

Witherslack Hall School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, GRANGE-OVER-SANDS, Cumbria, LA11 6SD

Inspection dates	28/09/2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The residential provision is helping residential pupils to make significant progress in their personal and social development. As a result of the care provided their behaviour and emotional health improves over time. Residential pupils speak positively about their boarding experience and the team of staff are effective in promoting their welfare and safety.
- Residential pupils benefit from having outstanding relationships with residential staff who provide clear boundaries along with a safe and stimulating environment. The structure and routines established allow new pupils to settle quickly.
- Residential pupils feel safe and parents and partner agencies are confident that the school is committed to ensuring every residential pupil remains protected and safe.
- Daily routines and working practices promote and guide residential pupils towards a more independent lifestyle so they can take appropriate risks in trying out new experiences and tasks in a safe and secure environment.
- A new senior management team has been established since the previous inspection. The management team demonstrates particular strengths through their commitment to implement consistent and effective monitoring. This practice, along with the ability to evaluate all areas of operation and implement changes when necessary to promote positive outcomes for pupils, supports the school's commitment to continued improvement.

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 inspection of the residential provision commenced three hours after notice was given to the school. The inspector met with: residential pupils, the head teacher, members of the senior management team, residential care staff and the school nurse. Telephone consultation also took place with a sample of parents, carers and a range of partner agencies. Inspection activities included: a tour of the premises; observation of activities, meal times and residential routines; and examination of policies, records, monitoring reports and quality monitoring questionnaires completed by residential pupils, parents and placing authorities.

Inspection team

Anne Bannister

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

The school is an independent residential special school with up to 72 pupils aged between 10 and 19 years who have special educational needs related to emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. There are 13 pupils currently living in the school's residential provision and 19 day pupils. The boarding facility is split into six houses. At the time of the inspection three houses were being used to accommodate young people. The school offers post-16 provision with a specific programme designed to meet the needs of young adults. The residential provision was last inspected in October 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ensure that there is a clear cross referencing of records relating to complaints raised by young people which are the identified as safeguarding issues.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. They receive excellent levels of support and care allowing them to prosper socially, emotionally, physically and educationally. Residential pupils have greatly improved their social skills and confidence as a result of the residential experience. For example one parent said 'The change in him has been quite dramatic. On admission he was extremely socially isolated. The staff team are skilled at giving him a range of options for dealing with the social situations he finds difficult, enabling him to make his own choices in how he manages his interactions with other young people. As a consequence his social skills have improved dramatically'.

Residential pupils are encouraged to plan and engage themselves in meaningful leisure activities that enable them to enjoy new experiences. These experiences enhance their self esteem and self confidence. For example, a number of pupils have recently returned from a tall ship expedition that provided them with new, and for most, positive experiences that have increased their confidence and self esteem. Residential pupils are aware that participation in such activities will positively inform future employment prospects. The school also provides pupils with experiences that enable them to involve themselves with community activities. An enterprise scheme provides opportunities for pupils to make and sell produce in the local community shop. Pupils are also encouraged to become involved in local charitable fund raising events. Such opportunities support the development of social skills and increase a sense of self esteem and self worth.

Residential pupils are looked after in an environment where boundaries and expectations of behaviour are well established. As a result, behavioural issues decrease significantly as residential pupils begin to flourish in a setting which provides them with a sense of security and consistency. For example residential pupils are proud of their increased ability to manage behaviours such as anger and aggression. They demonstrate their growing maturity and decision making skills.

Residential pupils health care needs are exceptionally well met. Staff are proactive in ensuring that they receive the health care support they need. Well established services such as speech and language therapy and the introduction of a dedicated counsellor, ensures that residential pupils complex health needs are well met. The school nurse determinedly ensures that all residential pupils have access to the range of health care professionals they require. As a result residential pupils have an increased understanding of their own health needs. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle and as a result are able to make informed decisions on issues which affect their health and wellbeing.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The care and support residential pupils are receiving means from starting at the school, they are making remarkable progress. This is validated in comments made by parents, who talk about the remarkable turnaround their children have made as a direct consequence their placement at the school. Residential pupils benefit from the close and frequent liaison between residential staff and their families that aims to ensure residential pupils achieve their full potential. Feedback received included views such as 'The care provided is fantastic. This school provides an A1 standard of care. I would recommend it to any one who has a child who presents challenging behaviours. I am well supported by the residential team if I experience difficulties when he comes home. It feels like we are a team working together to make sure my child reaches his full potential'.

Residential pupils confirm that they are happy at the school and that one of the strengths of their placement is their relationship with the residential care team. One residential pupil said ' Coming

to this school has been a turning point for me. the best bits are that I have become more independent and confident. Residential staff support you if you are struggling during the school day. They will spend time with you and help you to understand the lessons you find hard'. A significant number of residential pupils told the inspector that that they believe ' residential staff really care about us and want us to achieve our potential' and 'they all go the extra mile for you. At times coming in on their days off to support us if something is happening which effects us'.

Residential pupils are treated with dignity and respect at all times. They are empowered to make a positive contribution to school life. For example they are fully involved in the process of staff recruitment and school development. The staff ensure that all residential pupils are given the chance to say what they think and feel about issues, whether these are school-related or personal. This enables residential pupils to feel respected and valued and as a result they gain improved confidence and emotional well-being.

Residential pupils are observed to be tolerant of their peers, accepting each others differing needs and treating each other with sensitivity, respect and understanding. As a result there is an increasing sense of community within the residential provision.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The welfare of residential pupils is safeguarded, with staff having the necessary leadership, knowledge, experience and training in safeguarding procedures, to keep pupils safe. The school has developed excellent links with external agencies tasked with keeping children safe. Potential safeguarding issues are dealt with appropriately, ensuring residential pupils are protected. Very detailed chronologies of incidents are maintained as well as full details of professional contact with partner agencies. Staff practice demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding procedures and as a result the school are able to appropriately promote and protect the safety and wellbeing of pupils in their care.

Staffing ratios ensure residential pupils receive the supervision and support they need to feel protected and keep them safe. The boundaries that are put in place ensure that their behaviours are managed safely. Residential pupils contribute to their own behaviour management plans and help develop 'My support' plans. As a result they are learning to take responsibility for their own behaviours. Staff support residential pupils to identify their own triggers, and work out strategies to help them when they experience difficulties. As a result, young people are not getting into conflict as often with their peers. Residential pupil's respond very well to praise and there is good use of positive reinforcement as opposed to the use of sanctions. Few sanctions are used. Respectful communication and an excellent atmosphere was maintained throughout the inspection.

Staff are clear that physical intervention is very much a last resort. All staff receive regular and refresher training in positive handling techniques. There are relatively few occasions when physical intervention is necessary during care hours. When it does occur comprehensive records are maintained. Following any incident a detailed de-brief and review is undertaken to ensure strategies and plans remain effective. This supports residential pupils to take responsibility to react in a more positive way to issues which cause them upset.

Full recognition is given by senior management team to the vulnerability of residential pupils and the dangers associated with missing from care. A policy and procedure is in place and utilised by residential care staff to ensure safeguarding measures keep residential pupils safe. As a consequence of these effective measures it is extremely rare for residential pupil to be reported missing during care hours.

The school's recruitment arrangements are judged effective in ensuring that young people are

protected from being cared for by people who may cause them harm. Equally good practice ensures the vetting of visitors to safeguard young people.

Regular servicing of equipment and routine safety checks maintain a safe environment. Residential pupils know what to do in the case of an emergency and can exit the home safely. Staff implement a range of risk assessments to identify and minimise hazards. There is a comprehensive audit of health and safety matters carried out on an annual basis. Health and safety is managed well ensuring residential pupils and staff remain safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

There are clear aims for the residential provision. These aims are translated into practice, and ensure positive outcomes for residential pupils. A new, experienced senior management team has been established since the previous inspection. Residential pupils benefit from their inclusive, child-focused management style. They promote a clear vision of how the residential provision should continue to move forward and develop and are committed to ensuring every residential pupil reaches their full potential.

There is a continuing drive to improve outcomes for residential pupils, with regular, consistent and on-going monitoring and evaluation of practice. Strong and thorough systems are in place to review the quality of care, identify areas for future improvement and take action to ensure that the school meets residential pupils' needs and promotes their welfare. This involves an independent visitor, who visits the school regularly on behalf of the organisation to check records, assess the physical condition of the buildings. Residential pupils contribute effectively to all elements of the monitoring process and can discuss their views and raise issues with the visitor.

Residential pupils receive care from a well-supported staff team. Residential care staff receive specialist training which enables them to deliver a high quality service. They have a high standard of knowledge and skills relevant to the care of young people. They receive a thorough induction, regular formal supervision and annual appraisals. These processes ensure that they receive training to equip them with the skills necessary to meet the complex needs of the residential pupils in their care.

Team working is seen as key in ensuring residential pupils respond to consistent caring support provided by the whole care team. Comprehensive shift handovers and regular staff meetings help ensure there is effective communication within the staff team. This ensures consistency and helps staff to keep up to date with any changes to residential pupil's needs or circumstances.

The school has fully addressed the recommendations made at the last inspection. Residential pupils know how to and are now confident in raising a concern or complaint; these are handled quickly, effectively and are very low in number. The management team have sought clarification from the Local Authority Designated Officer in relations to roles and responsibilities of the Designated Person. As a result the school have established strong relationships that fully promote the safety and welfare of all pupils. All residential pupils have access to a telephone outside school hours.

Residential pupils' records are comprehensive and stored securely. This provides clarity about how their needs are being met. It provides accountability should they or others need to look back on their records in the future. And it enables young people, their parents and the staff to understand how they are progressing and how plans can be improved to achieve better outcomes.

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	112452
Social care unique reference number	SC040063
DfE registration number	909/6027

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	
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Mr Robin Adams
Date of previous boarding inspection	10/10/2013
Telephone number	01539 552 397
Email address	admin@whs.uk.com

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