access to a broad range of activities young people become active participants in keeping themselves fit and healthy while enjoying themselves.

The school's established healthcare arrangements play a significant role by actively supporting and promoting young people's physical, emotional and psychological health. Active liaison between the school nurse, carers and parents ensure that young people, often with complex, medical needs, are fully understood and have their specific needs addressed in a proactive manner. In this way, young people and their parents know that health needs are fully promoted by both school and residence. This supports young people to feel safe and well cared for while they are living away from home.

Young people and their parents see the residential experience as one of the ways they can improve attendance and attainment in education. By recognising and strengthening the relationships between school and residence, young people receive focused help to overcome some of their difficulties with managing behaviour. Steps taken, including the appointment of a behaviour manager and introducing sessions run by teaching assistants into residence further help young people explore and discuss their feelings. Such initiatives produce really positive contributions including behavioural improvements benefiting both settings and enjoyment for young people.

Very good communication exists between residential staff and parents. A large proportion of respondents to the Parent View survey strongly agreed that the experience of boarding/welfare helps their child's progress and development. One parent commented: 'Since on the school's advice we began using a visual timetable with our child she is much happier and more settled when with us...'. Most young people said that they would like to increase the time they could spend in residence if they were afforded the opportunity.

Young people receive practical opportunities to develop the key skills they will need for eventual independence both in school and residence. Some of these skills, such as cooking and baking, are fully utilised to promote citizenship, for example, setting up cake stalls to raise money for charitable causes. Another parent wrote: 'What amazing people and what an amazing school. My child has been with you for only three years but you have offered him the most fabulous opportunities, kindness, support and guidance throughout.'

Quality of residential provision and care

Good

The quality of residential provision and care is good. They receive their care and support from staff who are both motivated and skilled in encouraging them to achieve. Staff regularly praise the young people they look after, confirming that they enjoy their role within their mainstream residential task and through being involved in Aiming High projects. This commitment to provide practical help empowers young people to make good progress while improving their social

presentation and interpersonal relationships.

Some young people's behaviour can be difficult and challenging. The staff team is knowledgeable and experienced at identifying emerging problems, enabling staff to work consistently and fairly when managing individual behaviour. Through this informed approach, staff effectively promote generally good, unproblematic conduct while young people are in residence.

The school provides an excellent range of resources to support young people's academic and personal progress which effectively cater for all levels of ability. Team building, group activity and contemplative group activities promote social relationships and friendships to develop in a safe and tolerant atmosphere. Access to community facilities and on-site indoor and outdoor games areas and equipment encourage young people to keep active and safe under careful adult supervision. Following a community activity, a recreation provider commented: 'Your young people are a credit to the school in every way, they behaved beautifully and showed great sportsmanship in their support of their friends.'

Young people's understanding of difference is regularly explored through participation in local cultural events and celebrations alongside themed evenings centred on different countries, or sporting events such as the Olympics. Artwork and cookery help young people appreciate the origins of the foods they enjoy and brighten up the living environment. The use of valuable sessions such as 'Circle Time' to talk with and listen to young people is an important part of their daily routine. This formal listening experience helps staff to plan and organise residential care to ensure that all young people have their needs addressed while contributing meaningfully to formal plans of care. Young people's diverse needs are recognised and addressed within their plans and through practical day-to-day care for learning disability. Each young person is treated fairly and with equal concern; their differences are acknowledged and understood. Discrimination of any kind is addressed through direct challenge and improving learning about difference.

Robust healthcare arrangements importantly support and promote young people's physical, emotional and psychological health. Young people with complicated disability needs are well provided for by the multi-agency links in place that promote health and well-being while safeguarding vulnerable students whether or not they enjoy residential stays.

Young people experience a mixed range of accommodation, presently arranged to best meet individual care and age-related needs. Recent investment means that most residential provision is well maintained and comfortable, while not ideal for its purpose. The school has pragmatic improvement plans for residential redevelopment that will enhance the quality and flexibility of residence to better meet the needs of young people with mobility difficulties. Food provided for young people in residence is of good quality, plentiful and provides a good range of choice. Individual likes and dislikes are known and special diets are well catered for. Young people show their approval by delivering empty plates at the end of a meal.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The safety of residential pupils is good. They are safe and protected from harm. They say that they feel safe because staff look after them and stop them hurting themselves or others. Young people develop good relationships with their carers, enabling them to share any worries they may have. The school promotes the discussion of any concerns that may have a safeguarding aspect by shaping meetings, both children's and adults, to raise and address potential risk at all levels.

Young people receive critical information and support, helping them to recognise risky situations and behaviour such as those arising from exploitation. They know about the risks from emerging technologies and are taught how they can share their concerns. Unambiguous and well-publicised information about the school's behavioural expectations and the unacceptability of bullying

behaviour ensures that young people are aware of how they are expected to behave. Young people know how to report any concerns they may have and staff remain permanently vigilant, recognising the vulnerability of many students to various forms of unkind and oppressive behaviour.

Staff are well trained, knowledgeable and clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. School policies, procedures and guidance emphasise the priority of keeping children safe being everyone's responsibility. All staff are trained and understand this responsibility. Staff work in partnership with each other and other agencies, to consistently share the necessary information needed to promote young people's welfare and safety. Specific improvements have been introduced throughout the school in the reporting and recording of any concerns about changes to children's behaviour that may have safeguarding implications. Collated information is processed by the senior management team to ensure that all aspects of the school's safeguarding practice is sound, assesses risk accurately and thoroughly integrates with safeguarding board procedures. The school site is very secure. There are embedded, approved inter-agency protocols for protection and effective physical boundaries keep unauthorised persons out. These measures deter students from going missing from the school.

The school actively assesses and manages risks for all young people using the residential provision, while enabling them to participate in age-appropriate activities. Some of these include risks, such as football, horse riding and quad biking that enhance young people's growth and development. Individual care plans confirm that measured, protective factors are put in place after consultation with parents and guardians when planning these events.

Improved recruitment practice, reducing the reliance on agency staff, ensures that young people are looked after by the most suitable, vetted, trained and safe adults. Young people live in a safe living environment on a large campus where attentive risk management and health and safety practice reduce any potential hazard to students and school staff. Routine site maintenance and rapid repair of damage prioritises everyone's security and safety. Young people understand, practise and respond to regular fire precautionary tests, confirming their positive response to potential emergency situations.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Adequate

The leadership and management arrangements within the school and residential provision are adequate. The interim Executive Board is extremely supportive and provides valuable insight into the school's functioning, which encourages on-going development and improvement. The role of the school's residential provision is a key component of the school's service, providing valuable support to the 24-hour curriculum. The appointment of the head of care has strengthened the day-to-day management of the school's residential provision. This confirms a clear direction for the future of residential stays as a valuable asset within the school. The information outlining this school's residential provision is presently being amended to more accurately reflect the service provided and detail the key people involved.

Managers have taken concerted action to address all requirements from previous inspections to improve the quality and practice of the whole school. Residential staff fully support these changes, including the positive impact they receive from explicit direction, regular staff supervision and the provision of enhanced training. The school's record of residential staff training is not, however, up to date and this underrepresents the competencies and skills staff employ with young people. Flexible deployment of willing residential staff, however, helps to meet the changing needs and risks presented by the diverse client group safely.

Leaders and managers evidently understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service by producing realistic plans to address these and through commitment to further develop the

service. This includes providing revised guidance, policies and procedures that critically place young people and their safety at the heart of practice. Significant improvement is evident in residential recording practice. The collection of key information providing relevant, comprehensive detail about young people practically influences and shapes care and behaviour management plans. This level of detail helps keep young people safe, identify meaningful placement objectives and focus staff practice upon improving outcomes for young people. Individual case recording does not, however, always clearly reflect aspects of the service that go beyond the norm in the provision of enhanced care provision.

These improvements put the school in a far stronger position for the future. Significant and visible progress has been achieved; however, much of this work is yet to be embedded into practice to underline that positive outcomes can be consistently met.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	124507
Social care unique reference number	SC038723
DfE registration number	860/7021

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Mr J Kane (Interim Executive Head Teacher)
Date of previous boarding inspection	28/02/2013
Telephone number	01785 850420
Email address	headteacher@waltonhall.staffs.sch.uk

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