

Fred Nicholson School

Fred Nicholson School, Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB

Inspection dates	16/01/2017 to 18/01/2017	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The children benefit from the residential care of the school. The staff and the managers know the children well and are familiar with their emotional and developmental milestones.
- The staff have excellent relationships with the children. The staff speak knowledgeably and fondly about the children. They encourage the children to express their feelings, develop social skills and live harmoniously together. Children learn to manage their emotions and resolve any conflict.
- The staff and managers place the safety of the children at the heart of their planning. The school environment is safe. Highly creative initiatives have been devised by staff to teach the children about safe internet use and other potential dangers. All children learn basic road safety and how to access the community confidently.
- The staff and managers are highly skilled in working in partnership. They liaise with education staff, parents and other specialist professionals. Feedback is extremely positive about the quality of care provided.
- Families feel that the staff can be trusted to support and encourage children. Parents have great respect for the commitment shown by the staff. They comment that children are happier and able to look after their personal needs with more confidence.
- The children are supported to develop independence skills. Lessons learned in school,

and in residential time, are applied to activities in the community. As a result, the children learn to view the future with more confidence.

- Leaders and managers across the school work together very closely. They take immense pride in the children's achievements. They also have an ambitious plan for further improvement.
- Some points for improvement were identified as a result of this inspection. There are gaps in case records which make it difficult to track how a child is making progress against their starting points. Copies of professional qualifications and training certificates are not held in one consistent place, so are not straightforward to access. Meals provided are not consistently nutritious. Independent monitoring lacks reflection on the impact of boarding on the overall progress of children. There is no evidence that these issues impact on the safety of the children 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?

Points for improvement

- Ensure that case files are scrutinised so that all entries are consistently updated, signed and dated so that progress can be evaluated against the children's starting points.
- Ensure that children have a choice of balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- Ensure that records of staff training include certificates of any professional qualifications, and are held in one location so that staff and managers can access them without delay.
- Ensure that reports of independent monitoring visits reflect on the impact of the residential provision on the overall progress made by the children in the school, provide robust challenge and contribute to the overall drive for improvement in the school leadership team.

Information about this inspection

The inspection took place within three hours of the announcement. Inspection activity included talking with residential pupils and joining them for mealtimes, a tour of the accommodation, observation of staff handover meetings and scrutiny of case files and policies. In addition, there were discussions with key staff, external professionals and parents. There were three responses recorded on Parent View.

Inspection team

Fiona Littlefield

lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Fred Nicholson School is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council. It caters for children who have complex needs, and are aged from seven to 16 years. Situated in a residential area on the edge of a market town, the school takes children from a wide catchment area. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls. This accommodation is split into dormitories of five or less, and individual bedrooms for children who may benefit from this. Each residential area has a communal space where children may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. The children have access to a range of school facilities during residential time.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Parents consistently report that their children look forward to their stays in residence and that they settle quickly. Children who may previously have had difficulties with social interaction learn to live harmoniously, make friends and share accommodation. Parents attribute this to the warm and supportive relationships that the children are able to develop with the staff. The mother of one child said, 'They are really good at explaining things and preparing her, so she knows what to expect. It really works with her.'

The staff consistently promote regular daily routines so that the children are prepared for their day. Over time, the children take more responsibility for their own personal care and are then able to continue this at home. The mother of one child said, 'He is gradually learning about self-care although the truth is he can't really be bothered. Before he would refuse but the staff keep reminding him, so he does it now.' This enhances the children's confidence.

The staff and managers across the school provide a safe environment, but also teach the children how to keep themselves safe. For instance, all the children in the school are taught a comprehensive programme of road safety which is individually tailored to develop their skills and awareness. The children who board have additional opportunities to practise as part of developing independence skills. They progress from supervised trips into the community, to being able to go on their own to a local shop, by crossing busy roads. This is an important part of helping them access the community with confidence.

The staff and managers regard the residential provision as an essential part of the overall service that they can offer to the children in school. The new management team is ambitious and is working to raise the profile of the residential service within the school. This purposeful approach drives improvement and provides highly integrated and personalised care. The children benefit from this well-organised approach.

Parents speak very highly of how the staff work alongside them, keeping them informed of any developments and responding immediately to any queries. The parents feel supported and valued, and this helps the children relax.

The quality of care and support

Good

The staff and managers follow a careful process to ensure that they respond comprehensively to all new referrals. The care staff liaise carefully with the families, and with colleagues in the school, to make sure that they have all necessary information and plan the best way of introducing the child to the service. The parents often visit the accommodation in advance. They speak highly of how the staff welcome their child and seek to reassure them. As a result, the children relax and settle quickly, immediately building a positive self-view. The parents of one child said, 'As soon as he started, he seemed to relax. He wasn't trying to be anyone else.'

The care staff liaise closely with teaching staff so that any development or change in the behaviour of a child who boards is shared immediately at the beginning and end of the school day. Because of this seamless approach, nothing is left to chance. For instance, one child had to adapt to a significant change in her living arrangements. Staff monitored her carefully throughout the day to support and help her. The care staff team meets at the beginning of each evening to discuss individual children and any recent developments. This highly individualised planning means that the children feel secure.

The children benefit from a range of games and activities in boarding. The staff help children with their reading and use every opportunity for learning, with a particular focus on practising basic literacy and numeracy skills. Every week, the children go out into the community for an activity. These activities are organised comprehensively by a member of the care staff. Both the staff and the managers recognise that these outings are important occasions for both pleasure and learning. For instance, the children and the staff may go out to a local restaurant for a coffee or a meal. They learn to order what they want, pay for it and count the change. However, there are gaps in the children's plans which are not consistently updated. This means that it is not clear where the plans have been reviewed and what contribution the children made to this.

The staff and managers have a nurturing approach. They understand the importance of physical well-being and comfort of the children. The accommodation is clean, and the children personalise their bedroom areas. Arrangements for storing and dispensing medication are extremely robust. In the event of any query, the staff liaise with parents and medical professionals to resolve it without delay. The staff take every opportunity to encourage the children to take appropriate responsibility. The staff encourage the children to be aware of the medication that they take and how important it is. Specialist health professionals such as speech and language therapists work closely with the care team on individual speech and language targets. The residential provision offers a unique opportunity to focus on this, and as a result the children can consolidate their learning. One health professional said, 'It is done in a natural environment, so children absorb it.'

Mealtimes are important opportunities for socialising. The staff are extremely skilled at interacting with the children, encouraging them to behave calmly and politely. However, the meals provided do not always offer a choice of nutritious food.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The children who use the residential service have complex needs. The staff and management teams work across the whole school to ensure that the environment is safe. All visitors sign in at arrival and are monitored during their time at school. There is an emphasis on close supervision of all of the children. The staff know where the children are at all times. At the end of the day, the children follow clear routines to return home or are collected by residential care staff. As a result, no child has gone missing since the last inspection.

The children have close and trusting relationships with staff and turn to them when worried or uneasy. One child told his keyworker that he did not feel safe about going home. The keyworker reported this immediately, and enquiries were made to ensure

that the child could go home safely. While this did not result in a formal safeguarding referral, it did lead to discussions about promoting the child's welfare, which the keyworker followed up with the family. The children know that their concerns are listened to and taken seriously, and this helps to keep them safe.

Most of the children have little sense of danger. Senior care staff and managers in the school recognise this. They have established a highly creative programme to help the children to manage relationships, understand dangers and know what to do. The school operates parental guidelines to limit the use of computers. No child can use their mobile phone while at school. However, the children also need to learn how to use the internet safely outside the school and their time in the residential provision is an opportunity to reinforce this. Staff work with them to help them become more self-aware, to recognise when they might be at risk and how to get help. Consequently, the children learn how to keep themselves safe.

The staff and managers hold the protection of children at the centre of their practice. The school management felt that the current form for recording incidents was too broad in its approach. A more detailed report was recently introduced as part of staff training, which leads the staff to reflect on their specific concerns. In addition, the head of care has made a robust start on reviewing all children's files to review the quality of the recording and ensure that basic information is well organised and accessible to all staff.

The children choose to come to stay in the residential provision and clearly enjoy their time. Consequently, the number of negative incidents is extremely low. The school management team appreciates the importance of assessing a child's behaviour throughout the school day. On occasion, they will identify some children as needing extra support where boarding can play a crucial role. The social worker for one child said, 'Out of school, he can be out of control. Residential time has managed to establish some boundaries, and he is calmer and more contained. This is all a huge leap for him.' The staff and managers focus on promoting positive behaviour. They recognise and celebrate any achievement and concentrate on politeness, kindness and respect. The children feel valued and this enhances their self-esteem.

The school operates a clear and robust procedure for recruiting staff. Any concerns are followed up rigorously and immediately so that children are protected at all times. The head of care has developed an action plan which reviews safeguarding practice. This identifies clear priorities for the boarding service. While personnel files comply with statutory guidance, copies of professional qualifications for individual members of staff are not held in a consistent place. This can lead to confusion about their professional development.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The leadership team has fully addressed the shortfall from the last inspection. They have made significant progress in responding to points for improvement that have been raised: case recording on files has improved, and staff training needs are now recorded in a clear matrix. The head of care now reviews the school's compliance with national minimum standards on a consistent basis which is clearly recorded. Reports of visits from the independent visitor have improved. They are more detailed about the service.

However, they do not reflect on the impact of the residential provision on the progress that children make.

The new head of care has a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 and 4 in leadership and management. She will start her NVQ 5 on successful completion of her probationary period. All members of the care staff team have NVQ level 3 apart from one worker who is completing this shortly. The deputy head of care already has NVQ level 5. This reflects the high priority that the management team places on professional development. The children benefit from being looked after by staff who are valued themselves.

The school leadership team has taken the opportunity to review the service that the school provides. They are enthusiastic about promoting the residential service as a crucial part of this. The head of care has rewritten the statement of purpose for the residential provision. This clarifies the aims and objectives and provides a clear sense of direction for the staff and the parents.

The school management team relies on data to inform its members about the impact that the residential provision has on helping them reach their academic targets. However, the care staff are not consistently recording the work that the children do with the staff in areas such as reading or mathematics. This undermines the ability of the managers to understand the children's success against their starting points. The management team does not feel that the current data represents the full range of the children's achievements. The management team has recently developed a more comprehensive report, which will include life skills, ability to manage personal routines and going into the community.

The management team appreciates that the staff are the major asset in enabling the children to benefit from their stays in boarding. The staff team is well established and offers stable, consistent care. Staff are very proud of what they do and aware of how highly parents and children regard them. A member of staff commented, 'We are proud when they [the children] go off feeling empowered and confident. We see such a dramatic change.'

The children benefit immensely from the positive and trusting relationships that both they and their families develop with the consistent staff team. The grandparent of one child said, 'They have a way of engaging with him, so they will talk to him and sort things out. They manage to get through to him, so he will talk to me.' The head of care is purposeful about improving and updating practice. All the staff, including the head of care, receive supervision. It is recorded and includes a discussion about professional development alongside workload management issues. New supervision agreements have been introduced along with updated supervision recording formats. This energetic approach drives ongoing improvement.

A representative from the governing body continues to visit the boarding service. The reports comment on the detail of the service. However, there is no reflection or challenge about the impact of the residential provision on the progress that children make. This is a missed opportunity to raise the profile of the service and drive improvement.

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 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	121256
Social care unique reference number	SC038284
DfE registration number	926/7004

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	26
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Jane Hayman
Date of previous boarding inspection	12/01/2016
Telephone number	01362 693915
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