

Skilts School

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

Inspection dates

29 February 2016 to 2 March 2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The children feel safe in the school. They are all able to identify staff with whom they can share concerns. Where concerns have been identified, the school has shared these appropriately and robustly with appropriate agencies.
- The children's safety and welfare is paramount. Safeguarding arrangements in the school are highly effective
- The staff team are experienced, skilled and dedicated and are respected by the children and their parents.
- Monitoring of the school is rigorous and drives future improvement.
- A committed staff team, led by inspirational managers, provides a consistent approach. This enables excellent relationships to develop and to underpin the progress that young people make and the significant quality of care they receive.
- Trusting relationships develop between all children and the stable care staff team who provide consistency, nurturing and warmth. These effective relationships provide a stable base from which all children achieve.
- The children have a wider variety of stimulating activities, that some of them would not otherwise experience.
- Leaders work collaboratively to improve children's outcomes. This includes up-to-dating guidance in line with changes in legislation and from research.
- There are no shortfalls against the national minimum standards. One aspect is identified to enhance further the outstanding practice: the standard of décor in the dining areas varies between all of the houses.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue with the refurbishment plan to ensure that the décor is of the same high standard throughout the provision.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out within four hours of telephone notification to the school and took place over three days. Discussions with the designated officer for safeguarding, health professionals, governors, staff, parents and young people helped to inform the inspection judgement. The inspection included scrutiny of documents and records and observations of practice. One Parent View response was obtained prior to the inspection.

Inspection team

Natalie Burton

lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Skilts is a local authority residential special school for 80 boys between five and 11 years old with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and associated learning difficulties. The school is situated in Warwickshire, close to the Worcestershire and Birmingham borders, but operated by Birmingham City Council authority for Birmingham children. There are two joined residential houses. They have the capacity for 19 residential pupils, but currently 16 boys use the residence. They can sleep between one to four nights a week depending on their need, from Monday to Thursday, in term time only.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Parents spoken to all say that the school is extremely beneficial and makes a significant difference to children's lives and their ability to manage their behaviours. Family relationships improve as children develop an awareness of their own behaviour and its impact on others. A parent said: 'His behaviour has improved, he likes the staff and is able to reflect more. He always comes back shattered, they do so much'.

The children's needs are comprehensively understood by the staff, and lie at the heart of the residential arrangements. They make excellent progress in relation to their previous experiences, they engage with staff and are motivated to learn. The children who attend make significant progress educationally, emotionally and socially in relation to their starting points.

Staff are acutely aware that, for many children, residential stays are their first experience of peer relationships. The children learn about communal living, sharing, making friendships and respect through staying at the school. They develop acceptance and tolerance of others. One parent said: 'He was not good with socialising and making friendships, this has really helped him. His social side has really opened up. As a family unit it has helped considerably. It has been hard, but the residential side has improved all of our relationships'.

The staff are skilled and experienced and are committed to offering a safe but enjoyable experience. They enjoy their roles and bring enthusiasm and energy to the provision. Staff have an in-depth knowledge of individuals and celebrate their unique strengths. An emphasis on positive reinforcement and consistent boundaries has resulted in a calm and respectful atmosphere in which all children feel safe. Therefore children enjoy spending time with the staff and benefit from their support and direction.

The staff adopt a robust approach to safeguarding. They underpin their practice with regular training and use comprehensive policies and procedures. By developing and maintaining open lines of communication with parents, in particular through the parent liaison designated person, staff are able to identify potential concerns at the earliest opportunity.

Although some children say that they would prefer to be at home than stay in the residential provision, they participate in evening activities and meal times with energy and enthusiasm. They benefit from stimulating activities with ample choices and are engaged and motivated. One parent said: 'He is able to access activities that we would not be able to provide. He really enjoys it there'.

Leaders and managers are passionate about the quality of the school and have high aspirations for the children. The leadership of the residential provision facilitates a safe and excellent residential environment that runs smoothly.

The staff provide exceptional role models for young people. Their relationships with children are professional, nurturing and supportive as they adjust to residential life. The interaction between staff and the children is relaxed and natural, and staff tailor care to each child's needs.

The staff provide young people with a wide range of activities that are age appropriate and focus on enhancing health, social and peer activities. The staff seek ongoing feedback from children to decide which new activities they would like. This enables the staff to ensure that children gain multiple social and emotional benefits from the activities on offer. These include boxercise, go-karting, swimming and group-led activities in the school's gym. The staff ensure that children do not concentrate on one single activity, and encourage them to enhance their life experiences.

The young people make exceptional progress as the result of the well-organised and committed approach of the school. Feedback from professionals and families is consistently positive regarding the school's willingness to work in partnership and take on new ideas. One professional said: 'The staff embrace any new ideas I suggest to benefit the children.'

Some children access the therapeutic support available. In addition to the child and adolescent mental health services, the school commissions an independent speech and language therapist, who supports residential children through play therapy, group work and one-to-one sessions.

The staff and managers know the needs and vulnerabilities of the children. All children have a comprehensive care plan, which identifies their unique personalities alongside their additional needs. The staff have regular, systematic meetings during the day to exchange key information regarding the children. This enables the timely sharing of information and contributes to a consistent approach from the staff team. There is a seamless service, with the care and education staff working together. The staff involve children along with their families and carers to identify and to frequently review targets, aims and objectives. This enables the staff to measure the efficiency and impact of residential stays. The young people see this and feel secure as a result.

Parents and children can see the positive benefit of the residential provision on educational progress. Children who have previously had unsuccessful education placements have overcome barriers with the support of the residential provision.

The food is plentiful and of a good quality. Family-style dining supports social meal times, which children enjoy. A nutritious menu is tailored well to support a balanced diet, and includes healthy options. Children are encouraged to share their preferences and likes in regard to menu options.

Children's views are sought and respected by staff. This empowers children to speak openly. Their suggestions and ideas are used to make reasonable changes to the residential provision. Staff facilitate contact between children and their parents. They do this using the residential telephone in private.

The residential accommodation is well presented, warm and welcoming, because improvements have been made to ensure that both of the houses accessed by children are of an equally high standard. The staff encourage children to personalise their rooms with posters, personal interests, letters and toys. This gives children pride and helps them to value their environments. Sharing communal space with peers builds children's tolerance and acceptance of others, and enables children to build friendships. There are continued plans to improve other areas accessed by children to the same high standard, this includes the dining areas.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The children say they feel safe, and they are safe. They appear relaxed and confident in the residential provision. Parents spoken to have confidence in the school's abilities to ensure children's safety and supervision. A parent said: 'I was unsure at the start if anyone else could keep him safe, but they do. I feel safe with him being there.' Information displayed throughout the accommodation informs children how to make a complaint or to raise a concern. In addition, children have access to the independent listener, can identify adults they would talk to, and there are external helpline numbers. These facilities give children a trusted adult with whom they can raise a concern.

The safeguarding approach is meticulous in all aspects and delivers an excellent level of safety for children. The staff successfully safeguard children and educate them to keep themselves safe, in line with their age and abilities. The school has two designated safeguarding leads, ensuring joint decision making and that there is always someone available to refer a concern to. Staff identify welfare concerns and apply procedures without hesitation. Established links with children's services, and up-to-date training, ensure that concerns receive prompt attention. Child protection records are clear, and detail the immediate action taken to protect children's welfare.

The designated person has implemented the school's policies when there have been allegations, although these are in relation to the school day, and not the residential provision. Good links and two-way communication with the local authority were demonstrated from a sample of records. The school benefits from a good working relationship with the local authority designated officer, and this provides transparency and objectivity in decision making.

There are no incidents of children leaving the site without permission or being unaccounted for. Direct staff supervision ensure children's whereabouts and safety. The children are busy and engaged outside the school day. There are no concerns in regard to child sexual exploitation, although the staff have a good understanding of the signs to be aware of, in particular because children go home regularly.

Behaviour management is monitored using a data analysis system that can track information in a variety of areas, and can link these to potential trends and patterns. This enables preventative action to be taken. The staff provide children with consistent messages about acceptable and appropriate behaviour, and children are clear about the expectations of their behaviour. Physical interventions are rare, and when they do occur they are systematically monitored and evaluated, including an opportunity for the staff

and the child to reflect on any incidents.

Bullying is not cited as a concern in the school. The children, staff and parents confirm this. Staff monitor this and undertake specific training. This helps staff to understand what constitutes bullying and to raise its profile in school.

Risk assessments of trips and activities detail safety measures and protocols. The recording of these is not always consistent or with accurate information. This minor shortfall does not detract from the excellent practice and high quality care that children receive.

Recruitment is robust, and involves children in the process. Meticulous records of recruitment are held within the school, in addition to records in respect of people living on the school site. All staff family members living on site have a written conduct agreement, requiring them to adhere to a number of requirements which focus on the protection of the children in the school. Nobody has unauthorised access to the residential accommodation or school site.

The site is physically safe and secure. Visitors are carefully monitored, signed in and chaperoned. The recent recruitment of a business support manager will further enhance the security and maintenance of the building, which already ensure that children are safe and protected from environmental hazards. Fire drills and checks are carried out regularly, and ensures that children know what to do in the event of an emergency evacuation.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The residential provision is exceptionally well managed. The head teacher, head of care and staff form a very strong and stable staff team. They strive to deliver the highest quality of care and they focus development on promoting purposeful achievements for all children. The joined-up school, residential management and staff teams provide effective leadership and care across the provision. Leaders take time to understand the children, they introduce approaches to care that reflect children's needs and up-to-date guidance in line with changes in legislation and from research.

The culture in the residential provision reflects the aims of the school and is well embedded. This denotes high expectations and clear boundaries, supporting a respectful environment where children learn to accept one another's difference. All staff are clear about the ethos and aims of the provision. Effective policies and procedures are regularly updated and reviewed and underpin the running of the residential provision, which is constantly evaluated. This results in a highly effective residential environment that provides excellent care to children.

The leaders ensure that care staff receive appropriate training and development opportunities to enable them to consistently meet and adapt to children's changing needs. The staff are qualified and extremely experienced. They receive supervision regularly and all staff receive an appraisal during which they identify areas of practice and development. Team morale is excellent and roles are defined with clear

accountability. The staff skills are used well, and staff take pride in their individual task management. This results in the whole staff team working extremely well to provide a safe, welcoming, and comfortable environment. All staff view the leadership team as supportive, approachable and accessible to them at all times.

Leaders and managers undertake internal audits and quality assurance exercises to scrutinise the quality of the school. External monitoring visits routinely take place. Governors visit the residency houses regularly. The reports that governors complete are thorough. These clearly demonstrate time is spent talking to children, and in evaluating the facilities. One governor said: 'The care side has always had something very special about it'.

There have been no complaints in respect of the residential provision. The school works well with outside agencies, parents and carers, who all gave positive feedback about the school. A parent said: 'It is a real partnership, they helped to manage his anger. Another parent said: 'They are the first people that I go to. They see the other side of him, the side that is relaxed.' A professional said: 'There is a really good community spirit and feel and a team approach to things. The mutual support among the staff group filters down to the children. It feels like a welcoming and friendly place to come'. Parents have confidence in the management team and staff at the school. They recognise the benefits and highlight the positive impact to children in their academic and personal development.

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	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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	16
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	7 to 11
Headteacher	Mr D Crompton
Date of previous boarding inspection	10 December 2014
Telephone number	01527 853851
Email address	enquiry@skilts.bham.sch.uk

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