

Elmore Hall School

Elmore Hall School, Littletown, Durham DH6 1QD

Inspection dates

22 February 2016–24 February 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

- Young people make excellent progress as a direct result of attending the school and residential provision. Positive relationships with staff significantly enhance young people's overall development and their extraordinary achievements. Young people thrive in a safe, nurturing environment that fully meets their needs. Peer relationships are very good, and young people unquestionably enjoy their education and overnight stays.
- Behaviour is managed positively. Highly innovative care gives young people the structure and boundaries that they need to flourish. Activities are a clear strength and provide a wealth of vibrant opportunities delivered by highly trained staff. Inclusion in the local community is exceptional and inspires young people to contribute and to lead purposeful lives.
- Comprehensive, individualised care planning and parental involvement play a pivotal part in young people's successful transition through school. Each young person is seen as a unique individual with strengths and potential. Extensive consultation fully involves young people in important decisions. Young people are safe, and their safety is seen as paramount.
- Leadership and management is exemplary. Meticulous leadership and oversight consistently improve outcomes for young people. Staff are highly competent and deliver superior care and support. All staff at the school are valued and are extremely well supported.

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 school was notified three hours before the inspection began. The inspector spent two evenings with the young people and joined them for meals. Young people were consulted individually and during a group discussion. Key staff members were interviewed, as were all the residential and ancillary staff. Parents were contacted and their views from the school's consultation were also taken into account. An inspection of the school and boarding facilities was undertaken, and the school's records were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Debbie White

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

This is a maintained residential special school for up to 80 boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs due to social, emotional, and mental health difficulties. The school is located a few miles outside the centre of Durham. It is a converted country house in its own grounds and has a residential facility for up to 25 residential pupils split between two units. Accommodation is provided for boys only and for up to four nights a week, but is not provided at weekends or during school holidays.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people are very positive about their school experience. Their progress is exceptional, and many young people's achievements surpass all expectations. Relationships with staff are excellent and highly contribute to each young person's overall development and well-being. A parent said, 'The school is great for my child. He loves it. He's made lots of friends and has excelled at school. The staff have done wonders. He used to be very shy but is now confident. His key worker is spot on. She just gets him. He has grown up loads.'

Young people stay in high-quality accommodation that meets their needs. Staff have gone over and above to make the accommodation homely and comfortable. Each residential unit has its own kitchen where young people can access drinks and snacks as they wish. They also learn a wealth of independence skills that prepare them for later life. A young person said, 'The staff do everything. They are mint. They advise us and make us laugh and they teach you things like how to cook and do our washing.'

Young people's health needs, including their emotional and psychological well-being, are very well met. They access the services that they need, and staff work closely with external agencies to ensure that young people get the best possible care and support. Young people's behaviour is exemplary. This is a credit to the young people and to the skilled staff who manage behaviours in a positive, proactive way. This caring, nurturing approach highly values young people and teaches them excellent social skills. A parent said, 'My child absolutely loves it and has come on leaps and bounds. He used to have separation anxiety but now stays over and has made friends. He never had friends before. I can't praise the school enough. Staff have brought him out of his shell.'

Activities are a major strength and bond young people to form positive peer relationships. The choice of activities available is second to none and significantly enhances young people's progress and development. Young people see activities as one of the best things about the residential provision and they are highly motivated to take part in a diverse range of hobbies and pastimes. This unreservedly boosts their confidence and self-esteem and in many instances leads to aspirational goals and future career choices. A young person said, 'The best things here are spending time with your mates and the activities. You have a good laugh with the staff and we go out, sometimes to the chip shop, and at the end of term we all go to a restaurant. It's brilliant.'

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The school's vision and values promote a positive ethos that is threaded through all aspects of young people's pastoral and educational care and support. All staff are immersed in a motivational culture that respects and values young people and everyone who works at the school. Every young person is seen as a special, unique individual with

strengths and potential. This dynamic approach unmistakably impacts positively on young people who flourish as a direct result of their school and residential placement.

Placement planning is comprehensive and needs led. This provides young people with high quality individualised care. Young people are fully included in their plans, and this actively engages them in important decisions about their lives and their future. Parents feel equally involved, listened to and valued. This joint-working approach is inspiring and extremely effective. A parent said, 'I love the school. It's fabulous, fantastic. My child has massively increased his social skills. They do everything well. Our meetings are very good, they give clear aims and look at strengths and weaknesses. I would give this school ten out of ten. I honestly can't say anything bad.'

Young people are highly active in the school's decision-making protocols. Their views are important and they are listened to. The young people's councils are involved in changes to the school's routines, structures and interviewing new staff. Individual consultation takes place during key-worker sessions and young people complete regular questionnaires about how they are looked after and their outcomes. All young people said that they can talk to staff about anything and that staff are interested in their views. This collaborative working inspires young people and teaches them excellent communication skills. A young person said, 'They always ask us what we think, and we make decisions about things.'

The quality of meals is superb. Young people are involved in menu planning and rate the meals as very good. The kitchens are spotlessly clean and very well organised. There is a choice of meals at every mealtime and special diets are catered for. The overall cleanliness of the school is outstanding, and this is solely due to the hard work and commitment of the domestic staff. All ancillary staff work over and above, and take a pride in their work. A domestic assistant said, 'We have a good relationship with the young people and I treat them as I would my own children. I am very proud to work here. This is a very happy place.'

The school significantly invests in extra-curricular and leisure activities with astounding results. Residential and school staff organise and lead a wide range of evening activity clubs that considerably enhance young people's lives. These include bush craft where young people learn about outdoor living and survival, football training based at a local professional football club, skiing, kayaking, indoor and outdoor climbing, and professional golf. Other initiatives include a Princes Trust employability course that results in an accredited qualification and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The headteacher said, 'The activities are very important to our young people and they benefit from achieving. I support staff to initiate clubs, usually in something they are interested and invested in. That way, they are passionate about what they do and they fully involve young people to learn new skills.'

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Safety in school is paramount, and every measure is taken to promote young people's welfare and to protect them from harm. Health and safety arrangements are robust and regularly monitored and scrutinised. A young person said, 'When you first come here, they show you around and tell you about fire drills. We had one in the middle of the night once and early in the morning.'

Risk management is exemplary and the environment is regularly checked for potential hazards. Extreme care is taken to risk assess potential hazards fully, particularly with regard to outdoor activities. Staff undertaking these activities have an advanced first aid certificate and carefully assess potential dangers and pitfalls. This level care and attention enables young people to lead an active lifestyle whilst staying safe.

Child protection measures are excellent. The school's designated safeguarding officers are clear about their roles, and there are very good links with the local authority designated officer. Designated staff are fully involved with all young people who have known child protection concerns and there is very good attendance at child protection meetings. Case records for young people at risk are of a very high standard. This substantial contribution to child safety is extremely well delivered. A parent said, 'My child is safe. I have no worries,' and a young person said, 'Of course I'm safe here.'

Behaviour is managed positively with very good results. Staff have received additional, bespoke training to provide a non-confrontational model of care that includes behaviour-modification strategies. This successfully avoids young people's behaviours escalating and their going into crisis. There have been no restraints used in the residential provision since the last inspection, and it is pleasing to see that ground floor restraints are not used as a control measure.

There have been no incidents of bullying or children going missing. This is due to good staffing levels that increase the safe observation and supervision of young people and the proactive approach to countering bullying measures. Young people have no desire to run away from the residential provision and know that they can talk to staff if they are upset or distressed. A young person said, 'We don't have bullying. We would tell staff if we saw anything. Bullying is not right.'

Robust recruitment procedures ensure that regular safety checks on all new employees are carried out. Regular updates are sought to ensure that all police and safety checks for current staff are updated within the school's prescribed time scales. This protects young people from potential abusers.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Leaders and managers are highly effective and operate an accomplished, expertly organised, progressive school. The headteacher and senior management team are fully committed to improving young people's lives and their outcomes. This dedicated and motivated approach ensures the ongoing drive for improvement in all areas of the school. Leaders and managers are extraordinarily supportive of staff, which results in

every staff member delivering exceptionally competent services to young people and their families.

Staff retention is outstanding. The entire school staff team is very well established, and most of the team have been employed at the school for a significant number of years. Residential staff are fully committed to their role and to making a difference to young people's lives. They create a happy, supportive environment that nurtures and enhances the lives of each young person under their care. The impact that they have on young people's rapid progress is immeasurable. Consequently, young people experience a first-class residential experience. A staff member said, 'Why have I stayed here so long? Every day is different. If you have an idea, you are listened to, and we can change things for young people,' and, 'It gets in your blood. I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. Every day I am happy to come to work. You can't say that about every job.'

Robust monitoring and ongoing performance evaluations ensure that young people's outcomes are at the very least maintained, and in most cases vastly improved. Young people are involved in the monitoring of the residential provision, and written reports show consistent improvement and development. The headteacher regularly reviews residential outcomes, and there is a detailed development plan in place that further drives improvement. As a result, young people are provided with optimum experiences and opportunities.

Leadership and management are further strengthened by the headteacher participating in a range of external projects that enhance the overall school and residential provision. This increases the headteacher's expertise, which is shared with the staff team to update and complement their practice continually. For example, the headteacher is involved in the strategic development of residential special schools to ensure their longevity, and is part of a local authority project group to improve outcomes for young people with mental health problems. This constant versatility in how the school operates ensures that young people who need specialist care and a wide support network will continue to benefit from a place at this school.

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 exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact that 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 that children and young people are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number

Social care unique reference number

SC040508

DfE registration number

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

67

Gender of boarders

Mixed

Age range of boarders

11 to 16

Headteacher

Mr Richard Royle

Date of previous boarding inspection

23 January 2015

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