

and

# Windlestone School

Chilton, Ferryhill, Co Durham DL17 0HP

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This is a maintained residential special school for 80 children and young people aged from 11 to 16 years who have social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties. The school also manages a Personal Alternative Curriculum Centre for 40 children and young people who need additional support. There are two residential units that provide accommodation for up to 20 children and young people. The school also offers extended stays to all pupils, should they wish to participate in after-school activities. This modern school is located in a semi-rural location and it homes a small farm in the school grounds.

**Inspection dates:** 21 to 23 March 2017, with feedback given on 27 March 2017

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>Good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 13 October 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The children and young people enjoy their residential experience in a supportive, caring environment. Behaviour is managed positively, and the children and young people are learning useful independence skills.
- The children and young people feel that they are consulted and have good relationships with the staff and with each other. The information provided by the school in relation to the residential provision is very good, particularly the child-friendly website.
- The residential units provide high-quality accommodation. There are extensive grounds for free play, and the children and young people can access the on-site farm. Activities are wide ranging and meaningful.
- The children's and young people's health and welfare needs are met. They have access to the services that they need and they live a healthy lifestyle.
- The children and young people feel safe during their residential stays. Staffing levels are good, and all of the staff have regular child protection training. Health and safety in the school are robust.
- Leadership and management are effective, and regular monitoring drives improvement. The board of governors actively supports the headteacher to improve the school's performance.
- The school has progressed by meeting the areas for improvement from the last inspection. There has been a range of further improvements across the school and in the residential units.
- Feedback from parents, carers and visiting professionals is very positive.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- To review how the information about the children and young people is formatted so that they can fully understand their written residential plans. This will enable them to better contribute their views and wishes.
- To ensure that the children's and young people's placement plans are individualised.
- To provide an individual medication recording chart for each child and young person.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Review how the children's and young people's case files and residential placement plans are written to ensure that they are composed in a format that is appropriate to the age and the understanding of each child and young person.
- Ensure that the residential placement plans are fully individualised.
- Provide an individual medication recording chart for each child and young person.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

The children and young people enjoy and value their residential time. At the end of each school day, the children and young people enthusiastically head for the residential units to get ready for their evening activities. They are greeted warmly by the staff on duty, who are keen to talk to the children and young people about their days.

Good relationships between the staff and the children and young people are a strength. There is an easy, relaxed rapport that gives the children and young people a sense of trust and emotional security. The children and young people relate well to each other and they form positive friendships. This increases their confidence in their peer group and helps them to develop positive social skills.

A young person said: 'All the staff are really friendly and easy to talk to.' Another young person commented: 'Being on the living unit has helped me to get on better with other students.'

The children and young people progress as a direct result of having residential stays. Their academic achievements increase, and there are noted improvements in behaviours. The children and young people respond exceedingly well to the structure and boundaries in the units and the consistent support from the staff. This enhances their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

A senior manager from the local authority said: 'In my experience, the staff know the children and young people very well. I think the strengths are that the children and young people have set boundaries, structures and routines, such as a regular bedtime, that they do not always have at home. The staff also help them to develop good social skills.'

The children and young people are consulted about their everyday activities. They share their likes and dislikes with the staff regarding activities, menus and their routines. They all have access to a personal mentor whom they can talk to on a one-to-one basis, and they can communicate via the school council to have their say in wider school issues. This gives the children and young people an active voice in important decisions about themselves and their school.

During a discussion with a group of children and young people, their comments included: 'I think the staff ask us loads. I can talk to my mentor about anything. He has really helped me', and: 'When I first came, the staff asked me what I liked to do.'

The children and young people stay in high-quality accommodation that meets their needs. The units are spacious and very well equipped. All the bedrooms are single accommodation and can be personalised. The units are located in the school grounds that provide large open outdoor spaces for activities and free play. There is an on-site

farm where the children and young people can help with the animals and learn about agriculture.

A parent said: '[Name] loves the farm and the animals, and he loves being at the school. It is all brilliant, and he loves the residential too.'

All the children and young people rate the activities as being 'one of the best things about residential'. The scope of activities is wide-ranging and tailored to the children's and young people's needs and their preferences. All the pupils in school are invited to join in after-school activities by having an extended day. This inclusion and engagement enhance many of the children's and young people's lives as they may not have friends outside of the school. Learning independence skills is actively encouraged to prepare the children and young people for later life.

A senior manager from the local authority said: 'The residential staff promote welfare and education, and there is very good individualised work linked to the activities. The staff are very good at engaging the young people and finding out what their interests are and helping them to achieve these. The school and the residential unit have a family atmosphere, and the staff genuinely care and want the best for the young people.'

There is a wealth of information for the children and young people and their parents, about the school and what it is like to stay in the residential units. The school's newly revamped website is particularly good, being child friendly and interactive. This way of presenting information is attractive to the children and young people and fully engages them. There is also a bespoke written booklet and the school's statement of purpose, which are informative and easily accessible. Providing good information enables the children and young people and their parents to make informed choices about their education.

The staff ensure that the children's and young people's health needs are met. They are provided with healthy nutritious meals and they take part in healthy outdoor activities that involve lots of exercise. All of the staff have a first-aid certificate and can respond to accidental injuries, and known healthcare needs are catered for. For children and young people who have additional needs, external healthcare specialists, who visit the school, are made to feel welcome.

A visiting healthcare specialist said: 'I have worked at the school for some time and when I visit the staff work really well with me. They follow advice and see things through, following the strategies for the children and young people.'

## **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

The staff at the school strive to keep the children and young people safe. All the staff have child protection training, and they are aware of the school's child protection policy. A designated member of staff oversees all child protection issues in the school. She works closely with local safeguarding agencies to promote the children's and young people's safety and welfare. All concerns are appropriately recorded, and the headteacher has a good relationship with the local authority designated officer, who provides the school with ongoing guidance and advice.

The school designated staff member said: 'I have overall responsibility for monitoring child protection, along with the assistant headteacher. My role is to monitor child protection in the school, keep records and support the staff and young people. I liaise with social services and keep records, including a chronology of all contacts from the point of referral.'

No children or young people have gone missing from the residential units, and none is at risk from exploitation. The children and young people report that there is some bullying in school, but they were very clear that bullying does not occur during their residential stays. The school operates a number of countering-bullying strategies and sees eliminating bullying as a high priority. All of the children and young people consulted said that they would tell a member of staff if they were being bullied.

The school has progressed by implementing and developing new approaches to managing behaviour. The staff have received training in using restorative techniques, which are proving successful. The introduction of a 'reflection room', where the children and young people can spend quiet time to relax in a calming environment, is proving to be an effective strategy to support crisis situations. In addition, a staff member has undertaken training in mindfulness to support the children and young people to manage their anxiety.

A visiting educational psychologist said: 'I work at the school to do allocated therapeutic work, and the school has also bought in an additional half day a week. I work with the children and young people, and do staff training. The staff interactions with the young people are very positive. I have good links with the staff, and I am supporting them to set up restorative approaches, which is good progress. Another good improvement is a member of staff has been trained in mindfulness, and she is working with the young people. This is a really great step forward.'

Health and safety are taken seriously, and there are robust measures in place to ensure that the school and the residential units are safe environments. Staff safety checks are regularly updated, and staff recruitment procedures are thorough. This way of working promotes the children's and young people's welfare.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The headteacher supports an experienced management team that has set roles and responsibilities. This organised way of working ensures that the school works according to the statement of purpose. The board of governors is actively involved in supporting the headteacher to focus on meeting the school's aims, objectives and targets for improvement.

There is regular monitoring of the school's performance and the children's and young people's outcomes, which is closely scrutinised at regular governors' meetings. The head of care regularly monitors the performance of the residential units against the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The school's independent visitor contributes towards improving the children's educational and residential experiences.

The chair of governors said: 'We meet termly as a board, and I visit the school twice a term. I do full report of my visits and feed back to the governors about what I have looked at and if there are any areas of development. During my visits, I have talked to the staff, children and young people. We have two parent governors who are looking at doing additional parental surveys, and I have also spoken with the local safeguarding officer about promoting safety.'

The school has progressed by addressing the shortfalls identified at the last inspection. The headteacher now ensures that robust records are kept of all safeguarding events and the actions taken in response. The child protection policy now includes the most recent safeguarding guidance. The format for individual risk assessments has been reviewed, and the assessments now make it clear how known risks are minimised. These measures strengthen the school's commitment to drive improvement.

There have been other developments that have positively influenced outcomes for the children and young people. There is a stronger emphasis on rewarding the children and young people for their successes, which included a 'leavers' celebration awards evening' to give school leavers a positive transition. Enrichment and cultural activities are now an active element of developing children's and young people's life experiences. The children and young people are more involved in the school council and tackling problem areas, such as bullying. An example of the children's and young people's suggestions to improve peer relationships is to have a friendship bench, where the children and young people can go when they feel that they need support. The school also plans to introduce student mentoring. Involving the children and young people in how the school operates empowers them and develops their empathy skills.

The children and young people are cared for by an established, experienced staff team, that provides stability and consistency. All the staff have a relevant level 3 childcare qualification and they attend additional training to meet the children's and young people's needs. Relationships with parents and carers, which guide and support the children and young people and their families, are very good.

A parent said: '[Name] is doing great, and if there are any problems the staff phone me straight away. I am kept up to date and I can talk to the teachers and the residential staff about anything. I think they do a great job. I cannot think of anything they can do better.'

A visiting professional said: 'I think residential is a positive option to the children and young people. It's a very calm environment. The staff are good role models and they are very good at engaging the parents and keeping them on board. Feedback from parents is always very positive.'

There are three new areas for improvement arising from this inspection.

The current format for the children's and young people's case files and their residential plans are not written in a style that is appropriate to their age and understanding. This impedes their direct involvement in their care and support. Additionally, all the children's and young people's residential plans are identical, and therefore do not demonstrate that the children and young people receive individualised care.

Overall, the administration of medication is good. There is a recently updated policy that sets out good practice for the safe handling of medication, and the staff involved in managing medication have undertaken relevant training. However, none of the children and young people has an individual medication administration chart. This means that there are currently no separate medication records that can be stored in the children's and young people's case files for future reference or, if required, further scrutiny.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service and how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.



## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC007615

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Bennett

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Debbie White, social care inspector (lead)



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