

Witherslack Hall School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Leonard Hird
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	18 March 2009

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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

The school is situated in a very rural location in the southern Lake District. It 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 large group of independent schools, and 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, most of whom live in the school's boarding facility. The boarding facility is 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

The purpose of this announced visit to this school was to carry out an inspection of all key national minimum standards. This is an outstanding service overall.

The school is fully child orientated, well managed and provides a very safe, nurturing and caring environment for boarding pupils to live in. Much emphasis is placed on the 24-hour curriculum at the school and this is used to achieve excellent outcomes for boarding pupils. Members of staff are well managed, trained, dedicated and fully committed to providing excellent levels of care and support to the boarding community. Boarding pupils indicate that they feel the school is providing high levels of opportunities for them to participate in a wide range of relevant activities, in very pleasant surroundings and accommodation.

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 for improvement made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils are actively encouraged to have very healthy and active lifestyles while attending the school. The school's personal, health, social education and citizenship curriculum supported by the care staff team provides excellent guidance on matters such as health and relationships.

The school has developed excellent working relationships with all of the local health services that are used by the boarding pupils. Clear and comprehensive policies and procedures are readily available for use by care staff to address boarding pupils health needs. Boarding pupils have a comprehensive, easy to use individual health plan in place which has been developed in conjunction with them. All the of the boarding pupils have parental permissions in place for the management of their day to day health needs.

Members of the care staff team receive regular training in the safe handling and administration of medication and first aid. The health and medication needs of boarding pupils are closely monitored, administered and well recorded by the school's experienced care staff team and registered nurse.

Boarding pupils have an excellent, nutritious and enjoyable diet which helps in the promotion of their health and physical well-being. Menus are well-planned by the catering manager in conjunction with the boarding pupils to ensure as wide a choice of meals is available for boarding pupils to choose from, including a vegetarian option. The school is taking part in the healthy schools award to further develop its healthy lifestyles programme for boarding pupils. Boarding pupils commented, 'the food is really good', 'it is gorgeous to eat' and there is always plenty of it so that we can get second helpings.' Boarding pupils are receiving very positive guidance on how to live a very healthy lifestyle at the school from all of the school's staff.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Records about pupils are securely stored and confidentially maintained. Safeguarding records are only accessed by nominated senior staff and on a need to know basis. Boarding pupils said, 'Staff don't talk to pupils about other pupils.' Most boarding pupils reported that there was someone within the school whom they talk to if they had a problem. They also said that their privacy is fully respected by staff who were observed knocking on boarding pupils doors and waiting for an answer before entering.

There are very effective anti-bullying and complaints policies and procedure in place. Parents, carers and boarding pupils are able to access an easily understood booklet which details how concerns or complaints will be resolved. Boarding pupils confirm that they are able to raise any complaints they may have through this complaints procedure and that they will be dealt with quickly and fairly. Boarding pupils spoken to knew how to complain and it was observed that complaints information is displayed throughout the residential houses. There are detailed records maintained of any complaint or incident of bullying occurring and these records are regularly monitored by senior members of staff to ensure that any incident has been appropriately addressed.

Members of staff receive very good levels of training in safeguarding and behavioural management and this is commensurate to their individual roles. The overall standard of behaviour at the school is excellent. Boarding pupils are fully supported by a staff team that has a deep understanding of the very complex and diverse needs of each individual. Members of staff are fully aware of the comprehensive and easily understood policies, guidance and reporting procedures in regard to safeguarding issues. There is a very experienced and well qualified designated person who, with the assistance of two qualified members of the senior staff team, provide guidance and support to the staff on all safeguarding matters.

All staff employed at the school undergo rigorous checks to ensure they are suitable to work with boarding pupils. The recruitment files are very well ordered and information is easy to retrieve. The recruitment process is consistently rigorous. All relevant vetting checks for staff are completed and deemed satisfactory prior to them commencing employment at the school. This prevents boarding being exposed to potential abusers.

Comprehensive systems are in place to monitor, record, and prevent risks to health and safety at the school. Regular fire drills are held at different times and boarding pupils confirm this.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Excellent care practices at the school ensure that each boarding pupil receives the individualised support they require to succeed. Boarding pupils are offered numerous opportunities to be involved in planning the type of support they require and how this will be implemented. This personalised approach to care planning enables boarding pupils to feel really involved and listened to. Each pupil is assigned a key worker to specifically support them in the delivery of their care and education plans. These plans are fully reflective of the needs of the pupil and are based on a very thorough pre-admission assessment as well as a comprehensive programme of regular reviews. Members of staff regularly communicate with parents, carers and placing authorities, to keep them up to date on the progress being made by an individual pupil.

The school is creating an environment in which pupils see learning as an extremely important part of their life and this is giving them the confidence to be themselves and to grow personally and emotionally. Staff work closely with parents, carers and teachers to ensure that boarding pupils are given all the help and support they require. Boarding provision makes available a wide range of resources such as computers to enable boarders to attain good levels of academic success and have life enhancing experiences. Members of staff positively support pupils to take part in a wide range of out-of-school activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Boarding pupils said, 'they thought all of the out-of-school activities were enjoyable and interesting and that they were always consulted about the types of activity on offer each term.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school has excellent arrangements in place to consult with boarding pupils. There is a school council that meets regularly to address issues raised by individuals or groups of pupils. Each house also has regular house meetings to discuss the important issues that are affecting the day-to-day running of the house. The school undertakes regular quality assurance questionnaire with boarding pupils about the care, support and education they receive. Responses are generally very positive and information from these is used by the school's management as part of its monitoring and evaluation processes.

Highly effective care and placement planning arrangements for boarding pupils ensure that their physical, emotional, social and educational needs are met. Boarding pupils' files include all of the information required by the national minimum standards. Information about progress made by the individual pupil is extensive. Annual reports to parents are very informative and give a comprehensive picture as to the progress of their child. Excellent systems are in place to review the individual pupil's needs through the annual review of the statement of special educational needs and regular personal reviews throughout the term.

Boarding pupils said that they are encouraged to maintain links with their families and friends. Boarders can talk to parents by using the phones located in the different houses. Comments from boarding pupils included, 'yes I do ring home regularly when I am here.' another pupil said, that their parents made contact with them by phone and 'they contact me, you can make private calls in your bedroom on the staff phone.' Effective systems are in place to monitor all

visits and contact made and to restrict contact where this is agreed and in the interest of the child.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils about to leave the school receive excellent support for the transition into independence. The key worker ensures that transitional arrangements are carried out in accordance with the wishes of the individual pupil. The school has developed close links with local colleges and the connexions service to ensure that support is maintained even after a pupil has left the school. Both of the 'independent houses' are equipped with domestic appliances and equipment which is used to teach boarding pupils independence skills. Boarding pupils spoke positively of the support they receive, 'loads of support, help with learning to cook, we do washing and ironing.' and 'staff really do work with us to teach us to be independent.'

All of residential houses provide sufficient space and facilities to fully meet the needs of the boarding pupils at the school. However, the school's accommodation is unsuitable for children with physical disabilities as the building has not been adapted for disabled access. The residential units are extremely well maintained, furnished, decorated and equipped to a very high standard. All of the bedrooms are personalised and meet the required standard. Washing and bathing facilities are sufficient in number and meet the privacy and personal care needs of boarding pupils.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school has comprehensive policies and procedures in place for addressing equality and diversity. Boarding pupils are encouraged to be thoughtful and helpful to each other in the boarding community as well as the wider community. This is demonstrated by their regular involvement with the local community at Christmas time as well as other organisations such as the Sea Cadet Force throughout the year. All of the boarding pupils confirm they are always treated with great respect, understanding, and dignity by the staff.

The school provides a very detailed statement of its boarding principles and practices for parents, carers, boarding pupils and staff. The organisation and management of the boarding houses is creating a very safe, non-discriminatory and extremely helpful environment for boarding pupils to live in. There are excellent systems of risk assessment in place to ensure the health and safety of boarding pupils and staff. All of the administration systems used in the school are ensuring the safety and welfare of the boarding pupils.

The headteacher and the senior care management team provide very effective and highly positive levels of management support for the care staff team. The care staff team are very well experienced in their individual roles and linked to this high level of management support are providing a stable and very caring environment for boarding pupils to live in. Staffing levels both during the day and at night are meeting the current needs of boarding pupils.

All of the boarders spoken with said that they feel well cared for by their staff teams.

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

There are no recommendations.