

Windlestone School

Windlestone School, Chilton, FERRYHILL, County Durham, DL17 0HP

Inspection dates	09/12/2014 to 11/12/2014	
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

- A restructure of the school's management has given leaders in the residential provision additional responsibilities. They have risen to the challenge admirably, taking on new tasks such as becoming more involved in partnership working. All national minimum standards have been met, and recommendations made at the previous inspection have been addressed.
- Residential students achieve exceptionally good outcomes. Their school attendance and attainment is significantly better as a result of being in residence. Additionally, they develop respect and consideration for others and have a strong attachment to the residential community.
- The residential provision gives students an outstanding quality of life. Staff provide them with close support which helps them to develop as more mature and responsible individuals. The nurturing environment gives residential students emotional security as well as enabling them to fulfil their potential. The accommodation is of exceptional quality, and conveys to residential students how well they are valued.
- The quality of care planning has improved markedly. Plans take account of the individual needs of students and are successful in helping them to achieve. Staff encourage residential students to exercise choice and make their views known. This approach promotes the rights of residential students as well as reminding them of their responsibilities.
- Residential students feel very safe here. They have no anxieties about bullying, being confident that staff will deal with any issue promptly and decisively. Residential students place their trust in the staff and feel happy to confide in them, providing extra assurance that any concerns will be swiftly addressed.

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

This standalone inspection took place with approximately three hours' notice. The inspector met with the headteacher, and residential and support staff. Discussions took place with residential students both individually and in groups, and some students completed survey forms during the course of the inspection. The inspector also scrutinised policies and records and observed routines in the residential provision at various times of the day.

Inspection team

Nicholas Murphy

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this 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 a purpose-built residential block with two ten-bedded mixed gender units. Most bedrooms are single-bedded and all bedrooms have ensuite 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 October 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide training to kitchen staff in the use of fire fighting equipment.
- Amend the policy on physical restraint to clearly show the different criteria which apply in the residential and education settings.
- Revise the individual student risk assessment format so that it is understandable, and clearly describes the severity and likelihood of risks and the measures in place to control them.
- Ensure that the headteacher's annual report to the governing body contains sufficient detail about the residential provision and its compliance with national minimum standards.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding.

Residential students have excellent relationships with staff. They are polite, helpful, respectful, and relaxed in their company. They also get along very well with each other, showing consideration and tolerance in their everyday interactions. Residential students have a very good awareness and acceptance of the differences between individuals and cultures. Staff encourage them to develop an understanding of how other people live. Residential students have been on foreign visits, for example, touring battlefields of the First World War. Another trip was with young people from other schools who cycled around the French Alps. Such opportunities build social confidence and enhance self-esteem.

The behaviour of students within the residential setting is extremely good. Even those who sometimes struggle with adhering to the classroom structure have little trouble in following the residential boundaries. They understand the need for routines such as daily showering and teeth-brushing with only the occasional reminder from staff. The general atmosphere of residence is friendly and sociable, students of different ages and stages of development relating well to each other. One student said, 'In residential it is almost always very calm.'

All residential students say that they enjoy the experience of staying here, most enthusiastically so. One summed up his feelings by simply saying, 'Residential is just the best thing in my life.' Students have a keen awareness of the difference that residence makes to their academic progress. They enjoy the stability and predictability which means that they rise in good time for school, breakfasted and well prepared. And, after school, they can do homework with the support of staff, some of whom also work in the classroom and so provide skilled help. It is no surprise therefore that the school attendance and attainment of residential students is exceptional.

Students have frequent opportunities to voice any opinions they have about life in residence. Nightly get-togethers with staff around the kitchen table enable students to discuss activities, meals, or routines. More formal meetings take place every half term. A number of improvements have been made directly as a result of residential students' requests. There are new televisions, and older students now have PCs in their bedrooms which they can use for homework or for leisure.

Residential students are in excellent health. They enjoy the physical activities on offer and understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, good diet, and the maintenance of good personal hygiene. Some students receive additional input from specialist services to improve their emotional well-being. They also find the advice and support that staff give them in individual mentoring sessions to be beneficial in helping them deal with difficult emotional issues.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of care received by residential pupils is outstanding.

Staff prepare thoroughly for new students moving into residence. If a student is transferring from another school, senior staff visit them and meet with teachers. The student and parents then visit the residential provision to ensure that all parties are happy with the plan for transition. This quality of induction provides a sound foundation for the success of the placement. The attention paid to communication with parents continues through a student's stay. Staff have frequent phone calls and meetings with parents, ensuring that any difficulties can be addressed swiftly, as well as passing on good news and celebrating successes. As part of this work, care staff liaise

closely with teachers. Some also work as support staff within the education setting, and this provides additional continuity of care and support for residential students.

Care plans are detailed and are updated at regular intervals. They are tailored to each student's particular needs and take account of their strengths and vulnerabilities. Each student has a mentor who agrees targets with them for each term. Progress against these are discussed in individual sessions, the mentor providing encouragement and motivation to improve. In addition, staff are always around to give individual support and reassurance, should a student have a particular worry. One residential student said, 'If we are feeling down or there is a problem at home staff will always make time to meet with us and discuss it.' Another commented, 'I think that the residential staff are brilliant and are always there for us.'

Staff are meticulous in promoting the health and well-being of residential students. They work in partnership with other services, for example in contributing to reviews of students' medication needs. The arrangements for administering medication within the residential setting and the wider school are effective and safe, and follow best practice. There is wide variety of physical, recreational and cultural activities which residential students relish. They find these stimulating and give them the opportunity to experience success.

The food provided to residential students is of extremely high quality. Main meals taken in the school cafeteria follow a menu which relies on fresh ingredients and is designed to provide nutritional balance. Students have a very wide choice over what they eat, but staff are skilled at encouraging those with fussier tastes to try new things. Within the residential setting, suppers and snacks are freely available and students are able to have what they want, within reason.

The residential accommodation is of exceptionally high quality. It provides residential students with a high level of comfort, privacy and security. There is plenty of space for students to spend time with each other and staff, or simply to be alone for a time. Residential students respect and take care of their environment, indicating the value they attach to staying here.

Residential pupils' safety

Good

The residential provision is good at keeping residential pupils safe.

The school's procedure for vetting staff is sound. Staff who are not directly employed, such as contract cleaners, are also subject to rigorous induction to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Policies in respect of safeguarding are comprehensive. They ensure that staff know how to respond to any concerns that they or students may have. This includes making referral to safeguarding agencies if there are potential threats to a student's safety outside the school, for example, at home. The school has a strong, visible culture of absolute intolerance of bullying. Within the residential setting, bullying is extremely rare. This is due to the good relationships between students and the vigilance of staff. All residential students are emphatic in saying that they feel safe, one affirming, 'I definitely feel safe, all the time, 100%'. Another said, 'In residential we have bullying boxes – if we've been bullied or we've seen it we can let staff know what has happened in confidence. Anything like that gets sorted. All the staff from the headteacher down won't tolerate it.'

There are good arrangements in place to ensure that risks within the residential setting are assessed and managed. Staff have a good knowledge of each residential student's individual characteristics and how these affect their safety within the school. In addition, there are written risk assessments on each student, but their format is confusing and not easy to understand.

There are clear procedures to manage any incident where a residential student goes missing. These are compliant with the protocols not only of the host local authority and police but also

with those of placing authorities. Commendably, since the last inspection there has been only one incident of this nature within residential time.

Staff manage the behaviour of residential students very well. Each student's individual plan sets out what might trigger challenging behaviour and how best to respond to it. Staff are extremely observant of students' demeanour and their interactions with others. They quickly step in to prevent a minor issue from becoming a major one, using their good relationships with students to divert any potentially disruptive or harmful behaviour. As a result, the need to use physical restraint on residential students is extremely infrequent, staff sharing the belief that such action is the absolute last resort. Records of restraint are very detailed and always include the student's account of what happened and what they might do in future to avoid a similar situation. The policy on restraint, however, is a general one for the whole school. It does not take account of the different criteria for using restraint which apply in the residential setting.

The school's management of the safety of buildings and plant is particularly well organised. All staff have refresher training in safety aspects such as first aid and fire precautions. However, kitchen staff have not had recent training on the use of fire-fighting equipment.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good.

Managers within the residential provision have taken on additional responsibilities over the past year. They play a greater part in planning the induction of new students and have a more formal input into meetings with other professionals such as reviews. Despite the challenges, they have embraced this extra dimension to their work with enthusiasm. Staffing levels within residence are sufficient to meet the needs of students and provide them with consistent support. In consequence, the residential provision runs smoothly. There is a very well established line of management accountability at all times of the day and night. This provides support for staff and in turn means that the welfare and safety of residential students is effectively promoted.

All residential staff have the required qualification or are working towards it. They also have the benefit of a range of training to maintain and increase their skills. The staff group as a whole is very stable, with little turnover. They clearly enjoy their work and are highly motivated to do all they can to help residential students to thrive. To support them in their task, residential staff receive a good standard of supervision from their seniors. This helps them to reflect on their practice and constantly seek ways to improve the service they offer.

The headteacher and managers within the residential provision have a good awareness of the value that it adds to the whole school and the difference it makes to residential students' outcomes. However, the headteacher's reports to governors do not always adequately reflect the contribution of residence, and self-assessments are insufficiently detailed. Nevertheless, all recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed, and the school has good capacity to make further improvements in its performance.

A particular strength of the school is the quality of the external monitoring of the residential provision. The independent visitor is well known to all the students, and is therefore a valuable additional route should any student want to share a concern. The visitor spends time talking to residential students in order to understand their experience and how it might be improved. There is a particular focus on safeguarding, further strengthening the protection the school provides to students.

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	114347
Social care unique reference number	SC007615
DfE registration number	840/7030

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	Maintained residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	18
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Mr Tim Bennett
Date of previous boarding inspection	10/10/2013
Telephone number	01388 720337
Email address	t.bennett@durhamlearning.net

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