

Witherslack Hall School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Julia Toller
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	27 November 2007

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Witherslack Hall School is situated in a rural location in the southern Lake District, not far from Kendal. Witherslack has operated as a residential special school for over 30 years. There are extensive, well-maintained grounds, with clearly designated boundaries.

The school is a member of the Witherslack Group of Schools, which is registered and approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families for up to 72 pupils aged between 11 and 19 years who have special educational needs related to emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. The school's aim is to develop 'resilience' and self-esteem so that pupils improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning and can be successful.

There are 53 young people currently on roll, including seven day pupils who live in schools managed by the Witherslack Group. The boarding facilities are split into eight living units. Two of these are cottages in the grounds, which provide independent units for older pupils. The school offers post-16 provision with a specific programme designed to meet the needs of young adults.

Summary

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. This is an outstanding service overall.

Young people benefit from positive relationships with staff, they are afforded an excellent range of facilities and opportunities to encourage and support a healthy lifestyle, to develop their life skills and to reach good outcomes from education. Great emphasis is placed on the 24 hour curriculum at the school and this is used to achieve excellent outcomes for young people.

Staff at the school are highly motivated and professional, they benefit from an excellent range of training and support. They work well with other professionals to meet the complex and holistic needs of young people in areas such as education, and emotional and physical wellbeing.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations raised at the last inspection, however, the school has utilised their own internal quality assurance systems to secure further improvements.

The school has maintained their high standards of care identified at the last inspection and also improved further to achieve a rating of outstanding overall at this inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people who attend the school benefit from excellent health and placement plans which identify and meet all their health needs exceptionally well, they are provided with nutritious

meals in line with their likes and dislikes, and are encouraged and supported to participate in the planning of menus.

The school has a small vegetable and herb garden that allows young people to grow and sample school produce. This encourages young people to experience a sense of achievement and improve their independence skills, as well as developing an understanding of the nutritional value of foods and where they come from.

Individual health records are comprehensive, clear and easy to use. They demonstrate fully how the school meets all individual health and medical needs. Young people are encouraged to participate in the development of their plans, by staff who are innovative and able to gather their feelings and opinions in a non intrusive manner.

Staff actively encourage young people to enjoy and participate in healthy activities and experiences. Young people have accurate records that reflect their health care needs both inside the school and when on outings and activities. This demonstrates an excellent commitment to providing young people with positive healthy and stimulating experiences, whilst adopting an organised and safe approach.

The school has effective systems for the safe handling and storage of medicines. Staff are appropriately trained in meeting the medical needs of young people and ensuring all medicines are given as prescribed, and appropriately monitored and managed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff ensure that young people feel valued and that their privacy and dignity is maintained at all times. This is achieved by adopting a professional approach and through maintaining descriptive and accurate records that reflect the level of personal support afforded to young people, such as placement plans and risk assessments.

There is a fully accessible complaints procedure. Young people are able to make complaints and any raised are given the highest regard and acted upon without delay. Young people also feel more than able to raise informal issues with staff and one said that the 'staff are more than fair'. Young people are confident that appropriate action will be taken, but are encouraged to find solutions to concerns themselves where appropriate. In addition the head of care monitors records of complaints, analysing the information to improve standards within the school.

Young people feel safe and secure living at the school. They are fully involved in the development of all care records, such as health plans, placement plans and risk assessments. Staff have a clear and comprehensive understanding of individual needs and risks. Staff utilise their skills well to ascertain opinions and feelings with regard to the way in which support is provided to keep them safe. Records are extensive and explain in detail how the school keeps young people safe in line with their assessed needs in areas, such as absconding.

All staff working at the school are appropriately vetted and have attended an extensive training programme which encompasses all aspects of safeguarding young people, including delivering and maintaining safe practices around social behaviours and personal boundaries.

The school's procedures for promoting positive behaviours shows a clear and professional commitment to developing individual and supportive strategies, for example, records fully demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of the diverse needs of young people and are consistent in their approach. Staff support young people to address behaviours and enjoy positive relationships with others. This is also achieved by employing systems and pro active practices which value and include young people, whilst improving their self confidence and allowing them to flourish within the school setting.

The overall standard of behaviour of the boarders at the school is excellent. The procedures for promoting positive behaviours shows a clear and professional commitment to developing individual, specific and supportive strategies for managing behaviours. Records demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of each individual and are consistent and respectful in their approach.

Records are in place to show that the school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. The senior management team at the school ensure that regular and ongoing evaluations of the service take place. This means that young people are afforded the best possible care and support, in an environment that is assessed as safe and meets their needs fully. The school also has detailed environmental and fire risk assessments and all necessary checks, such as gas and electric certificates are in place.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The placement plan and other associated records, such as risk assessments, placement plans and behaviour plans for each young person sets out individual and specific needs in considerable detail. This ensures that the staff team are able to provide a very high standard of care and support in a way that is resourceful, versatile and effective. Plans encompass and address fully a wide range of individual needs, such as education, personal care, health and ensuring personal safety. All care records are regularly monitored, reviewed and updated to ensure that they are accurate and fully reflect specific practice employed to support individuals.

Staff are positive and proactive in their approach to supporting the education of young people. Staff have a high regard for education and ensure that young people attend school daily. They also make sure that young people have appropriate equipment and that they are fully prepared for the school day. Young people are afforded good resources to enhance and assist them with educational tasks, such as independence and social skills. This is achieved by working closely with the teaching staff, promoting positive multi agency working and by the implementation of excellent placement and education plans.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have clear, robust and accessible placement plans which provide precise information to demonstrate how care is provided in areas such as contact, identity, independence skills and social and emotional support. The school's systems for monitoring and reviewing the placement and care records fully involve young people, those with parental responsibility and social workers. This demonstrates that the school is committed to providing an inclusive service that values individuals and enhances the positive outcomes for young people.

Staff work well with young people to ascertain their opinions and feelings around the care and support they are afforded. The school promotes consultation with young people through excellent systems when young people are in school and on residence. Staff are trained and experienced in engaging with vulnerable young people. Therefore, the staff are able to ensure that all young people have opportunities to effectively contribute to the delivery of their care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school provide a weekly pocket money allowance for all young people who board. The amount of pocket money given is based on age and behaviour in line with the school's behaviour management incentive scheme. Young people are aware of how the system works and explained the system in detail to the inspectors, showing that they fully understand the system and what is expected of them.

There is a well developed leavers' programme in place for young people preparing to leave the school. The programme tries to prepare young people for independent living and develop their life skills. The school liaise closely with parents, placing authorities and the connexions organisation in the development of these plans. The school has semi independent living units for boys sited separately in the grounds. The leavers' programme is designed to give young people accredited educational awards as well as developing their life skills.

Young people have the opportunity to open bank accounts, manage their own living budgets, purchase and prepare food for all their own meals and travel independently using public transport. Young people are given a budget to purchase groceries, and are encouraged to prepare and cook their own meals.

The school does an extremely good job, living areas are very pleasant, comfortable and homely. The residential accommodation comprises of eight separate units, each with its own facilities, which are well furnished and decorated. The school has a rolling programme of refurbishment and redecoration in place. There are sufficient baths, showers and toilets for young people, all bathrooms are fitted with locks to promote privacy and dignity. Young people are very proud of their living areas and of the support and interest staff also take in ensuring a homely atmosphere.

The extensive grounds provide exceptional opportunities for young people to play after school and at weekends. Staff encourage young people to make the most of the outdoor space and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individual's rights are respected and promoted and boarders benefit from a service that is able to meet their holistic and diverse needs. Staff demonstrate a professional approach to ensuring that boarders feel valued and listened to.

Staff are provided with a high level of training, support and supervision to maintain professional practice and review their performance. They are fully motivated and demonstrate a commitment

to meeting the diverse needs of boarders. The skills of the team compliment and contribute to the outstanding care provided.

Residential staff are extremely positive and proactive in their approach to supporting the education of boarders. Excellent resources are available to enhance and assist with educational tasks, such as, independence, communication and social skills. The school provides a seamless service which promotes attainment and personal achievements.

The school is staffed to meet the individual needs of young people. This is achieved by robust risk assessments and placement planning which clearly assesses the support needs of each individual and incorporates this into the schools staffing levels. All staff employed at the school are appropriately vetted and have attended an extensive induction and training programme. This encompasses all aspects of safeguarding vulnerable young people, including delivering and maintaining safe practices around bullying, dealing with complaints and reporting concerns.

Witherslack Hall provides an excellent standard of accommodation. Boarders have a wide range of behavioural, emotional and learning needs. The school is able to cater and meet all needs exceptionally well, by employing a staff team who are highly trained and skilled in delivering care and support to those with additional needs.

The school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. The school has detailed environmental and fire risk assessments. All parts of the building to which boarders have access are adapted, and facilities within the school are designed and positioned to ensure that all young people enjoy the full benefits of an inclusive service.

Young people have accessible care records that are dynamic, clear and reflect the standard of care and support delivered to each young person. Systems within the school ensure that all records are well maintained and regularly monitored and reviewed.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):