

# Oversands School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6SD

## Inspection dates

08/11/2016 to 10/11/2016

## 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

- Significant steps have been taken to review and update working practices, reflecting the positive changes achieved over the last three years to the ethos and culture of the school.
- Residential pupils who have been in the school for some time recognise and speak positively about the changes of culture and working practices, describing a less authoritarian and gentler approach to life in the school.
- Residential pupils benefit from having outstanding relationships with residential staff who provide clear boundaries, along with a safe and stimulating environment. The support, coupled with the structure and routines established, allows new pupils to settle quickly.
- The retention of residential staff is high, leading to an improved continuity of care for pupils. Residential staff are well organised and well coordinated throughout their shifts, with high levels of communication ongoing. Links between residential and educational staff are excellent, providing a well-coordinated approach that reflects the unity of the school's management team.
- Residential pupils are treated as individuals and not managed as a group. Excellent plans and assessments of risk highlight individual needs, with routines, structures and strategies personalised to meet those needs.
- Residential pupils are making outstanding progress in all areas of their lives, based on their starting points.
- The whole-school policy, practice and approach linked to restrictive physical intervention has been revised, with steps taken that are well advanced, to eradicate certain restrictive holds in current use.
- Feedback received from residential pupils, parents and others external to the school is positive, with pupils able to say that they feel safe in the school.

## **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 to report all minor injuries until you receive specific written agreement from the appropriate authority, should changes to the current level of reporting be agreed.

## Information about this inspection

Notice of the inspection was by telephone call to the school at 8.30am on the first day of the inspection. Details of the inspection were confirmed with the headteacher and then followed up by email, which also contained a letter of confirmation, a letter to parents (Parent View) and a copy of Annex A.

During the inspection, the following activities took place: a tour of the residential provision, touring the residential areas after school, in early evenings and in early mornings, observing routines and interaction between residential staff and pupils and sharing meals with them.

In addition to this, meetings and discussions took place with the headteacher, the deputy head of care, the care manager, two team leaders, two care staff, the school nurse, the chair of the school board and the operations manager of the school. Informal discussions with other members of the care staff also took place.

All but one residential pupil was met and spoken with by the inspector, with some discussions taking place individually. A case-tracking exercise covering three residential pupils was conducted. Contact, either through discussion or in writing, took place with three parents. Contact with the local designated officer and the local safeguarding hub was made prior to the inspection commencing.

## Inspection team

Graham Robinson

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

The school is an independent residential special school with up to 72 pupils aged between eight and 19 years who have special educational needs related to social, emotional and mental health difficulties. There are nine male pupils currently living in the school's residential provision and 31 day pupils. At the time of the inspection, three houses were being used to accommodate young people. The school offers post-16 provision with a specific programme designed to meet the needs of young adults. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2015.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

The progress and development made by residential pupils, based on their starting points, is outstanding. A more flexible approach in the use of its residential provision is providing pupils with a more targeted input to meet their individual needs and with the development of their independence skills.

For example, since the previous inspection, a post-16 independence unit has become operational. This enhances the passage pupils take as they move towards greater independence, complementing the semi-independence unit already operational. A pupil living in the new independence unit has nothing but positive things to say regarding his experiences of the residential provision. He concluded his discussion by saying: 'I would have been in big trouble if I had not come to this school and eventually changed my ways.'

His views are supported by his mother who states: 'This school has been amazing to both me and my son. For the first time in a long time I have hope that my son will succeed in life. They not only support him but support me as well. The school has helped him to achieve in all aspects of his educational and social needs. The team is always accessible and keeps me informed of all relevant information in relation to his development.'

In the main house, pupils thrive in a social environment that has structure and appropriate boundaries. This gives them a sense of responsibility and duty towards others in a group-living situation. They enjoy spending time and socialising with other pupils and many form strong friendships with each other. In addition, they develop strong relationships with staff. Pupils recognise this, with one telling the inspector that: 'I like the staff, I get on with them.'

Residency is used to support and guide pupils towards developing new interests and hobbies, as well as supporting existing ones. Along with the excellent facilities contained on the campus, full use is made of both local community facilities and, when appropriate, facilities in a pupil's home area. Activities are chosen with care to promote a pupil's interest, meet their individual needs and provide them with new experiences that can be replicated in their own communities.

For example, one pupil spoke about joining a community-based football club, and another about trips to the theatre, which stimulated his interest in the arts. Other young people had recently experienced wild camping and others completed their bronze Duke of Edinburgh award following a canoeing trip in Scotland.

Residential pupils appreciate living in an inclusive environment where disability is not viewed as a barrier to leading a challenging and fulfilling lifestyle. For example, one pupil, who knew the inspector from the previous inspection, discussed how he was managing his own behaviour better and was now less confrontational. He attends college regularly and has a career path mapped out for himself. He described how he

learned to become more resourceful, giving how he gained temporary employment during the summer break as an example. This reflects his growing confidence, maturity and independence.

Residential pupils, along with day pupils, have a strong voice within the school because of the excellent levels of communication and consultation that exists. Pupils confirm that they have a voice and can influence certain areas of the school's operation, giving house meetings as an example of where they can express views and make suggestions.

They also become involved with other influential activities, such as being part of the formal interviewing process that takes place when the school recruits new staff. Two pupils spoke in some depth about this role, demonstrating how their views and opinions are taken seriously. This gives them a great sense of empowerment, alongside knowing that their opinions and views are taken seriously. They also demonstrated a great sense of responsibility, recognising the potential impact their decisions can have.

Promoting and meeting the health needs of pupils is outstanding. The school employs its own full-time nurse who has developed excellent links with local medical services, ensuring that everyday health needs are being fully met. Detailed planning documents, which include health along with areas of risk and strategies, cover any specific health needs a pupil may have. The arrangements for storing, administering and recording medication are overseen by the nurse, who provides appropriate training for the staff involved in dispensing medication, as well as regular auditing.

The school also employs a number of staff who are qualified and trained to provide a whole range of therapeutic input to its pupils. This is another area that has developed further since the previous inspection, with the addition of a mental health practitioner. Having these facilities gives pupils access to a whole range of therapeutic input that meets their individual needs. Much of this can be delivered within the campus, which often cuts out long delays in accessing specialist services.

Activity programmes are individualised, but contain regular exercise to promote fitness. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily, and special dietary needs are catered for. This includes religious as well as medical needs. Food intake is monitored, with steps taken should staff become concerned. For example, during the inspection one young person, who is not eating well, was taken out to a restaurant for an evening meal. This had the benefit of kick-starting his eating habits.

## **The quality of care and support**

**Outstanding**

The quality of care and support given to residential pupils was judged at the previous inspection as outstanding and remains so. One of the reasons why this judgement has been maintained lies with the ability of senior and other staff to review, reflect on and evaluate current practice and then adapt it successfully to the ever-changing needs of its pupils.

Examples of this range from simple things, such as providing a lockable facility for

residential pupils to store their mobile phones, through to major developments such as the creation and implementation of social development and independence files. This electronic process maps progress and identifies areas of need, as well as highlighting the development each pupil is making. This is viewed as an outstanding development. It is a well thought-out piece of work, which significantly improves how the school evidences the progress pupils are making.

Residential pupils and staff speak with genuine warmth when discussing each other. Residential units, as well as the whole school campus, are well ordered and punctuated with a buzz of positive energy. Pupils are relaxed and at ease in their environment. The relationships between themselves and staff were observed to be outstanding. A pupil spoke for many when saying; 'I get on with staff. I am now more tolerant, mature and independent.' These outstanding relationships are the foundation for the excellent progress residential pupils are making.

Feedback from other sources supports this view. A parent describes the journey her son is taking by saying: 'I see the residential provision as a real strength. They understand my son's needs and this has helped him engage positively with his education, which he is doing well with. They use reflection really well. This helps to get over difficulties and builds trust and relationships that help to resolve incidents.' Another felt able to say: 'Staff listen to what he is saying to them. They understand him and this has helped enormously with his development, maturity and growing independence.'

There are excellent, tried and tested systems for introducing pupils who are new to the residential provision. The inspector spoke in some depth with a pupil who has not been resident for long. He described how he was nervous and unsure at first, admitting it took time for him to settle. He appreciates the support he gets from both staff and other pupils, concluding the conversation by saying: 'I have settled so well I feel as though I have been here for a long time.'

Residential pupils benefit from experiencing an environment where individual needs, disabilities and identities are fully accepted. As they develop their interests and confidence grows, they become more involved with community life. Appreciating and celebrating different cultures is built into the daily life of the school, such as themed nights and trips into the wider community. This results in pupils developing a greater appreciation of what is around them by giving them insight into areas they may not have experienced before or be familiar with.

The three residential units in use range from one which provides high support and is generously staffed through to semi-independence, then full independence. Pupils plan meals with staff and shop locally for the ingredients. Many either cook for themselves or assist with the cooking, which links to their programme of independence. The state of repair, decor, fixtures, fittings and equipment are of a high standard. Bedrooms, which are personalised to reflect the taste and interests of the occupant, have their own bathrooms. This improves privacy. Pupils say that they are comfortable and were observed as being relaxed and at ease in their environment.

The arrangements to protect and keep pupils safe are outstanding. The three designated safeguarding officers have each received the appropriate level of training. Residential staff receive training in safeguarding, which is updated regularly. Staff demonstrate an understanding of their role and responsibility to keep pupils safe. This is underpinned by other training, such as the Prevent duty training, which staff have completed since the previous inspection.

The school maintains excellent links to other external agencies charged with keeping young people safe. Working relationships and levels of communication are strong. Since the previous inspection, cooperative working with other agencies has ensured that any issues that may have safeguarding implications have been referred appropriately, with pupils benefiting from receiving a multi-agency approach. For example, in recent weeks, the school acted proactively in referring a pupil to the local Prevent duty team, a move that has substantially improved the support both he and his family are receiving.

Serious behaviour management incidents in the residential units, which include physical intervention, occur less frequently than those in school. Those that have taken place in residency have been well managed and only involved a minority of residential pupils. Records are detailed and management oversight of each incident is thorough.

No pupil raised any issues or concerns about physical intervention or behaviour management in general. One who spoke directly about his experiences feels staff handle physical intervention well, recognising the training they have received. When comparing staff at this school with other schools, he remarked that: 'Staff at this school don't bear any grudges.'

Linked to its push to refresh its culture and ethos, changes to the way the school implements physical intervention have been introduced. Considerable investment has been made in training staff and introducing a system known as positive behaviour support. This is designed to give staff greater insight, skill and confidence to look into incidents and analyse them in depth, with a view to reducing the number of physical intervention incidents taking place.

Alongside this, advanced 'Team Teach' techniques are to be phased out, with refresher training for existing staff and training for new staff only being taught to intermediate level. A commitment from the Witherslack group has been made to totally eradicate the use of front ground holds in its schools by July 2017. This significant development is viewed as a positive step and is welcomed by Ofsted.

The overall safety of pupils is underpinned by a range of plans and strategies in place to keep them safe. Pupils expressed confidence that any matters of concern they may have will be dealt with appropriately by staff. No complaints were received from either pupils or parents during the inspection process. Incidents of bullying, missing from home and use of sanctions in the residential provision are either rare or do not occur. Bullying is not an area of concern for residential pupils.



The detail currently being provided in records and notifications of minor injuries was the subject of discussion, as it is an area to be looked at by the school with the appropriate authorities. The school has been advised to maintain its current standard of recording and notification of minor injuries unless an agreement for change is reached and backed-up in writing.

Recruitment and clearance procedures meet with statutory requirements and guidance and all levels of staff are being suitably cleared. The depth of involvement for pupils in the recruitment process is seen to be another area where the school has moved forward in its quest to develop improved practices and outcomes for pupils. The school is also implementing its policy of re-checking longer-serving staff every three years, which is deemed to be good practice.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

**Outstanding**

The headteacher, when first appointed, had a mission to change the culture, ethos and working practices of the school. Three years on, with some aspects still ongoing, the school is well on its way with the transition. A senior staff team, made up from both education and residential, works with a team-centred approach that is replicated in other staff groups throughout the school.

They work collaboratively, setting high standards for staff, which transfers into having high aspirations for pupils. A series of short, targeted meetings held at various points throughout the day ensures that the levels of communication throughout the school are high. These meetings ensure that both residential and teaching staff are aware of issues and have knowledge of events that may have occurred before they come on duty.

The internal monitoring undertaken by senior staff is methodical and evaluative. Information feeds into development plans which, in turn, promote change. For example, since the previous inspection, areas of progress and new developments not already highlighted in this report include a change to the post-16 approach to independent living, a review of how planning documents and assessments of risk can be better presented and an improvement in the acceptance and cooperation of the various staff teams to providing care that is individualised and targeted to meet need.

The external monitoring of the school takes place regularly and is robust, but this has not deterred staff from looking at how improvements can be made. The recent introduction of an independent element to external monitoring is another example of the school being proactive and being prepared to improve its practice.

The residential staff team, which had had a number of changes to it when the previous inspection took place, is now collectively more experienced and well trained. Staff retention is high, leading to a greater consistency regarding the quality of care provided.

Staff fully support and respect the senior staff team, buying into the ethos, culture and working practices that have been built up over the past three years. The whole organisation and functioning of the residential provision is child-focused and aimed at meeting the ever-changing needs of pupils.

The school expects high standards of its staff, who are monitored, supervised and appraised regularly. Any shortfall is quickly identified and rectified with appropriate action plans put into place. Constant evaluation, coupled with the willingness and ability to make changes when necessary, allows for continual progress and development to be made.

The school invests heavily in training for staff. The core staff training programme is active, with a clear expectation placed on staff to keep their core training modules up to date. Residential staff are suitably qualified, with the more senior staff qualified to level 5, with others either qualified or in the process of qualifying for the level 3 diploma. This training aids both professional and personal development and helps staff to reflect on their own practice and make further improvements.

The school has an excellent record of compliance. Following the previous inspection, one area for improvement was identified. This has led to improved recording and evidencing of how staff act on the wishes and suggestions made by pupils during house meetings. For this inspection, the national minimum standards have been fully met, so the report contains no recommendations. One area for improvement has been identified, linked to ensuring that the current standard of recording and notification of minor injuries is maintained.

Although not yet fully completed, the school is well on with its programme of change, which is showing positive results in a variety of ways. For example, the corridor where most senior staff have offices becomes almost a drop-in centre for pupils between lessons. On numerous occasions, pupils were spotted walking through open doors to speak with senior staff in a relaxed and casual manner. Doors of offices are open at this time not because of policy or procedure, but because this is something that has grown into the working practices, reflecting the ever-changing ethos and culture of the 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 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112452
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC040063
<b>DfE registration number</b>	909/6027

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	9
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Male
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	8 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr R Adams
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	22/09/2015
<b>Telephone number</b>	01539 552 397
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk">oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk</a>

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