

Penn Hall School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

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, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Penn Hall School is a Wolverhampton Local Authority Community Special School for pupils aged three to 18 years whose special educational needs fall predominantly in the category of physical disability and complex medical needs. Some pupils will have an associated learning difficulty related to their physical disability. An increasing number of pupils have communication delays and difficulty. The school can accommodate 80 pupils.

The residential hostel can accommodate up to six pupils for overnight stays. All pupils are given the opportunity to take part in the residential experience. A flexible approach is maintained so that children can stay from one to four nights a week with a maximum stay of 16 planned nights per year. On occasions the hostel can take children on an emergency basis due to family circumstances. The hostel is also available some weekends through the year as well as two weeks during the summer holidays. The unit consists of a number of bathrooms and dormitory areas together with a television room, games room, life skills room and dining area.

The aim of the residential hostel is to encourage independence and long-term emotional maturity, extend the school day and have fun with friends.

There were four children resident during the inspection.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Penn Hall School provides an outstanding service with exceptional strengths that meet all, and exceeds the vast majority, of the national minimum standards. As a result children make exceptional progress and are achieving excellent personal goals, whilst having great fun with friends.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The environment promotes the individual and diverse identities and needs of children. This uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and positive outcomes for children.
- The superior standard of care of children is making an exceptional impact on the quality of their lives. The residential experience provides extensive opportunities that enable them to flourish personally, socially, culturally and educationally.
- Children develop a strong sense of their own value and self-worth and a humane and tolerant approach to others.
- The school has in place comprehensive safeguarding procedures and training that ensure staff practice is professional and robust. As a result, children's safety and well-being is protected at all times.
- The school continues to develop the outstanding service already provided by the residential provision. Systematic quality assurance, including extensive feedback from parents, children and staff is used to inform and plan for the future.
- All national minimum standards have been met.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for children are outstanding. They receive a specialist service that provides comprehensive intervention and excellent support that is tailored to their age, ability and special needs. Children experience new social and personal situations and develop a wide range of new independence skills. Children are making significant individual progress, whilst having fun staying with their friends.

Children substantially increase their social skills and social opportunities. They experience a highly inclusive residential community that gives all children at Penn Hall School the chance to have regular short breaks. Outside education children find socialising with peers difficult, due to wide geographical spread, the lack of wheelchair accessible transport and complex physical disabilities. The school's residential accommodation enables friends to plan stays and activities together. It enables them to develop meaningful relationships outside of education, take part in a wide range of age appropriate activities and hobbies, and access facilities, such as bowling, shops, cinemas and restaurants, in the local community. One child stated, 'We could never have a friend for a sleep-over or go out with five friend's who are wheelchair users. It would be a logistical nightmare for our parents to transport us or organise. If the school didn't provide us with this opportunity it would never happen.'

Children have an insightful understanding of their own individual needs. They are confident and able to self advocate. This is often the first and only time they have stayed away from home. It is also often the first time they have been supported with aspects of their life, such as personal care and a night time and morning routine, by someone other than a family member. As a result, children become confident in making choices, voicing their opinions and developing their self esteem and emotional resilience. One child stated, 'Staying overnight at school gives you the confidence in the future to go on residential school trips and move on to a residential college.'

Children have compassion and a comprehensive understanding of others backgrounds, cultures, disabilities and personal needs. This shared residential experience enables them to provide sensitive reassurance and support to each other. It also promotes individual responsibility and maturity; for example, some children will act as 'buddies' or mentors to new children when they first stay. The staff team also promote consideration and respect for others and this impacts positively on children and results in them establishing long lasting meaningful relationships.

Children take part in a wide and varied range of activities, hobbies and outings, which promote new interests, inclusion and community involvement. As a result, children are making outstanding personal development with regard to mobility, communication and social skills. There are extensive facilities on site, available to all children, including a swimming pool, soft play area, gardens, outdoor toys and play equipment. All children are actively involved in planning their weekly programme of

events that includes activities off-site and on-site. Some activities are focused and lead to specific skills being learned for independence for example, cookery club and shopping trips.

Children's needs and views are integral to all aspects of how the school operates and develops its practice. Children feel included and valued because staff ask for their opinions and views. Staff are skilled at facilitating group discussions using a range of speech and language resources and tools to cover a wide range of topics. They explore feelings and emotions, as well as more practical subjects such as mealtimes, activities and trips out. Decisions and ideas coming from discussions and consultation groups are acted upon and result in children developing a strong sense of their own value and self-worth.

Children's transition to the next stage of their life is successful. They learn extensive skills that develop mobility and personal care and help prepare them for moving on to college and adulthood. Through their boarding experience they grow in independence and confidence. Parents stated, 'He always seems so grown up when he comes home', 'He feels all grown up and independent' and 'He is becoming less dependent on us and more willing to do things without us.'

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of care is outstanding. Children enjoy a professional service that effectively supports them to succeed as well as have an enjoyable and social stay. They make outstanding personal progress based on their assessed abilities and needs. Each child is supported by a team of experienced and highly motivated staff who have comprehensive knowledge of supporting and enabling children with complex disabilities. This holistic approach ensures there is specialist support with regard to education, care, speech and language, mobility, physical and emotional health, family support and transition.

The residential experience is proactively promoted by the school. Residential staff are strategically linked to the school so that there is an effective crossover from reception class up throughout the school. These arrangements and excellent communication between the education and residential teams result in staff consistency and continuity of care, and the outstanding support to, and knowledge of, children's individual needs.

Introductions to residential stays are specific to each child and their family. Some children are invited for a series of tea visits while others are eager to stay overnight straightaway. The staff team consult with parents and children to ensure the mix of children at each stay is right. All information required to ensure the safety and well-being of a child is gathered prior to their first stay. This informs staff of the actions they will need to take prior to that stay. For example, adaptations or aids to the accommodation, or staff training to best meet the needs of the child and their disability.

All aspects of planning and practice are highly personalised to meet the individual needs of each child. They are well focused, detailed and rigorously implemented and have a highly beneficial impact on outcomes. Staff know each child exceptionally well, either from working with them in the educational setting, or from the multi-disciplinary information available on each child. This includes regularly updated information from parents, as well as professionals within the school including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and nurses.

All children have an individual education plan, which sits alongside extensive and comprehensive information from all other professional fields. Since the last inspection, the residential service have developed the written records of targets and progress made by children using the service. This new format does not evidence as clearly as the previous system the outstanding progress clearly being made by children.

Children continue to be provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs, by a team of experienced catering staff who are integral to the life of the school. Children are encouraged to eat a healthy diet. Vegetarian and culturally appropriate foods are available. Feeding plans are exceptionally well documented. They ensure what level of support is required at mealtimes for each young person, listing special diets, what crockery and cutlery are used, what help children need to feed themselves and what strategies to employ if a child refuses to eat or drink. Mealtimes are seen as social events and support children with differing communication difficulties to improve their social interactions.

Children's individual health and intimate care needs are identified and taken into account at an early stage. There are comprehensive health care plans, which ensure residential staff are accurately informed of individual children's needs. There is excellent access to health care professionals, who work closely with school staff and parents to identify and meet children's unique needs. Staff are required to gain high-level competences before they can provide any health-related nursing tasks. Robust risk assessments are completed for manual handling and guidance is in place for staff to ensure that this is done in a safe way. As a result, children reside in a healthy environment where their good health is comprehensively promoted.

Children continue to be proactively encouraged, enabled and supported to contribute to their care by using an extensive variety of communication aids. Their views are clearly valued and they are given choice wherever possible. There are explicit written plans, which summarise how children's needs are to be met. Residential staff's care practice is professional and sensitive in addressing individual's needs.

The residential unit is a separate building to the school within the grounds. The hostel provides a homely environment with comfortable furnishings. The lounge and dining room provide sufficient space for the group and additional play rooms are

available for specific activities and individual time with an adult. Dormitories are suitably furnished with ample space for those children using wheelchairs. The accommodation is well maintained and furnished to a good standard. A programme of redecoration is planned yearly.

Residential pupils' safety

Children's safety is promoted at all times and is outstanding. Given the complex needs of the children, the school values and includes the involvement and views of professionals and families with regard to the welfare and well-being of children. For example, the school sends out regular questionnaires to parents asking for feedback. The response from the last parent's questionnaire was outstanding with regard to the safety of their children.

The school ensures that each child has a team of staff supporting them who have specialist knowledge of their individual needs. They support the child to communicate their views and concerns, but can also advocate on their behalf. Over and above this, the school has employed a home/school liaison officer. This post provides parents with individual face-to-face support to discuss any issues including any concerns they might have with regard to their child's safety and well-being. The home/school liaison officer is also facilitating parent support groups, which provide parents with further opportunities to discuss a range of topics, as well as inviting along guest speakers.

Children are kept safe because staff have a clear understanding of what their key role and responsibilities are in terms of protection. All staff undertake child protection training relevant to children with complex disabilities, which is regularly updated. They are well informed and take appropriate action to ensure children's welfare and ensure any issues are addressed. All safeguarding procedures are robust and regularly reviewed and developed to ensure the well-being of children remains at the centre of the school's practice.

There is a calm and relaxed atmosphere throughout the school and behavioural issues are minor. Staff are skilled at managing inappropriate behaviour, role modelling positive behaviour and promote listening, taking turns, sharing and consideration of others. All behaviour is managed through exploration of issues using effective systems of communication. Any strategies implemented are regularly reviewed and discussed with parents and other professionals concerned.

While no formal complaints have been raised since the last inspection the school has processes in place to manage complaints and concerns quickly and to resolve complaints in a manner children and their families both understand and can agree with. Staff are fully aware of the complaints process and help children raise any particular issues.

The quality of relationships between staff and children is excellent and reinforces the

very caring atmosphere that can be witnessed throughout the school. Children are very supportive of each other and very accepting of each other's differences. Staff receive effective training and information about countering bullying. They are very clear that any form of behaviour that causes distress to others, regardless of intent, is treated as a serious matter. Staff are provided with clear procedures to investigate any incidents and monitor outcomes. Children also learn about bullying through the school curriculum. Discussion and role play enables them to explore issues related to bullying and gives them strategies and confidence to combat it.

The sensitive implementation of personal care is a key strength. As previously stated, staff are very aware that this might be the first, and only experience, some children's have of adults other than family members supporting with night time and morning routines. Guidelines and training for supporting children with personal care is comprehensive. Staff are professional and meticulous in ensuring each individual's needs are met in line with their wishes. They are committed to empowering children to undertake as much care for themselves as is possible and become confident in expressing preferences and views.

Children's safety is promoted by an established health and safety policy, which ensures risks are identified and appropriate action is taken to manage and reduce them. Children and staff are involved in fire drills and there are regular checks on all fire and electrical equipment to ensure it is in good working order. All staff are appropriately trained in health and safety matters, including first aid and fire awareness. The school has regularly updated risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds as well as individual children's safety.

Children continue to be protected by the school's robust recruitment systems. These ensure all staff employed complete the necessary recruitment checks and are deemed suitable to work with children before commencement of employment. The local authority enhances these established systems by undertaking regular quality assurance checks on staff recruitment and vetting files. The school ensures staff practice is in line with the most recent guidance by sending key staff on safer recruitment training.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management at Penn Hall School is outstanding. The school is successfully meeting its aim 'to provide a rich, stimulating and accessible environment in which children have the opportunity to develop and flourish'.

The school was judged to be outstanding at the last inspection and one recommendation was made. This has been met and the school continues, through comprehensive quality assurances systems and a detailed development plan, to improve safeguarding, quality of care and outcomes for children.

The school's ethos and underpinning philosophy is strong throughout, ensuring

children are in a supportive and caring residential environment within which they are valued and safe, but enabled to thrive and develop.

There are comprehensive records, policies and procedures and Statement of Principles and Practice. The hostel is organised and managed in a manner that delivers and maintains an outstanding and simulating level of care. Children stated, 'Its fun', 'Excellent', 'I love staying here with my friends.' Parents stated, 'She enjoys her stays', 'She loves resi more than anything', 'He always wants to stay in the hostel', 'She never wants to come home' and 'It provides an outstanding service.'

The head of care provides excellent leadership and has the expertise, skills and knowledge to effectively manage the residential provision. She forms part of a strong leadership and management team who provide staff with clear and consistent guidance and support. The cohesion of this team is a strength of the school and they continually raise standards in the delivery of care and education. Children are central to all decisions and make outstanding progress within the service.

There is exceptional expertise in meeting the diverse needs of children. Staff consistently promote the voice of the child and ensure that children are not subject to discrimination or marginalisation. Full attention is paid to individual children's gender, faith, ethnic origin, culture, linguistic background and disability.

A key strength of this service is the high ratio of professional staff skilled in meeting the complex needs of children. This service is organised to meet the needs of children first and foremost. Outstanding investment is given to the development and training of staff. Their training needs are regularly reviewed and revised in line with the complex changing needs of the children. The staff team is professional and passionate about their work. They place the well-being of children at the centre of their practice and ensure children's achievements are celebrated. Their deployment and performance is effective.

This school has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering outstanding performance and managing improvement. There is accurate and insightful evaluation of performance. Where areas for improvement emerge the school recognises and manages them well. The local authority and senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records, practice and events. This monitoring, parent and children consultation and regular communication, ensures proper scrutiny and on-going development of all aspects of the children's care. This quality monitoring contributes to reports to the board of governors and the service's overall development targets. The board of governors also play an active role in the monitoring of the hostel and the quality assurance function captures children's overall experiences and highlights any areas for improvement. These visits provide excellent additional safeguarding mechanisms for children by looking at staff and management practices.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure placement plans are regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23/02/2012

To all the children at Penn Hall School

Inspection of Penn Hall School

I really enjoyed visiting you recently.

I thought Penn Hall School was 'outstanding'.

The staff team that care for you are excellent.

They know you well and make sure you have lots of fun.

You are involved in making important decisions about menus, activities and outings.

The staff make sure it is always safe for you.

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Bennett