

Cedar House School

Cedar House School, Bentham, Lancaster, LA2 7DD

Inspection dates

17/11/2015 to 19/11/2015

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Requires improvement 3

The quality of care and support	Requires improvement	3
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings

The residential provision requires improvement because:

- Arrangements for promoting awareness of complaint procedures and responding to complaints are weak. Complaint procedures do not reflect national guidance. Children and young people are generally unaware of how to raise formal concerns. This means important issues may remain unaddressed.
- Children and young people are not being provided with up-to-date information about how to raise concerns to an important external agency, the Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- The structure of children and young people's care plans means it is hard to understand how their needs are to be met on a day-to-day basis. Although the information is present, it is distributed across several documents. This means they are hard to understand and reduces accountability to external agencies.
- The staff feel challenged by staffing absences and the loss of experienced staff. More staff are due to start soon. The school offers a counselling service but does not provide training in stress management. Consequently staff may be less equipped to cope with the pressures they experience.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Children and young people feel safe and all staff, including ancillary staff, receive comprehensive training in child protection. The head teacher has an effective working relationship with the local authority designated officer for child protection.
- A new head of care was appointed eight months ago. He has had a positive impact on developing the residential provision and has detailed development plans to improve the quality of care.
- The training programme for residential staff is very good and nearly all the staff are qualified. They receive training in a wide variety of courses, some of which is

delivered by professional experts. This helps to give staff the necessary knowledge and skills for their roles.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- 2.2 The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children are informed who this person is, and how to contact them and they are easily accessible. Children are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside contact numbers, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, to ring in case of problems or distress.
- 8.2 The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to residential provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).
- 21.1 The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consider how children and young people may be enabled to store personal belongings in a manner that is both secure and convenient.
- Make clear, when recording the outcome of any complaint investigation, whether the complaint was upheld, partly upheld or not upheld.
- Comply with any recommendations or requirements made by the independent visitor in their half-termly monitoring reports.
- Provide training in stress management to the residential staff.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted gave the school one hour's notice of the inspection of its residential provision. Inspection evidence came from discussions with residential pupils, parents and social workers; analysis of written surveys received from two residential pupils, one parent and 10 residential staff; discussions with residential staff, the school nurse and members of the therapeutic team; discussions with the head of care and the headteacher; analysis of the school's policies, records and residential pupils' case files; a tour of all the residential houses and observations of the residential routines.

Inspection team

Steve Pearson	Lead social care inspector
Anne Bannister	Social care inspector
Michele Hargan	Social care inspector (shadowing for development purposes)

Full Report

Information about this school

The school is a co-educational independent residential special school for young people exhibiting emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. It is run by a private company and is located in a small village close to the national parks of the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. The school provides care and education for young people aged 7 to 18 years on a day or residential basis. Residential provision operates for 38 weeks per year. Currently there are a total of 54 pupils of whom 18 are resident. The residential accommodation comprises four adjoining houses, each with its own facilities. Three of the houses care for boys grouped into similar ages and the fourth house cares for girls. The residential provision was last inspected on 20 November 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Requires improvement

The residential provision is helping children and young people to make progress and enjoy their time at the school. Most young people spoken with confirmed this. For example, one young person said, 'I'm more calm since I came here.' Feedback from social workers was also positive. For example, one said about their young person, 'I don't know where they'd be if they weren't coming here. They now sit in class and their behaviour is so much better. It's been the making of them.' Some young people rated the quality of care as mediocre. For example, one young person who had been at the school for over a year said, 'I'm more naughty since I came here.'

Children and young people get on well with each other and with the staff. Observations in the school day and in the residential time showed that behaviour is generally good. One significant incident of risk-taking behaviour occurred during the inspection. The head teacher and the staff responded effectively and tirelessly to protect the welfare of all young people. Young people are safe and feel secure. The school gives a high priority to ensuring training covers all important aspects of safety and child protection.

Young people develop social skills and skills that will help them when they are older and living independently. The head of care is implementing a programme of independence development within each house so that young people are skilled and confident to live a more independent life on leaving the school. This includes development of self-care skills such as independent travel on public transport, shopping, preparation of meals and laundering clothes. Young people are involved in helping elderly people in the community for example by tending to their gardens. This helps to develop their sense of responsibility and personal wellbeing.

A new head of care was appointed eight months ago and is starting to have a positive effect. There are some management issues to address. For example, there has been a significant loss of staff since the previous inspection 12 months ago and current absences mean the remaining staff feel stretched and challenged; the arrangements for managing complaints are weak; the capacity for continuous improvement is not fully developed because recommendations or requirements made by the independent visitor are not always being met.

Young people are given a say in how the residential houses are run. They are invited to attend residential forums every term and house meetings twice a half term. Minutes of these meetings are recorded and actions from each occasion are checked the next time. Young people have been given their personal choice of décor in their bedroom and contribute suggestions to the food menus and other aspects of daily life in the house.

The quality of care and support

Requires improvement

The school does not meet all the national minimum standards in this judgement area.

Care plans for each young person are not sufficiently clear about how staff are expected to meet children's individual needs on a day-to-day basis. Such information is spread across at least three separate documents so that to get a full understanding all three must be examined. This reduces accessibility for the reader and leads to less accountability to external people as to how needs are to be met.

The school is not supporting young people to be sufficiently aware of the function and contact details of important external agencies. For example, children are not supplied with information about the Office of the Children's Commissioner. Contact details for an independent visitor, an independent listener and Ofsted are mentioned in the pupil handbook but the role of these people and organisation are not mentioned. In all other respects the handbook is a useful and informative document for young people coming in to the residential provision.

In pre-inspection surveys and in discussions at the inspection, young people said they felt the arrangements for keeping their personal belongings secure were not satisfactory. They do not have lockable storage facilities in their bedroom. They can ask a member of staff to lock their door or lock their belongings in the staff sleep-in room. However this is not always convenient.

The quality of accommodation is good. Each young person has a single bedroom which is also fully en-suite with toilet, shower and sink. This was summed up by one young person who said, 'I like my bedroom. I've got all I need in there and can put up my own posters.' The head of care is implementing a programme to make the residential houses more homely and personal. A member of staff said, 'The new head of care has made a big difference. Each house is much more homely and personalised to the care needs of each child. There is now a real focus on care.'

The staff and head of care listen to the wishes of young people and do not discriminate between them. For example, one young person with specific concerns did not want to move house. The staff and head of care listened to their views and responded appropriately. Girls also said that the staff enable them to meet their needs and choices which may be different to those of the boys.

The school has a therapeutic team including an educational psychologist, a creative therapist, a speech and language therapist and a psychotherapist. They are registered with the relevant professional bodies and are making a major contribution to improving children's emotional well-being.

The school offers young people a varied and nutritional diet. There is always a choice at every meal and this includes a vegetarian option. Young people in the residential provision make at least one evening meal a week in their house and this helps them to develop important independence skills. Young people can also make a snack in each house kitchen at any reasonable time.

Arrangements to enable young people to have telephone and email contact with their families, carers and friends is good. Each house has its own independent phone line on which young people can make and receive calls. Each young person also has their own email account and access to a computer in each house and in the school. One parent

summed this up saying 'I can contact the staff or my child at any time. This is very helpful.'

How well children and young people are protected **Good**

Young people are safe and feel secure. Strong and effective arrangements are in place to promote and protect children's welfare.

The headteacher is the lead for child protection within the school. She has a close working relationship with the local authority designated officer for child protection. The school operates a transparent system of responding to any allegations of inappropriate conduct, for example in the use of restraints. Investigations are conducted following consultation with the local authority designated officer and a clear report follows. The investigation clarifies helpfully at the end whether the allegation is substantiated or not. The procedures are in line with statutory guidance set by the government.

All staff, including ancillary staff, receive training in their induction period about the signs and symptoms of abuse and about their duty to report concerns. This training also includes information about such issues as child sexual exploitation, trafficking, radicalisation and other issues set out in government statutory guidance. The range of issues covered is therefore thorough and enables the staff to be knowledgeable and skilled at responding to any safeguarding concerns.

The head of care and staff assess the risks that may affect each young person and these are recorded in a personalised risk assessment document. Where significant risks are identified, there is clear guidance as to how the staff are expected to address the issue to reduce risks further.

Young people spoken with said they had not experienced bullying. Three members of staff oversee this issue and the school keeps a log of any incident of bullying. The school's response to bullying is to include a measure of restorative work with the perpetrator to enable them to understand the negative effects of their actions. A young person summed this up saying, 'There's not really any bullying. It's not like being in mainstream school where you get lots of groups/cliques. It's not like that here.' Another young person said, 'There's not much bullying... as soon as it happens it gets stopped straight away.'

Professional technicians regularly service the electrical equipment, gas appliances and equipment for preventing, detecting and extinguishing fires. An external consultant visits the premises once every three months and conducts a health and safety audit. All these measures help to protect young people's safety. Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that staff recruited to work with young people are suitable and safe.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers **Requires improvement**

The school has not met all the national minimum standards in this judgement area.

The management of complaints is weak. Young people are not aware of how to raise concerns formally. Information is provided in their residential handbook but in reality they are not aware of the procedure in place. The school's own policy is based on obsolete government guidance. When a complaint is investigated, the evidence found is not recorded clearly and there is no final clarity as to whether the complaint was upheld or not. This means that the complainant is unsure whether their concern was valid and there is a lack of accountability as to how any shortfall in quality of care has been addressed.

In line with the national minimum standards for residential special schools, an independent person visits the residential provision once every half term. They assess and report on the quality of care and evaluate the issues recommended in the standards. They make recommendations or requirements and evaluate whether these have been met at their next visit. They also talk to the young people and staff to gain their points of view. The school is not always meeting their requirements or recommendations within the timescale and so this limits the school's capacity for continuous improvement. The head teacher also conducts an annual assessment of how well the residential provision is meeting the national minimum standards.

The head teacher and head of care have created clear plans for the development of residential care. Feedback in pre-inspection surveys from residential staff was mainly, but not wholly, positive about how well the residential provision is led and managed. In discussions, several staff commented about the positive impact the new head of care has had. This was summed up by one member of staff who said, 'the head of care focuses on the care of each young person...he has a lot of experience in residential care and this shows in the promotion of care in each of the houses.' A young person also spoke positively about the head of care saying, 'What I like about the head of care is that he listens. We also see him about quite a lot.'

Staffing levels in the residential provision are appropriate but the staff are feeling stretched due to working extra hours to cover sickness absence. At the time of the inspection, five of the 30 residential staff were absent due to sickness and some of this is long-term. Several staff spoken with at the inspection were experiencing significant challenges caused by a combination of responding to young people's behaviour and long hours in the school and then in the residential provision. Although the school offers a free and confidential counselling service, they do not provide training in stress management. Staff felt this may be helpful to give them coping skills when they are stretched emotionally and physically.

Some instability has also arisen due to staff turnover. Seven of the 33 residential staff have left since the previous inspection 12 months ago. Two new staff are due to start in the next few weeks.

The staff feel supported by effective levels of formal supervision, annual appraisals and a comprehensive training programme. Nearly all the residential staff are qualified in social care and have good levels of knowledge and skills. Many staff have worked in the residential provision for eight or more years and this brings good levels of experience and consistency for young people.

The school has responded appropriately to the points for improvement made by Ofsted at the last inspection. For example, children and young people are now developing skills in independence which will help them to succeed in adulthood; the school has updated the policies and procedures regarding behaviour management and the staff no longer require any young person to go to a room on their own if they behave unacceptably during residential time. This means there is no longer a risk of young people feeling alone or distressed after a difficult incident. There is also better accountability for how the staff have carried out any physical intervention. This is because they record the incident promptly and the head of care evaluates each record to ensure it meets expectations. The school's procedures for monitoring the quality of care are more robust. This is because the annual internal assessment now involves an evaluation of all the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	112456
Social care unique reference number	SC040058
DfE registration number	815/6041

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	18
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 18
Headteacher	Kathryn Taylor
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/11/2014
Telephone number	015242 61149
Email address	Cedar-house@witherslackgroup.co.uk

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