

Windlestone School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Nicholas Murphy / Leonard Hird

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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

Windlestone School is a residential special school maintained by Durham County Council for 70 children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is situated in a semi-rural environment in Chilton, County Durham. The school provides 20 residential places on weekdays for boys and girls, aged from 11 to 16 years old. Accommodation comprises of a purpose-built residential block with two ten-bedded mixed gender units. Most bedrooms are single-bedded and all bedrooms have en-suite showers and toilets. Residential students have access to the extended day facilities provided at the school until 7.30pm each weekday. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2012.

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

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The school has a happy, purposeful and productive atmosphere. The good quality of the residential provision has a significant impact upon the lives and outcomes of residential students.
- The ethos of the school is consistently promoted and well understood by staff and residential students. The residential experience makes a marked difference to the outcomes achieved by residential students.
- The school keeps residential students exceptionally safe. Staff manage behaviour in a very positive way which means that restraint and sanctions are seldom used.
- The behaviour of residential students is excellent. Bullying is well controlled and students are confident that it will be dealt with should it occur.
- The residential accommodation is comfortable, of high quality and affords good levels of privacy.
- The school meets all national minimum standards. A welfare recommendation made at the last inspection has not been addressed so has been repeated.
- The school values residential students as individuals, listens to and acts on their views, and promotes the principles of equality and diversity.
- Residential students and their parents take great pride in the school and understand the difference it has made to their lives.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential students are outstanding. Residential students have exceptionally good relationships with staff and with each other. A student said, 'I have good friends here and the staff are great.' Staff foster an ethos within the residential setting which encourages respect and consideration for others. This supports the more focused work within the school curriculum on promoting tolerance for people from different backgrounds. In addition, residential students are developing excellent social skills. They are generally confident and assertive while showing appropriate respect for other people. A parent said, 'My son has matured so much and made such progress.'

Residential students are doing exceptionally well in education. They are achieving outstanding examination results compared to day students and this confirms the value that the residential experience contributes to outcomes. Many residential students have acquired enthusiasm for activities which prior to their admission would have been unheard of. For example, one parent said, 'My son never used to read at home. Now he chooses to lie in bed and read his books.'

Additionally, the school places a high importance on tracking students after they have left the school. This monitoring shows that residential students are exceptionally well engaged in further education, employment or training. One student said, 'I have been here for a long time and it has helped me.'

Staff consult and involve residential students at every opportunity. A parent said 'The staff speak to the students like people, not like children.' Regular meetings within the residential setting enable the students to make suggestions about their living arrangements. These meetings link to the wider school student council, which has two representatives from the residential setting. The headteacher skilfully encourages student members to contribute and treats what they have to say seriously. For example, a proposed initiative of assertive mentoring will only be introduced if the student body is agreeable.

Staff are very effective in promoting and safeguarding the health of residential students. The school has an extensive range of facilities which enable residential students to let off steam and take enjoyable exercise. Staff take full account of the individual health needs of residential students which ensures that their well-being is always protected.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of residential care provided by the school is good. Staff work across the residential and school settings. This helps to provide consistent support for residential students which is highly effective in achieving good outcomes. The school is committed to providing a '24-hour curriculum' and the presence of the same staff

in both school and residential settings supports this. For example, a reading scheme which a residential student follows within school can be continued in the evening within the residential unit to accelerate the student's development.

Each residential student has a care plan. The format of this has only recently been revised, and when fully implemented will further improve the quality of planning. Residential students are able to see their plans and make detailed contributions to reviews of their care.

There is a very wide range of activities on offer to residential students. Facilities on the school campus provide sporting, leisure, and cultural opportunities. Students can also take part in activities out of school, for example swimming, cinema, and golf. In addition, some activities provide not only physical recreation but also enhance residential students' knowledge, skills, and self-confidence. For example, there was a recent multi-day sailing trip. This provided the experience of a lifetime for the students, who were stretched physically and mentally by the experience but tremendously enriched as a result.

The school effectively promotes the health of residential students. There are good links with health professionals. For example the school nurse, who provides not only a direct service to residential students but also training to staff.

The school provides residential students with high quality food. Most meals are taken with the rest of the school in the main dining room ('Le Café'), which enables residential students to sit with their friends and the school staff. Kitchen staff are very well trained, and present meals attractively. The nutritional balance of the menu is carefully monitored to ensure that residential students eat healthily and well.

The residential accommodation is of very high quality. This conveys to residential students that they are valued and respected. In turn, this encourages students to respect their surroundings. Suggestions by students to improve the facilities are always considered by staff. For example, a request to provide additional computers in the residential unit was submitted to the student council and agreed by the headteacher. There is plenty of space for students to be together or, if they choose, to spend time alone. The privacy and safety of residential students is further enhanced by the en-suite bathrooms. However, these do not have toilet roll holders or towel rails, which rather detract from the overall high level of comfort and homeliness of the accommodation.

Residential pupils' safety

The safety of residential students is outstanding. The school places the safety of students, including those in residence, at the very heart of its operation. There are very effective policies and procedures in place to keep residential students exceptionally safe. All staff, no matter what their position, receive appropriate training in these procedures. This ensures that any concerns expressed by a student,

or worrisome observations by staff, are addressed promptly. A designated member of staff is responsible for reporting any incidents that need to be reported to other agencies, such as children's social care.

Bullying is accorded a very high priority by the school. There is a well-embedded culture of complete intolerance of bullying. This is enhanced by the close links the school has with an independent anti-bullying advisor. He visits weekly to do direct work with residential students as well as giving training to staff. As a result, the school has achieved formal accreditation for its anti-bullying practice. What this means in practice is that residential students feel safe and know that if bullying does occur, it will be dealt with effectively and quickly. A parent said, 'I am very happy that my son is safe'. In addition, the school is constantly evaluating its practice in this area. For example, managers realised that the 'bullying boxes', placed around the school for students to report concerns, were not being used. This was discussed with the students, who felt that putting a concern in writing on a bullying form was too cumbersome a process. As a result, it was agreed that students would use the bullying form simply to say 'I want to talk to Mr or Mrs X' and then post it in the box.

The effectiveness with which the ethos of the school is promoted ensures that standards of behaviour are extremely high. Residential students treat each other with consideration, and staff reward good behaviour through praise and more tangible incentives. Staff always look to build on positive traits in a residential student and increase their abilities in areas where they need to develop, such as social skills. This positive approach to behaviour management means that the use of sanctions is limited, and the need to physically restrain residential students is extremely rare. A parent commented, 'My child wants to please staff and for them to be proud of him.'

The environment is exceptionally well managed and supervised to ensure that all aspects are safe. Regular checks such as those on the fire and electrical systems are carried out meticulously. The processes for recruiting and vetting staff are extremely robust. These measures combine to further assure the safety and security of all residential students.

There are very few incidents of residential students going missing. When such an incident does occur, the school works closely with other agencies including the police to ensure that any risk to the student is minimised.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good. The aims and ethos of the school are clearly summarised in the school's documentation which is available for residential students and parents in a suitable format. This enables users of the service to be clear about what the school offers. It is evident that the principles contained in the school's Statement of Purpose are carried out in everyday practice.

Daily life within the residential provision is very well managed. The crossover of staff in the residential setting and the main school helps to ensure the consistency of an orderly routine. This makes residential students feel more secure and know the standards of behaviour which are expected. One residential student said, 'I like this place because it is peaceful'.

Staffing within the residential setting is always sufficient to meet the needs of students and keep them safe. The deployment of senior managers at all hours of the day and night to provide support to staff is a particular strength of the school. Staff are also supported through regular supervision, annual appraisal, and high-quality training. However, the team leaders have had little training in management. This reduces their potential effectiveness in leading and supervising their team. A recommendation to improve practice in this area was made at the previous inspection and has not been addressed. It has therefore been repeated.

The school has good systems in place to independently monitor all aspects of its operation. Effective monitoring by the headteacher also enables staff to understand the contribution that the residential experience makes to good outcomes.

Staff advocate for residential students and inspire them with the belief that they can achieve anything with hard work. This helps them to be able to participate fully in society both during their time in the school and after they leave. The emphasis upon having respect for the needs and rights of others also promotes within residential students a realisation of their own rights and develops their assertiveness.

There is excellent communication between staff and parents. Feedback from the school emphasises positive progress made by residential students.

It is clear that all staff have an extremely good working knowledge of each residential student. This includes their needs, their areas for development, their objectives, and work needed to achieve them. However, there are some deficiencies in the monitoring and updating of information in case files, and the system of case file audit does not pick up these shortfalls.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- Provide suitable training for the team leaders to enhance their supervisory, leadership and management skills.
- Improve the auditing of case files to ensure that placement plans are monitored and updated at appropriate intervals.
- Provide toilet roll holders and towel rails in the en-suite bathrooms.

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.



04/10/2012

Dear Residential Students

Inspection of Windlestone School

Thank you for spending time with me and my colleague Len during our inspection. We talked to many of you about the residential units and what it was like for you living there. We also talked to a lot of staff, the headteacher, and other people like the anti-bullying worker. We looked at a number of records and files and sat in on various activities. For example, Len spent some time in the units on an evening, and I attended the student council meeting.

I have said in my report that the residential provision is good. Some aspects of it, like keeping you safe, are outstanding. The staff get on very well with you and work with you to make the school a happy and safe place to be. Living in the school helps you to achieve better exam grades and to go into further education or training when you eventually leave the school. Your parents are very pleased with the way the residential units look after you and help you to do well at school and become more mature and responsible.

There are loads of interesting activities for you to choose from. Staff listen to your suggestions for how to do things differently. The units are very comfortable, and you respect your surroundings so there is no damage.

I have asked Tim to change some things to make the residential units even better. These are about training for the team leaders and how your files can be improved. Additionally, I have recommended that Tim puts toilet roll holders and towel rails in your bathrooms to make them more homely.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Murphy / Leonard Hird