

Skilts School

Skilts School, Gorcott Hill, Beoley, REDDITCH, Worcestershire, B98 9ET

Inspection dates	10/12/2014 to 13/12/2014	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The school and residence has a highly inclusive atmosphere. Residence offers an exceptionally supportive and nurturing environment. Residential pupils thrive, form strong bonds with staff, and feel pride about their place in the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are strong across all areas of residential and school life: rigorous whole-school systems keep residential pupils safe. There is excellent creative direct work with pupils about personal safety.
- Systems of governance are very effective and the school consistently build on improvements. This results in smooth running, child-focused residential provision.
- Staff are highly committed, energetic and reflective about their practice. They have a significant depth of knowledge about the needs of boys with educational and behavioural difficulties and the quality of their care reflects years of training, skills and experience.
- Residential pupils' perspective has a high value. Consultation is firmly embedded in daily life in residence and excellent partnership working with parents is fundamental to residential pupils' success.

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

Ofsted carried out this inspection with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of residential practice over two evenings; a small formal group meeting with residential pupils, as well as informal discussion during shared meals; meetings and discussions with boarding staff; contact with the statutory safeguarding authority to gather their views; and scrutiny of a wide range of documentation about residential provision. There were insufficient responses to Parent View to include and there was no fresh information yet available from Ofsted's 'point in time' surveys by parents.

Inspection team

Christy Wannop

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Skilts is a local authority Residential Special School for 80 boys between 5-11 years old with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and associated learning difficulties. The school is situated in Warwickshire, close to Worcestershire and Birmingham borders, but operated by Birmingham Local Authority for Birmingham children. There are two joined residential houses. They have the capacity for 19 residential pupils, but currently 14 boys use residence. They can sleep between one to four nights a week depending on their need, Monday to Thursday, term-time only.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refresh information about referral points in safeguarding policy and procedural documents.
- Ensure all areas of residential accommodation and facilities are of an equally high standard.
- Consider a review of any concluded complaint or safeguarding concern to identify any improvements in practice that could be made: this could further contribute to the school's reflective approach.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. They feel welcomed, accepted and valued in a small, close residential community. Residential pupils' individuality is respected and every small achievement is celebrated. Residence is seen as something especially positive by other pupils. There is a calm, homely atmosphere, but also a good sense of fun too. The residential pupils get terrific encouragement to fulfil the school's motto and: 'be the best that they can be.'

Relationships with staff are exceptionally strong and trusting. Residential pupils clearly enjoy being here. They feel accepted and valued as individuals. They learn how to be members of a community where friendships are encouraged and valued. They also contribute to the wider community through fundraising for homeless charities, dog-rescue and children in need.

Residential pupils value the education. One said: 'they teach you well - especially maths.' They learn to trust adults and gain better control of their behaviour and talk about their development. They know staff will listen to them and act on their views. They learn about practical democracy and take up responsibility in active school council and residential forum meetings. They develop skills and confidence and feel pride in hard-won achievements.

Residential pupils thrive under staff's nurturing and holistic care. They have excellent support for their emotional and mental health, as well as their physical and educational needs. Residential pupils have safe, healthy fun 'playing out', in the gym and playing football. They are secure knowing that there are plenty of staff to give them the support they need to take turns and deal with losing at games.

New residential pupils have a careful, meticulously planned introduction. Those moving on to secondary education have an equally excellent transition, tailored to their needs. They enjoy a residence based 'youth club' night and have had an experience which prepares them very well for the next stage in their lives. Older residential pupils said how much they felt they had moved on from their early days in school.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. Wellbeing, emotional and physical health is exceptionally well managed. Residential pupils get a high level of nurturing support from the residential team who are on call during the school day. The 24-hour curriculum provides a stimulating learning environment. The focus is on progress and the school rewards academic achievements, but gives equal value to small steps in social skills and the ability to be a good friend, improve self-control and take turns.

Therapeutic support is a highlight. In addition to the local authority provision of psychology and child and adolescent mental health specialists, the school now commissions an independent speech and language therapist. Visiting therapists also support residential pupils through direct play therapy and speak highly of residential staff's insight: 'they understand the therapeutic process and the emotional needs of the child.'

Systems for assessment, care planning and review are excellent. Plans are clear, comprehensive and up to date. They are child focused and respectful: based on parents and residential pupils' contributions. Realistic, holistic targets keep children progressing and inclusive school reviews track their changing need. There is an equal exchange of ideas between residential, educational staff, visiting therapists and parents, so that good ideas and innovations are shared for children's benefit. For example: communication tools and social stories are shared; there is excellent

practice in the extension of the Forest School curriculum to residence, and a reciprocal promotion of the self-protection syllabus, used extremely successfully in residence, to the classroom. Parents are integral partners and implement the school's care plans at home to build on their success in education and residential spheres. Consequently, at home children communicate better, are calmer, sleep better and improve their memory.

Support for parents of residential pupils is exceptional: developed through the school's parent support advisor and the residential team. The school holds a festival 'Skilts-Fest' each year to raise money to increase the offer to pupils at the school. This is a testament to the commitment of staff. They use monies raised to fund specialist family-therapy organisations to work directly with parents and residential pupils. This strengthens parenting skills and improves children's behaviour. This has been empowering for some families, who have felt sufficiently confident after group work to take their children away on holiday for the first time.

Play and healthy activities are a significant part of every day. Residential pupils, mainly from the inner-city, experience freedom playing outdoors in the extensive rural grounds, on go-karts, bikes and scooters and on the imaginative large play equipment: hand-made from fallen trees. They enjoy the 'Forest School' and the vegetable patch. There are trips: to theme parks and to the theatre and cinema for special occasions. There are evening activities of games, art and craft, watching movies. However, many of the residential pupils value adult one-to-one attention as the ultimate reward for good behaviour.

Residential accommodation is warm and welcoming. All bedrooms are single, and are decorated with individual children in mind. Residential pupils are proud of their rooms and they say they feel safe and secure at night. The improvements and special touches provided by staff in both houses reflect their good care. However, some small areas of the residential houses are in need of repair or upkeep to maintain the overall good standard.

The school makes excellent provision for good food and social mealtimes. Meals are cooked from scratch and are healthy and delicious: dietary requirements and food preferences are respected. Staff maximise opportunities for conversation and learning at mealtimes. They are sensitive to those children who struggle to maintain sociable behaviour at table. Residential pupils enhance their skills by planning menus and are increasingly helping with cooking. Recent changes in the organisation of lunch and the residential tea have resulted in calmer school dinners and more flexible evening meals that can be changed if residential pupils need an earlier or later tea. The food is a highlight of the day.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Residential pupils' safety is outstanding. The safeguarding approach is strong in all aspects and delivers a high level of safety for residential pupils. They say they feel safe and secure. A particular strength is the way staff work with residential pupils to make the environment safe for everyone. Staff implement a creative 'protective behaviour' package that gives children the vocabulary and the confidence to keep themselves safe through art, discussion and activities, including on-line. For example: some residential pupils have created wall displays about 'safe touch' so others can think about what this means. This highly enabling approach has been very successful in helping those with risky behaviour or those who are very vulnerable to others, whether because of a disability or difference. It helps residential pupils learn about justice and fairness. Residential pupils have a range of 'safe people' they can tell if they have concerns, including an external person who visits and is available on the end of a phone, or email. Anti-bullying practice is strong: residential pupils get immediate support or challenge about oppressive, dominant behaviour and the expectation of respect is well understood. Children do not go missing from school: there is too much going on and they value their time with adults.

The service has established good safeguarding practice, with regular training of staff at all levels and clear flow-charts for referrals to either the host authority or the placing authority. The local area designated officer reports positively about their management of child protection issues. There is excellent partnership working with protective agencies and social workers. Staff are confident advocates and supporters of children and their right to be safe. The senior management team has recently redrafted safeguarding procedures. They should consider including the referral route to the responsible safeguarding authority for any incident occurring on site, as in the previous version, to ensure that everyone is clear about the point of referral.

Behaviour management strategies are positively and proactively applied, so residential pupils are clear about the expectations of their behaviour. They say the rules are fair and they respond well to the system of daily merit points and rewards that helps them to regulate their responses. One said, 'I want to try harder to improve my behaviour.' The focus is on diffusion and preventing incidents. Staff are highly alert to the signs that a residential pupil is unhappy and may become challenging and they respond with sensitivity. Physical intervention is used safely and very rigorously monitored and evaluated so that staff and residential pupils have the opportunity to reflect and learn after any incidents. Older residential pupils said that they thought this helped them to manage their own anger.

There are robust systems for health and safety at all levels. Unnecessary risk in the environment, residential pupils' activities and their behaviour is reduced through clear assessments and delivered in practice through staff training and checks. Recruitment procedures ensure that all staff working with children, or visitors, are suitable to do so. These comprehensive measures result in a school that is safe for adults and children alike.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

There is a forward thinking, resourceful senior management team. They make creative use of scarce funds to shape a service that is responsive to the developing needs of the boys at school. They are partners in research initiatives to consider the changing mental health profile of pupils. Rigorous monitoring is based on regular reviews of the quality of the residential provision. This review drives a programme of continuous development and improvement that is linked to effective staff performance management and results in a sense of pride and ownership. Year-on-year the senior management team has strengthened the quality of provision across the school.

There is a culture of respect. Consultation with residential pupils at school council provides a real focus for active participation in whole school issues. The headteacher uses these as an opportunity to talk about policy and developments with children in an exceptionally inclusive way. There is a continual respectful dialogue with pupils to encourage and challenge them about the impact of their behaviour on learning and their relationships at home and school. There is also a responsive approach to complaints. Staff and the headteacher are approachable and want to sort things out for pupils and parents equally and resolve their issues. The school could strengthen their reflective approach by inviting a review of any concluded complaint or safeguarding concern to identify any improvements in practice that could be made.

The stable and mutually supportive residential staff team is a hugely valuable resource. They have the energy, skills, personal qualities and experience to enhance their work with children. The staff team are also extremely resourceful in maximising and seeking out new ways to help residential pupils, not only in school but at home with parents and carers too. A visiting professional said: 'Residential team is really proactive.' Training and supervision is very effective. Residential pupils respond to staff's emotional warmth and their mutual respect and affection is clear.

The school is exceptionally aware of the diverse nature and needs of its residential pupils.

Professionals are unanimously positive about the quality of the support: one said: 'the school "get" the children.' Leaders and managers have developed an enhanced residential provision that is integral to the delivery of improved outcomes for residential pupils and their families. Some residential pupils feel an acceptance and belonging they may not have experienced in previous mainstream schools.

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	103617
Social care unique reference number	SC033753
DfE registration number	330/7037

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	Local Authority
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	5 to 11
Headteacher	Mr S C Herriotts
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/03/2014
Telephone number	01527 853851
Email address	enquiry@skilts.bham.sch.uk

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